(Since I'm unsure how much of this material is "military secrets", though my guess is that not much of it is, I advise that these notes be kept relatively confidential.)

Monday, June 7, 1982

As this letter will explain quite clearly, I didn't get around to writing on Shabbat. After working in the pardess picking grapefruits in the morning, reading the week's parasha and sleeping a bit in the afternoon, I was planning to write in the evening and was devoting the late afternoon to preparing a proposal for the midrasha since I had a meeting at 6:00. At around 5:45 I got a knock on the door and was informed that I'd been called up. From the kibbutz those of us called (reservists who serve in the north - and not very many) went to Ashdod and from there we were brought by buses to our bases. I arrived at mine around midnight and things were quite well organized - getting equipment went quickly, and early Sunday morning we moved out. Since there's a war going on in Lebanon someone has to be on the Syrian border (in somewhat greater numbers than usual) and that's us. Of course I'm hoping, for obvious personal reasons beyond the political, that the Syrians won't become involved in the conflict.

I've had very little news and I'm really unsure about what's going on, though it's quite clear that Israel finally found the opportunity to enter Lebanon as it's been trying to do for quite a long time. The snowballing development of events is, as usual, frightening. I was planning to devote my Shabbat letter in part to the attack on the Israeli ambassador and Israel's (what's in retrospect partial) response. I felt then as I do now that a correct political response is more important than an emotional one. I can't deny that one feels that something has to be done after such an attack, but politicians are supposed to be able to tell the difference between how you want to respond and how it's worthwhile responding. So things snowball. Israel bombs the hell out of Lebanon (with the expectantly heavy civilian casualties) and the Palestinians (the terrorists) as expected respond by heavily shelling settlements in the north of Israel. Since Israel has made it publicly clear time and time again that it won't tolerate the shelling of settlements, it was only a matter of time until Israeli troops would enter Lebanon. And so I'm now sitting in the Golan Heights hoping not to be here too long, and more than relatively confident that I'll be doing no more than sitting. Who's complaining? Well I for one certainly am. I'm of course personally not pleased to be here and I have strong political misgivings about what's going on. And it's still unclear how long I'll be here.

Other than this I've got little to report on what's happening. I'm at a place I've sat at before, with people who I'm used to being with. We're not talking politics very much though I've heard people say things to the effect that what's important is what will happen in the political sphere, not the military, and that's about the most encouraging thing that I can expect to hear. I didn't take along with me a large pack and thus I didn't bring along my books, only two Shabbat papers, and already, after being here altogether only 24 hours I can feel that I made a mistake not bringing a larger pack with all the things I usually take with me - mostly books, books and more books. Since we have no idea how long we'll be here (and though that's the uppermost thing in all of our minds we try not to talk about it) things feel different than when we come here for a predetermined three weeks. I hope that this time it will be for less.

Tuesday, June 8

It's around 9:00 in the evening and in another hour I start two hours of guard duty and since I've slept well these past two nights and don't need to sleep now, and since I don't feel like watching the news (I've heard enough on the radio) I'll take a bit of time to write. Our main question here is whether or not Syria will get involved in what's happening in Lebanon, and if so, what that means about us here. I readily admit to not being enamored of the idea of Syrian involvement for purely selfish reasons of saving my own head. I'm of course against wars in general, and I like to think that I do my part in trying to prevent them, but I also admit to having a strong dislike toward being personally involved in a war. I'm sure that my mother, in the name of all mothers, will agree. The first Israeli casualty statistics were made public this morning, and though they are said to be low, any casualties are for me too many. At the same time, I can hardly contain myself from blurting out against Begin when I hear him in the Knesset (this afternoon) say almost the same thing. Somehow I can't make the simple and automatic distinction that he does between Jewish casualties and everyone else. The same man who wreaks havoc on Lebanon without any qualms sheds what for me become crocodile tears when speaking of one Jewish casualty being too many. I don't want to suggest that Israel can't defend itself because all war is immoral, but it is difficult for me to justify military action when I know that in Begin's mind the fact that the Palestinians live at all is a threat to Israel's existence which must be dealt with.

One other issue makes me very uncomfortable. I saw Begin in the Knesset explaining what a glorious hour this was for Israel when the entire nation was united around the war. I'm sure

I'm in a small minority, but I can't help feeling disgust that this is the sort of issue that unites the nation. Suddenly we're all united, glued to our radios, urging our fighting men on to greater and greater victories, oblivious to the fact that one can't destroy the Palestinians by purely physical force, that there's no substitute for a negotiated settlement. Five years ago Israel entered Lebanon to quiet the threat to Israeli settlements in the north once and for all, and this week we did the same thing. One would think that the conclusion that a purely military solution doesn't exist should be obvious, but military success blinds, as it has for the past fifteen years since the six-day war.

Thursday, June 10

I'm rather pleasantly surprised to discover that I'm not the only person here who's finding it hard to believe that Israel (or our government at least) continues to fight this war. At present there's a rumor that a cease fire is a few hours away, and I'm more than happy to believe that it's true. After the first day of fighting Israel declared that almost all its objectives had been reached, and then we continued pushing further and further into Lebanon, seizing the opportunity to destroy Syria's missiles in Lebanon and invite the Syrians to enter the conflict. This morning we listened to the news report that Israel was preparing to invade and take over Beirut, and though ordinarily I would respond to such a report with utter disbelief, after all the other reports that have been verified over the past few days, I had no problem being sadly convinced of the truth of the report. Simply put, Israel's government and military truly believe that it's possible to solve the Palestinian problem by wiping out the terrorists. With that sort of mentality it becomes clear why Israel is so pleased with its military victory while it is losing so totally in the diplomatic arena. As I cry over the people killed in this to my mind unnecessary war (over them all, but certainly and naturally first over the Israelis) I cry also over the grave loss to Israel's already almost non-existent international stature. Things don't look good.

I've taken a writing break of a few hours which included an hour of the television news. In some ways the news were quite good: the Israeli army has apparently been very successful in its confrontations with the Syrian army, and that suggests that even though a cease fire still hasn't been reached (both Israel and Syria, true to military mentality form think they can still achieve more of their objectives before a cease fire) the chance that fighting will break out in the Golan Heights is quite minimal. I write this even though we had a number of alerts through the afternoon. Because I feel quite comfortable about the fact that though I may still be a long way away from getting home I'm now rather confident that there won't be fighting in the Golan, I'm able to permit myself to write the next sentence without feeling too morbid. My request is very simple. Should I be killed in wartime activity, I want to express now my refusal to have a military funeral. I'm not embarrassed about being a combat soldier and doing my part for Israel and Jewish survival, but to me it's very clear that my military contribution to that cause is (and should be) quite insignificant to the civilian contributions I try to make.

Sunday, June 13

I didn't get around to writing on Friday or Shabbat not because there was too much to do, though not exactly because there was too little. They were on the whole quiet days, and even rather pleasant ones, as far as that's possible. I watch the evening news, read whatever paper finds its way to us (usually yesterday's) and have time to pass the time, which is our main activity here and we're becoming rather good at it. I try to telephone the kibbutz whenever I get a chance, though I've only succeeded once, and that in the middle of the night when I was able to leave a message at the baby house. I do write postcards, about once a day (they're only for internal use, sorry) though the postcard carries the slogan "write on experiences, not secrets" (experience in Hebrew being an inaccurate translation for what is meant to be a positive emotional experience) and since my emotional experience here isn't exactly positive and even telling where I am is considered a secret, I usually fill up the postcards with what must seem like a large amount of double-talk. My guess is that they're still pleasant to receive. On Friday I built an Othello board and appropriate pieces, and it's seen some pleasant use since then.

I don't get the papers that I usually read here - papers that tend to be more critical of government actions than those we do get - but I've found at least one article by a favorite columnist who was both cynical and critical of our military action. Since I maintain my very critical attitude in the face of waves of popular solidarity and war spirit, it's reassuring to read that I'm not the only person with that critical perspective.

I can't say that seeing the news was very pleasing. Israeli casualties must be considered heavy, over 100 killed, and there's no doubt that the destruction in Lebanon is many times greater. Reports from U.S. televison suggest perhaps 10,000 killed or wounded, and I have no doubt about the rather total destruction of many villages and town. Last night we saw Nathan (?) Perlmutter of

the ADL explaining on U.S. television that the U.S. public has wide support for Israel because that public sees Israel in the John Wayne role between the white hats and the black hats. No Thanks, is my only response. If that's the way the ADL wants to sell Israel, I suppose they know what they're doing (selling to the American mentality and the like) but it's not for me. I've never been a believer in overkill, even for a good cause, and it's very uncomfortable knowing that in the name of your good cause your leaders are able to commit any action. For me, in the long run human lives are human lives, and even when we're speaking about Jewish existence (and to my mind that chord has been strongly overplayed as of late) it's hard for me to justify defending myself by brutally attacking others.

