Received 2-28-85

Tuesday, Jan. 8, 12:00

This is the first chance I've had to sit down and write. We enlisted on Sunday and in the mid-afternoon came up to the Golan Heights for what are supposed to be three days of practice and manuvers before going into Lebanon tomorrow. The practice by itself isn't much, though most of last night we spent wandering around outside, occasionally conquering a hill here or there. This morning was devoted mainly to "hurry up and wait", and now I've got time to myself. Our officers went into Lebanon this morning, preparing the way for us tomorrow, and that means that there's little for us to do here as far as practice is concerned. We were pleased for a few hours yesterday when a rumor spread that we would be going to the eastern front, facing the Syrians. Though it's cold there it's also quiet. But it was only a rumor. In fact we'll be stationed on the Zaharani river, in the west near the sea, in Shi'ite country. I guess things could be worse, but for the moment I don't know how. The Shi'ites, once pleased to see us in Lebanon getting rid of the Palestinians, want to get rid of us. And they try and do this mostly by means of explosive devices on the roads which they detonate as we pass by. Our job is thus to wander around the territory near the roads, on the lookout for those devices or people preparing to detonate them. Of course when we find them, we're supposed to kill them before they kill us. I'm certainly in favor of self-defense, and all the moreso in favor of saving my own skin, but it seems to me only too obvious that the best way we can do that is by getting the hell out of Lebanon. When we first enlisted one of our highest commanding officers spoke with us, explaining that the Shi'ites aren't our enemy, that all they really want is for us to leave. He then added that our job is to suspect everyone in order that we return in one piece. Anyone (it seems to me) with even a little bit of logical thought would come to the conclusion that something is wrong with this reasoning if it makes a non-enemy into an enemy, but the way out of this bind is leaving Lebanon, and that solution is "off limits" to mainstream Israeli thinking.

Before starting these miluim I began to think a bit seriously about refusing to serve in Lebanon, though of course I decided in the end to go. Since being here the main question in my mind is what's the madness that keeps us there, yet I haven't thought at all about refusal. It seems that there's a certain dynamic in the army that acts against entertaining such thoughts. Partially this must be due to the fact that few people here are at all familiar with the "alternative" of refusal. They're used to taking what they get without protest. (This doesn't mean that they're not willing to find any one of many possible personal solutions like faking an illness, though of course those who do this aren't here. Still, there seems to be a certain amount of respect for those who are able to "arrange" their way out of serving. I don't get the feeling refusers get this same respect. Anyway, when you're already with the people you're going to serve with, the "brotherhood of fighters" seems to be in effect, and it means identifying with the "plight" of everyone. There must also be a certain pride that goes along with this, but I'm not the person on whom to look for it.

It's now around 20:30 - time to go to sleep before waking up relatively early tomorrow morning for our going in to Lebanon. (Actually, it's not very early for me since I wake up around 6:00 every morning, but for most of the others here it's an ungodly hour.) It's still rather early for me since I slept in the afternoon and besides about half an hour of manuvers did close to nothing today, though I did sleep in the afternoon. We returned a short while ago from our manuvers which finished off with a shower at a nearby base. I also found the kitchen and schnorred a bit of cottage cheese. My guess is that the food will be much better once we're in Lebanon (at least something will be). As for now we're eating what I guess are called K-rations in English, and it's a meat diet (and I usually don't even eat canned vegetables if I don't have to).

We have 28 days (count 'em) in Lebanon coming up, and it looks like we'll be counting off each day. When I sit down to write I tell myself that I want to keep a journal of my thoughts, but it will become rather boring to write (and read) over and over again that what we're most concerned with is getting back. One person in our unit returned from a day's leave this afternoon and was greeted by a black humor session. He wasn't amused and was even quite taken aback - he wanted to know if we didn't have anything else to talk about besides different ways of getting killed in Lebanon. I think he understood when I explained to him that we weren't looking forward to the various fates we described, but that it was a healthy way of expressing and dealing with our fears which are of course very normal, and very real.

Wednesday, Jan. 9, 18:30

I think that I wrote yesterday that things could probably get worse, though I didn't know how. Seeing as how I was still in the Golan when I wrote that, it seems as though it was a pretty astute remark. We entered Lebanon this morning around 10:30 via Rosh HaNikra, and travelled north for almost an hour and a half until a bit north of the Litani River. Now, two and a half hours later I'm ready for a night's activity, outside our strongpost (if that's what it's called) and that means (as often happens) that a better and fuller description of what I did today will have to wait. Suffice to say that I've already succeeded in spending about two and a half hours as a traffic cop outside our post - mostly with the job of keeping track of Israeli army traffic, but also with the job (or the opportunity, depending on how you want to look at it) of checking any Lebanese cars that go by and look suspicious to me. In the words of Pogo, "we have met the enemy and he is us". I definitely thought that in the future I'd refuse to fill this job again, until I realized that the other jobs aren't much cleaner.

Thursday, Jan. 10, 12:30

I've just returned from what might be called a tiyul through fields, citrus and banana orchards, and anything else in our path. Five of us spent around four hours of the morning more or less looking for explosive devices that someone might be preparing for us. I guess that more than anything else it's a matter of luck whether or not we find something (or not find, according to how you determine your luck) but the second reason for our wandering around this way is to simply show that we've got our eyes open. Though in one way it could be considered looking for trouble, when we patrol the areas around us we make it at least a bit more dangerous or difficult for someone to set up such a device on the road or near us, and we thus enlarge our security. Yesterday evening, after aruchat erev we had our daily briefing during which we were told that our main mission here is seeing to the security of IDF forces. Once again, common sense suggests that were we not here, there wouldn't be any need for us to see to the security needs of ourselves. Last night I was out for three hours doing the same thing that I did this morning, except of course that it was dark out. At one point during the night we had to climb down one side of a wadi and up the other, and we got a bit tangled in the bushes. One person remarked (in a whisper, of course) that this reminded him of tiyulim in the youth movement, and another responded that it reminded him of Vietnam.

Friday, Jan. 11, 14:00

Did I already write that sometimes things happen too quickly for me to review? Sometimes they can happen too quickly for me to relate to them with the necessary respect. Yesterday I stopped writing to go to eat lunch. After that I finally got around to taking a shower, with the intention of continuing to write after that. But. While still in the shower (having problems with the hot water) almost all of the people in our outpost were called outside because of an attack on an army transport just north of us. Thus instead of having a relaxing afternoon, I had to fill in for other people who weren't here. (In the attack, five soldiers were injured, one apparently seriously - none from our unit.) I finally ate a late aruchat erev after taking care of a few odd jobs here, and then did my sergeant a favor and filled in on guard duty for an hour - as usually happens on miluim, there are usually two kinds of people here - those who are sure they're getting a bum deal in terms of the "division of labor" and those who are able to cope with whatever comes their way. After that, around 20:30 I went to sleep, even though I didn't have to wake up until 6:30 in the morning. Everyone was tired and wanted to turn out the light, and I was tired too. This morning I did what I've been doing most of the time until now - demonstrating our presence here - this time not only in banana and citrus groves with an aching back, but also within a couple of nearby villages (El Khareib and Arzai, near a larger, more or less major, village, El Z'rareirah). I, who don't want to stand outside at a blockade for civilian traffic instead parade through a village with loaded gun. It really doesn't help much to try and wear an expression that says that this isn't me, only someone following orders that he doesn't agree with. I've tried to think of some better way to say this, but any way I put it, it comes out just as bad. How do you explain to a six year old kid watching you patrol through his or her village that you're not doing this because you agree with your government's policies, but because you believe that in the long run your ability to influence what happens in Israel (and thus perhaps prevent such patrols happening again) is greater than were you to refuse. And once again, if it's not me, someone else will do the job.

It's not pleasant, but still a bit heartening to hear more and more of our soliders saying that they can't blame the Shi'ites for hating us. After all, when the British ruled over Palestine we weren't especially quiet either. One friend has asked me to bring him a "Bring the Boys Home" bumper sticker, and others have said that they're willing to leave tomorrow. A few

days ago I discovered that I'd been unfair to one of the religious members of my until when last year I'd written that it seemed as though his opinions had undergone changes since Lebanon. We were standing together at the roadblock on Wednesday watching an 18 year old (whom we were learning to replace) do the job, and enjoy having the power to check whomever he wished. My companion shook his head and said that before coming to Lebanon this time he was in favor of leaving tomorrow. Now he wanted to leave yesterday. He was most disturbed by the effect that being a conquering power has on the youth. As we talked he said that he's been a more or less leftist for a long time, and has had problems with his neighbors in his religious moshav because of that, but that he's willing to negotiate on and return the west bank for peace. Even though I get the feeling that more and more people here are beginning to think that way, I can also see that most of the younger people in our unit hardly think twice about what they're doing here. If I walk through a field I try not to stamp on the plants - the work of the farmers who don't have to suffer too much because we're here. But that thought doesn't exist by everyone. We pick oranges freely. I've tried not to, but I get spoiled as well. When you're the conqueror you get used to the fact that everything is permitted.

On the inside of the door of one of our outhouses is a slogan "It took the U.S. 50,000 lives before leaving Vietnam. How many will it take us?" People here, who on the whole aren't familiar with the history of the U.S.'s war in Vietnam, make the comparison rather freely, and when we're walking through banana groves or bamboo filled river beds, it seems like a rather apt comparison. What's most clear is that we're fighting a guerrilla war, and that that's not the type of war an organized army can win. The driver who smiles at me at the blockade may well set up a booby trap at night - and the chances of my discovering him are close to nil. The intelligence services keep very busy, and we're told that they do good work, but it's not the sort of battle you can win when the population is against you. Once again, more and more soldiers here seem to be learning this - but it's a conclusion that the government has to come to.

It's now 17:00. I've cleaned my gun, shined my shoes, showered and shaved, and cleaned and arranged my bed. I'm ready for Shabbat, though Shabbat is little different from any other day here. The Shabbat papers arrived, and I've discovered that I'm not very interested in what they contain - what concerns us here is getting home, and the papers don't write much about that. (For the sake of fairness I should note that one paper today carriers an interview with Yitzkhah Rabin, Minister of Defense, under the headline, "Whoever steps in Lebanon sinks in mud" but for my taste he ain't getting us out fast enough.) I brought five or six books with me (less than usual) but I haven't gotten around to starting even one of them. I trust that in the next couple of days we'll be well enough into a routine such that I'll be able to relax and read, but we're not there yet. Supplies have started arriving, and our cook, one of our unit who's family has a restaurant and who's freed from other activities in order to prepare meals, is working wonders in the kitchen. I don't eat the meat, but reports have it that he makes K-rations into a treat. For Shabbat he's baked challot and rolls, and they look great.

On the one hand I look forward to getting into a routine, yet on the other, it's one of the things we have to be most fearful of. We're doing the sort of work in which we have to suspect everything - we've received reports of makeshift bombs even being camoflaged as potted plants. But the more we do the work, the less attentive we become, and it seems as though the only way of avoiding this happening is by developing a sort of catechism which you repeat as a mantra - "anything can happen, be prepared for the unexpected". But it's very hard to suspect every thrown away cola can you see on the road.

Shabbat, Jan. 12

The commanding officer of the g'dud which our g'dud replaced remarked to some of our officers as he prepared to leave that the work which we're supposed to do isn't work for miluimnikim. He meant by that two things - first that this sort of work demands younger people, faster on their feet and with faster reflexes and second, that it's the sort of work which you learn over an extended period of time. When a standing army unit comes here it does so for around six months and it's able to learn the terrain and its specific problems. Our being here for a months means that we have time to learn the problems, but not enough to really make use of what we've learned. We, the soliders, though we definitely understand the second reason, have more of an affinity for the first. I'm in quite good shape and I'm able to walk long distances (and do whatever is necessary) but there's a lot of work each day, and I already feel at the beginning that in the end I'll be quite exhausted.

One might say I'm getting old. Yesterday, during my morning patrol, I replaced the person carrying the field radio for more than half the distance (perhaps seven or eight kilometers) in hilly terrain. Carrying the field radio is no longer my job - a sort of gesture to my getting

old. Few of the older members of our unti (plugah) are still with us, and at least half of the unit is ten years younger than I am or more. But when someone gets tired you don't ask his age before replacing him. Actually, if the army intends to stay in Lebanon very long, it should start breeding a new type of soldier - one no taller than four and a half feet so that he can walk underneath the oranges and bananas without getting an aching back (and this is especially true for those with the field radio because of the antenna that gets stuck in the branches). At aruchat erev yesterday I and my closest friend from the plugah ((Eli)) intended to celebrate a joint 71st birthday - he was 37 yesterday. Since we'd intended to buy some things to eat for the plugah from the canteen which in the end had nothing, we gave up on the idea. Our sergeant, also a close friend will be 35 at the beginning of February. Last night I spent the night on another patrol (from 23:00 to almost 2:00) with him among others. Every so often he would whisper to me - "I've had it" or something similar. The truth is that we're both holding up quite well - and that we've both more or less had enough.

