Dear Family,

Wednesday, July 6, 1983

Thursday, July 7, 1983

That was a pretty impressive start. As soon as I took out my writing pad I got called for a meeting, and from then it was night time and guard duty and sleep, and then a morning patrol which isn't over yet but I've got a feeling that the present break will be long enough for me to write down a few sentences.

I'm in Lebanon. Actually, I'm at the northern most point in the easternmost area that IDF forces reached - perhaps we should call it the fartherst point that Arik Sharon's crazy dream was allowed to go. I'm about 6 kilometers from the Beirut-Damascus road, and not too much farther than that from Damascus ((22 kilometers)). Where I am has nothing to do with Israel's security, and that's clear to all of us who are here. Our main task is trying to keep ourselves out of trouble - though of course the best way to do that would be not to be here at all, but the logic of that seems to be lost on Israel's policy makers. Thus we're sitting close to and almost surrounded by Syrians, bordering Lebanese villagers who are much less than pleased that we're around and our main activity is seeing to it that we get out of here alive and in one piece. That's a rather uncomfortable thing to write - after all, we're in no real immeidate danger of fighting breaking out (Israel's government has made enough dumb errors and apparently even it doesn't see the point in making the error of a renewal of fighting now) and our main fear is that of becoming a statistic. Statistically the amount of casualties is actually quite low - but when you become one it really doesn't matter that you're one of only a few.

Last year we entered Lebanon on buses with all our equipment thrown every which way. This time, a year later, we sit on open trucks facing out with our weapons ready - and that only to get to our posts. One year of a very successful war. This morning I was on morning patrol with my plugah commander, and as we walked we talked about the sights around us, and about how last year both of us wanted to get out on tiyulim to see the country and this year all we want to do is finish our job and get out. I'm back with people from last year (actually, quite a few haven't shown up yet, and not because they refuse to serve) and on our first night, before moving up to Lebanon I talked with one of my closest friends who admits to be on the whole a Likud supporter. He also thinks that the best thing to do is simply fold up and get the hell out of here. I'm doubtful as to how effective I can be as a political organizer here, but I do have the feeling that quite a lot of people are ready to hear what we have to say.

I of course arrived a day late because Tuesday morning I read Dad's paper at the Family Therapy conference (it went over well, but more on that another time) and when I met up with my unit I was told that some people had already started getting a pool together, betting on whether I'd be with the unit or in prison. I've started explaining why despite everything I'm here, but I admit that the explanation is rather complicated. I've brought along a copy of Gary's and my petition which we didn't publish, and if the opportunity presents itself I'll take it out to explain (I'll also try and translate it.)

I've been sitting and waiting for well over an hour for our Armored Transport carrier to be fixed so I can get back to our outpost and take off my shoes for the first time in over a day ((overhauled would be a better word than fixed)). Since stopping writing almost an hour ago I've spent most of the time simply bullshitting with the others who are waiting....(I've now returned and taken my shoes off - when keeping a journal in the army sentences have a way of being cut short by having to take care of things.) Anyway, to finish the thought, most of the talking done in the army under "wasting time" circumstances is totally filler talk - no contact and solely for the purpose of passing the time. Sentences are usually short and declaratory, and it's understood that one responds to one declaratory sentence with another similar one - similar in lack of content but also hopefully more or less on the contentless subject in order to be polite ((and to show that you're listening)).

It's now about 8:30 in the evening and I've been reading, but someone has just walked into my bunker who prefers to talk. He asked me if I'd heard the news - a Jewish kid was killed in the Hebron Casbah today. My companion lives in Kiryat Arba (next to Hebron) and he's upset - what are we doing way out here in Lebanon if we can't even keep law and order in our own country (backyard). I told him that to my mind that was as good a reason as any to get out of Lebanon quickly. The subtle humor was lost on him. Now he's trying to convince me that he loves Arabs and that he only wants to live in peace with them - and he's trying to pull me into a discussion I'm sorry, but I'm just not interested, and I don't have the strenght at the moment to start arguing with true believers - who by the way (in this case at least) honestly don't know what they're talking about. Still, I really did like his unintentional reason for getting out of Lebanon, even if in his eyes the people from Kiryat Arab who throw grenades at houses in Hebron and tear out phone polls and the like are truly only interested in living in peace in their ancestral hom

land and the Arab mayor of Hebron is on the payroll of the PLO - but otherwise he wouldn't have anything against him. Honestly, I really don't know where to start if I get into an argument.

On the other hand, earlier today I had a discussion with another religious member of our unit - also a rightist which is something which all too often goes together here. I was honestly taken aback by the amount of criticism he had for our Lebanese adventure and for his willingness to withdraw, and even negotiate on the future of the west bank. Apparently our government's behavior in the war has been too repugnant for him. He's come to realize that you can't have military solutions to political problems. I'm still trying to get out of him some response to my rather careful prodding of "isn't it interesting that I told you so a year ago."

Friday, July 8

Our first day and a half here was very hectic and too full of activity to get the feeling that we'd soon be getting into a normal day to day schedule without too many hours of busy-ness each day. Since then things have become what I guess can be called normal, and I've been able to write, and start reading a book, and in general relax for a good deal of my time here. Routine is what helps the time pass and even if I'm in Lebanon at very close range from the Syrians ((at one point of our outpost we were no more than 200 meters from them)) we're already getting the feeling that this is simply another month of miluim.