Tuesay, June 15

It's now 6:00 in the morning and though since my last writing I've jotted some notes to myself (in Hebrew) which I want to relate to a bit in these writings, on the whole my situation has undergone a fundamental change which demands some relating to. Early Sunday evening we learned that we were going to Lebanon, and after quick preparations (in that great army tradition of "hurry up and wait" we finally moved out around noon Monday, getting to Rosh HaNikra and from there to Lebanon around six. That didn't leave much daylight to get much of an impression of Lebanon, and what I did see was rather similar to the Galil. When we passed through Tyre it was dark already, but we could easily make out the signs of war - shelled buildings, abandoned cars, and white flags flying every where. At present we're resting somewhere between Sidon and Damur, waiting to hear in a few hours what our job is.

To put things rather bluntly, I certainly wasn't, nor am I now interested in being in a war. It's now eight days since fighting broke out, and on the whole things are quiet. But there are still "terrorists" around, and our government and army are continually making it publicly clear that their objective is totally wiping those "terrorists" out. Thus I can say that until now, if my main objections to Israel's continued action in Lebanon were the political (and physical ) infeasibility of totally wiping out terrorists, and my concern for other mothers' sons, today I can add a first and definitely predominant reason - my own skin. I doubt that I'm an exception in this respect - undoubtedly we're all concerned about ourselves, in the most healthy manner imaginable.

This concern for physical safely is connected to another major concern of mine, though one which I can't do much about at the moment - my parents' worrying. I'm sure that you started worrying even before the outbreak of fighting, and since the letter which I didn't write last Shabbat should have not arrived around today, my guess is that if your worrying hasn't peaked until now, now is the time. I send banal postcards almost daily to the kibbutz, and in one I told Gary that he might have to deal with you, though I didn't know how to suggest that he do that.

While on the matter of parents' concern, I want to mention at least one aspect of our move from the Golan to Lebanon. At about every urban or even rural road crossing we were met by people passing out sandwiches, cakes, ice cream and whatever else possible. This of course is a sign of solidarity with our fighting forces. It certainly is heartening, but still rather depressing to think that this is what unites us. Much uf my unit is from the north, and two pepples' parents met them on the road on the way to Rosh HaNikra - something pleasing to those soldiers and pleasing also to me (and I think the others) to see.

Thursday, June 17

This morning there's nothing to do, and I'm not complaining. Tuesday afternoon after we got organized here we went out in our armored personal carriers to get a feel for the territory. We're sitting close to the beach around three miles south of the Damur River (undoubtedly a military secret) and our mission two days ago and yesterday as well was to travel through the territory, visiting different villages (some Muslim, some Christian) checking out what the Palestinian soldiers left behind, trying to find out if they're still in the area, trying to regain strongholds in the evening. In some ways it's a very pleasant mission - Lebanon is very beautiful (if also very similar to the Galil) and travelling through the hill country near the sea from village to village is usually pastoral and sometimes even breathtaking. In non-wartime conditions it would be a great place for tiyulim. I said "in some ways" because in others it's definitely not pleasant - we really don't know what we're going to meet when we go out, and someone waiting in an ambush definitely has an advantage over us. Thus I admit to being fearful - after all casualties usually continue to happen even after cease fires, and our cease fire is far from a stable one. We've found bunkers and encampments, ammunition and personal belongings left behind as "terrorists" either fled or were evacuated. And of course we've found many signs of there having been a war, only a few days ago.

I've been trying for the past few days to find the proper word for "terrorists". From what we've found, Palestinians isn't really correct. We've found identification cards for people from

many different Arab countries, and I'm certainly not willing to call them freedom fighters - mercenaries is more correct. Still, Israel fought against a Palestinian army, and when Israeli sources insist on calling them terrorists, something far from the truth is implied. Whenever we enter a village we're met with smiles and hand waving, but it's obvious that power talks, and only a fool wants to appear against the guy with the gun in his hand. With that said, it's also true that the smiles we receive from the Christian villages seem warm and honest, and from the firsthand impression we get here, they really suffered under "terrorist" rule when among other things houses were commandeered from them for military purposes. They seem pleased with Israel at the moment, which suits much of the Israeli public since the image we're now developing for ourselves is that of cops of the world, the only ones brave enough to take the actions that others are hardly even willing to admit they wanted taken.

Yesterday afternoon I had a bath in the Damur river where it meets the Mediterranean - an unexpected but real pleasure, and after swimming and washing and in general relaxing, I truly felt clean for a while. I also received a package from Benni and Ruchama yesterday, with a vegetarian's delight inside and most important, news from home & much needed and most welcome.

Shabbat, June 19

These past two days, Thursday and Friday were rather long ones for us - we left our encampment rather early in the morning and didn't get back until quite late, and quite exhausted. Our job has been checking out the city of Damur, or more correctly, what used to be the city of Damur, entering the houses and apartments which were known or suspected as being "terrorist" strongholds - both searching for arms and making sure that the terrorists haven't returned. Since we're not really sure whether or not they've returned there's a certainly danger involved, but after two days of finding no one (along with a bit of firearms and lots of photographs) we've relaxed our readiness a bit. On Thursday we searched apartments which seem quite clearly to have been occupied by terrorists - we're told that years ago they commandeered whole blocks of apartments. Yesterday I had the feeling that we found Palestinian apartments rather than terrorist - an occasional gun, and a neighborhood which included anti-aircraft guns or tanks hidden on the street, but along with them childrens' toys and the comforts of home. When we occasionally meet someone on the street we ask them where the terrorists are, or fled to. Our officers tell someone who speaks Arabic to ask, and thus I'm able to learn that the Arabic translation for terrorist is simply Palestinian - which raises once again the question of just who it is we're fighting against. ((As a later note, I did hear the correct translation for terrorist as opposed to Palestinian in some of our later searches, depending on who was doing the asking.))

I don't feel that I'm in a position to be an authority, but the question of just how much destruction of Lebanon took place is one I've been trying to find an answer for, especially since it's raised continually in the news. As far as I can see, Damur no longer exists, and I got a similar feeling as we passed through Tyre.

The question of what it is we're doing here at all gets raised rather frequently, and I'm not the only one who raises it. It seems as though we're going to be here until a Pax Israelia is reached. In other words, Israel believes that it's able to dictate the terms of a peace, and to me that just doesn't seem possible. At the moment we are a liberating/occupying army - liberating in our eyes, occupying in Lebanese eyes. Of course there are Lebanese who see us, or who say they see us, as liberators - one tends to say nice things to the guy with the gun - but how they see us really isn't the point. The point, for me at least, is whether Israel can continue to see itself as world cop. One of my closest friends here, whose political views are quite far from mine, agrees with me wholeheartedly on this account - what Israel has to do now, he emphasizes, is to get the hell out of Lebanon.

Both on Thursday and Friday we swam and washed in the Damur river at the end of the day. I've volunteered to be on permanent guard duty there (to be sure that no one steals the water). It's a true pleasure to be really clean after so much dirt - yet amazing how filthy we can get so soon afterwards. Our encampment swarms with flies and when I write I often write one sentence, battle with the flies, another sentence, another battle. Flies seem to love an army, even if we really do try and keep ourselves relatively clean.

I wanted to relate a bit to the necessity (or lack of it) of our activities in Damur these past two days. Someone high up in the army obviously thinks it's necessary that we check out the town, so who am I to say that it ain't so. Still, the feeling I get is that our higher ranking officers are upset that they missed the war, and are trying in any way they can to get a piece of the action. I'd be happy to be proven wrong.

Thursday afternoon the first of our unit returned from 48hours leave. (My turn, fixed by lottery is a full week off.) He phoned the kibbutz as I requested, and reached Sarah Eshel who informed him that via Uri and Mira the kibbutz had been in contact with my parents and that as

much as was possible, they were reassured. (Of course then the latest was that I was in the Golan, and since then things have changed - but since it wasn't a lie I suppose that no one's to blame, especially if it makes us all feel better.) If my parents are reassured, then I feel more comfortable also.

The streets of at least the PLO sections of Damur are filled with posters which remind me of the 60's - Madison Avenue Socialist Realism. As should be expected, there are posters emphasizing the role of women in the movement - brave young women clutching rifles and the like. On the other hand in some of the rooms we've found hard and middle core pornography, suggesting that the reality of women in the movement is quite different from that advertized. Eldridge Cleaver in the 60's answered the question "what's the position of women in the Black Panther Party" with the blunt answer "Prone", and it's a fair guess that women's liberation in the Palestinian movement, other than lip service, hasn't advanced much beyond that stage.