The sort of work we were doing last night might be considered a sort of cross between a game of capture the flag and Russian roulette. Our goal is to check out certain spots from which there is reason to believe rockets might be launched on us (or anything similar) and to see that everything is alright. We may find something and thus prevent an attack. We may also prevent an attack simply because we demonstrate that we're checking every place out, thus making it difficult or not worthwhile to prepare something against us. But the work itself is very different from the feeling it carries with it. Though it's very serious, we can't get over the feeling of it being somewhat of a game - to get to a certain spot, via a certain route, quietly, and to get back, in one piece. Though my feet ache more than just a bit, if it were only an exercise I'd enjoy it greatly. It's the Russian roulette aspect which gets us jumpy - things may go by quietly thirty times and then on the next time we may run into something. As trained soldiers we're much better prepared to deal with whatever we meet than whoever it is we run into, and experience (not mine, thank you) teaches that if we react quickly we have a great advantage, but still, who needs this.

In the middle of that last paragraph a telephone truck arrived and I was able to call the kibbutz - reaching Gary since Bennie and Ruchama apparently weren't home, and then calling Sheryl since I know her number by heart. I'm never sure what I'm permitted to say on the phone and what not and because of that these conversations are quite short, but it's nice to call just the same. I've got a couple of hours before my next job and I think I'll do a bit of reading. The last hour I spent sitting and bullshitting with a couple of friends - hearing of the work problems of one of them. When in Lebanon, being here becomes the chief, perhaps only, worry. But that doesn't mean that people haven't left other serious problems behind them at home.

Sunday, Jan. 13, 8:00

Things happen quickly. My intention in keeping this journal isn't to make a report of every thing that I do, but rather to keep a record of my thoughts and feelings as I slowly get through this month. But it's hard to do that - less because I don't have the time than because those thoughts and feelings come at such a rushed pace, and usually with such intensity, that I'm hardly able to give each experience the attention it deserves. In one way, keeping this journal is my way of maintaining my own perspective - not that otherwise I'd change my opinions, but that as I write I keep myself from developing the apathy which it seems that others here so easily get adjusted to. At the head of each page I've started making short notes to myself - thoughts which I want to develop more fully in writing, to see where more structured, formalized thought leads them, or simply because they seem to me significant events or experiences (or thoughts or feelings) which deserve to be dealt with here. I guess that one could thus say that I feel a need to write, and perhaps it's because of this that I still haven't opened a book. I do find time to bullshit - that's a need no smaller than writing - but I haven't been able to read yet.

Leaves started today. About 20% of our unit went home for a few days. That's always a good thing, even if it means that the workload on those of us who are still here will be a bit heavier. I usually prefer to try and take an extended leave toward the end of our service, but it may be more worth my while to take a leave at the beginning of next week - a week from today. What's definite, and is something I've learned from experience, is that thinking about this subject too much is bad for your health. Last night the phones were still with us, so I gave Ruchama a call and visited with her for a few minutes. I was able to report to her that just a few moments before we'd eaten the cake she'd baked for me to take with me to milium - and that it was very tasty.

Yesterday afternoon and early evening I was once again outside - wandering up and down,

in and out of orchards, with a special added attraction. Part of our assignment was to walk down the main road of the most unfriendly village in our area ((Arzai)). This is the sort of dirty work which in the past has always made me prefer even Lebanon to being in the occupied territories - but we've got it here as well, and it's at the least depressing.

21:00

Anyway, I can sort of say that I've received my first rock. The five of us on our patrol are still arguing a bit about whether a rock was thrown or whether a couple of kids only picked a few up with the intention of throwing them. I belong to the second group, though of course it doesn't really matter. If in the village I patrolled through two days ago our welcome was rather cold, bordering even on the apathetic, yesterday's was certainly a much "warmer" one. I felt more than just a little bit like the pied piper of Hamlin, bringing the kids out into the street and joining behind me in a parade as I passed by. Except that it was rather obvious that the main reason for their following us was to get us out of town. At the least it was very unpleasant, even without political/moral qualms - it simply ain't a nice situation to be in.

Why we were supposed to make our presence known in the village is beyond me, and I guess that once you're there it doesn't help much to say that the best way to deal with the problem that arises is not to be there in the first place. Still, though it may not be a practical solution for that particular moment, it's definitely the best solution I can think of. While faced with the problem we debated the best way of dealing with it. Some argued that we simply continue walking at a moderate pace until we get out of town (and I add to this perspective that in this way both sides can feel that they've won a victory). Others said we should fire in the air (or break a couple of arms) to calm things down. Those who argue this way say that experience shows that this is effective. They don't, however, seem to be able to distinguish between long and short range effectiveness.

What's quite clear from this experience, and from the reactions of the people around me, is that even more than in the past (and we've been an occupying power for almost 18 years already) is that we've sanctioned the use of force as a means of solving problems, and that Israeli youth today is very comfortable with this use of force.

Monday, Jan. 14, 10:30

There's more than just a little of the surreal in laying in ambush in a lettuch patch at 4:00 in the morning with a slight drizzle fuzzing up your glasses, rifle cocked, waiting for some rather undefined enemy to perhaps cross your path. Marx wrote that history repeats itself - the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. But even though there are more than a few elements of the farcical in what goes on here, when seen from the inside, from the perspective of an Israeli, it's only more and more tragedy.

14:30

While sitting on my bed, trying to think where that particular thought I was writing was taking me, we heard an explosion, and those of us inside the tent at the time instictively started putting on our shoes. The first report was that a vehicular patrol from our unit was attacked. I was supposed to go out in another hour on a foot patrol, so I was one of the few who stayed here instead of going out in our armorred personnel carriers to the scene of the explosion. I thus spent about two hours at a guard post, and I've recently been replaced. I've eaten something and have some time to "rest" before whatever else is awaiting us. We still haven't gotten clearer reports, but one report has it that two of us were killed and another three injured. We're depressed, but still waiting for a more definite report. I've refrained from writing about fear until now - not because it's not a central part of our feelings here, but because it's so central that it's hard to isolate it into a single issue which can be written about. Very simply, it's only a matter of luck that I wasn't one of the people on that particular patrol, or that nothing happened to the patrol I was on yesterday. If the reports we've received over the field radios are correct, I was in the exact spot of the explosion two days ago. Just a moment ago someone walked into the tent who just returned from a morning foot patrol. I had the feeling that he hadn't heard much of what we've heard here, and I didn't exactly know how to break the news. We've got time for that - and of course hopes of more positive news.

Last night, before we went out on our patrol, my officer asked the five of us going with him if any one was scared. I was a bit taken aback, and said that of course I was scared, but that I didn't know that because of that I might not have to go on the patrol. He responded that he was scared too, but that he was asking about a stronger sort of fear. I'm still a bit confused since fear is something that we live with here, and there's little we can do about it. Early this morning, just after the patrol, I was once again speaking with the same officer.

We both remarked that we were sleeping surprisingly well here. We do have a heavy work load (heavier than assignments we've had in the past, and apparently heavier than the unit we replaced because we're fewer people - no doubt a military secret) but we also have time to sleep. Though we're nervous and edgy because any thing can happen, we seem to have adjusted very quickly, and that's evidenced by the fact that we sleep well under these conditions. I guess that that's supposed to be expected of soldiers, but we're civilians who become soldiers for only around a month and a half a year. Here we are, with probable chances that the rumor that two of us whom we've been working with and eating with for over a week and with whom we've served for at least a couple of years have just been killed, and we're already putting it into the back of our minds so that we'll be able to function as necessary when we have to go out on our assignments tonight, tomorrow, the next day, and until our month is finished.

I suppose that people shouldn't be held responsible for things they say in time of crisis, though it may well be that it's precisely at these times at which people express themselves clearest. We first expressed our confusion and discomfort after the explosion by rather instinctively saying that Israel should get out of Lebanon immediately, if not long ago. One of the people here, a Likud supporter (at least in the past) from Kiryat Shemona said that it was easier living with ketuyshas than with this ongoing guerrilla war of attrition (though he didn't call it that). I don't know whether this is a fitting time to "talk politics" or not. For me "politics" isn't issues and opinions and votes, but how people live their lives and can be helped to live them as best they can, thus matters of life and death are highly political. We're here fighting (more or less) for some higher idea called Israel's security, yet almost everyone seems aware that the connection between our being here and any real security we can speak of is very amorphous. It's at times like this that this awareness, which seems to be present by almost everyone, surfaces and gets expressed. Along with this political feeling, or shortly afterwards, comes the desire for revenge - those Shi'ites got my buddy, they're going to pay for it. Of course in the long run not much can come out of this, because those Shi'ites are a large civilian population, and in a guerrilla war, the guerrillas are like fish in the sea of the general population. What we feel most is discomfort, distress, confusion and sadness.

Tuesday, Jan. 14, 10:00

Yesterday my relatively new plugah commander (Sefi) who'd been with us about a year, and another member of our unit whom I've served with for about the last seven years (Miki) were killed by the explosion of a bomb placed in a wall of a terrace that they were passing. Two days earlier I had sat at that same spot with Miki after receiving the previously reported unwelcoming from the children of the neighboring village and before starting out on a rather difficult trek back to our outpost that evening. "There but for fortune". Miki was from a kibbutz close to Hatzor and though our worlds were very different we were together often in the army and would exchange greetings via friends rather frequently. Though he was around 28 I always thought of him as a kid. We were among the oldest single people in our plugah and one of the commoner issues of discussion was when we would get married. As is fitting to any good screenplay, Miki was planning to get married in April.

When I write this journal I'm the main character and everyone else is supporting cast. I of course thus see myself as the character who stays in the show from the beginning until the end. With all the pain and discomfort, two friends who are dead aren't the main characters in my play. (15:00) I certainly intend and hope not to turn out to be a supporting character with the same sort of role in someone else's. That's not the sort of thing we can know until this month is finished. Somehow the certainty that I felt when I started writing these notes (and even then I was from from totally sure) has been reduced.

The site of the explosion was one over which a rather strong argument was conducted. The site was in between two very unfriendly villages, and there's really no reason for us to visit there at all. I was unpleased with the fact that I was there twice and expressed my feeling that our visiting there served no purpose, and a couple of our officers felt the same way and said so. Today our orders are to avoid getting to such places - but the orders are late in coming. We were told at the start of our stay here that the best defense we have is thinking twice before taking chances. We're told to feel comfortable with our fingers on the trigger, and fast reactions under attack can also save us, but first and foremost we have to avoid taking unnecessary chances. Sefi and Miki were careful in their approach to the site of the explosion, but the thinking twice should have taken place before getting there at all.

Three more members of our unit were injured in the same explosion -- two with only slightly surface wounds and one rather seriously, we know that he's lost one eye. This particular member of our plugah is ultra-religious. On the way into Lebanon we talked about various topics on which we can never agree. He knows that the world is only five thousand, seven **hundred** and forty five years old. About a month ago a religious member of the Knesseth, from the list which Nati almost certainly voted for, made headlines by claiming that Israeli soldiers were being killed and wounded in Lebanon because of the low moral standards of the army's women soldiers. On the way into Lebanon Nati defended this point of view.

One of today's papers carries the headline: "On the day it was decided to withdraw from Lebanon -- Two soldiers killed in explosion." I want an immediate withdrawl, the government's decision is a very welcome one. But it's also late. Personally, at least two people too late.

Wednesday, Jan. 15, 9:15

Last night we returned to our "regular" activities. The evening and night of which Miki and Sefi were killed, I spent at the strongpost somewhat inland, nearer to the scene of the explosion, serving along with my g'dud commander as an emergency force for a group of us which approached the scene of the explosion by foot at night and lay in ambush for anyone who might come to the sight to see how much damage they'd done. No one came. The next morning, before returning to our stronghold the general in charge of our forces in Lebanon came by helicopter for a short visit, to hear what his soldiers (the around 15 of us there) had to say. Our g'dud commander hoped that we'd talk of the fact that we're too few people for the job, that our days are very long and that we have too many assignments. We did, but as is to be expected, our general had answers to all these things. Mostly he reminded us that we're a highly regarded infantry unit and that we should be capable of fulfilling any assignment. What did you expect. I looked for a place in which to elegantly sneak in some politics, but there was no such place. Perhaps I should have tried to be less elegant and more blatant.

One conclusion which was reached was that we were demoralized and that that was the result not only of losing two of our unit, but also because we really are physically worn out. We were thus permitted to occasionally reduce our workload, starting with yesterday. Essentially our orders for yesterday (after getting back to our strongpost around noon) were to relax and rest up, to shower and shave and to get back into mental shape. Around 22:00 last night I went out on our only night patrol of last night (normally we have two) and a bit after lunch I'll go out on a day patrol, and we're thus more or less back to "normal". Some new people have arrived soldiers who were permitted to enlist a week late, and my sergeant wanted to let them do the "harder" work like the foot patrols, but I requested that I get this assignment. I "enjoy" it more than any other sort of work here.