Still, this is Lebanon, and even if I'd like to forget that fact, I can't. We're wider awake here than normally in the Golan, and everyone is aware of the dangers that can surprise us. Our living conditions here can almost be called spacious. Twenty-four hour a day electricity which pumps us constant hot water, an electric refrigerator, a color television with a video-tape attachment for which at present we have no tapes but have been promised that they'll arrive. This morning a phone truck arrived and I was able to phone the kibbutz and leave a message that my spirits were as high as the mountain peaks around me.

I arrived at our base one day late and I joined my unit at night, going by truck to the area in which they were doing some practice shooting before leaving for Lebanon. Sitting in an open truck on a starry and moonless night I had the strange sensation for a short moment of being on a summer camp outing - until I felt my rifle in my hands. It's harder to get that feeling here, but during the two nights I've been here, on my guard duty hours, I've been able to gaze up into the sky, watch shooting stars and simply enjoy the moment.

Shabbat, July 9

Things really have become quite normal here. We generally have a way of complaining about spending too many hours doing patrols or guard duty, but for the time being we're busy approximately six hours a day, and for someone used to very long days that's really not such a long time I have time to read, including a good deal of the Shabbat papers this morning, and I had time to take out my Othello board for a game. I realize that I never explained the game to Dad, but it's really a rather well known game, also called reversi. I also helped out my officers in enlarging a map of our outposts - they were doing it free-hand and I showed them that by making a matrix and pinpointing important points on it, they could be much more precise. They were pleased (I ended up doing most of the work) and I thought - my mother would be proud, probably asking out loud if the army couldn't put her industrious son to better use than as an infantry soldier.

One of the nicer things about night guard duty here, in addition to the very star-filled sky, is the fact that we have firefliers, and they're a real pleasure to follow with the eye.

About one-third of the people in my unit didn't show up for miluim for one reason or another. Perhaps half of those for very unclear reasons - in other words they simply didn't want to come. The army is no doubt trying to find these people - to check out whether those who are sick are really sick and the like. Still, two interesting things need to be said about this aspect of the war in Lebanon - one, whatever popularity polls may show (and they are pretty negative) no one wants to be the one to fight this war (or more exactly, take his chances in Lebanon) and two, those of us most adamantly against the war, even considering out percentage of refusers (who go to prison not stay free for one excuse or another) is apparently lower than that of those who support the war - when somebody else is fighting it.

Actually, we got off to a rather bad start here. My former plugah commander, who for the past four years was second in command of our g'dud and just recently was promoted to being commander of another g'dud in our khativa was killed the first day in Lebanon when his jeep ran over a mine. We got the word the morning of our second day here, and of course that not only put us into a bad and depressed mood, it also made us more than a bit fearful. The bad mood goes away very slowly, though our fears have to a good extent abated - there's a lot to be fearful of, but we can rather confidently carry on with out day to day tasks, even if we are only a few hundred meters from the Syrians. Yoel was about 36, a father of four and a good kibbutznik. He wasn't much of a political feelow, but he was far from in favor of this war.

Sunday, July 10

I'm keeping myself on a pretty rough schedule - I try not to let myself sleep more than six hours a night (definitely not non-stop - I invariably have to get up for guard duty sometime during the night or very early morning) and until now at least I haven't allowed myself to sleep in the afternoon. Perhaps for someone else the six hours of guarding or being on lookout and the perhpas two more hours of various odd-jobs is a very full and exhausting day, but for me it's almost a vacation, and the thing I'm most worried about is getting into the habit of too much sleep. When that happens I get tired simply from how much I sleep, and when I get home I have a hard time getting out of the sleeping habit and then I don't get around to the work I have to take care of.

In addition to keeping a journal, I've got a few books with me, the first of which I'll soon finish, and I'm also writing a letter to David McReynolds. A couple of weeks ago Gary received a letter from him for Shalom Achshav and Gary responded to him with a short note explaining that we're interested in contact with the WRL but that we have real problems with the way the American left relates to Israel and its left, adding that I would try and write a fuller letter. Yesterday I started writing and I'm quite pleased with the start.

Today I spent three hours of my morning looking into the Syrian controlled side of Lebanon through strong binoculars - watching for troop movements, though on the whole seeing that the average Syrian soldier is about as bored and disinterested as I am by our soldiering job - not much of a suprise, but something it would be nice for policy makers to think of - and send us both home.

Tuesday, July 12

I'm rather surprised that I didn't write at all yesterday - perhaps I did and had the dates mixed up, but I simply don't remember. I do remember that today and yesterday were quite full, though not necessarily active days. Life has become so regular that our hours are filled with quite a few tasks which keep me from sitting down and writing, for example, this short paragraph was started over an hour ago and then interrupted by our pre-night time briefing. Now it's time to go to sleep - it's 7:30 and I'll be sleeping for five and a half hours near where I'll be guarding from 1:00 until 3:30. I'll have a mattress and it'll be "indoors" more or less, but it'll be dark and I won't be able to write, which is a pity because I really did want to develop a few thoughts at this time. Hopefully tomorrow morning. As things have been going I won't be very tired so that I'll have some free time to write again.