Sunday, June 20

Yesterday was Shabbat for me until a bit after noon when I went out with a few others for a tour of a few villages a bit north of Sidon (just north of the El Awali river), trying with the help of the villagers (Christians and apparently Phalangists) to find the abandoned hiding places of the terrorists. As far as scenic trips go, this was about the best that could be asked for - Lebanon rises into hill country almost immediately after the coast and thus after a climb one gets a truly beautiful view of the area - villages, city (Sidon), Mediterranean, and lots of quite lush hill country broken up by deep river valleys. The people seem rather well to do, more suburbanites getting away from the city than poor village dwellers, though it's clear that that's not exactly the case. The land is used very well and as fully as possible, with small terraces on the hillsides and what looks like companion planting in small plots. To tell the truth, it's very easy to love Lebanon. I'm also rather happy to report that the area I saw yesterday was in much better shape than Damur which I'd gotten used to. Whole villages seem to be in very good shape, and from the view I had of Sidon (from above, and not from very close) it also seemed to be in rather good shape.

Each day as I listen to the news and I hear of the continuation of hostilities, the inability of both sides to reach an agreement, I get madder and madder - enough already! I've been called up two weeks, one week in the Golan, one week in Lebanon, and I'm still a full week away from getting home for my first leave. Of course we all hope that we'll get sent home soon, and even start rumors right and left that in the next couple of days we'll be released, but at the same time we're also getting used to being here, and things are getting organized as though we'll be here for a long time - sometimes it's better to be realistic and be surprised than to be optimistic and disappointed. Meanwhile I've got the feeling that on the political front Israel won't be especially pleased with what seems to me a very real possibility - the PLO will become a purely "political" organization, will join the autonomy talks and will ultimately get a Palestinian state. The possibility doesn't bother me much, after all I see it as unavoidable and even positive, but those who thought they would solve the Palestinian problem by military means are in for a surprise.

Though I'm sure I've emphasized this already, I'll do so once again. I don't like this business at all. Travelling through Lebanon is interesting and in some ways even pleasing, but yesterday we also had our fingers on the trigger for a while, ready for finding someone armed. If you'll excuse the expression, we're "deadly" serious.

I've now got some time to relate to the notes I made a full week ago. While still in the Golan we had a kabbalat Shabbat before our Shabbat meal - kiddush and motzi, and a drasha from one of our datiim. He related to that week's parasha (the m'raglim) and how it was relevant to us in this time of war, showing us that the "truth" of the situation depends on how you look at it, and with god's help we can take care of our enemies. There's certainly nothing earth shattering in this drasha and few would argue with it. What bothered me was that because it was erev Shabbat and this soldier had a kipa on his head, he was free to make what was essentially a political statement in the guise of religious preaching. Had I said that I wanted to give a different interpretation and then explained how the parasha suggested that we be careful not to get mixed up in dangerous adventurism, I'm sure that I'd be attacked from trying to divide the people in a time of crisis.

This brings me to another point I've wanted to make. From Dad or from books or simply from the folklore I've learned the phrase "there are no athiests in foxholes" and here we see many soldiers who are seemingly wholly secular laying t'fillin - for added security or something like that. We have religious people here who think they're helping us by letting us use their t'fillin. I'm happy to say that the kibbutznikim among us seem the strongest in withstanding this religious onslaught.

After the first few days of battle, when we had the impression this was a short war, the news

reported that 25 soldiers had been killed, and we all felt this was a heavy price. Today 200 more are dead, and we've stopped talking about the price, and almost about the goals of the war. War is war is war, and it drags on, even if I'm relatively safe at the moment.

Today I mark 10 years in Israel, even if at the moment I'm not in Israel. I hadn't planned to make much a a celebration around 10 years, preferring to celebrate a Bar Mitzvah in Israel three years from now, and that's what I've discussed with a number of people on the kibbutz. Being in Lebanon changed that somewhat - I've played with the idea of having a party here and some of my friends like the idea, but in the end I'm sure I'll choose to do nothing - I'm not exactly in the right mood.

Monday, June 21

It's now rather late in the afternoon. We were busy all morning and apparently I'll be busy this evening (and through the night) so I tried to rest, but the heat and the flies keep me awake. Earlier I wrote a postcard to my class since I received an envelope with four letters from the kids and they wanted to respond quickly. Our activity this morning would under other circumstances be considered a very pleasurable nature hike - and inside Lebanon no less. But the present circumstances - in full battle gear and me with a heavy field radio on my back - didn't help much. The territory was a wadi with terraces on both sides, and of course we were looking for terrorists hiding out. Still, I enjoyed the atmosphere and the scenery, even if we didn't have much of a trail (of course we didn't walk altogether on the same path) and we were kept busy bending down to pass under bushes and trees. We were close to the El Mashra river bed. I make note of all these places so that later on I'll be able to find a good atlas and get a better feel for where I've been. And anyway, in the meantime I try to make the best of things.

I was pleased when the Shabbat paper got to us yesterday and I was able to read some of the opinion columns. I write pleased because I discovered that I wasn't the only Israeli with very strong misgivings toward our action (or more precisely, war) in Lebanon. Here it's easy to get the feeling that those raising misgivings back at home are defeatists who are lowering the morale, and who anyways are against whatever the government does. Thus when I read columnists whom I don't ordinarily agree with and they have strong misgivings about the rightness of Israel's destruction of Lebanon in the name of defense I feel comforted. At least two fo the people in my immeidate unit (plugah) have been active in Shalom Achshav in the past, all all three of us have told each other than when we get out of here we should get more involved again, and as soon as possible.

Israel's army spokesman is always slow to make official reports. From where we're stationed we can hear shelling on Beirut (usually during the night - and especially last night) and then in the morning Israel radio reports that foreign correspondents report of Israeli shelling of Beirut, which we confirm immeidately but don't get official army confirmation until a few hours later. It's not too easy to sleep to the sound of this shelling, though I on the whole succeed. The most worrysome thing is that the shelling raises the possibility of a renewal of hostilities, and though I'm not the only person who's concerned that that may happen, I'm concerned for my own sake and hope it doesn't happen.

The official Israel policy toward war spoils is very clear - we're not to take or even touch anything other than weapons. My plugah commander agrees with that policy 100 percent, and when our g'dud got terrorist mattresses (at present we sleep on the ground) he refused to let us use them and complained to the g'dud commander that he looks the other way when other people in the g'dud use them. Though it causes a bit of discomfort, I'm in full agreement with my plugah commander and urge him on. When some of our unit took some firewood from a place we stopped at today he silently took it off the transport himself. On the whole, in my immediate unit, the only spoils have been small things for remembrances, though we've heard rumors of more widespread spoils taking by other units (ordinarily non-combat).

Wednesday, June 23

It's now rather early morning (6:30) but the latest we've awakened for quite a while. Apparently we've got nothing to do today, as there wasn't yesterday either, though we'd spent the entire previous night laying in ambush. In some ways things here are becoming rather clear - for instance we'll apparently be here until July 15, at which time we'll be replaced by other miluimniks who were released at the beginning of this week. Altogether it'll be 40 days - in the long run perhaps not too long, though each day seems endless. What's still unclear are Arik Sharon's plans for Lebanon. Last night a new cease fire went into effect, and from where we're stationed it seems that it's really in effect - the night passed quietly and ordinarily we hear shelling through the night. What we're most worried is the fact that even though the government claims that it has no intention of taking Beirut, the army (or Sharon) apparently does have plans of that sort, and we're part of them. I admit - to my mind conquering Beirut is political madness of the worst sort, and I'm afraid that this madness is what's running the war. All of us here are concerned foremostly

with ourselves and thus don't want to go to Beirut, but still we all admit that it's not only our worrying about ourselves that makes us against the taking of Beirut. We're all rooting for the cease-fire.

It's now middle-afternoon, and we're relaxing - half relaxed/half bored - until the evening at which time we'll probably relax and be a bit bored until we go to sleep, rather early since we don't have elctricity so that there's little to do at night. I get enough sleep, though food-wise I'm on a belt-tightening diet. Milk products and eggs get to us very infrequently so that my main diet is vegetables - hopefully fresh, often canned. We all receive packages mostly with cakes and sweets, and we're more or less eaten all we can of that sort of food. Most of us have had bouts with some sort of dysentery, though mine has been rather mild and hopefully behind me.