To pass the time while on guard duty I'm usually able to sing to myself, going through a vast repertoire of songs or tunes I know. While on patrol I'm also sometimes able to do the singing in my head, and it helps. This doesn't mean that I'm not always thinking, but since the main topic of thought is getting out of here, sometimes it's more worth while to simply try and empty my head of thoughts via this singing. Last night, as I suppose is to be expected, my thoughts always came back to Miki and Sefi, and the fact that I'm here and they're not. Only a half hour before the explosion I'd been speaking to both of them about day to day issues around the strongpost. That immediacy, and the fact that we very quickly get back into the swing of things is very confusing. Is it normal to get back to normalcy so quickly. I've spoken to a couple of friends about this issue, but I'll try and write about it another time.

Nati who was injured in the explosion, was supposed to be in the same course that I was sent to in November. We saw each other there and argued over what was more worthwhile, two weeks of the course instead of two weeks in Lebanon, or the full month in Lebanon. I "won" the lottery which sent me home (and to two more weeks in Lebanon) but at the beginning of these miluim Nati reported to me that only a couple of hours after I was released, the course was cancelled and he was released as well. For what it's worth, even had the course taken place, Nati still had another week to serve at the time of his being injured.

Thursday, Jan. 16, 9:30

I'm now awake after going to sleep a bit after 6:00, having then returned from another night foot patrol. I'd been out during the afternoon as well but was able to sleep from 20:00 until 2:00 so I'm definitely getting enough sleep. Barring surprises (and that's pretty difficult in Lebanon, but perhaps we'll be surprised by a lack of surprises) I'm free until the evening. Yesterday afternoon's patrol took me to the seashore and I collected some rocks. It

was quiet, pleasant and peaceful, and thus most probably deceiving. On the way, in the middle of some orchards only a few hundred meters from the sea we came across a deserted summer house (or mansion) recently built and apparently hardly used, designed with money and good taste -- to give an idea of what Lebanon once was, or could be.

Upon returning from that patrol we had a discussion with an officer of mental health. Today it's customary in the army to send someone to field units where something like an attack occurs as quickly as possible -- mostly to get the soldiers to talk and to let them know that it's legitimate to express their feelings. There's another motive, of course. The army is concerned that its units function well and get back to normal after incidents such as what happened to us as quickly as possible. A visit from the mental health officer who ostensibly tells us that it's good and healthy to express our pain and sadness and to make it part of the past in 48 hours is in the army's own best interests. ((I later learned that another important reason for this visit is to check up on the officers, to see whether they stand up well under pressure and whether the soldiers maintain a trust in them in these conditions.))

In this light it's interesting that yesterday morning I made a note at the top of this page: "normal to return to normalcy so quickly?". I don't have an answer to the question, just a feeling that once I get home I'm going to be down for a while. Here, today, we're functioning as best we can, and at least among the older members of the plugah, those who've been together for a number of years, speaking rather freely. But there's something artificial about the "business as usual" here. I, at least, need a longer, more tangible, mourning period -- longer than the few minutes here and there which the army permits us.

16:00

I've had most of today free, outside of a short trip to a stronghold nearby to pick up some of our unit who got there on their way back from leave. My main activity of the day was making a list of the belongings of Miki and Sefi and the injured members of our unit. It would have been easier to be out on a twenty kilometer trek, but it had to be done, so Tzvika (my sergeant) and I did it. But if it was hard for us, it may well be that it was easier to be here than to be on leave. Those who returned today from leave attended the funerals and visited with the families, and they certainly didn't have an easy or enjoyable job. Of course those of us yet to have leave will also visit the families, but it's undoubtedly harder the first couple of days.

Today's sunset was especially impressive, and since I was awake at dawn I had a chance to see the sunrise as well. That, along with the beach yesterday and the general quiet of today create an impression of peaceful calm. I've seen a number of places in Lebanon that, like two and a half years ago, it could be very easy to get adjusted to. One of the continuing refrains of almost any conversation here is "Ah, two and a half years ago", said by some in a truly longing voice, but others, far from the minority, say it with irony. I receive a certain amount of deference from those who realize that I made quite accurate predictions about how we'd get stuck here, but I'm not looking for credit, I just want us to get the hell out of here.

Friday, Jan. 17, 9:30

Last night it was almost back to childrens' games. From around midnight until around 3:30 I was outside with five others, supposedly on the prowl against someone who just might have chosen that night to prepare some explosive device near the road. The problem is that this was about the pitchest of pitch black nights that I can recall, and we literally couldn't see further than a meter in front of us, if that. The officer leading us had a device for seeing at night, but he confessed when we got back that it didn't help at all. Usually at night we'll get as far as three or four kilometers from our stronghold, but last night we hardly were further than 500 meters from home base. To tell the truth, we weren't especially fearful of meeting some defined or undefined enemy (who would step outside on a night like that?) but we did have reason to fear that we might fall off a terrace or something banal like that. But once again, it wasn't just childrens' games. While outside we heard in the distance (though not especially far from us) the sound of katuyshas, and learned via the field radio that one stronghold south of us had been fired upon. Thus though it might have been an enjoyable exercise someplace else, here it was much more serious. Still, in many ways it was an enjoyable experience, and something we were in need of. After coming back (and bumping into our armorred personnel carrier because of the dark) we sat down to a cup of coffee and a very healthy round of laughter. This led to telling stories of various choice adventures of the plugah, and hearing reports on the funerals from two of us who'd returned from leave and were on the patrol last night, and I finally crawled into bed after 4:00, almost an hour after getting back from the patrol.

This morning I would have been happy to sleep in late, but at around 7:30 we received a visit from our Khativa commander. The message he brings us is far from encouraging. According to his evaluation of the situation, the last few weeks of our stay in this part of Lebanon will bring with them intensified attempts at attacking us. In general the army will be more of a target because it will be travelling much more -- bringing down to Israel the vast amounts of equipment presently in Lebanon. On the one hand that means that our job is now concentrated much more on the coastal road and much less in the outlaying areas. That's nice to hear since we've got very little interest in having any more contact with the villages to the east of us. On the other hand, since there will probably be more attempts to harm us, we'll have to be more alert than usual, and since we really are quite alert, that may be rather difficult. And we have to remember, as I at least remind myself often, that when you're fighting a guerrilla war, even if you want to see yourself as the good guy, the guerrillas have the upper hand.

One of the issues which some of the unit raised in our meeting with our khativa commander was the possibility of retributive action for the attack in which Miki and Sefi were killed. Since the army goes by the assumption that everyone here hates us, and that since we're leaving soon anyway, we don't have to try and maintain the good relations that don't exist anyway, it doesn't totally rule out the possibility of retributive action, or revenge in less diplomatic language. The army may have a point when it argues that the less polite (or more brutal) that we permit ourselves to be, the better a chance we have of preventing additional attacks. We're no longer dealing with "winning hearts and minds". I may be in the minority, but I tend to believe that this isn't a clearly thought out line of strategy, but rather a prettier way of legitimizing revenge. A country, a government, an army, aren't supposed to act out of the desire for revenge but out of lucid political considerations. But Israel got into this mess because it wasn't able to make those political considerations, so I guess that it's hardly surprising to see that they're missing now as well.

Shabbat, Jan. 19, 9:30

I'm now awake from a more than twelve hours night's sleep. I can't remember such a thing in the last six months of civilian life. I was supposed to be out on another foot patrol from around 3:00 until 6:00, but we had a night of heavy rain and our mission was cancelled. (Any Shi'ite who would brave the dark and the rain in order to perform some act against us deserves to succeed.) Now, though it's a bit muddy around us, the sun is up and it's rather warm, and I really can't complain. In a few hours I'll be out again, once more apparently in the direction of the sea. Yesterday afternoon that was also the direction we took, and I admit that despite the atmosphere of fear and the unexpected here, it's quite easy to become apathetic to the dangers around us. It's not that we're overly brave and not afraid of anything, but that things around us seem so peaceful that you can so easily be led astray to feeling that nothing can happen.

One of the members of our plugah is a professional cook, and he's happy to spend (most of) his time in the kitchen preparing first class meals. We're happy to let him do so. Among his specialties is pastries, and he prepares rolls and cakes the quality of which is hard to find in a bakery. On Fridays we don't eat lunch because he's busy all day preparing the meal for erev Shabbat, and even I as a vegetarian have more than enough good food to eat. When we take leave we always ask what he wants us to bring from home.

We've now been here a week and a half out of what's supposed to be a full four weeks. Outside of our own tragedy we have daily reports of attempted attacks on army outposts throughout Lebanon and there are always intelligence reports about possible actions to be taken against us. Yet I guess we've more or less reached a plateau of business as usual. Today I've got some time to read the Shabbat papers and if I didn't have those papers I might be ready to open the first of the books I took along with me. Though as we've learned, all this can change very quickly. If all goes as planned, tomorrow morning I'll be getting leave until Thursday, and I'm very ready for that. Our leave schedule has been quite good, even though it's meant that we leave a minimum of soliders here (and sometimes a bit less than that). I'm among the last to take leave, and that means that I may even have a chance to get a second leave. I'll be going tomorrow along with Tzvika my sergeant. Both of us thought we'd take a long leave only at the end of this month, but we're not complaining that things are working out differently. We're more than a bit exhausted (mostly emotionally) from the events of this last week, and we need a rest at home.

Before our kabbalat Shabbat last night I was asked if I wanted to take part in a minyan. The Chabadnik of our plugah whom I've been with for perhaps eight years ((and who deserves that his special story be told sometime)) told the person who invited me to leave me alone --

he knows me already and knows that I don't want to take part, but also knows that if they need a tenth person for a minyan, especially if someone needs to say kaddish, I don't refuse. (I loaned our Chabadnik a book by Itzik Manger I brought along with me and he's enjoying it. And I know that this is one of the few chances he has of reading "secular" literature.) ((Later I gave him a couple of other books and he requested that I bring something for him to read each miluim.)) The rabbi of our g'dud who's presently with our plugah gets the opportunity to give a sermon. Our Chabadnik does the same, though since he's a part of us we relate to him differently. I see the sermon of our g'dud's rabbi as out and out politics in the guise of religion. In principle I have nothing against this, and expect that this is what any rabbi does. But we're supposed to leave politics behind us when we come here, and while some of us do that (more or less -- it's virtiually impossible to do so totally) others receive a platform to express their views.

Sunday, Jan. 20, 11:30

I'm presently sitting at an outpost around five kilometers south of "our own", waiting impatiently for a ride which will bring me to Rosh HaNikra and to Israel. I'm here with seven others, and impatient or not, I've got no choice but to wait -- which is more or less what I've been doing for the last three hours. To Rosh HaNikra it's about an hour's ride, and from there it's no problem to catch a ride, meaning that if I can get out of here I'm not a long way from home. But this is still Lebanon, and I won't feel comfortable until I'm on the other side of the border. I guess that if I have to spend another day in Lebanon this is among the easier ways, except that I'd hoped that I'd be in Israel by now.

On Thursday a high ranking officer, who was injured in the same spot that Miki and Sefi were killed, in the second explosion, died. ((A couple of hours after the first explosion, while forces were still gathered around the area investigating and in general congregating, a second explosion, from a bomb hidden in the same terrace wall went off.)) That means that three soldiers were killed in that spot. Thinking about this officer I was reminded that the last time we were in Lebanon an officer stationed just south of where we were stationed was killed during our stay. Though that was very close by, and certainly a tragedy in its own right, I was hardly affected by it and forgot it rather quickly. Thus also with this officer, since he wasn't at all close to me he's just another person whom I read about in the papers -- another statistic.

Before these miluim I had an ongoing argument with a woman who occasionally drives me home on her way to her kibbutz. She tried to convince me to refuse to serve in Lebanon, less because of political reasons than because she thought that nothing merited taking such a chance with life. I argued that every day we take chances and that we measure these chances against the advantage we have to gain. Thus for me it was a question of measuring a political value against a statistical chance. This led to thoughts on the great god of statistics. After all, in the eys of someone who doesn't know me, I'm no more than another statistic -- the percentage of kibbutznikim, the percentage of male elementary school teachers and the like. I'm a three dimensional person only to those people who know me, and though I can feel sorrow for starving children in Ethiopia, it's a very general, amorphous sort of sorrow. In the same way that others are sadly (but inevitably) statistics for me, I'm that for them as well. An explosive device doesn't compute percentages, but it very easily converts a person into a statistic, and that's the chance I take. When I started writing this paragraph the idea I wanted to express seemed very clear to me. Now I'm a bit confused and unsure both of what I wanted to express and of what came across.