Wednesday, July 13

And now it's 8:30 in the morning, after sleeping until 1:00 and then from about 5:15 until 7:30. I certainly need no more sleep than that under my present circumstances. This morning I phoned Gary at the kibbutz Artzi since it's easier to reach him there than to reach the kibbutz, but this time we had a poor connection and he was barely able to hear who was calling. Better luck next time. Anyway, I only wanted to call to jibe him about organizing a meeint of Shalom Achshav activists today (which I read about in a paper I received here) when I can't be there in attendance. I just now finished a happily milkech breakfast. Not too many milk products find their way to us here so that when they do I almost corner the market. I do get enough to eat, though quite a bit of that "enough" is rice or potatoes.

Two days ago a transit bringing soldiers back from leave was attacked (or somehow blown up) and two soldiers were killed - neither of whom I knew, but both of whom from my larger unit or khativa (I've looked up the proper translations for these terms in the past, but I simply never seem able to remember them). If I thought a year ago that the deaths in this war were pointless it's sad to say that these new ones are even more pointless - even many of the most ardent Begin supporters are fairly openly saying that the best thing to do is simply get the hell out, and as quickly as possible. Our first few days went by here with rather a minimum of political discussion, but things have been picking up and we argue/discuss more freely. Once again, my political views are common knowledge here, but I still find the opportunity to express them, and to emphasize that I've been consistently against this war from the beginning, and that perhaps that suggests that my basic perspective is a correct one which deserves consideration. Most people don't see the need for any sort of ideological orientation and they thus don't understand the significance of "being right" not simply to be able to say "I told you so" but in order to be able to correctly predict what will happen in certain situations and thus perhaps to avoid predictably unadvantageous situations. I may be able to get a point across concerning the war, but I greatly doubt that this underlying idea has a chance of getting through.

Two more soldiers killed, along the same route that I'll be taking when I go on my leave (though I still don't know when that will be - I prefer to leave it until the end) doesn't make me or any of the others with me especially comfortable. We're very close to the Syrians, and we occasionally fire in their direction to keep them from crossing the imaginary red line that divides between us, but on the whole things are very quiet here and we don't have the feeling of an imminent outbreak of fighting. (The Syrian soldiers facing us seem as disinterested in fighting

us as we them, and as I guess should be expected, it's apparently only their leaders who speak of being willing to sacrifice 20,000 dead in the next war.) Still, when these pointless deaths occur, I have to think twice about my position against refusing to serve in Lebanon. If something happens to me that is (excuse me) my problem in the sense that I won't have to answer (or be able to answer) to anyone. But if something happnes to someone whom I convince that it's necessary to serve, that's the sort of responsibility that I could find it very uncomfortable to live with. Basically today's refusal to serve in Lebanon is based on the idea that we must express our refusal to be part of our government's schemes for a Pax Israelia which we understand can only bring us greater and greater problems instead of solving them. But I certainly don't disregard the personal element which although often denounced as cowardice seems to me a very valid way of viewing things - my life is too valuable for me to risk on the crazy schemes of a power crazed government. I admit to being almost fascinated by the idea that my life isn't too valuab to risk in other circumstance like a war which I accept the necessity of. After all, death is death, and I'm not looking forward to it in the near future, good cause or not. Still, there's something that both commands respect and yet seems even ridiculous at one and the same time in the way that someone so quickly, even automatically, heeds the call to drop everything and go to war. (I should add the obvious - that one's community's expectations play not a small role in the way a person behaves in this situation.)

Thursday, July 14

Armies are for warfare, and war today is pretty specialized destruction. I was released fr the standing army eight and a half years ago. When I enlisted I used a semi-automatic weapon an learned the use of a wide range of weapons not significantly different from those seen in World War II war movies. The development of "personal" warfare technology has so increased since my release that it's not too much of an exaggeration to say that I'm already a soldier of an earlie generation. But we're all still needed, and thus we are constantly going through refresher courses on the latest in use in the Israeli army - rocket-grenades launched by our automatic rifles, personal "fire and throw away" rockets, and whatever else can be used to kill more effectively. Warfare has always been among the most advanced technologies around, but today it's even further advanced and moving into the future in leaps and bounds.

Meanwhile the individual soldier is yet to be replaced by a re-usable robot. (I remember when still in the enlisted army a group of us from infantry who were supposed to be moved to tanks spent a day at a tank base. The commander there, in a "conversation" with us at the end of the day, explained with a certain obvious embarassment that it was cheaper to replace a soldi than it was to replace a tank. He emphasized that he wasn't making a value judgment, just statin a fact, but the sad point was even more sadly clear.) We have to spend long hours on guard duty often when it's late at night and cold, and we get tired even if our weapons don't. We also get bored. At present I'm doing a good job of keeping myself busy (I just finished reading my secon book during miluim) although a very bored comrade here asked me how I can keep myself occupied b reading and writing. He's bored stiff, watching television (or video-tapes) all day and finds it strange that I'm not.