There's supposed to be a cease-fire at the moment, but our ears confirm what the radio reports - shelling continues, and with it apparently some scirmiches. We're rooting for quiet as I'm sure I've written at least once in the past. Part of the morning we spent practicing - exactly what I'd rather not explain, and it's probably a military secret anyway. Suffices to say that the army continues to make war plans while at least some of the politicians try to make peace. From the reports we hear and read Arik Sharon has done a good job of being two-faced, saying one thing and doing another, and I'm fearful that Begin who has now returned from what he doubtless thinks was "wowing" the Americans will either not be able or won't want to control him.

Thursday, June 24

It's presently 1:30 in the afternoon. I returned about two and a half hours ago from my morning activity - checking out a wadi near Damur - and have been relaxing and trying to keep in whatever shade we have here as much as possible. I've done some reading and written two postcards, and I've been telling myself that it's time to start writing these pages, but I've found myself up against a rather big problem - I don't have anything to write, or more precisely, the only thoughts which I might write down at present are rather depressing ones. We can hear shelling continue, and though I don't have a radio by me today it seems rather clear that there's no cease fire in effect. The question keeps coming up in my mind again and again - how much longer can this business go on. I'd guessed that Reagan had pressed Begin quite strongly, saying "look, don't go into Beirut", but I've been getting the feeling that even though Reagan probably said that, as do many Israelis, opposition and coalition alike, Begin seems to be leaning toward taking Sharon's advice, and if I'm frightened when Begin is in charge, when Sharon is in charge I'm terrified. So I don't really have much to write other than we'll wait and see and hope that this ends soon.

Now it's 5:00 and as I keep thinking (I also had time to read a far from good book) I think of things to write. Yesterday someone came to us from the Education Department of the army to give us some background on Lebanon and to develop some discussion among us. Though as soldiers we're supposedly not allowed to express political views, this person explained that part of his goal was to initiate just such discussion. Our discussion didn't develop much ,essentially because we knew rather well already the different viewpoints of the people in our unit. For me the most important point was one made by someone who lives in the Golan, a viewpoint expressed by Amos Oz in one of this week's newspapers: this is the first war we've fought which isn't outrightly and solely fought in order to secure and ensure our existence (though I'm not sure how the Sinai campaign of 1956 fits in to this picture). As long as we could explain (first and foremostly to ourselves and to our soldiers) that war was necessary for our existence, we could at least explain, if never justify, the deaths. But when we fight in order to gain some geographical or political advantage we call into question the basic consensus upon which Israeli society is based, and this is all the more so when we attempt so viciously to wipe out not only PLO but Palestinian existence. Still, it's good to know that I'm not the only person who thinks this way. The main problem that bothers me is that there's really nothing that I can do to act on these feelings. I can't exactly pack up and go home saying it's not my war. One of the people in my unit did exactly that, and while I can understand and even to some extent support that point of view, as a political person I have to acknowledge that though he may have acted on conscience, he also ruined his chances of having some effect on people in the future. ((What apparently happened was that my plugah commander felt that he was lowering morale and told him he couldx go home, which he did for a few days, returning a bit later and functioniong very well from then on.))

Sunday, June 27

It's now 2:30 and I returned to my "base" around an hour ago after leaving the kibbutz around 6:15 this morning. I was on the kibbutz almost 48 hours, and they went very, very quickly. I was among the last of the kibbutz's soldiers (altogether around 50 of us) to get home for a visit, and though I honestly felt a bit embarrassed being greeted by almost all the kibbutz in the chadar ochel and on the paths of the kibbutz I guess I should admit that it was also rather pleasing to be met with so much warmth and concern. I met concern for me, but also concern for us all - concern,

fear, a feeling of powerlessness and inability to do something to change the course of events in Lebanon. I came home hoping to be strengthened by the home front, to learn of their efforts to bring the war to an end

Monday, June 28

I stopped writing where I did yesterday because even though I was more or less in the shade, it was hot and uncomfortable and even a bit hard to concentrate.. What's more, though I wanted to review my weekend I found myself more concerned with my immeddiate surroundings - getting updated on what had or hadnèt happened when I was at home - such that I simply didn't get around to continuing.

Our mood here is greatly determined by the hourly news reports. When we hear that the ceasefire is holding our spirits rise, when it's broken we become fearful. Put bluntly, none of us want to visit Beirut. Today in the late morning we went out for a few hours to search a village in the vicinity of which terrorists were suspected to be hiding out. It was a ritzy neighborhood, and impressive to see. We had to approach the houses in order to question the residents, and that caused some rather heated discussion among us. Most of us felt very uncomfortable with that sort of job though some didn't express an opinion and exibited rather a high degree of naturalness in the job. It's important to note that those of us who claim that the Lebanese Christians are happy to receive us and who see Israelis as saviours still don't trust the Lebanese and continually mutter under (and even over) their breath that they're probably hiding terrorists, or even quiet Lebanese by day, terrorists by night. Sad (and even strange) to say, I'm about the only person who catches the sad absurdity of this situation. I've asked others why they think we can't trust the Lebanese if they also think they're so happy we came, and I've only met with a non-response - if they're still afraid of the terrorists and thus are under their influence (whether they're around or not) and thus we have to be careful in how we deal with them.

Tuesday, June 29

And now it's Tuesday morning, after managing to sleep unti rather late this morning (8:00), the result of being awake into the night (3:00) patrolling a couple of villages in our armored personnel carriers. Yesterday I found some time to read a bit and to play Othello (reversi), and as long as the news are more or less promising (though as attempts to reach an agreement drag on longer and longer the chances of a renewal of hostilities grow) life here stabilizes and becomes more or less bearablex (which is also a factor of the amount of shade I'm able to find).

Our patrols here remind me of the experiments conducted around the end of the sixties in American universities - students were chosen to be prisoners and guards and the guards amazed even themselves with the amount of brutality they exibited. We're not too different. Even the best of us (meaning I suppose those most concerned with being humane) can easily find ourselves unconcerned with what we step on, or the fact that we're searching someone else's house as uninvited guests. What's more, we seem all too readily able to accept the logic of our being here putting Lebanon in order. Some of us rationalize this by saying that the Christians really want us even if not all of them admit it, others simply call it our job. Even those who claim we're wanted here must find it hard to explain their liking us when we roll through their streets late into the night undoubtedly keeping many people from sleep.

Wednesday, June 30

It's presently around 10:30 in the morning, and I'm sitting more or less in the middle of a large Arab village ((Barja)). I've been here some twelve hours, my entire unit having hiked in last night in an attempt to surprise the villagers and thus keep PLO sympathizers (or outright terrorists) from running away. When we arrived curfew started, and with daylight all the males of the village were ordered to go to a central spot where professional intelligence people (and undoubtedly some Lebanese stool pidgeons) are busy identifying them, separating the good from the bad. While all this is going on military presense is needed in the village in order to find people who may be trying to hide from the identifiers or find a quick way out of the village. That's the justification of our being here. What exactly we're doing is a different matter. My main activity (as it is at our home base) is trying to find shade to sit in, and that not too successfully. I've read a few chapters of a book, gone through much of yesterday's paper, and slept quite a bit, though it wasn't very refreshing sleep. Other than that we've had close to nothing to do, and I'm more or less pleased with that role - I'm not one for telling people not to walk on the streets or searching for people in their own homes in order to bring them to the interrogators. On the whole the atmosphere is more or less bearable - children are playing in the streets, pleased with their games of sneaking around to get a look at us, the braver kids also greeting us with short "shalom"s. Women are sitting on their porches, more or less reassured that things could be much worse.

The village is a Moslem village, and thus according to Israeli thinking, obviously pro-PLO, and that's what the intelligence reports also verify. Once again, I'm in the minority, since I think that if someone wants to be pro-PLO that's their right, whereas Israel has set as its goal the uprooting of all PLO (and if you ask me, Palestinian) existence in Lebanon, and thus if you politically support the PLO you're automatically suspect of actively supporting it. It's very easy to justify our being good for Lebanon and yet putting this village under curfew. On the one hand (the liberal, wide-hearted approach) when we say we're doing Lebanon a favor and that the people here want us, we're referring to the Christian population - the Arab population is another matter altogether. The other approach is a bit simpler, if less pleasing to the kind-hearted Israeli - our first duty is to take care of the terrorists, after that we can worry about doing the native population a favor or not. In this particular case I don't get the feeling that we're doing much of a favor to the native population. ((Apparently during our full day activity we rounded up some 200 suspected terrorists or terrorist helpers, of whom perhaps 100 were released shortly thereafter and this was considered a successful action. When we finished a doctor was called in to look at a number of sick people which made all the soldiers feel like good Israelis. Toward the end of the day I along with a few others found a Christian family which more or less adopted us - we were ostensibly guarding the back side of the village where the family's house was, and they started bringing us a large and tasty meal. We ate, and talked, and the time went by pleasureably considering the circumstances.))