Yesterday afternoon I patrolled once more to the beach. The purpose of these patrols is ostensibly to be on the lookout for terrorist boats that are reported to be interested in landing near us and carrying out actions against us. Whatever the reason, it gave me another chance to get to the beach, and this time, even though it was a bit chilly (it is the middle of January) I took a swim. War or no war, Lebanon or no Lebanon, a beach is a beach and it was good to have a nice swim. I was of course reminded of my swim at the beach just south of Beirut two and a half years ago, with Miki among others.

My activity for last night was a very short patrol to a spot where we lay in (muddy) ambush, keeping tabs on what had seemed to a patrol of the day before a suspicious object. With morning (after about two hours of laying outside) we checked out the spot from close by, coming to the conclusion that though it's better to be suspicious than apathetic, this time our suspicions were unfounded. It's after returning from that patrol, packing some things and eating some breakfast that I started the long wait which I'm still in the midst of.

Yesterday morning we had a conversation with another khativa commander, this one not of our organic khativa like last time, but of the forces in the area we're serving. He spoke specifically about the upcoming weeks before the first stage of the withdrawl. Like the officer who'd spoken with us the day before, he felt that chances were good that there would be an increase in attempts to harm us. However unlike the previous officer he didn't think this meant we should become a bit more vicious or trigger happy. He thought that just as in the past the Shi'ites had resisted the Palestinians (and us) so they would do when we leave and someone else tries to occupy them. Thus, instead of reaching the conclusion that it doesn't matter how we relate to these people since soon we won't be here, he reaches the conclusion that it's still in our interests to relate to them humanely.

It's now 14:00. Two hours of waiting have passed, and I have nothing better to do than to take out my writing pad and think onto paper. Our patrols lead us through orchards with all sorts of citrus trees, bananas, guavas, anonas, qumkwats and perhaps a few other trees I haven't noticed. Not everything is ripe, but as I think I've already written, we eat rather freely. The least of our sins is eating the fruit of the trees. We've trampled on lettuce or bean patches, but that's also little league activity. This morning, on our way back from our patrol/ambush we stopped some cars so that they wouldn't interfere with us. When one car didn't stop quickly enough, one of us stopped it -- with a bullet in the windshield. We argued later whether this was necessary, though there's really nothing to argue about -- it obviously wasn't. At the least, a bullet in the air would have stopped the car, and had the bullet hit someone, we certainly would have had more problems than we need. We're free to decide what endangers our safety and thus what should be dealt with and how, and when some of us receive this power it's almost unavoidable that we misuse it.

Tuesday, Jan. 22, 23:00

I'm home, and I've been home since Sunday evening, walking into the chadar ochel a bit before 21:00. Thursday morning I go back north for an additional two weeks, and I'm not looking forward to it, but I'm at the least resigned to it.

I finally got a ride out of Lebanon Sunday at 15:00, reaching Rosh HaNikra by 16:00 and then making very good time to Haifa -- good enough for me to stop in at the hospital in Haifa where our plugah member who lost an eye is hospitalized and visit with him for almost half an hour. He was being visited at the time by people he works with near Tel Aviv, and I picked up a ride with them to Tel Aviv, and that helped immensely in getting me home quickly.

I suppose that it's preferable that most people on the kibbutz didn't know that what they'd read about in the papers a week earlier had happened to my plugah -- that way there was less worrying. A couple of people knew that I was together with Miki in miluim, but they told few people so that word hardly spread. Since my leave just about everyone I know has heard from someone, and if I'd been in a position of not having anything to talk about, I don't have that problem now.

Monday I went to Tel Aviv both to do a bit of work in my department and to get to my computer class. My head wasn't fully into studying, but I still did a good job of catching up on the material I'd missed. Later that afternoon I went to the home of Sefi's parents to visit with his family. I got there when two other members of my plugah were there and I visited for two hours. Sefi came from a well off, bourgeois home, with relatively expensive art on the walls, a piano, books, and an in general cultured atmosphere. His father owns a gas station which in Israel is not a small achievement, and his mother taught Bible and literature, apparently in high school, until recently. By the time I arrived they'd received many visits and were speaking out loud about learning to cope. I knew Sefi as an officer with whom only recently I'd begun to be friendly ~~and~~ get to know as a person. From the visit (and from things reported in the papers) I began to get a fuller picture of a real person and told his parents (and 21 year old widow of six months) this. His father responded that the same was true for him -- that as a wide spectrum of friends visited he was getting a fuller picture of his son. His widow read part of a letter she'd received from him two and a half years ago. When our unit was in Damour, Sefi was still in the standing army and stationed on Mt. Hermon. In the letter he wrote that if he knew that he were going to be a casualty in a war then he wouldn't go, but since nothing is ever clear in this sense beforehand, he takes his chances. His reflections on statistics were quite similar to mine, though I think that mine are more fatalistic. I was reminded of the joke of why World War III was cancelled -- the computer went berserk and printed out the lists of the casualties before the war started, but I didn't tell the joke.

This afternoon I visited with Miki's family in Ramla. Though I was much closer to Miki than to Sefi, I felt closer to Sefi's family. My guess is that Sefi's family is Polish (and

most probably of a right wing bent). Miki came from a Rumanian family with a much more modest standard of living, and no books on the shelf or other signs I identify with. His sister lives in Spain with her Israeli family and came over for the funeral and Shiv'ah and is heading back tomorrow. When I arrived she was speaking with a young woman officer who's job it is to deal with bereaved families, and they were talking about how much the Ministry of Defense reimburses her for her trip to Israel and other financial matters. The officer made a list of all the questions and promised that they would be checked out. In this home there was more of a feel of "getting back to normal" (whatever that may mean) but there were also moments in which Miki's mother fell into her own thoughts. When I left their homes, both these mothers told me to take care of myself and to return whole and healthy from the next two weeks. I promised I'd try.

For my own part, my mood hasn't been the best. While on the kibbutz I've done a lot of visiting and talking. I thought I'd prefer to talk about just about anything else, but talk reverts rather naturally to the subject of Lebanon, and from there to my mood and my visits to these families. What is for me a new experience is something that many friends have gone through in previous wars, though they listen and ask questions as though this is as new to them as it is to me. I certainly can't say that I'd prefer to be in Lebanon, but in certain ways it really is more difficult to be here -- to visit the families, to know that I have to return very soon. I admit to being fearful about returning. Perhaps I feel more fear here than when in Lebanon because there things are more definite -- less is left to the imagination. This evening at around 10:00 I called a member of the plugah who came home a day after me. I called in order to check out whether he was intending to visit Miki's family tomorrow because I had some information for him on when they'd be home. But I think that more than any thing else I called to know what news he had of our home away from home. After all, he was there a full day after I'd left. He reported that the outpost next to ours (also manned by our plugah) had been shot at with an RPG, but that no harm had been done, and that the plugah next to ours had run over another explosive device - once again, no one injured. Be that as it may, tonight I'll sleep well. I'd intended to stay home tomorrow, but one friend suggested that I go to work in Tel Aviv -- that with my head filled with other matters I'll be in a better mood. I accepted that idea, especially since I have a ride rather late in the morning (9:00) meaning that I can sleep well as well as do some work.

Wednesday, Jan. 23, 20:45

One member of our plugah didn't return from his leave. He was supposed to return a week ago, and he still hasn't come back. A couple of people say that this was to be expected, while another report has it that his father died while he was on leave. The cynics respond that this isn't the first time that his father has died at a particularly opportune time. I'm not sure what the truth of the matter is, besides the fact that he apparently was afraid of returning, and in that respect I certainly understand him. I return tomorrow morning and I'm a bit amazed at the way in which I haven't at all entertained the idea of not returning. We say that those who don't return are afraid, as though the rest of us aren't. We've so conditioned ourselves to believe it is our duty to serve that we're hardly able to imagine that it takes a certain sort of bravery to decide not to return.

Should I decide not to return, I of course have a political excuse. And were I not to return, instead of staying home I'd report to Rosh HaNikra and request to be court-martialled. Yet I have to have a certain respect for someone who's concerned enough with himself that he's willing to pay what's most probably a high price. My guess is that if someone's not returning became public knowledge in his neighborhood, he would be seriously ostracized, and he'd most definitely have a hard time returning to his unit when his next miluim came up. For Israelis, serving in the army is supposed to be a sign of pride, and at least in the circles I'm familiar with, evasion (as opposed to political refusal and paying the price for that refusal, which of course has its own drawbacks) is definitely looked down upon. Perhaps in other units or in other social spheres this is accepted behavior, but not in combat units and the people who normally make them up. This may be a sign of the disintegration of certain well-established values in Israel. Be that as it may, I still feel a certain respect for someone who is able to free himself from the many layers of social conditioning around him and act according to his most basic survival instincts. I, for one, am unable to do this -- not only for Zionist or political or idealistic reasons, but very simply because of social pressures -- and I'm returning tomorrow along with my fears.

Friday, Jan. 25, 9:00

I've got a few minutes before the vehicular patrol I'm on today goes out again, and I want to do a bit of catching up. I finally got back to my home away from home at around 17:00, after leaving Hatzor at around 6:45. With a running leap I made it to the 8:00 train from Tel Aviv to Nahariya, and from there I caught a ride to Rosh HaNikra, arriving there a bit before 12:00. There, along with six others from my unit, I began the long wait. Nothing was going in our direction. Two of us caught a ride in the right direction at least, and around two hours later I caught a ride as well, leaving four people behind who may end up staying in Israel until Sunday. I certainly wouldn't have minded doing that, but when you know that someone else is waiting for you to get back in order that he can get leave, you don't always act according to your first selfish instincts.

16:30

It's almost Shabbat. A rather large part of today's job for me has been accompanying a telephone unit (6 or 7 phones) to and fro. The phones will be in our outpost for Shabbat, but their operator is religious, and until a few minutes ago he refused not only to keep them working on Shabbat (they work via a generator) but even to teach a Beduin soldier we have with us here whom our g'dud's rabbi says is kosher to be a Shabbes goy. The situation is little short of absurd. We brought the phones to us about an hour ago so that the operator can set things up before Shabbat started, but in order to do that we had to take it from another outpost where not everyone had phoned yet. They then took their armorred personnel carriers (it's forbidden to travel in less than two on the road) and paid us a visit in order to finish phoning. And all this in a place where we try and travel on the roads as little as possible. Were we able to "turn on" the telephones after Shabbat started, almost all of this running around would be avoided. At present it seems as though some sort of solution has been reached. I'm pleased with this because I still haven't been able to reach the kibbutz.

We don't pay too much attention to the news here. We have better sources of information on what's happening in Lebanon than the newspapers, and other issues just aren't that interesting here. We keep an eye on the economic situation, but it seems that in comparison to other times I've been in miluim it concerns us much less. One issue that's held the interest of quite a few of us is Arik Sharon's trial against TIME. One could almost say that we're divided between the forces of light and the forces of darkness; and this time I'm definitely not referring to color -- on those lines we don't have a clear division. Today we got word of the jury's decision on the third count, and many of us were able to sigh a sigh of relief. We were very fearful that Sharon would win on this count too, and that would pave the way for him to return home as a conquering hero. Not that he's not going to try and do that anyway, but at least he's got a much weaker case. In many ways the trial is very related to our being in Lebanon -- Sharon is always on our minds here.

This morning we had a short talk with the second in command of our g'dud -- formerly our plugah commander and thus a friend. He brought us the latest news on what's going to happen with us here. As things stand now, we're going to be the last Israelis in this particular spot -- when we leave, we take whatever will be left here (which will be close to nothing) with us. There's always a chance that everything will be ready a couple of days early and that we'll leave then, but my guess is that this is wishful thinking. While I was at home our heaters were taken away (and for some strange reason the rather mild weather turned colder at the same time) and more and more equipment will be dismantled and sent back to Israel until the end of next week. Most probably we'll spend our last week here like we spent our first one, two and a half years ago (ah...), attached to our armorred personnel carriers.

Shabbat, Jan. 26, 10:30

I seem to have a knack for getting a good night's sleep on Friday night. I was scheduled to be on a night foot patrol, but my officer took sick and the patrol was cancelled, and I slept a very full sleep. Today I've only got two hours of guard duty in the afternoon, and I can't call that being too busy.

Yesterday evening, around 18:00, and RPG rocket was shot at the outpost nearest ours -- part of our plugah. It came pretty close. Though no one was injured, it wasn't far from that, yet very quickly things were back to normal. We ate our Shabbat meal a bit more tensely than we're used to (after only a bit more than two weeks here we're already "used to" doing things in a particular way) but by the time I took my shoes off (the first time in 36 hours) and crawled into bed we were quite relaxed already. It looks as though this is the sort of thing we can expect for the coming (now less than) two weeks.