Friday, July 15

This morning I was on patrol (for a change riding what would be considered shotgun in our armored personnel carrier instead of walking) which included walking through the village nearest us in the very early morning hours. There's really nothing new for me in seeing a poor Arab village waking up to work - I've seen that sort of thing often in Israel, or in our traditionall occupied territories - still, this time the thoughts that came to mind were more depressing than usual. It's well known (and rather obvious) that this part of Lebanon isn't overjoyed with the Israeli "liberation". We can't pretend to be the good guys here, and when we walk through the village I get the feeling of being in a B Western of 20 years ago - we hear only the sound of our footsteps (and the motors of our armored personnel carriers) and are ready at any moment for an ambush behind each wall. We're certainly lucky that the villagers do nothing about their dislike of us, because they certainly could do something if they chose to. But it's strange to think about these people - should I hold them in a certain respect for their ability to adapt to new and not especially enjoyable circumstances (like most peasants throughout history have been known to do) or should I feel contempt for them for doing close to nothing to stop the occupatio they're under? Whichever way I look upon them (and I think that I mostly have a sort of anthropolotical/investigative interest which I'd be happy to forego by simply not being here) I can't get over two basic facts - that I'm the guy with the gun in his hands, and that each additional day that we're here is playing with fire.

We're about 30 people here, and today an additional person from our unit joined us - anothe kibbutznik and Shalom Achshav supporter. I was surprised and even a bit offended when at dinner someone spoke to him disparagingly - "be quiet, you Shalom Achshavnik". I was surprised and offended because no one has said that sort of thing to me. I immediately jumped into action -

"why do you say that to him and not to me? I'm much more active than he is". The response was rather surprising - "what', really?!" I said of course, that I was proud to be a Shalom Achshav activist, and what's more, that I'm right. I certainly caused a couple of people to be rather surprised, but apparently I'd already established pretty good contact with these new people so that I was already off to a good start and I may even be able to exercise some political influenc

Sunday, July 17

I thought that I'd write yesterday - after all, Shabbat is my regular letter day - but it turned out to be a very long and not very enjoyable day. At around 9:00 in the morning we were put on alert, and remained that way until the late afternoon, most of that time not knowing why. It turns out that the previous night the Syrians moved tanks into front line positions just a bit south of us, and in the morning the outpost facing those tanks was busy trying to get them to retreat - by occasionally shooting at them. Things could have flared up rather quickly and because of this we spent most of the day in our bunker - just in case the Syrians decided to shoot artillery in our direction. We're now back to normal, though I ended the day with a Class headache and since I had to be on guard duty in the middle of the night I drugged myself pretty heavily with aspirin in order to make sure that I'd be able to function well. It's now mid-mornir and I'm doing well.

I want now to translate Gary's and my public statement on not refusing to serve (which never went public) because in the past few days I've been doing a good deal of thinking about the issue of refusal, and if I'm going to explain myself well (to myself as well as to others) I have to open from my starting position before coming here ((to Lebanon)). (I should make clear now that my basic position hasn't changed, though I may shed some light on how I get to it.)

Following the Lebanese War, the present government's policies and the ongoing rule over a foreign population, confusion and a lack of understanding have grown within the country on basic questions around our existence in the State of Israel. The use that the government makes of the IDF for purposes that aren't accepted by a large part of the citizenry raises second thoughts among many youth as to their ability to identify as in the past under any circumstances with the State.

We have been educated to be, and we wish to be, sensitive to the Other, to relationships of respect between us and other peoples, and to live in peace, and now - the reality which a government insensitive to feelings creates leads us to more annexation, more settlements in occupied territories, more oppression - and more distasteful and avoidable wars.

We believe that any dovish position which is also Zionist in the sense that it is based on zealous guarding of the existence of the State of Israel and of the right of the Jewish people to independent and sovereign existence in its homeland - any dovish position of this type must be based on the existence of a strong IDF as a defensive and deterrent force for generations to come in our region.

We stand at a cross-roads and search for the golden path between the reality of the State of Israel as it is today and our moral values. Because of our desire to repair and to improv that reality, we live with a constant tension between the cry of personal conscience and the sense of belonging to a society with common national goals; between the desire to have absolute justice and pure morals and our ability to actually influence the development of events.

The decision is not an easy one, but we must choose responsibility to our people above a seemingly clear conscience. The only way in which we can truly solve the problem of conscien is via educational and political influence on the people. The call to refuse to serve means withdrawing from the national debate which is still being strongly debated; to give up our sources of influence and to break totally with those who do not think as we do. Beyond this red line lies a dangerous chasm.

We feel great responsibility for the future and the security of Israel and the image of the IDF. We cannot, neither are we permitted to break the rules of the game as our present government does. We must put all our strenght in a struggle with democratic means - both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary - in order to change th government and to influence its decisions until it is changed. We don't claim to judge decisions of conscience of others, but in the present reality of Israel there is something lacking in decisions of conscience of this sort. They divide between us and the rest of the country and divorce us from the centra question of conscience - our mutual responsibility to return the country to a pioneering and humanistic Zionism and to work toward peace between nations. Not via refusal to serve but only via an ongoing and uncompromising political and educational struggle for the heart of the nation will we succeed.