Thursday, July 1

As I've no doubt noted a number of times already, my mood (along with that of most of the people I'm with) is to a good extent determined by the news reports and the news they bring us about the attempts for a peace agreement. The last reports haven't been overly heartening - as time continues to go by and an agreement isn't reached the chances of a renewed outbreak of hostilities grow, and the Israeli army (let it be known, military secret or not) has rather massive plans for finishing off Beirut. Thus I want to be optimistic about the chances of reaching a settlement.

To my mind it remains madness for Israel to invade Beirut. Clearly, the strength of the Israeli army is sufficient to militarily put an end to the PLO problem, but that doesn't mean that we'll solve the Palestinian problem. Sadly, this isn't the first time that I think that madness is the dominant characteristic of Israel's rulers. I've got to conclude that the logic which to my mind governs my political thinking doesn't play much of a role in Israeli policy making. This means that if I can't understand what Israel thinks it can achieve in Beirut, someone else with a good deal more power and leverage than I have thinks conquering Beirut is a good idea. Needless to say, casualties on all sides will be high. When I try to explain that our casualties in this war are well beyond the casualties in a number of terrorist attacks my argument falls on rather deaf ears - war is war and it has a logic of its own.

With all this said, it's important to criticize the Palestinian leadership. Quite bluntly, the PLO leadership is responsible for bringing destruction on its people. A political leadership has to know the difference between working toward political goals and working toward ensuring the survival of its political base. When it makes the mistake of miscalculating its chances for success (or more bluntly, uttering empty slogans about fighting until the last drop of blood) it becomes at least as responsible for the destruction that happens to its people as the enemy. Certainly Israel has responsibility for what has happened to Lebanon and to the Palestinians, but just as we in Israel's peace movement knew that plans for a war existed and did what we could (perhaps not enough) to avoid it, Arafat and the rest of the PLO leadership knew of Israel's plans, and instead of doing something to avoid a war which they undoubtedly knew would bring about their military and political destruction continued to spout empty slogans. To me it still seems unavoidable that a Palestinian state will ultimately be established, but that's not justification for the PLO leadership to opt for a bloody war instead of seeking political solutions to their (our) problem. As is too well known, this wasn't some new mistake in the PLO thinking, but a continuing mistake which has brought both them and us much too much bloodshed.

One of our Shalom Achshav people (there are three of us - out of about 50 - altogether, though we certainly don't function as a unit, and undoubtedly there are others among us who have more or less similar views but aren't involved) just returned from two days at home and reported that it looks as though there'll be a large Shalom Achshav demonstration this Shabbat. Though I was very pleased to learn this, the news came to me while listening to a conversation the gist of which was that while there are soldiers at the front the country should be united and thus demonstrations were far from desirable. (As usual, the conversation also included strong criticism of the opposition along the lines of "those guys are just jealous that they're not in power and will criticize whatever Arik Sharon does". Sadly there's a bit of truth in this criticism. Though I'm against

more or less everything which Sharon does since it's ultimately destructive to Israeli survival, our opposition seems to honestly be jealous, or at least unable to explain the difference between it and the coalition.)

Since I believe that demonstrations can help to influence policy (I still believe that our major demonstration before Camp David made it possible for Begin to make peace) I'm rather hopeful aboud this demonstration. Still, I'll write Gary a postcard saying that the atmosphere among the soldiers which I thought a week ago was positive and sympathetic toward a demonstration may not be what I thought it was. While I was at home we talked and talked about how Israel got into this mess and how we can get us out. I'd written a postcard to Gary still at the beginning of the war requesting that he do something quickly to get us out of here. While at home we discussed the problem since some of our soldiers (miluimnikim) had returned home against doing anything, though after a few days they were ready to be out on the streets.. Apparently there's something about being at the front which makes you rather reticent to hear about demonstrations. But my job (which I'm far from good at) is to convince the people here that the demonstrations are in our best interests - bringing us home and getting us outx of Lebanon. I'd also like to explain that it's no accident that we got into this war, that Israel's leaders were looking for this opportunity for many months already, but the Israeli mentality is determined to a great extent by the word terrorists. Say that the terrorists are responsible and you don't have to make political sense - say the magic word.

Friday, July 2

Yesterday was perhaps the first political argument/conversation which I can say was more or less positive from my perspective. This isn't to say that people here don't frequently express the feeling that entering Beirut is worthless, but that this time those feelings were accompanied by a more or less political framework. Around aruchat erev someone remarked that a demonstration was planned for motzei Shabbat against the war, and the general reaction was disgust and indignation: "Those kind-hearted liberals demonstrate while we're still on the front - disgusting!" I remarked that I know a number of organizers of the demonstration and that only a couple of weeks ago they also were on the front. My objective was to make the organizers into real people as much as possible and not professional demonstrators. I think that I was rather successful. I reported that these same organizers were rather dubious about organizing a demonstration while they were at the front, for the same reasons that we here feel uncomfortable about it, but that their fear that Israel really intends to enter Beirut, and the fact that such a course of action will be not only destructive to Beirut and to too many soldiers but that it would also be destructive to the future of Israel, convinced them of the need for the demonstration. I emphasized that the demonstration wasn't about 45 instead of 40 kilometers into Lebanon - though we might argue about that point it wouldn't merit a demonstration while soldiers were still on the front - but around entering Beirut which was too important not to demonstrate about. To be honest, I'm not sure I spoke the truth here (I'll wait until I'm home to check out the point) but the point I made went across well and successfully (more or less - I know that I won't convince everyone) and that's good ehough for me at the moment. I knew that I wouldn't succeed in convincing people that this war was planned in advance - the cold and calculated act of politicians who see Israel as a world power putting every one else's house in order and who think that they can militarily solve the Palestinian problem.

One person here, who is adamantly against entering Beirut, claims that though he was against the war at the start, once he saw the bunkers of ammunition which the terrorist organizations had stockpiled around Damur, and the way in which they had entirely taken over Damur, he no longer felt that way and was willing to finish them off.

This raises for me the issue of the news reports that we hear about. In Israel it's a generally accepted truism that the world is against us, thus we're normally not surprised by reports of exaggeration or outright lieing on the part of the foreign press. Personally, I really don't know what I'm supposed to believe. We hear reports of news reports which are shelved by the U.S. networks because they're too sympathetic to Israel - a priest in Beirut whose house was destroyed by Israelis who still defended them because they freed him from seven years of destruction at the hands of the terrorists. If this is true, I really don't know why it shouldn't be passed for broadcast. I can't think of many more examples at the moment, though over the weeks we've heard and read of plenty of them.

Sunday, July 4

On the whole our job here until we're to be released is being prepared for the possibility of a continuation of warfare if and when negotiations break down. Needless to say, I'm rooting for them to hold up. Our government, however, seems to only understand force, and thus only know how to use force. Each day we hear that time is running out on a political solution, and each day we hope that things will remain quiet and are comforted with each day that passes. In the meantime

we really don't have too much to do. There are those who complain and are unable to fill up the time, while others of us succeed a bit better with the time on our hands, mainly because we prefer having almost nothing to do to having a war on our hands. Today we had a rather full day of a tiyul (10 hours) around a good deal of Lebanon - very scenic, very interesting and a great way to spend a day, if it weren't for the war. Details I'll fill in when I can sit down with a map and be more precise than I can be at the moment.

Last night's news reported that at the Shalom Achshav demonstration in Tel Aviv the police estimated 100,000 participants, without a doubt, a very, very impressive turnout. After I finish writing for today I'll send off a congratulations postcard to Gary. I have no doubt that some of the soldiers here who generally felt uncomfortable about the war were relieved to hear about such a large turnout. Suddenly it was easier for them to express their feelings more openly. It's interesting to note that as the night continued, the estimates quoted on the news went down and down. Today the government declared that it wouldn't be effected by the demonstration - 100,000 or not, to their mind Shalom Achshav is small and marginal and shouldn't be paid heed to. This is all, of course, as to be expected, and I still maintain the belief that a large tunrout has effect. I went to sleep last night very pleased; not convinced that we won't enter Beirut, but at least feeling that an important step in that direction had been taken.

Tuesday, July 6

Believe it or not, I'm sitting at a beach just south of Beirut proper, having stepped out of the water just a few minutes ago. The waves were small but the feel of the water great.