After the RPG was shot we went into what might be called a defense pattern -- for around half a minute we shot with all of our guns in just about every direction as a sort of warning, a showing of our firepower, to whomever might want to try and attack us. Once again many people here, including some who generally can't be accused of being overly impulsive, thought the best reaction would be forcefully entering the closest village (which by the way is rather far from where the RPG was shot), arresting all of the men and giving them anything ranging from a roughing up to a few bullets. The fact that these villagers are people just like us, that they can be expected to respond as we respond and thus that they would interpret our reaction as provocation deserving some other reaction, is a fact most difficult for some of the people here to grasp. This is partially due to the fact that we've got guns in our hands and thus think in terms of solutions that include them. But it's also closely related to the fact that for the past 17+ years we've been an occupying power which has learned to see the occupied people as sub-human, not as people who bleed like we bleed or with mothers who mourn like ours do. Getting out of here will be a step in the right direction of getting over this "occupier's vision", but we'll still have a long way to go.

Sunday, Jan. 27, 11:30

My turn has finally come to be dish washer for a day. I think I might even prefer war. I did my best to try and switch with anyone, but it looks like it's my day all day. At least this means that I don't have to wear shoes for an entire day. I'm inside a tent, and outside I just started hearing the roar of a bulldozer about to start the day's work of taking this place apart. I wish him well.

It's becoming as hard to reach this place as it is to get out. Of the perhaps ten people who are presently out on leave, so far today only one has returned, leaving us to think not only about the difficulty in getting here, but also of the desire to do so. At present, because people aren't returning, my chances of getting another leave are close to nil. I wasn't really expecting one, but there was a chance for a while and that always makes being here a bit more bearable.

Yesterday evening I finally got out again on another foot patrol -- my first since being back. I write "finally" because as I lounged around here doing close to nothing I felt myself becoming more fearful, more apprehensive, than is really necessary. I don't mean the logical, and necessary, sort of fear that comes with being in a dangerous place, but rather a sort of across the board apprehensiveness which includes even not being sure you've dressed warm enough for being out at night. That can be an important issue, but still not something that merits getting excited over. All together we're hardly ever outside at night for more than four hours, and even if it's cold, that passes. It was good to be out last night because after about the first ten minutes the sweat and the adrenalin are flowing and the mind is taking in the situation around us, and I quickly feel back to normal, in control of at least those things of which I'm able to be in control.

The bulldozer stopped working long ago. It hardly warmed up before it was shut off again. If we're going to get out of here as planned it's going to have to work a good deal harder.

I spent two hours on guard duty yesterday afternoon, from our guard tower that stands over the road. I'm hardly ever on guard duty during the day. This time I had the chance to see the traffic going by. I was on guard duty when school got out, and I saw a number of packed school buses taking kids home as well as a number of kids walking home. Occupation or no occupation, for the people here it's business as usual. I suppose that in their schools they learn a bit of Lebanese history -- that they belong to a great nation with a proud history and the like. I doubt that it's different any place in the world. Sometimes when we pass by a village I see very young kids waving to us. I think that I once saw a mother stopping a kid from waving, teaching him or her not to respond to his or her impulsive reactions. I'd probably do the same -- it seems to take a lot of thinking twice to learn to live as an occupied nation.

Monday, Jan. 28, 12:30

I've just returned from a morning patrol -- and found almost nothing. All morning semi-trailers have been at work here, taking away whatever they can. Things now look very similar to how they did when we first entered Lebanon two and a half year ago -- a makeshift encampment. We still have our tents and kitchen, but they're doubtless on their way out soon as well. Gone are our showers and toilets (makeshift as they were) and various prefabs that we had here. By the time we leave here (and once again rumor has it that it will be earlier than scheduled) we'll really be back to two and a half years ago -- armorred personnel carriers and nothing more. This doesn't make for very comfortable living, but at least it does suggest that Israel is really getting out of here.

My patrol this morning was to the outpost just south of us, immediately on the other side of the Litani river, around three kilometers from us. About one kilometer into the patrol we heard to the south an explosion and then shooting, a sure sign that something had exploded on our forces and that they had responded by firing (every-which way). Sure enough, a vehicular patrol of the outpost we were headed toward had been attacked -- two people were slightly injured. This didn't keep us from continuing with our patrol, nor from fixing ourselves a tasty breakfast there when we arrived, all in a very business as usual, non-chalant, fashion. The news that we heard on the radio while there reported that yesterday in all of Lebanon there had been five attacks on Israeli forces -- more or less par I guess. I don't know the full political bent of all the other four on the patrol with me, but only one really supports the Likud, or Sharon or the like. He also wants us out of Lebanon quickly, and I don't have to say anything because the minute he says this the other three immediately jump into the conversation and ask him how he can support who and what got us into this mess and still think that they can also get us out.

As I finished my last sentence of yesterday, I was called to make final preparations for lunch, and from there I had cleaning up after lunch to take care of. When I finished that, around 15:00, I was promoted -- to chef in charge of preparing supper with one person in my charge (our chef is on leave). Since we were down to very little provisions I felt more like a magician than a chef. In the end I was very successful (it was a dairy meal) and I had to strongly refuse to get the job full time. I was able, however, to say that I finally fulfilled my mother's wish. After all, she always asks me if the army can't use others of my skills instead of using me as an infantry soldier (some honor!).

Tuesday, Jan. 29, 11:45

Though I last wrote only around 24 hours ago, and at that time I thought I was pretty well written out, as I've noted before, things happen quickly. At present I'm sitting at a nearby outpost, pleased with myself that I guessed correctly that this was going to be a case of hurry up and wait. It was a good second thought to take some pages along with me. I've already been out this morning -- for a foot patrol of little more than an hour and a half, and I had the whole night to sleep, so I shouldn't complain. But I hardly slept. I think it was a case of "too much rest" if there is such a thing. I've slept very well over the past few days, and I think that when I went to bed at 18:30, my body simply didn't want the sleep I wanted to give it. I was supposed to wake up at 21:30 for a night foot patrol, but it was delayed and finally cancelled. Throughout the night various forces opened fire -- on what were most probably imaginary targets. I've more or less stopped waking up to this shooting (at least until someone tells me to get up and get dressed) and though I was awake for last night's shooting, it didn't excite me very much.

But it wasn't all imaginary targets. Toward dawn the intelligence forces started arresting suspects in an unfriendly village. They were relatively successful until their last arrest when someone apparently caught on and fired on them. ((Later guesses have it that even this was in their heads.)) No one was injured, but more or less since then we've been on call for a continuation of the arrests, which brings me to what I'm doing here. I'm part of that on call. (I've just been told that the "on call" has been called off, or is finished, and I'm soon on my way "home".

Early this morning I had one of those jobs which the other people around me know isn't the sort of job for me. Seven suspects were brought, blindfolded and handcuffed, to our stronghold where we had to stand guard over them for around an hour and a half before they were taken from us. We were supposed to make sure that they didn't talk to one another, or try to flee. I got the job for part of that time. Once again, I felt I was seeing (or participating in) The Battle of Algiers from the wrong side. In their movie they were the freedom fighters and I was the occupier. Some of our plugah suggested, mostly in the exaggerated bravura of soldiers with guns, that we finish them off once and for all. Our g'dud commander tells us that the only soldiers who kill prisoners are cooks and quartermasters. He's more or less right, and though there was a lot of talk, when our prisoners had to urinate, even though people said "let him go in his pants", these same people led them to a proper place and undid their hands. Not everyone who talks bloodthirsty really is bloodthirsty.

Yesterday afternoon I was once again outside patrolling. Walking in what was more or less someone's backyard, I saw a woman standing by a guava tree eating a large ripe guava of a type I haven't seen here yet. My first thought was to where she got that guava and I searched the tree for one. Only a few steps later did I realize that I was walking in her backyard, a very unwelcome guest thinking first not even of my own security but of my stomach. Once again, it's very easy to get used to being the man with the gun.

17:30

We're not supposed to do anything besides keep our eyes and ears open and alert while on guardy duty, but I think I do a good job of that as I occasionally lower my head to add a few words to the page. In around half an hour it will be dark. I'm filling in for someone else and it's calm at the moment. There are those who say it's the calm before the storm while others say that poetic license has no more hold on reality than anything else does in Lebanon, and I'm one of those others.

I'm filling in on guard duty because the person I'm replacing is on his way to Tyre accompanying an injured person -- a "localer" whom our sister outpost (where I was earlier today) injured when he came too close to them. He was apparently injured before then as well and came to the outpost to get aid. Now he's getting it. He was brought here first because we have a doctor and four medics here and here he received first aid.

I'm presently facing west and gazing into a rather pleasant sunset. Nothing special, but still nice to see. Today was the first day I've noticed wildflowers blooming here. It's been a short winter here as well as in Israel, and with Tu B'Shvat little more than a week away, I may still see a few more wildflowers and sunsets. Like swimming in the sea, you might as well make the most of it while you're here.

t:18:40

I've been replaced and even eaten something somewhat resembling aruchat erev, and our generator is working at the moment, meaning that we've got light in our tent. And I want to make use of the light to make note of a couple of events. Perhaps the central event of the day for me was taking my shoes and socks off around 14:00 and giving them a healthy washing (or as healthy as is possible from a jerrycan). I was desperately in need of this washing, and though I haven't showered for a couple of days (four!) clean feet is definitely a good way of starting -- from the bottom up.

I was wrong when I reported that our toilets were taken from us -- we still have them, and today I got around to copying the graffitti in them. Like yesterday, a great deal was taken today, and little remains, much of which will apparently be taken tomorrow.

Wednesday, Jan. 30, 11:00

Like two days ago, I'm at the outpost just to the south of the Litani River, this time waiting for a rather constant (and heavy) rain to let up before heading back. It rained rather hard much of last night, but it was clear enough this morning for us to start out on our mission. We would have arrived before the rain except that on the way we received an unexpected mission -- to stop and check traffic on one of the roads in our area. Last night another RPG was shot at our sister outpost (where I'd been in the early afternoon) and there was reason to believe that whoever did the job was going to try and flee via the road we closed off. ((As though he hadn't fled long before, during the night.)) No one was injured, and though there was a great deal of firing for a half hour after the RPG, including illuminating mortar shelling as aid from us which makes a good deal of noise. Be that as it may, I followed the play by play from my bed, waking up at the beginning of the whole episode, and falling asleep again without difficulty after it was over. Strange as it may seem, I slept a full night's sleep of at least eight hours, and woke up quite rested.

We would have made it to the outpost we're at now before the rain had we not had to check the traffic for about an hour. By the time that mission was over we were very thoroughly soaked. I wore a rain-jacket over my shirt, but I didn't wear the pants. Thus before I did anything else I first took off my shoes, socks and pants and put them on a heater. This outpost is just south of the area being evacuated in the first stage of the withdrawl, and they thus still have the comforts of home -- heaters and showers. I brought a towel and soap with me for my first shower in four or five days, and the rain certainly didn't keep me from getting to the shower. I'm presently sitting in my underwear, next to the heater in one of the tents here while my other clothes finish drying, which they've pretty much done already. We ordinarily eat breakfast here when we're on patrol to here, and today was no exception. I especially enjoy getting here because they still receive cheeses whereas it's been a few days since we last saw milk products by us. In general we're received very well, even warmly (even without the heaters), although the unit stationed here has no connection to ours. So here I am, showered and clean, dry, well fed, and officially fulfilling my mission of the day. It's now habit for me to put a few pages in my pocket whenever I'm outside. This certainly pays off since although there are newspapers to road, I still haven't opened a book and there doesn't seem to be much point in taking one along with me. Thus writing is in many ways the best solution. This time my pages got drenched along with my pants, but they dried along with them as well.

Yesterday, while writing from our sister outpost, I was also in the midst of a conversation with a friend who's stationed there. He's from Nahariya, and though he's now very much in favor of the whitdrawl ("we've got no reason to be here") he's also quite a hawk. He claims that we'll still have problems from the Shi'ites after the withdrawl because the real reason that they're shooting at us here isn't that they want us to leave, but that they get paid well (by the Syrians or the Palestinians or someone else) to attack us. Thus it really won't have that much effect that we withdraw.

To a certain extent he's right when he says he's fearful about katuyshas returning to the settlements of the north. For a full year before the start of the war no katuyshas fell in the north, and there's reason to believe that our settlements there will be less secure than they were before the war. This is part of the price we have to pay for a disastrous foreign policy -- in order to get out of Lebanon we have to take certain chances that we wouldn't have to take had we not entered Lebanon in the first place.

My friend wanted to know what my opinion of his suggestion was. He suggests that we withdraw as planned (after all, we have no good reason to stay here and keep raising the casualty statistics) but that when we leave we make it clear in no uncertain terms that if katuyshas are shot at us, we'll raize the villages from where they were shot. I had a very hard time even figuring out where to start explaining why I didn't like the idea and didn't think it would be effective. Moral considerations don't carry much weight here and it's more or less axiomatic (though experience has proven the opposite) that when force doesn't work, more force does.