This is a rather quick translation, and though it may seem strange, I'm quite sure that I write Hebrew better than I translate (my own writing at least) into English. Parts of this statement have the feel of being the work of a committee, though on the whole I'm quite pleased with it. But this is beside the point. I translated in order to raise the issue of refusal

from the beginning. What's most interesting to me in our argument and counter-argument is the fact that what I call the anarcho-individualist argument isn't raised at all. During the war in Vietnam, in addition to the argument that if we all refused to serve we could stop the war was a very strong and perhaps even more popular argument - it's my life and nobody has the right to tel me what to do with it. This wasn't pure selfishness but rather a certain view of society - I'm a member of a society through my own choosing and if I choose I can deny its legitimacy. What's more, my life is the most precious "possession" I have, and thus I'm the one to decide whether or not to sacrifice it and for which cause.

Though this argument raises certain problems around the nature of an "off/on" society - conditional membership probably raises more problems than it solves, I can find quite a bit of valu in it and find it quite defensible (and all the moreso when I'm in a position of risking my life for a reason totally unacceptable to me). What's most interesting however, is the fact that such an obvious argument as this hasn't been raised in Israel. Even those who refuse to serve do so not for reasons of "saving their own skin" but out of a desire to "stop the war machine" and/or not to be part of an immoral action. Apparently Israel has remained, at this late date, enough of a "family" united by a common cause so that social atomization, even in conditions of grave personal danger, isn't a major issue. This is to Israel's favor, though I'm quite dubious that this situation will hold for much of a long time to come.

Monday, July 18

Time passes slowly, though last night I was on guard duty late so that I had a chance to wat the news on television, and the feeling of being on a more or less regular schedule (instead of either starting to sleep or to guard at 7:30 in the evening) made the time much more "normal". We've still got two and a half more weeks to go here, and I'm still rather unsure when I'll be getting home for leave, though it looks as though I'll have a relatively long vacation starting in another week and a half. I could be home now for two days and then for perhaps another three toward the end, but I prefer to try and put the leaves together - for a couple of reasons. Firs though I'd be more than happy to get out of here for a while, I want to put my vacation to the be use possible, and that means having a number of days together so that I can get some work done. My second reason is admittedly a bit strange - toward the end of this miluim period is a jazz concert in Jerusalem with some artists whom for someone living in Israel it's something extra-ordinary to get a chance to see and hear. When I left for miluim I didn't think too seriously about the concert and had no misgivings about missing it, but sitting in Lebanon for an extended period of time makes one think more seriously about little pleasures like this so that I'm now making plans to have my leave in time to be at the concert.

Thursday, July 21

I'll probably succeed in writing only a few sentences at the moment, but since it's been a rather long time since I last wrote, I want to at least get myself started for when I'll have mor time to write later today. It's now about 7:00 in the morning and soon I'm off for a rather long (and probably tedious) trek with our field radio on my back - patroling a number of dirt roads which the army checks out here once a week. Tuesday I didn't get around to writing because I was busy the entire day on maneuvers - two armored personnel carriers from our infantry unit participated in an exercise of a tank unit. We didn't do much, but as opposed to our expectations about exercises of this sort, we also didn't rest much, and we were travelling a good part of the 24 hours we were away from our outpost - almost 20 hours. Thus late yesterday morning when we returned, our major tasks were getting the tons of dust and dirt which we had accumulated off us, and resting up. I'm definitely in good shape, if the fact that I didn't need much sleep is a measure of that. Still, last night I was lucky not to be on guard duty (partially because I've got a rather exhausting job this morning) and I did an excellent job of using the time for sleep, even if I was dressed and wearing shoes. By now I'm well rested, though I expect to be rather exhausted once again when I return hopefully early this afternoon.

Israel has decided to withdraw its troops to the natural border of the Awali river. In the west that means that there will be much less contact with the Lebanese population and thus hopefully fewer soldiers will be injured. In the east this doesn't mean anything - the IDF will be staying where it is now, with us sitting 22 kilometers from Damascus. Israel is always rightfull concerned about Arab troops being so close to our major population centers, and here we are, spitting distance from Damascus, and we can't accept as honest or justified the Syrian concerns about that closeness.

The partial withdrawl puts the left in a bit of an uncomfortable position. We are and have been from the beginning for a quick and total withdrawl of Israeli troops. Simply put, our being here doesn't add anything to Israel's security. (It's now 3:00, and I've just woken up from an hour's sleep, following lunch and a long shower after returning. I asked someone to wake me by 3:30 if I'm not awake, but he told me he was sure that by 3:00 I'd be awake already - he's gotter to know my habits.) Anyway, the left has to support a partial withdrawl as a good start, while

at the same time alerting people to the danger of our setting up semi-permanent shop in Southern Lebanon. The danger of Southern Lebanon becoming our "north bank" is a very real one, an idea which a number of people in Israel speak seriously about at present, with undoubtedly more who will adjust to the idea and support it with time. There can be no real replacement for a quick and total withdrawl.

It's hard to speak of my "tiyul" today as an enjoyable one - walking perhaps 12 - 15 kilometers, including rather steep hills, with 12 - 15 kilograms of field radio on my back is never truly pleasureable. But it gave me the opportunity to cross a good amount of territory and thus to catch the view and get a feel for the territory I'm in. At the start of these miluim I wrote that I wasn't interested in seeing the country, and it's true that I'd much rather be at home and not have to think about Lebanon at all, but we've got to make the best out of what we've got, and this is what I've got at the moment. I suppose that to a certain extent today's tiyul could be called dangerous (or at least moreso than simply sitting on guard duty at my outpost) but I didn have the fears that I had of a year ago. This time the fears are of something much less clear - not waiting for a battle but instead not knowing if and/or when something will surprise us. Thou I've adjusted to both of these fears (and I question whether such an adjustment, like that of the peasants here whom I've already written about, is a positive one) I'm not sure which I'm more disturbed by. Probably by the present one, though "when I'm not near....".