Wednesday, July 7

Yesterday's writing was kept rather short because when I finished writing those two sentences I decided to back to the water for another round of swimming. Yesterday's job was relaxing and enjoyable - travelling alonside some people from the navy who had some jobs to do (which don't concern me) and when they worked, I had some time to swim. At that time my overriding feeling was that one more week of this won't be too bad, and the 15th is our latest date for being released. Since then a half day has passed, and my mood has changed again. Talk has resumed of a continuation of fighting, and our place in that continuation, and this morning we've been busy making sure we're ready for that possibility/certainly (take your pick, depending on your mood or your source of information). What I have to learn to get used to (and has been hard for me to do) is the fact that the army doesn't act in the same way that a government does. At present I'm hearing the 10:00 news and they report definite advances in the negotiations, but we continue to prepare for war.

Two days ago the news reported that Begin stated that he didn't want to send troops into Beirut because of the price in human lives. Yesterday he claimed that Shalom Achshav's demonstration aided the PLO, making it less willing to give up. Be that as it may, I believe that the demonstation caused Begin to say what he did about not entering Beirut and I can only hope that he really will stand by that statement, even if at the moment I'm far from sure of that. Meanwhile Arik Sharon takes every opportunity he can find to explain whatever new reasons for starting the war, that he hadn't thought of previously. Hardly a day goes by that Sharon doesn't give a speech that explains why Israel went to war, and each reason is new and original. Perhaps this is a good sign - he has to find new reasons because the old ones don't convince any more.

Once I say that, I should also say that I've travelled through a good deal of Lebanon, and haven't seen the wanton destruction which I'd expected to see. This includes Sidon - parts of the main streets of Sidon are totally destroyed, and on the main road to Beirut I don't think that there's even one building which isn't at least shot up a good bit, but Sidon is a big city and away from the main streets the city seems very normal, with few sign of there having been a war. I don't really know what Israel claims, as opposed to the rest of the world, and I'd really like to know what's being claimed so that I can get a better picture of who's telling the truth, but I guess that I'll have to wait to get home in order to get these things straightened out better in my head.

I was busy yesterday reading Uri Avneri's report in HaOleam HaZah about the PLO in Beirut, and since I'm quite close to Avneri politically I found myself getting upset all through my reading. Avneri raises all the possibilities about Abu Nidal (who organization is apparently responsible for shooting Argov in London) in an attempt to explain how the war started. All of the possibilities he raises are ones he received from Palestinians while in Beirut - that Abu Nidal was working for people who were against the Palestinian cause, starting from the Syrians and Iraqis and as expected getting to the CIA and the Israeli Mossad. The basic idea is that everyone is against the Palestinians and wants to sell them out, and that's what caused all the destruction that befell them. This perspective bothers me greatly because it denies the most logical and simple possibi-

lity - that the Palestinians themselves are responsible for the destruction that occurred to them. For me all the rest is paranoid excuse making and conspiracy theorizing which should have gone out of style long ago when no one succeeded in making a conspiracy stick to the JFK assassination. Avneri continues to praise the "moderate" PLO members even though they continue to be moderate only behind the scenes and deny their moderation whenever Israeli peace forces try to publicize their contact with them.

Thursday, July 8

For a change I'm writing from home. When I didn't write from home my last leave I forgot a good number of details which I'd have liked to write, and thus I'm happy to sit down a bit and write. Still, there are a few details which I've told myself will have to wait until I'm at home for good - my way of satisfying the requirement of not giving away military secrets. ((I must have been referring here to the fact that I got home in the evening because I wasn't released until 2:00 in the afternoon instead of in the morning. The reason was simple - we were on alert for entering Beirut the next day and thus leaves were cancelled. Around 2:00 word came that the plans had been tabled and thus I could go home. 2:00 was also the hour we heard the news report of the ending of the government's meeting, meaning of course that at that meeting they decided to delay the plans for entering Beirut and thus letting me go home.)) Anyway, I got home last night around 9:30 in the evening and happily found Ruchama almost immediately. She was pleased to prepare a meal for me and we sat around the kitchen table while I ate and gave her and Benni an update about what's been happening by me. We sat for around an hour and then I left to visit for a while with Gary and Tamar before I got around to showering and going to sleep, around midnight. I thought I would wake up around 8:00 but by 7:00 I couldn't sleep already (force of habit, I guess - we wake up each morning at 5:00) and thus was able to call before 8:00 my time. One of the reasons why I didn't inform more details on the phone was that I'd done so in this journal and didn't feel the need, forgetting that up until now all the pages are still by me. Still, military secrets are military secrets and my guess is that I'm a bit too generous with them, though probably not much more so than other miluimnikim.

I didn't write yesterday that when I got to the beach off Beirut I also got to the northernmost outpost of the army below Beirut (from the south - from the east troops are much closer and inside Beirut proper) and I got an up front view of the Beirut airport (close enough to touch) and vicinity. A few hours later shells were falling right near by there, and I've got to admit that I don't mind being second line of fire, waiting to be sent to do something, rather than front line and in the middle of it any time. Of course I'm not really sure that I really like the idea of being a combat infantry soldier, but that's not something I can do much about at present.

I had most of today to feel amost at home, getting to the kvutzah, visiting with people in the chadar ochel, taking care of a number of things in preparation for going back, and constantly answering the question of am I through yet with the repeating refrain "by the end of next week". I even started to believe myself that it's not too far off in the future, even though I know too well that each day drags on and on.

Shabbat, July 10

No doubt about it, we're getting used to being here. It's Shabbat and Shabbat is a day of rest. Thus I woke up around 8:00 and read much of the Shabbat papers (I left the kibbutz before the papers came but was able to buy HaAretz and Al HaMishmar in Tel Aviv thus giving me a much needed change in my reading habits) and even started reading a book and now I'm starting to write and it's only 11:30. I returned yesterday afternoon, and in the evening there was heavy shelling of Beirut, but though we saw parts of Beirut going up in flames and heard about what was going on via the radio, it didn't keep me from getting a good night's sleep. The weather is a bit cool and windy today. On the whole not much of a change from the normal heat, but enough to cause a decline in the amount of flies around us, and I'm certainly not complaining about that (though during the writing of this sentence one fly persistently sought my nose). I suppose that the clearest example of getting used to being here is calling coming back from leave "coming home" and it's almost frightening how quickly I felt as though I hadn't been home at all.

I returned to my second home to the apparently true rumor that tomorrow we'll be leaving Lebanon for our base in Israel where we'll be busy for a few days putting our things in order, cleaning our armored personnel carriers and the like, and then being released a few days later. Though I joked that I don't want to leave Lebanon after finally getting used to it, there's no doubt a sense of relief in learning that we'll be leaving here soon, even if it still is a rumor. I admit that the news reports continue to frighten me and that I've got the feeling that this whole business still isn't over. I certainly don't hope that someone else will have to do the fighting if it's renewed (and let's not forget that at present between cease fires each day people

are getting injured) but I'll admit to being relieved once I'm no longer here. If I haven't written this in these pages already, one of the feelings I readily admit to here is fear.

The days here are long not only because it's light from 4:00 until 7:30 in the evening. They're long because there's so little to do. That's basically the reason that we took a full day tiyul and then the next day had a day devoted to sport, and why we wake up early by taking a short run and firing a few bullets and then prepare our morning misdar ((the dictionary translates parade, but that doesn't seem right, inspection sounds better)) - both special activities and rather regular hours are ways of making the time pass, and since we're supposed to be ready for any alert I suppose that it's logical that we be kept as much as possible within some sort of frame work that keeps us from falling apart completely. I'm with people of all kinds, those that clean up after themselves and others, and those that give this place a feeling of being a sty. Admittedly it's hard under these conditions to think too much about order and cleanliness. Our tent is made up of a camoflage net stretched out to whatever we can attach it to with mattresses thrown around all the ground where there aren't rocks and thorn bushes. It doesn't sound like much, but after a few weeks of improvements (and getting used to it) it's actually quite liveable. We read in the papers that the army is preparing to spend the winter here and that it gets cold here early. Our own stay is of course much shorter, but we also did what we could to make things liveable. We gegenrally don't eat breakfast and instead only drink a cup of coffee. Then in the afternoon it's usually too hot to eat much so that we only eat in the evening. The only problem with this schedule is that there's always someone who can't wait until the evening to eat and thus starts to prepare a small snack which almost inevitably becomes a rather full-scale meal with everyone taking part. Then the problem becomes whether or not someone is going to clean up, though the problem is rather easily solved since I've already noted that there are those who are good at messing up and others at cleaning up. ((We ceased washing in the Damur river when field showers got to us, about two and a half weeks before the end of our stay. A bit before that my makhlaka had improvised a pleasant shower when we found a showerhead and hose, and by sticking it inside a jerrycan placed on top of our armored personnel carrier and standing underneath, we were able to be the cleanest soldiers around.))