Thursday, Jan. 31, 10:30

I'm more or less used to returning to our outpost after a day's patrol and finding that there's less and less of it left. Yesterday I joked that when we returned we passed by the site of the outpost and continued some 200 meters beyond it and then checked the map and discovered we'd gone to far -- we didn't recognize the spot because there was nothing there. Yesterday there were two less tents and I no longer had a mattress. This morning we're already less another tent (our chadar ochel) and even part of the weapons and ammunition that's usually here.

We had a rather full day of rain yesterday and between my shoes and my socks I've got plastic bags that keep my socks and feet relatively dry. Last night I was on guard duty for three hours, two of them during a constant drizzle which occasionally became a real downpout for a few minutes. During my last hour the sky cleared, but it's back to very threatening again, and there's no doubt that we'll have more rain, and mud. Most of my work today is what most of us are involved in -- taking apart what's left of this place to take apart.

The mud certainly affects my mood. That and the fact that it's been a very long month.

19:15

I stopped writing when I did to help out in taking this place apart. Trucks had arrived and we had quite a lot to load. After that I spent a few hours on guard duty, part of it during heavy rain, but I was well protected and not much bothered by the rain. We had a few hours of clearing and dryness throughout the day, but on the whole it's been a day of rain, and it's raining now once again. When I stopped, I'd intended to write about exhaustion -- physical and emotional. Though I'm more than pleased to be involved in the withdrawl, our living conditions have gone from passable to depressing, and the rain and our cold feet don't help much. I'm hardly affected by our long patrols, unlike many others, but the conditions here do take their toll on me. And always somewhere in the immediate background are the two deaths in our plugah and the constant, but very hard to define, danger that we're in.

This afternoon it looked as though I was going to get deeper into this mood, what with loading everything on the trucks and the rain, but for a while at least there was a definite improvement.

Friday, Feb. 1, 9:00

It's a bit strange to try and pick up the threads of a thought at which I left off not only half a day ago, but quite a lot of activity ago as well. I'm presently undressed and in my bed-sleeping bag, but though I've now got time to sleep, I'm not really tired, and I prefer to write. I just heard the weather forecast on the news, and it looks like we're in for two more days of rain and it's raining at the moment. Be that as it may, and it's not very encouraging, I'm still able to write about an improvement in my mood.

Yesterday afternoon, in between cloudbursts, we built a chadar ochel to replace the tent that was taken from us. Earlier that morning we'd hidden some tables, and with materials which we scavenged from the immeidate area we were able to build what might be called a succah

(though it's closed on top). All this was done in a totally makeshift manner, with stones for hammers and restraightened nails removed from the boards we found. To our pleasure (and almost amazement) it stands. One of yesterday's headlines reads that everything in the army's outposts in the area of the first line of withdrawl has already been taken apart. We joked that the papers didn't know about us, building instead of taking apart. Since we're all in favor of the withdrawl, we were also able to joke that we're setting up a hitnachlut here and will refuse to give up the territory we're in. Had we not built this succah and hidden the tables we would have had to eat our meals in whatever makeshift way we could -- either standing or on our beds -- so the fact that we have something ressembling a chadar ochel is certainly encouraging unto itself. But the process itself, the activity of building, a mix of energy, initiate, joking and a bit of madness, was the best mood improver. At one point the sky provided us with a master rainbow. It's little things like this that make the time go by bearably and even enjoyably. ((I now remember that lifting one board for the succah we found a family of rats, about six or seven from a recent litter. They may have been cute, but certainly not desirable to keep around. My compatriots refused to kill them, instead covering them once again and letting them be. This in no way reflects how they relate to innocent women and children, though as I've hinted before, they're certainly not bloodthirsty, despite whatever militant talking they may engage in.))

Last night I was once again scheduled to be on a night foot patrol. These patrols have been cancelled over the past few days because of the weather, and that's not really for the good. We sometimes say that any Shi'ite who's willing to brave the rain in order to attack us in some way deserves to succeed (or at least commands our respect). It's important for us to be out at night not only to find whatever we may find -- someone preparing a bomb or something similar -- but to let our surroundings know that we're outside and in that way make it even less likely that someone will brave the rain to prepare something against us.

So last night, at around 3:00 I was wakened in order to get dressed and ready to go out on the patrol. It was totally overcast and even raining a bit, but our plugah commander (whom we were set to go out with) thought it very important that we get out at night for a change. But he was also willing and ready to cancel the patrol at the first sign of rain. I convinced him that it was worth taking the chance, and we were outside from 4:00 until 6:00, with little more than a drizzle. The ground was muddy and I was lucky to have taken a pair of rubber shoes from a medic who had recently arrived. To our dismay, our unit didn't give us shoes like this. I felt like a kid, stamping in puddles yet keeping my feet dry. It really was important for us to be outside, perhaps more for ourselves than for whatever security we may have achieved. At certain parts of the patrol we purposely made noise -- to let it be known that even on a rainy night we're out. For ourselves, mud or no mud, the hardest part of the patrol was the long time it took us to decide to take the chance. Like before, once we were outside and underway, our fears subsided.

This morning, after returning and drinking a poor cup of coffee, I was out again for another hour -- a two kilometer patrol which we have each morning. If last night we walked in mud, today it was more like swamp, and I was even more lucky to have the rubber boots on. Now I'm back, and barring anything unexpected (which sadly is rather expectable here) I'm free until the evening. And they say that we work hard in the army -- in civilian life I'm never as free as this.

almost Erev Shabbat, 16:45

It's raining, and it's raining hard. But since the last time that I wrote that it was raining, almost eight hours ago, we've had mild and pleasant weather. We built a couple of small fires on which to dry our shoes, and our bones at the same time. We knew more rain was on the way, but it was very much at the right time that we had this weather. We took out a couple of jerrycans (from our very limited supply of water which was replenished this morning) and washed our heads and feet, and it was even warm enough to dry up outside. What a difference a (sun) ray makes.

Last night, during our daily briefing some of the members of our plugah once again raised the question of what sort of retributive action we might take against the Shi'ites for the deaths of Miki and Sefi. The main idea raised was a general "celebration" the last night we'll be here -- shooting it up in the direction of the unfriendly villages. (Strange that I haven't used the word "enemy" villages -- the Hebrew word I'm translating from is somewhere between the two.) ((Hostile is the dictionary translation.)) Noam, our present plugah commander, previously second in command, and a very nice guy with a good head, a fine sense of humor, and the ability to think straight under pressure (and around 24 years old), didn't rule out the idea of blowing up a water pump or something like that, but strongly and totally ruled out any attack that might harm innocent civilians. When you're here for a full month and still able to talk in "mild" terms like that, it's a good sign.

Shabbat, Feb. 2, 15:30

It's storming outside, and I'm inside a tent in our sister outpost. My job for today is the vehicular patrol, and since around 9:00 we've been very mobile, much of the time accompanying a telephone unit around to the various plugot of our g'dud. Most of the day has been dry (and being on an armorred personnel carrier the mud hasn't bothered me much) but this looks like a heavy cloudburst which doesn't really bother me too much. We'll be here with the telephone unit until the soldiers here finish telephoning, and the rain will probably subside by then. I'll try and phone when we bring the phones to us for the night.

I once more got a very full night's sleep. If nothing else, the rain is quite helpful in that respect, and as I've probably written before, the other important way it's helpful is in keeping any Shi'ite with plans of attacking us at home since he doesn't want to get drenched any more than we do. We shut our lights out last night at 20:00 and I was scheduled to get up at 3:00 for a foot patrol, but instead I woke up around 8:00. I don't really like the travelling that goes along with my patrol of today, but it's going by quite easily, and I'm drier than those walking through the mud today. The day vehicular patrol is also our alert unit for 24 hours so we ordinarily have to sleep in our clothes and shoes -- for me among the worst punishments of this place. Since our shoes are wet and the punishment is thus almost torture, we only slept with our clothes on -- an additional benefit. ((There are many soldiers who sleep with there clothes on every day. Not in order to be ready more quickly if necessary, but because they think they're warmer that way or simply are too lazy to take off there clothes. I'm not one of these.))

For our Shabbat meal last night we crammed all our tables into one tent so that we could all sit down together to eat. Our regular cook is still away so we had to make do with third class food instead of the first class meals we're used to, but there was a pleasant atmosphere. Afterwards a few of the older members of the plugah sat around a table along with our new plugah commander (aged 23, I asked) to chat about the plugah a bit. My sergeant, Tvika, whose 35th birthday we celebrated last night is going to become master sergeant of the plugah, and we're trying to convince Eli, who celebrated his 37th birthday along with my 34th, to become our plugah's clerk. If these changes take place, it looks as though I'll be the oldest active soldier in the plugah, a rather strange honor which seems to carry with it very few benefits.

Sunday, Feb. 3, 10:00

Once again, showered and fed, and sitting by a warm heater -- ah, this is the life. The sun isn't exactly shining, but it's not raining either, and that's an improvement. I'm on the morning patrol to the outpost just south of the Litani River, and it's a popular route among us because we get wet and dirty on the way there, shower and dry up, and then get dirty once more on the way back, and the shower really makes all the difference. I was on two and a half hours of guard duty last night, and it was relatively clear with a large moon most of the time, so the time went by quickly. I didn't succeed in phoning any of the times I tried.

In the evening, Tvika, Eli, Noam and I sat down to talk about how we're going to commemorate the month of Miki's and Sefi's deaths. Eli and I were worried that if we didn't start organizing things now, whatever we might do then would be contentless and worse than nothing. Noam explained that when he was on leave and visited with the families, they told him that they understood that we weren't in a position to organize anything at the moment, and they thus requested only that we attend. Still, we decided that I should try and reach the mazkir of Miki's kibbutz, whom I know, and learn from him what's being planned. I tried last night, but that phone didn't seem to be working either.

As we get closer and closer to the end here (and officially our last day here is Wednesday, but there's a new rumor -- after many similar rumors have come and gone -- that tomorrow we'll be getting out of here) we become more and more apathetic about our work. It's not that we don't know that we have to keep our eyes open all the time, and to expect the unexpected, but that we're tired, that we no longer are surprised by things around us, and that even though we always try to walk via different routes (to confuse the enemy) there seems to be a limit even to the limitless routes that there are here to walk through the banana and orange groves.

15:30

It's with a bit of discomfort that I feel compelled to admit that I feel that to more than just a limied extent I enjoy being here. I'm not sure exactly how to define the feeling. It may have something to do with the adrenalin (and sweat) that flows here, and there's probably something about the excitement of taking chances and of every day seeing that you're still whole. That's a feeling that ultimately leads to emotional exhaustion. But it seems as though

there's a certain stage in that process, and I seem to be at that stage now, at which an equilibrium is reached, a sort of standoff between the forces that lead to exhaustion and the forces that replenish our batteries. Thus it's not as strange as it may seem that on the same day that I write about our alertness gradually deteriorating, most definitely a very dangerous sign, that I can also write (or perhaps better, confess) that there's something "attractive", perhaps "electrifying" in being here. Another reason for "enjoying" being here is the positive atmosphere that has developed among us. I'm not close to many of the people I'm here with, but even with these people a certain closeness develops, not to mention being with friends -- people with whom I've become close especially because we've shared a common danger. But enough is enough. It may be a positive experience (and that's still debateable) but I'm more than ready for it to be over.

Monday, Feb. 4, 10:30

Same time, same place -- the outpost just south of the Litani -- and more or less the same story. I didn't shower today -- we're almost positively leaving Lebanon tomorrow morning and one more day of dirt isn't going to make much difference. This is thus almost certainly my last foot patrol, day or night. I thought it would be a rather pleasant trek, along a route which I'm very familiar with, but the rain caught us, and even though I was wearing my full rain gear, it wasn't very pleasant. I kept dry from the rain, but the material the rain clothes are made from keep sweat from evaporating, and thus my clothes were drenched from sweat. I've dried my shirt on the heater (bending my pen into a rather original shape at the same time) and one of the soldiers here traded a pair of pants with me. So I'm dry, but the weather is still stormy so we're not in much of a hurry to start back. Actually, rain or not I'll return rather wet -- from the sweat once again. At the moment, our outpost is being disassembled (or what's left of it) and we hardly have much to return to. We'll spend the night on our armorred personnel carriers and hopefully leave in the early morning.

(I should add that we try not to walk via the same route twice. The problem is that for the past two weeks we've had the job of patrolling the coastal road from our outpost to the Litani, and there's only a limited amount of routes via which we can patrol. We thus unavoidably walk on the same trails we've blazed for ourselves, and that means a certain extra danger. This morning our route included the one kilometer to the north of our outpost which we also have to patrol, usually patrolled by a different group of us. So I had an extra two kilometers to walk this morning -- not much, but some 500 meters were via mud, and that's not much fun.)