Tuesday morning I stuck a book and my writing pad into my back pouch, expecting that I'd fin a good deal of time to either read or write. I didn't. When I returned late Wednesday morning, after having slept perhaps three hours I succeeded in sleeping an additional three, but there was enough busy-work to be done in order to keep me from reading or writing - my major pleasures here The exercise gave me a chance to see how tank warfare functions from close up, and while I have r special love for infantry (we're supposed to have some special pride because of our doing everything by foot ((something which with our armored personnel carriers is no longer true))) I am pleased that I don't have to be inside a tank all the time.

Free time in miluim isn't what it used to be, basically because we've entered the era of video. Not too long ago the chief education officer's department would send us books and games and an occasional lecture. Though most of the books were third rate mysteries or Carl May westerns, it was nice to see a group of soldiers reading, and the conversation that developed around game of checkers or dominoes was, even if small talk, positive. Today we have video, and that means either second and third rate films from the education department or tapes that soldiers bring from home, invariably blue. There's nothing intrinsically bad about watching a blue movie (though five minutes is enough and ten often too much) but when it's your central (and only) form of entertainment it gets to be very tiresome. It should be clear that I'm writing here of myself and not of too many others - we have people here who from morning until evening are glued to the television, and they don't even laugh at the jokes we make about seeing the same central characters over and over again. As a by now conneusseur, I can rather conclusively state that most of these films are not outrightly oppressive of women - they're too mechanical for that . Our most "arty" film is the only truly "oppressive" one - it truly tries to prove that a woman is only a sex-object. Its major redeeming value is that it has a soundtrack with an Albinoni piece which t soldiers here have learned to enjoy and hum rather constantly - it adds quite a bit to the cultural atmosphere here to hear a bit of "classical" music.

Friday, July 22

This morning has gone by very quickly - after being on guard duty until around 4:00 and then spending an hour and a half cleaning some of the weapons here, I was able to catch two hours slee thus filling my quota of six a day, and then I thought I'd read and write but I instead got caugh up in a rather enjoyable and at the least time-filling film that arrived yesterday, then helped someone who's studying English and then had a short course on first aid which brings me to a significant digression.

Yesterday while on our patrol I had a chance to speak rather lengthily with my pluga command (we walk next to each other since I carry the field radio and he has to be "on call") and among other things I asked him whether miluimnikim get sent to medic training courses since this was something that I've been thinking about for quite a long time. I'm not really young for this sor of thing, and it's also rather time consuming, but I do think this is something I want to do. What's more, it's something which can be very useful in civilian life. My plua commander liked the idea (we in general have very good contact) especially since our pluga's medic is now 40 and finally finishing his active duty in a combat unit, and Chanan (our pluga commander) isn't exactl enamored of the present possible list of replacements for our medic. Thus he was pleased with th idea when I raised it, and in his characteristic fashion, already started the ball rolling by speaking to our g'dud's doctor about the possibility, and this morning the doctor was already speaking to me. So now I have to seriously think the matter over and make a decision.

One of the balloons that I sent up to check out the political weather in conversation here was sent up shortly after the muder in Hebron of over a week ago. I remarked that it wasn't so bad being in Lebanon - we could have been sent to Hebron. According to the reactions of a good number of the people here, the others find the job of policing Hebron as distasteful as I do - though of course they don't make the political connections which I do between being an occupying power in Hebron and the decline in the human atmosphere of Israel. Still, there was something heartening in hearing a rather diverse group of Israelis express a rather strong gut reaction against what has become one of the major tasks of the army.

Shabbat, July 23

Much of my free time today I devoted to my letter to David McReynolds - a letter I've neglected for a full week. I wasn't pleased with the declaratory tone that the letter had taken on. It read too much like a continuation of my journal instead of having a clearer focus, something necessary when you're trying to get a particular point across to a particular person. Anyway, today I think that I got somewhere. At least I finished the uncomfortable but necessary paragraphs that preached Zionism and stressed the necessity of a solution that recognizes the rights of both sides. Now I can get on with the task of explaining why the Israeli peace movemer acts as it does which was the point of my letter from the start.

Today I let myself wake up relatively late - close to 7:30, which, since I went to sleep around 8:00 Friday night and then was awake on guard duty around three and a half hours, means that I got around eight hours sleep. Certainly enough even for Shabbat. I read most of the Shabbat papers that arrived here and still had time for quite a bit of writing. I was on guard duty much of the afternoon - 1:30 until 4:30 - with someone whom I ordinarily try to avoid, and of course we talked. He's sure that everything is a sign of God's providence, for instance the the fact that so few people get injured in terrorist attacks (like the one today by the good fence which started him talking). I of course asked if it wouldn't be a better sign if there were no attacks at all, but this was a futile line of argument and in the end I simply accepted the fact that we belong to two entirely different worlds. This sort of thing happened in all the subjects which we "discussed" (if that's the right word) but I can't really get upset about this - only or miluim do I get a chance to meet some of these people. (I almost always come to miluim with long hair and cut it when I finish. I get a certain childish pleasure out of hearing some of the people here exclaim in wonderment that he can't really be an elementary school teacher with hair like that - not to mention opinions like those.) ((Sunday afternoon I had my hair cut and yesterday the change in me was one of the central topics of conversation at our party.))