Now it's 12:30 at night and since I'm on guard duty doing nothing else than listening to the radio I decided to take out my pad of paper from my pocket and add a few notes. It really appears as though in a few hours we'll be leaving here and we'll be getting up with the break of dawn (how poetic) to clean up and pack and probably hurry up and wait. This is one of the things I most dislike about the army, but one of those things I've learned to put up with.

Earlier this evening we had a conversation with the commander of our ugdah (very high up) and since he dealt only with military questions and not political he wasn't overly interesting for me. Still, he had some interesting things to report, for instance confirming the fact that the army's (and government's) intention from the beginning was to get to Beirut. ((I'm not fully sure that this is really what he'd meant to say.)) Perhaps a couple of weeks ago hearing someone admit to such a fact would cause at least a bit of confusion if not an uproar, but today it caused little more than a raised eyebrow or perhaps an "I told you so" from those who really did tell us but now gained little satisfaction from hearing this. It's already old news by us. Perhaps of more interest was his explanation of how the army found that it had to work in order to defend its soldiers. He explained than when Sidon was taken the original intention was to save as much of the civilian population as possible, but this caused the loss of too many soldiers. Thus it was decided to let the air force go to work, and the result was an increase in civilian casualties but a decline in military. I can't imagine anyone being surprised by this reasoning. What's perhaps surprising is that someone would think that conquering a city could be done "cleanly".

Wednesday, July 14

The past few days I haven't found time to write (not from being too busy as I hope will become clear as I continue) and at present, 5:00 in the afternoon, I'd expected all this writing to be over and to find myself well on the way home, even in the shower already trying to get rid of 40 days of dirt. But things have changed a bit, and at present we're simply sitting around our base in Israel, ready and willing to be released, but not yet able for some reason which is far from clear to me, and I'm not the only one.

Sunday morning we left Lebanon and by the evening we'd returned most of our equipment. Monday and Tuesday were devoted to putting our armored personnel carriers (how I wish I knew a simpler name in English) in order, getting them clean and then returning them to proper wartime conditions. All this was completed yesterday, and we expected that today we'd have close to nothing to do and be released early. Or so we thought. Soldiers are always ripe territory for rumors, and this time it feels as though the worst rumors may be coming true. At least at present rumor has it that we'll finish on Friday. The problem is, that if someone already knows that on Friday we'll be sent

home, it's hard to explain just what we're doing here now - without equipment nor weapons simply sitting around very impatiently, though rather resigned to remaining here. Whatever work we've had to do here has been over by the evening, and until now we've been free from the evening until the morning. That's not enough time for me to get home so Sunday and Monday I slept at our base after spending most of the evening at the home of one of my friends from my makhlakah from Tzfat (only a few kilometers away) enjoying a pleasant meal around a table (for a change) and watching television until returning to sleep under the stars. What a life. This morning we had to return a bit later (9:00) so I took the opportunity to visit Racheli and Marty in Haifa. Racheli is expecting any day now and last night a bit after I'd gone to sleep Marty took her to the hospital, but by the time I woke up this morning they were back, still no baby. This is the first time I've gotten to their apartment in Haifa - lucky for me since I'd promised that I'd visit before the baby was born. Last night we had a pleasant meal, and since Marty had a map of Lebanon I was able to show them where I've been and what I've seen. As expected, a very pleasant visit.

As I've already written, today we had close to nothing to do. In the mid-afternoon most of my plugah went in a few cars to Tzfat to eat a real meal (though as a vegetarian I'm not sure that I respond in the same way to finally seeing a steak after 40 days).

And now it's midnight and I'm sitting at home after a shower, tired but still able to jot down a few words before going to sleep, especially since I don't know what's awaiting me tomorrow and thus it's worth while writing a bit now before going to sleep in order to make sure that I make note of a few things. As I finished writing my last paragraph word came that we could be released until tomorrow morning, and my commanding officer agreed to let me come back relatively late tomorrow in order to give me a chance to get home. Then I found a ride until Rechovoth which is returning tomorrow morning (along with my plugah commander who lives in Rechovoth) and we were off, around 6:30. We stopped off for an hour at a kibbutz on the way to bring someone home and that delayed us a bit (though it being a good and pleasant reason I'm not complaining) and I got home at 11:00 - not exactly time to do much visiting, but still time enough to say hello to Ruchama and Benni, shower, put some things in order and then sit down to write. We still don't know why we haven't been released. Apparently the negotiations around Beirut have become very messed up and the government really doesn't know what to do, and because of that it still wants some infantry on reserve, and that's us. As I've already noted, we no longer have our weapons or other equipment, but it's always possible to give it all back to us, and while we're all hopeful that tomorrow we'll get to our base and learn that everything's alright and we'll be finally and wholly released, none of us any longer want to be overly hopeful. Anything's possible.

Meanwhile, I want to remember to note that while in Tzfat to eat this afternoon I ran over to the community center where I remembered Joel Siegel worked, and sure enough I found him. Altogether we had enough time to say hello and promise each other that we'll get together sometime, but it was an exciting short visit. For now enough, since tomorrow morning I'm getting up early, even if I have to be in Rechovoth only by 8:00 whcih isn't very early.

Thursday, July 15

I'm home. Today things worked out exactly as I'd hoped, and the end was a very pleasant one. After a relatively easy day of leaving the kibbutz at 7:00 and getting up to my base, I returned to the kibbutz before 6:00 in the evening and started visiting, finally being able to answer yes to the question of whether I had finished my miluim. The army had decided that miluimnikim called up would serve 40 days, and today I finished my 41st day. To tell the truth, one day too many (as if all of the 40 days weren't too many) but all's well that ends well, and I'm at home, starting to get used to the fact that I don't have to get up early, put on my uniform and return to the army. I hope and intend to be well adjusted soon. But if it's true that all's well that ends well, all's far from well with our war. For me it's finally over, but it's not that way for those who replaced me, and neither is it over for the government which gets deeper and deeper into a political mess as time passes. Sadly, our government usually works via the maxim - when in a rough spot use force, and thus the possibility of the army's entering (or better, conquering) Beirut continues to grow. I didn't get home yesterday as planned (nor did a good deal of others, not only in my unit but apparently in all the units which were supposed to be released) apparently because plans to enter Beirut today (Thursday) weren't called off until the evening. This doesn't mean that entering Beirut has been called off, only that today's plans have been called off, as were those of a week ago when I was supposed to be on my way home early in the morning instead of in the late afternoon. But once again, I'm home.

I woke up this morning before my alarm and went to the chadar ochel - more to visit than to eat, though I did that too. I had an hour in the chadar ochel before leaving for Rechovoth where I met my ride, and there I heard the latest news - that late Wednesday night some people had been released and that the Beirut plans had been called off (or more sadly but more correctly,

postponed - undoubtedly a military secret) and I left to meet my ride with the confident feeling that we'd get to our base and be released, turn around & head home. And happily that's the way it went. We didn't turn around immediately since we took some time to visit with friends and eat a watermelon which we'd bought on our way north, and coming home we stopped twice, but I was relaxed and didn't feel pressured, and got home before 6:00 in time to visit and take a long and serious shower before aruchat erev - believe me, getting all the layers of dirt off me is a serious business which will probably require a repeat performance tomorrow.

Into the evening I continued to visit with friends. A good number of us got out today and perhaps I'm projecting, but I had the feeling of a bit of a festive atmosphere on the kibbutz. But festive or not, and rested or not, I feel as though I've missed out on 41 days and I intend to get into high gear in order to make up for the loss. I'm also convinced that the overriding characteristic of our government at the moment (and perhaps that of the entire country) is madness, and even if I've got lots of things to get around to, trying to do something to make sure that the madness doesn't sink in too deep is for me a very high priority item. What's very clear after a bit of visiting this evening is that I'm not the only person who thinks as I do, and I hope that we'll be able to build up some momentum and maybe have some effect.

Friday, July 16

I've spent a good deal of this morning cleaning up my desk and unpacking my pack, trying to make my room into a place that I can live in rather than someplace which I get back to every couple of weeks in order to shower and rest in a bit. I intend that things will quickly get back to normal, and among other things that means finishing these diary type notes and writing a regular letter tomorrow. On the whole, the diary has served it's purpose. The transcribing will be the strange part since I tried to be true to my mood when I wrote, and now when I'll be typing this out I may have the urge to censor or change things, though of course I won't. It should be as interesting to me as it will be to you to read of the different moods and feelings I went through as my forty one days went by.