I think that I didn't emphasize enough yesterday the function that fear plays in my enjoying being here. I'm certainly not an expert on fear, though I've had my share, but it seems to me that one of the ways in which we deal with our fear (or at least I deal with mine) is not only via black humor, but also via a certain foolheartedness, perhaps abandon, that keeps us functioning.

After returning yesterday I found myself in the middle of a political discussion on the future of the occupied territories. I didn't really want to get into this discussion, but sometimes I just can't help it. I'm pleased to hear people say things like that they're willing to talk with the Palestinians but that they should stop their terrorist acts first, or that they're willing to talk with Palestinians who aren't terrorists. I try and remind them that five or six years ago, had they heard someone talking that way, they'd call him a traitor. This is certainly an improvement. The worst part is that so many people can quote facts which never happened or just ain't true. It's very hard to argue with someone who bases his opinion on mythical facts. It's interesting to hear how many people "know the Arabs" and thus hate them. Some understand the need to get rid of the territories because "you can't live with the Arabs", and even that's a good start.

Wednesday, Feb. 6, 9:00

I've made a series of notes for myself at the top of the page. Much has happened since I last wrote, and since I'm not sure how much time I've got to write at present, I made the notes so that I won't leave any thing out. It's hard to decide whether to make a chronological report, or whether to write first about the most emotionally significant events. I've decided to take the chronological route because I think that that way I'm able to be truer to the feelings I felt as I felt them, and for me, keeping this journal has value if I can capture the immediacy of the events happening around me. At the moment I'm not much concerned with what I'll think a couple of weeks from now. It is important to note, however, that I'm no longer in Lebanon -- I'm sitting at a base in the Golan Heights. We entered Israel yesterday evening around 18:30.

Returning from Monday's foot patrol was delayed slightly because of the rain, but around 13:00 the sky was clear enough for us to start back, and we walked very quickly, returning this time truly to nothing -- all our belongings had been moved to an abandoned house across the road, all the tents and their contents were gone, and a bulldozer was busy flattening the protective embankment which had been around us ((at a height of around two meters)).

23:00

It's been a long time since I stopped writing, but not much has happened. I write that even though I'm presently in Kfar Saba (a bit north of Tel Aviv) in a warm civilian bed. My last sentence of the morning was interrupted by the announcement that we were going right away to our base in Israel near Tzfat. We got there around noon and by 14:30 I no longer had any army equipment or my gun. From then until around 18:00 it was the well known story of waiting. We were then told that we were free until tomorrow morning at 9:00. We still have to clean our armorred personnel carriers, and that's our job for tomorrow. The problem is that they still haven't come back to Israel from Lebanon, and until they do so, we can't do much work on them. It's very cold at our base and most of the afternoon we spent in various attempts to keep warm and not too bored. There's nothing new in this. Usually we're there during the summer when it's warm, but even then, this waiting is something we're very familiar with. Had I gone home this evening I probably would have arrived around 23:00 (at the earliest) and I would have had to find a ride out of the kibbutz around 5:30. Thus though I very much want to get home, it was more logical to take up Eli's offer that I spend the night at his home. I know his wife and kids from our last visit to Lebanon, and it was nice visiting with them again. Anyway, though much time has passed since I stopped writing, I don't feel much difficulty in picking up where I left off.

By the time the bulldozer finished levelling everything, it could definitely be said that there was no longer an outpost. While the bulldozer was working my turn came for guard duty. I spent around an hour gazing into the banana grove to the west. But I think I spent more time gazing at the sky. Quickly changing and very impressive cloud patterns were filling the sky, and undoubtedly because I was sitting on that spot for the last time and because I could already feel that we were really getting out of Lebanon, I found them very exciting. I was also looking at the sky in order to find signs that the rain was over and that the sky was clearing. I found quite a few, but they were due more to wishful thinking than to any real meteorological ability on my part. Even while I was on guard duty a drizzle started, and that night and the next day we received healthy downpours.

Even though I've got quite a lot to write, I want to stop here and get a night's sleep.

Thursday, Feb. 7, 11:45

I've found myself a rather quiet corner in order to sit and write. We arrived around two hours ago and have taken care of some of the work to be done, but to do the rest we have to wait, and that's what we're doing.

Monday evening we slept in an abandoned house around a kilometer north of our former outpost. We got there via our six armorred personnel carriers and started parking them around the house. Except that the first two got stuck in the mud. We were busy for almost an hour getting them out. After that we parked in the "driveway" and on the road -- it was less strategically effective, but easier to move when necessary. I remarked at the time that our getting stuck was a proper metaphor for the entire war -- getting in only took a minute, but getting out was much more difficult. By this time we were sure that this was our last adventure in Lebanon.

That night I spent around two hours on guard duty. We'd been told that we might be needed during the night and thus were supposed to be on alert until the morning, but our alert was cancelled around 4:00. In the morning we sat around with nothing to do, slowly waking up and reviewing the month with joke after joke and story after story. Suddenly we got word of the possibility of terrorists coming into our area and we thus sent out two foot patrols in order to check the road. I was on the western side of the road patrolling, and enjoying it.

17:30

We hadn't intended to be on any patrols that day -- just to spend the day waiting to be told that we could all go to our g'dud's base and from there leave for Israel. Apparently there had been some shooting to the east of us, and because of that it was decided that we should patrol. We passed by our old base and found nothing -- a bulldozed spot of land where a month before we had found an Israeli army outpost. For me it wasn't in the least saddening. When the other patrol, those on the east side of the road, passed the old outpost, they didn't find nothing. Instead they found two cars which had stopped there and one person from the cars who was attempting to fly the Shi'ite "El Amal" flag at the outpost. They stopped one car,

but the other sped away to the south, our direction. We received word from them to stop the car, and almost as soon as we received the message, the car came speeding toward us (we had approached the road). What follows took only a few seconds, and I don't really think that I thought much during that time. Since then we've replayed what happened over and over. I think that I'm objective in what I report, but my account is quite different from that of the person who was next to me. My story, however, is very consistent with that of the others besides this one person, so I think I'm right.

We reacted very swiftly. At first we shot in the air for a warning, andwhen the car didn't stop we shot to the ground in front of it, and then to the car itself. I'm very sure, as is the sergeant who was with us, that I hit the front of the car. We didn't hit the windshield. The car stopped. Once again, all this took seconds. We have permission to shoot to kill in these circumstances, though we're also supposed to act as we did. I know that I didn't think about my country or for or against being in Lebanon, or whether I was shooting to kill or not (though I suppose that I did think of that). If I thought, it was of how best to protect myself.

The car stopped and the driver lay on the floor before the front seat. We were quite sure that we hadn't injured him. We shot the air out of the tires and called for him to come out. He didn't. He was very definitely afraid. We stopped someone else and had him get the driver out. While this was happening another man came toward us, from the south, telling us pleadingly that it was his son in the car. He was relieved to see him come out of the car whole and uninjured, and so were we. It would have been very easy to have killed him, and besides the fact that it would have been a waste of life, it probably also wouldn't have been worth our while. Not far from us were many people (on the street more or less -- it was around 10:00) and had we killed him these people would have gathered around closer rather than watched from afar, and even though we were armed they might have thrown rocks or something similar. All in all, had he waited another day to fly his flag, we (and probably no one else -- Israeli forces will patrol the area for another ten days before the total withdrawl to the Litani) wouldn't have bothered him. Now he's a suspected terrorist, probably sitting in some jail.

I'm known (rather rightly) in my plugah for not having much of a killer instinct. The fact that I shot at the car in order to stop it was thus a popular topic of discussion. I had to explain to everyone (and perhaps also to myself) that I'm not against self-defense, and that if I intended never to be in a situation in which I'd have to use my gun then I made a wrong decision when I entered the army. I have to admit to being somewhat surprised by the reactions of these people from the plugah. It may be good as a joke -- even Jay aimed at the car -- but it shouldn't be that surprising. From this same event we have another interesting story. The other patrol stopped the other car. When "reinforcements" arrived, the driver of one of our armorred personnel carriers requested that he be permitted to kill one of the "prisoners". It was a rather strange request, so Noam didn't simply say no, but instead asked why. The reply, given in full seriousness, was "I've never killed anyone before". This same driver is very far from being a leftist, but he's definitely a good person. I think that he now relates to the entire event as a joke.

Shabbat, Feb. 9, 10:30

I'm home, and I've already called Mom and Dad to let them know I'm back. They're relieved, and I'm relieved that they're relieved. I don't have too much to sum up here, but I still have notes which I want to write up. I intend to type a letter today though I don't know what it will contain since my month is in these pages and I'm not going to try and sum it up in one aerogram.

Shortly after our incident with the car we got word that we could travel to the g'dud and from there hopefully leave for Israel. It was about noon. The ride takes about half an hour, but we did it in something more like an hour and a half, stopping numerous times because of intelligence reports that there might be bombs along the route. We were definitely exhausted and didn't have the strength to pay full attention to this, but we had no choice but to be careful. We arrived and waited until about 16:00 until the transports came, and finally started moving out at 17:00. Our g'dud's rabbi said the Traveller's Prayer (if that's what it's called in English) out loud, and many responded with "Amen". I asked jokingly if he didn't have a prayer for atheists. He said that there's no such thing as an atheist. I told him that I was offended -- he's know me a few years and should by now believe me when I say I don't believe.

The ride took about an hour and a half, two thirds of it with enough light to see some beautiful parts of Lebanon. We left from the north -- the road which is more or less parallel

to the Zaharani River, and it took us via Nabatiyeh. Upon arriving at the gatepost near Metulla there was general rejoicing and other signs of relief. I felt strangely divorced from all this. Not that I wasn't relieved or happy to be out of Lebanon, but that from the moment I was no longer there, I was fully no longer there and not in the least involved with the place, meaning that even celebrating had little meaning for me.

After arriving in Israel we went straight to the Golan Heights. Our khativa commander intended for us to have a day's exercise taking one of the (highest) mountains in the Golan. To our relief, there was a mix-up in the army and no one at the base we arrived at was expecting us. Our g'dud commander decided that if that was the case, we'd go back to our base near Tzfat and forego the exercise. We would have done so that night except that at our base near Tzfat there was no place for us to sleep and there was fear of snow, so we spent the night at the base in the Golan, leaving for Tzfat around 11:00 in the morning.

That night we had a party at a restaurant in Katzrin, a town near the base in the Golan. It's customary for us to celebrate after finishing a month of service, and for most of these people celebrating means eating meat (although in the army they received many portions of good meat, more than at home for most of them). Unavoidably, there was sadness mixed with our celebrating, and proper words were expressed toward the end of the evening.

This about catches me up to when I wrote Wednesday night, meaning that I covered just about everything. I now only have a few notes which I still haven't written up.

The Israeli army is leaving behind it in Lebanon piles upon piles of garbage. I often felt quite absurd putting wrappers of candies or something similar in my pockets until I found a proper place to throw them away. The amount of trash we leave behind would only be infintessimally affected by what I might let fall to the ground. Still, I filled my pockets. This isn't to say that Lebanon wasn't garbage laden before we arrived. Some of our patrols took us next to a canal that runs parallel to the coastal road. People in the villages along the canal use it for irrigation and for waste disposal, and I even saw people using it for drinking -- their stomachs must be wonders of nature. I was able to see incredible amounts of trash thrown along the canal or near it, and behind buildings and in orange groves, and wherever I looked. We usually tend to speak of Lebanon as a beautiful country, and I can testify that there are spots of true beauty. But the Lebanese seem no more concerned with keeping it beautiful and clean than are the people of most other countries, if not less.

On my last foot patrol Monday morning, I walked with someone who goes at a very fast pace. (I should note here that each patrol -- five persons -- has a commander, usually at the rank of sergeant, who has central responsibility for what we do. We mix the people in these patrols such that I'm not necessarily with the sergeant of my own makhlakah.) ((It's also worth noting that he's the person who holds the map and is supposed to find the best route, or know where we are. I'm good at maps and would often check to see that we were where we thought we were, and not too infrequently had to make helpful suggestions.)) At the very end of our trek, crossing the bridge over the Litani River, we broke out into a competitive run, for the fun of it. We were tired and heavy from our equipment and the mud and hardly reached a sprint. When we finished I turned to him and told him that today's trek, what with the mud and the rain, was harder than others we'd done. He's around 27 or 28 and built well, on the whole a quiet person who performs his job well. He turned to me and said something like -- don't you understand that it's all up here, pointing to his head, and not here, pointing to his feet. I had a hearty laugh and asked him if he thought that I could keep doing this stuff at my age, and at the pace he set, if I didn't know that.