Friday I received a letter from Ruchama with news from the kibbutz

Sunday, July 24

(that's as far as I got when various busy-work tasks started and I didn't get around to finishing that thought)...which was of course pleasing to receive, even though part of the news was unfinished at the time of her writing: Ian's (my brother's) wife had gone to the hospital to give birth to her baby, and by the time the letter reached me it was already rather old news but since I hadn't succeeded in reaching the kibbutz by phone for a full week, I received no new reports or what was born. I'll probably have to wait about four more days until I get home.

Anyway, it's now about 7:00 in the morning and I've only now taken off my shoes after having them on for twelve hours. Last night our g'dud's higher ranking officers decided that it was a good idea to show the Syrians that we're awake at night, and thus some of us had the task of wandering around outside of our outpost in the late evening hours and shooting a bit at nothing in particular to make the point that we're on the ready. Almost all of us simple soldiers thought i was a pretty stupid idea - why take chances and warm up the area when happily everything is quite relaxed. But those thoughts may explain why we're simply soldiers and not high ranking officers. As was to be expected, the simple soldiers were proven right, meaning that the Syrians weren't overjoyed by the IDF telling it that it was awake and on alert in that way, and they decided to show us the same thing. We received a barrage of fire, much stronger than our own, which kept us with our heads down and our helmets on. Most of the fire was directed over our heads (a warning, like ours) but some was direcged a bit too close for comfort. Our alert didn't last too long and after about an hour things had returned to normal (I doubt that the fire was for no longer than ten minutes though I'm not sure) and I even succeeded in sleeping quite well afterwards. In some ways I was lucky - I was on guard duty when the shooting started and thus I didn't lose much of my sleeping time because of it. This morning we kept our shoes on a bit longer than usual, but now I'm in sandals and washed up, and since I've finished this paragraph, I'm going to eat breakfast.

A couple of hours and some reading (and an unsuccessful attempt at phoning the kibbutz) late I have misgivings about that previous paragraph. It seems too flippant to me. After all, we did put our helmets on almost immediately, take the necessary precautions to defend ourselves, and prepare ourselves to return fire. We're of course all happy that we didn't (and didn't have to)

and for at least personal reasons want everything to remain quiet, at least another week and a half, but I shouldn't belittle the feeling that we all had at the time that "this may be the real thing." Still, it all passed very quickly, and we all happily returned to business as usual - with a small but bothersome memory in the back of our heads of what almost was and how that feels

Monday, July 25

If all goes as planned, Thursday morning I'll be coming down from Lebanon on a lengthy leave until the following Wednesday when I won't have to return to Lebanon but instead to a party of my pluga on a kibbutz in the Upper Galilee. Our unit leaves Lebanon that Wednesday to be released Thursday and we'll be partying in the time between our leaving Lebanon and being released. From the beginning I'd hoped that it would work out for me to be off for about a week toward the end, and for a while now it's been rather clear that my plan would work out, but yesterday the plans were made formal, meaning that if nothing unexpected happens (always a possibility in the army) I'll be out of here in a few days. It's now almost a full three weeks that we've been here, and though it's a well known fact that time passes slowly when in the army, we have the feeling of almost setting a world record for time standing still. Once I've written that, I should also add the opposite - I can already feel the end and I'm quite successful in filling my time. (I'm also quite successful in getting by on only six hours of sleep a day, as planned, though I admit that were I to sleep ten hours a day I might have the feeling of time going by even faster.) We've certainly adjusted to being here - it's more or less like being in the Golan, or at least that's what we've convinced ourselves - and with all the distastefulness of being here, the end is already in sight, or more precisely the end of our month here, since the end of Israel's occupation of Lebanon seems still far off in the distant future.

I brought a number of books along with me to read if I'd find the time, but the main book I hoped I'd get around to was Being and Doing by Marcus Raskin which has been sitting on my shelf for a few years. It's not the sort of thing one ordinarily reads during miluim, but I wanted to read it, and I guess that I also wanted to see whether I could discipline myself to read serious social philosophy (if that's the right term) under these conditions. I'm approaching the end of the book and have found it worthwhile reading though much of what Raskin discusses is pretty distant from me today. He examines possibilities for human organization which create changes in the social structure of what he calls the pyramidal society. To some extent he's searching for theory which can act as a justification for modes of action which he's already convinced are correct, but we all do that to some extent. He uses John Dewey a lot, and a bit of George Herbert Mead, and he discusses the idea of Reconstruction which I'd thought was rather outdated (and admittedly know close to nothing about) in such a way that he certainly whets my interest. I'll have to pass the book on to someone on the kibbutz who's involved with the question of socialist social organization. ((The book was published in the beginning of the 1970's and it's interesting to note that he makes almost no reference whatsoever to the women's movement which only perhaps a year later would have become a central part of his argument.))