Two things didn't get written about which deserve mention. When I got home for my first leave I learned that the day before that Ayala Bar Amotz's husband had been killed. Gary asked that I tell you on the phone so that you could inform Dorothy Kaplan and I told him that I'd rather not - I didn't want to mix the first news that you would receive from me with something which would increase your fears rather than calm them. My guess is that via Mira this news already reached you. Today was the first time since I've been away that I've seen Tzvi and we exchanged only a few words. I was uncomfortable because I got the impression from him that he didn't want to hear any condolences or the like, and if things would have been awkward anyway, this only added to my confusion and discomfort.

We left Lebanon on Sunday and spent Monday and Tuesday working on cleaning and somewhat fixing our armored personnel carriers. In some ways these were for me the hardest days of the miluim, though of course they shouldn't be comparable to the days when we were on alert and prepared to enter in the fighting around Beirut. I'm on the whole a conscientious fellow and when there are technical jobs to be done about which I understand close to nothing and anyway require only a few people to be busy and the others to stand around and watch, I'm always uncomfortable standing around and watching, and knowing that I can be of very little help when that's needed. It was probably that feeling, mixed with a heavy helping of almost totally mental and emotional exaustion - the result of 41 days - which made these two days so tiring and trying for me.

(the fingers hit the wrong keys)

I think there are only two more items that have a place in these notes - my tiyul through part of Lebanon and an explanation of what our (happily unaccomplished) mission was supposed to be if Beirut was to be taken (today undoubtedly someone else has the mission and is listening to the news reports as I did). I still want a map of Lebanon before I explain the tiyul, and I want to ask some people how much I can let myself explain inwriting about military secrets, so both of these items will wait at least a little while and may be included as appendixes.

I've now remembered one more point that I wanted to make note of, once again around the religious atmosphere that surrounded the war. I don't remember hearing any public officials saying things about "god given rights" to the war (who would want them) but the Chabadnikim were out in full force. Civilians from Israel were forbidden to enter Lebanon, except for one exception - the Chabadnikim and their mitzvah-mobiles, travelling up to the front to bring t'fillin to the soldiers. The fact that they believe that this will help protect the soldiers (and cause fear in our enemies) doesn't mean that a modern army in a supposedly secular state has to defer to superstition in the name of Jewish unity or something similar. The absurdity is that I as an infantry soldier am made to feel that I'm working against the unity of the nation by refusing to lay tifillin after these kind people have come all this distance to do me a favor.

I'm not fully satisfied with the enclosed map because it doesn't show a number of places which I might have had a few words to tell about, but on the whole it gives a good picture of where I was. Some roads are missing which keep me from giving more exact details, put perhaps I'll get a hold of a better map in the not too distant future and then I'll add a few details.

1) just about here I spent the first week of the war.

2) at an encampment just east of the coastal road (200 meters from the beach at the most) I spent four and a half weeks.

3) the Beirut airport, unclear on this map, which we were supposed to take.

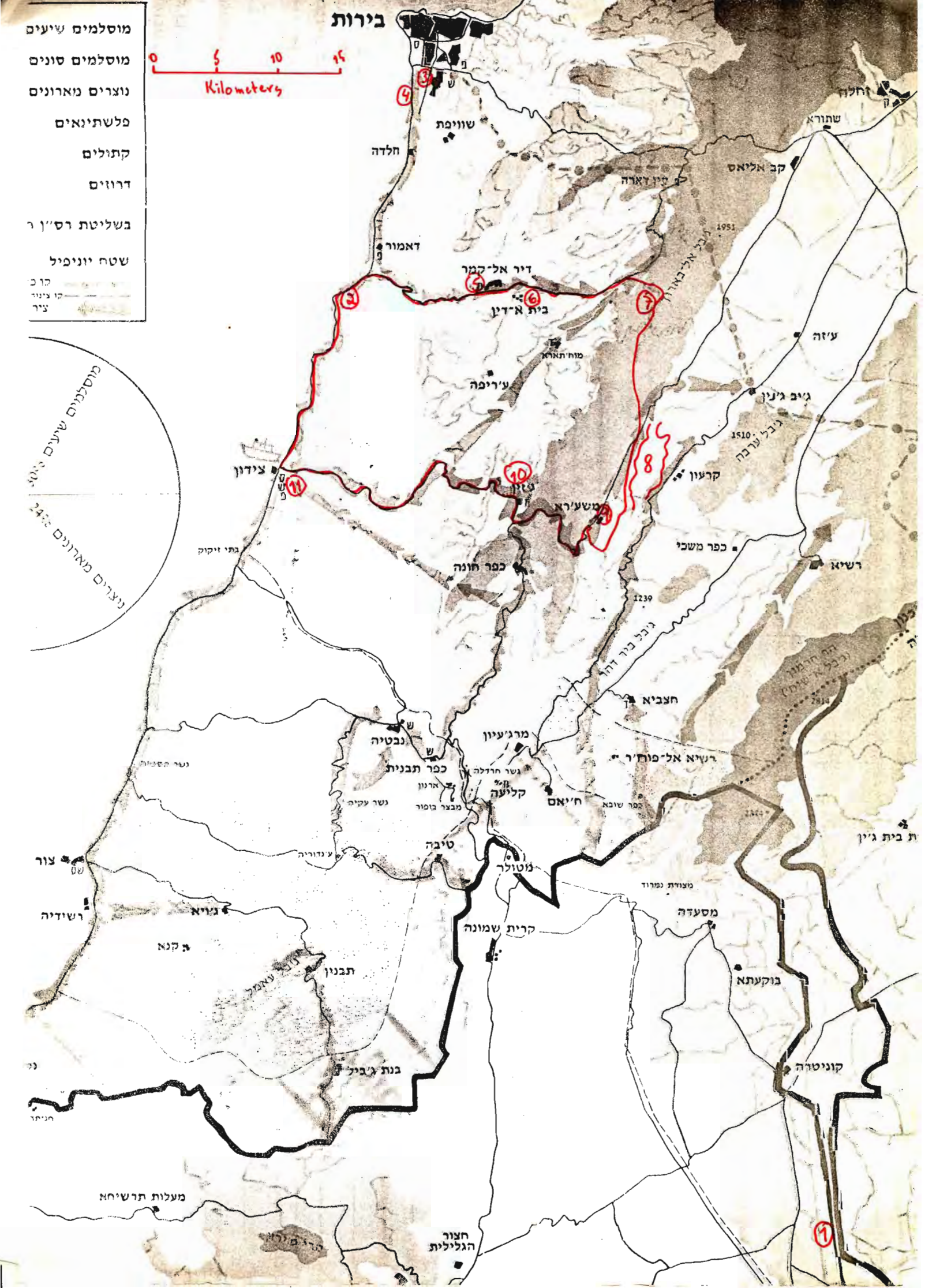
4) the beach just south of Beirut where I had an enjoyable swim.

The route of my tiyul - passing by Dir Al Kamar (5) and Beit A-Din (6), both very picturesque and pleasant seeming towns or large villages, the first Druze, the second Christian. By Beit A-Din we stopped to visit a hand-made castle/museum - both impressive and kitsch at the same time. It was completed rather recently, the work of one man (a sort of Simon Rodia obsession) and it's apparently quite a landmark, and even tourist attraction (Lebanon did have tourists besides Israeli soldiers not too long ago). Elias Sarkis lives in Beit A-Din and his home is visible from the museum. We didn't visit him though I suggested that we do so. Both the villages are in the hilly country that rises from the sea before the Shuf Mountains.

As we climbed into the Shuf Mountains (which included a distinct change in scenery, both of the view and of the flora) we arrived at a grove of cedars (approximately 7). We'd heard a lot about the cedars but hadn't seen them (there were those among us who pointed to every other fir or even cypress, saying "there's a cedar") and they were well worth the wait, and very hard to mistake for any thing else.

We came down from the Shuf Mountains still heading east, entering the Bak'ah, the valley of Lebanon, rich in agriculture and reminiscent a bit of the Jordan Valley. We headed south alongside the Kar'un Lake (8), a reservoir created by damming the Litani River, stopping to view it from the south, and then headed back west via Masha'ra (9) and Jezin (10) where we stopped to eat. Jezin is beautiful, built above cliffs and even waterfalls on the north-west (though not of exactly rushing rivers), the sort of place one easily falls in love with, though perhaps had we spent more time there I'd have been less impressed. We continued west via a number of pleasant seeming towns until Sidon (11) where we headed north to our home base. In all an awful lot of travelling, but worth it to see all we did.

I think that's about it, my notes are finished and I've told all I've got to tell until my next letter and those that follow, so for now, Love, Jay


בירות
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