In general I hold up very well. Though I'm really in good physical shape, I think this is primarily due to the fact that I keep my head in the proper mental attitude. On the whole I have a positive attitude which keeps me going. At one point, around the beginning of the rains, I admitted to one friend that the rain and general atmosphere had me down. He expressed honest surprise. It was hard for him to believe that I could let myself out of a positive mental state and give in to my surroundings.

I think this about winds things up. It's finished. I've returned whole even though all of us didn't and we had real fears as to our doing so. I've spoken to many people since being home and I've told part of my stories. In that way I'm still there to a certain extent, still living the experience. On the other hand, it's far away from me already. I'm busy filling up my life with activities related to being here, and that's the way it should be.

Sunday, Feb. 10, 23:00

A few additional thoughts have come to mind. On our way from the Golan Heights to our base we stopped in Rosh Pinah to eat. Many of us had eaten breakfast at the base in the Golan,

and the night before we'd eaten a large "civilian" meal. But this hardly matters for soldiers. We didn't expect to be released that day so another half hour or hour didn't mean much to us, and when you're away from a base, even in uniform, you feel less like a soldier. In Rosh Pinah Eli called my attention to that day's headline -- ten soldiers had been wounded in a kamikazi type attack on an army transport leaving Lebanon in the vicinity of Tyre. We'd left to the north. Had we gone via the south it could have been us. I was far from pleased to read the report, but my first reaction was, as I guess it should be, it wasn't me. I was already quite detached from the goings on in Lebanon.

On my way hom Friday morning I heard that week's accident statistics. Sure enough, more Israelis were killed and injured in one week on Israel's roads than in all of Lebanon during my month's stay. Yet I didn't feel at all anxious about travelling the roads. The two simply can't be compared, though once again, they both become statistics.

I just heard this evening's news. Three more soliders were killed in Lebanon today -- the first deaths since those from my plugah almost a full month ago. ((One of them in the area which our g'dud had occupied.)) My reaction has returned to being a political one -- bring the troops home now. I'm still emotionally involved, but I guess I'm back to business as usual. This week two friends from the kibbutz leave for a few weeks in Lebanon.

Thursday, Feb. 14, 19:00

It's almost a full week since I've been home, and this journal should be finished already. I should be back to "normal" and in many ways I am, yet in other way's I'm still living in a sort of continuation of my miluim. I've typed about half of my journal, and instead of it getting shorter it's still growing. One reason that I feel still connected to being in Lebanon is the fact of my typing up the journal. As I type I vividly relive the events I wrote about, and they remain very real and immediate to me. The other reason is that yesterday and today I attened commemorative ceremonies for Sefi and Miki along with many if not most of the members of my plugah, sitting with the families afterwards. That gives me the feeling of still being in the middle of an almost endless period of miluim.

Yesterday early afternoon I left work and took a bus to the military cemetary north of Tel Aviv. There I met my compatriots from the plugah, all in civilian clothes, all coming from work or studies. We're very used to being together, but ordinarily only in uniform and in the field. The atmosphere was somber, but also mixed with a certain unavoidable pleasantness that went with seeing everyone together. Altogether perhaps 200 people attended the service so our approximately 25 weren't especially visible -- we blended in well.

The service, conducted by the military rabbinate, was for me at its best passable and at its worst highly offensive. It's customary to read psalms starting with the letters of the deceased's name. This was done without feeling, with a sort of hurry up and get it over with tone. We were among other things told that Sefi is in heaven, and since he died a more or less martyr's death that he's on something like the highest rung next to God. Someone obviously believes this, but Sefi's family is secular. In a conversation with Sefi's father later on, he said something to the effect that if there's anything that condoles or consoles or comforts him it's the fact that for 24 years he had a son. He said this with a tone which hinted that he wasn't interested in hearing "being in heaven" type condolences. Our g'dud's rabbi said that at the funeral he had asked that Sefi request of God to protect those of us still in Lebanon, and the fact that the rest of us all came back means that Sefi fulfilled this mission. This was really too much for me, but I only ground my teeth, kicked the ground a bit, and bear it.

When I first visited Sefi's family, while on leave, Sefi's mother had mentioned a poem by Alterman which she had always felt was fitting to be read on Memorial Day since it captured an authentic Israeli atmosphere of mourning. While on leave I found the poem (she'd called it by a wrong name) and I brought her a photocopy of it yesterday. When I, along with other members of the plugah, arrived at their house after the service, she'd just finished reading it to the people there and once again expressed her feeling toward the poem. For me, and I'm quite sure for her as well, this was a more fitting way to commemorate. It was thus definitely gratifying to me that she thanked me for the poem. Interestingly, I noticed that in their living room there aren't books on the shelves as I thought there were. I had apparently gotten this impression because of the "cultured" atmosphere in our conversation.

Today I was at kibbutz Nachshon, once again with much of the rest of my plugah, for a memorial service for Miki. Yesterday was warm and sunny and today overcast, cool and a bit drizzly. I feel much more comfortable, at home even, in a kibbutz cemetary than in a military cemetary where grave upon grave is marked by the usually very young age of the dead. ((And

where one of the problems of maintenance is solved by a small drip-irrigation hose which passes very conspicuously via all the graves, giving the place a very un-personal touch.)) But once again, the military rabbinate ran the show. In this setting, and because I was much closer to Miki than to Sefi, the religious procedure was all the more out of place and irritating. This time after the service we sat around in the kibbutz's moadan and visited with the family. Both these times we had to explain what happened -- what we'd been doing in Lebanon until then and precisely what happened that morning. I'm sure that all of us from the plugah have relived those events a number of times in our heads. We're also ready, if we can succeed in doing so, to push them further into the back of our minds and make room for the present. But our activities during these past two days, and the knowledge throughout the week that we'd be attending these services, kept us in a sort of limbo -- somehow still there although we've been home for a week.

Nati, our member who lost an eye, was at the memorial service for Sefi. It was exciting for all of us to see him and visit for a while, joke a bit and then part. And then realize a bit later that I said hello and other necessary pleasantries and then went on my way whereas he's still without an eye -- today, next year, and for good.

I apparently functioned well throughout the week. I got (not too much) work done, visited with friends, worked at the computer. Strangely, however, I have to admit to a certain discomfort. I've written in the past of having "enjoyed" parts of my miluim. I think I now realize that a certain part of the enjoyment is the excitement of living with chances, the immediacy of truly not being sure what's going to happen tomorrow. There was thus a certain blandness to the week which I found to a certain extent bothersome. I'm functioning presently at a fast pace, but the pace of my life while on these miluim was totally different -- not fast as opposed to slow, but rather with that tense excitement that comes with skipping a beat, of having to check that I'm fully here -- and finding that I still am.

Dear Family, #567 Shabbat, Feb. 16, 1985

This has been a long and productive Shabbat. I spent two hours in the morning working in my kvutzah of last year -- waking the kids up, fixing them breakfast, sending them off to their parents. I'd worked there in the afternoon yesterday as well, and then in the evening I was with them once again as a guest at an evening for all of the elementary grades, a Book evening traditionally organized each year. But it's very different to come and go, work occasionally and not have too much responsibility than it is to have to deal with each and every problem that comes up. There are benefits each way, but I'm sure that for me it's a good thing that I've taken a break from the intensiveness of everyday responsibility. And it's nice that I've got the opportunity to still be with the kids occasionally instead of having all of my connections with them cut off. I'm still accepted as an authority figure by them, and I have no problem getting them to cooperate with me, even though I have more demands than the usual Shabbat worker does (I insist that they arrange their beds before they go to their parents' apartments).

Throughout the week I sat down at the typewriter to type up my journal, finishing today including photocopying it preparing a map and putting it into an envelope so that it's it's ready to go out in the mail tomorrow. For my own sake I'm very happy that I've finished typing it up. In some ways I truly relived the events that I reported on, and the intensivity of living through them again was more than I really had the strength for. It was a lenghty job and very tiring, but I'm pleased that it's over -- it's better to finish it quickly than drag it out. Copyreading it was an additional opportunity to live through the events, but as I copyread I had a strange feeling. As I typed I was able to picture in my mind precisely where I was as I wrote and to taste the actual taste of the events I described. When doing the copyreading I read quickly and the entire month, instead of being a developing series of events became a mishmash of events running into each other without allowing each event to take upon itself the full significance it had as I experienced it. I shouldn't be too surprised by this. On the one hand this is what happens when we read something as opposed to experience it, and all the more so when we read it quickly. On the other hand, it shouldn't be surprising because I'm not a writer but only a reporter trying to give an honest and accurate picture of what happened using the rather limited tools at my disposal. Perhaps what comes across best is the idea that I relate frequently, that things happen too quickly for them to receive the proper attention. Missing is a fuller description of Miki's and Sefi's death. Not so much because it's of especial interest, but because it's something that all of us there replayed again and again in our heads and was always somewhere in our minds. Thus it's even a bit strange to me that I don't report on it more than I do. The journal is supposed to reflect what was happening by me, but it also (perhaps unavoidably) attempts to give a play by play of what happened. In this respect I report on their deaths. But I don't report many of the reccollections that ran through my head again and again. I know that to a certain extent this is because I didn't want to write some of the not overly positive things about them that I thought at the time. The time at which I'll be able to do that is not far off.

Part of this week is covered in the journal -- the memorial ceremonies for Sefi and Miki and my meeting with other members of my plugah at those events. I think that the journal also reports on a good deal of talking which I did throughout the week, sometimes initiated by me, other times by people who wanted to hear about my month. I didn't succeed in in listening to music. Since I was busy typing much of the time I didn't have that much time, but even when I did, I didn't have the internal quiet or the patience to really listen as I like to. Toward the end of the week I was able to turn on the radio to classical music and browse through the piles of clippings and magazines that have accumulated, but not to listen intensively. It seems as though I'll have to give up on a good deal of the piles that are presently cluttering up my room. I'm sure that there are interesting items among those piles, and I've even made up a smaller (and still big) pile of items which I'd like to really read, but it looks as though there's simply too much to read and too much to take care of. And the papers keep coming out each day with more and more to read. (And I didn't read any books during my miluim, meaning that the enjoyable reading which I find time for on milium is also standing in piles around my room. In the next couple of days I'll return those books to the library and hope that the next time I go to miluim I'll find them (and/or more interesting things to read) and take them along, and successfully get around to them.

I wasn't overly productive at my work in Tel Aviv, but on the other hand I did get some important things done, and I discovered that one of the people I work with who was supposed to take care of some things for me during the month I was away did absolutely nothing and

she had no real excuse besides laziness. So I've got those tasks as well to take care of. That doesn't really bother me since it gives me the feeling that I work effectively as opposed to many other people, so I trust that sooner or later I'll catch up on all that I have to do.

I did a good deal of catching up in my computer class this week, including doing a good deal of work at home. I was definitely in danger of getting caught up in this material (we're now studying LOGO) and I had to remind myself that I had a number of other things to take care of and that I simply didn't have the time to devote to playing around with the computer. I've caught up rather well, I think, so I don't feel too pressured to spend too much time hacking away.

I decided to bake bagels today. They take much less time than bread, and while the dough was rising or the bagels baking I had time to read or take care of other tasks, and I truly enjoy the work and didn't want to let myself sleep in the afternoon. They came out excellent, and I'm not very tired, so things work out well on both counts. There's supposed to be a flu epidemic around the kibbutz, but even though the list of those who have fallen to it is lengthy and respectable, I have no intention of giving in. I want to get into my regular work schedule as quickly as possible and thus it's important that I not allow myself too much sleep.

Most of the week was sunny and warm, and then Thursday evening a storm started which lasted through most of Friday. Today was chilly and windy, but no rain. We'd started to act as though the winter (or what there was of it) was over, but it seems to be giving it a second try. We need the rain, so I won't complain. Love, Jay

first fold הקפל הראשון

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מען

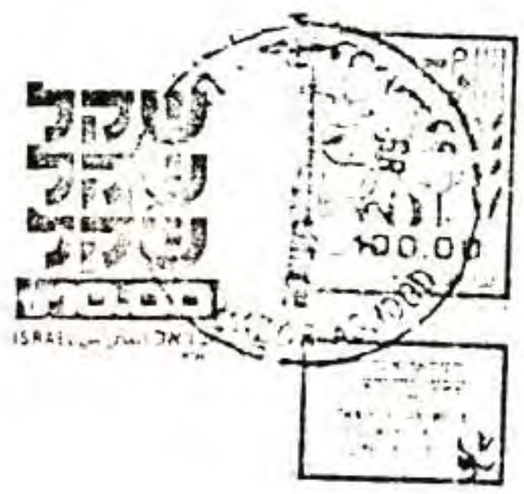
ישוב

אין לשים בדף זה שום חפץ אחר. איגרת אויר יכולה רק דבר תשלח בדרך הים
un aérogramme contenant un objet quelconque sera transmis par voie de surface
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