Wednesday, July 27

It's now around 9:30 and though my being released is still around 18 hours away, including around six hours of guard duty and then tomorrow morning's patrol, I'm almost fully ready to get out of here. My bag is all packed, with clean clothes outside for after my shower which will be after my guard duty this afternoon. And now I'm proving that age-old miluim maxim, the last day is always the longest. I've succeeded thoughout three and a half weeks in staying within the sleep framework which I permitted myself, and though I'm tired of simply being here, I'm really in good shape - something which is less important in terms of the present than it is in terms of the fact that as soon as I'm home I'll be able to function as I want to.

Yesterday afternoon we saw an interview on the television with a leader of Shalom Achshav who'd just returned from a visit to the Soviet Union. As soon as he was introduced a good number of the people watching started yelling and cursing at him ((or better, at the television he was on)). I remarked that not only was he a friend of mine, but he had also been an officer of and with our pluga commander (something I hadn't known but that Chanan had informed me the day before when he'd seen his picture in the paper). Needless to say, my comrades were a bit taken aback, but I think that I proved that at least some times the best defense is a good offense. I guess that during these three weeks I haven't convinced everyone that my point of view is correct, but on the other hand I have done a rather good job of raising questions about what we're doing here, and planting some basic ideological seeds that may in the future grow into a fuller understanding of what's to be done.

Thursday, August 4

I thought that I'd let this journal end a week ago with my coming home for my extended leave but I've got a couple of items I want to add that seem to belong more to the journal than to a regular letter (and which I'm writing down in longhand before typing, in regular journal form).

Yesterday early afternoon I met a friend from my unit (who was released early) as planned, in Tel Aviv and we drove to Kfar Saba to pick up his wife and two children. From there we all went north to Kibbutz Kfar Blum near Kiryat Shemonah where our pluga was having a getting-out- of-Lebanon party before continuing to our base the next morning to be released. We had a pleasant trip north and then waited for around an hour until our pluga arrived from Lebanon. When everyone arrived we partied for around three or four hours - eating, drinking and having a pleasant get together. Since I was on leave until yesterday I was essentially ordered to be at the party which I otherwise might have decided to forego and simply show up at my base this morning to be released, but it was definitely worthwhile making the effort to attend.

I've often emphasized that I'm not overly close to many of the people in my unit and thus I wouldn't have missed too much by not coming (and what's more, the gastronomic side was certain not planned with a vegetarian in mind) but it was important to be with these people in a relaxed atmosphere. As invariably happens, one person got drunk (and I was kept busy explaining to the wife of my friend from Kfar Saba what he was ranting about), someone tried unsuccessfully to lead group singing and organize some parlor games. So if our party wasn't the most exciting or joyous get together, why then was it worth my being there? I got a chance to see how some of these people relax and what they identify as a good time. I also met a couple of the wives of the unit and thus got a fuller picture into the lives of some of my fellow soldiers. What's more, by my coming I showed that I see this contact with others from my unit as something important and significant to me - a number of others who were at home before the release date didn't make the effort to attend.

Since I'd already returned my army sleeping bag I brought one along from home, intending to sleep on the lawn at Kfar Blum with the rest of the pluga and then get to our base in the morning with the trucks that had brought everyone from Lebanon. Instead I succeeded in getting an offer to sleep in the home of a friend from Kiryat Shemonah who had come to Kfar Blum in his car when he left the truck at Kiryat Shemonah. I was pleased with the opportunity to get an at least cursory view of the town - more than I can get by passing through on the main street. I ended up getting a rather full tour (albeit by night) and learned quite a bit. I also surprised my friend with my memory and sense of direction. Wherever he drove I had some recollection of what was there or what we were near simply from having passed by in the past. I explained to him that this is partially due to a good sense of direction, but due even more to my belief that a person should get to know something about where he/she is and thus when in the past I'd had to wait for a bus or had time to fill I wandered a bit around the town. As an interested and informed guest I certainly made a good impression - and I got an additional something out of my trip to Kfar Blu

The news of the last few days from Lebanon suggested that I got my leave at the right time - things became quite a bit more hectic there while I was happily at home. The soldiers who came down from Lebanon yesterday confirmed what I had guessed from the rather incomplete news reports. An officer who was killed by Syrian fire on his outpost Tuesday afternoon was stationed around three kilometers south-east of my outpost. Thoughout my stay in Lebanon there had been activity around that outpost. My fellow soldiers also reported that in the past few days the Syrians had fortified their positions close to our outpost and that there had been quite a bit of Syrian activity in the area which made life at our outpost much less comfortable. In short, from a purely selfish point of view, I was lucky to get home when I did, and those who came down yesterday from Lebanon who ordinarily would have been quite relieved to do so were now understandably even more pleased to get home.

We'd been promised that our release would go very quickly this morning, but we're rather used to these promises already. Actually, it really didn't take too long - I arrived at around 6:30 and by 9:30 I was on a bus that started moving toward Tel Aviv (meaning that I filled three hours with about 15 minutes of actual activity connected to being released). Still, by 12:15 I was in Tel Aviv and I was home comfortably early for a change, and I can officially say that my month is over and now start taking care of the many tasks which have been waiting for me.

Love,

Jay