Monday, December 12, 1994, 13:30

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. It's now a bit more than a full four days that I've been stationed in the territories outside (southwest) of Ramallah. I've been busy, but not excessively. On Friday and Shabbat I actually had quite a bit of time to write, but I spent most of that time reading — I'd brought along with me a good deal of school related material and my first priority was sinking my teeth into that. But it's not only because I've taken a substantial bite out of that material that I'm now sitting down to write. At the beginning of these miluim, until around Shabbat, I'd pretty much forgotten that I ordinarily keep a miluim journal. It was a strange sort of realization that struck me sometime during Shabbat — my head was bursting with experiences and thoughts and reactions and I was actually feeling a great need to report all that was happening.

It's not that things here are particularly eventful, and it may actually be quite the opposite. These miluim have, for me, a very different feel than previous times I've served. Though there's always a feeling of their being inopportune (at the least), this time, because they're relatively short, because we're actually very close to the center of the country, and because I'm continually involved with getting away to the university if possible, I have a tendency to relate to them as little more than a sort of pain in the ass. Perhaps the most uncomfortable feeling is the realization that the fact of being in the territories becomes secondary to my more personal concerns.

And we certainly are in the territories. We got here by turning north on a turnoff on the Jerusalem/Tel Aviv road where I usually turn south in order to get home. That spot is for me hardly more than 25 minutes from home, but when we made the turn I immediately felt that I'd entered the territories. The terrain is only slightly different, but the quality of the roads changes, Arab villages start popping up, and there's a very distinct feel that overrides everything else.

Few Israelis, other than those who live in them, enter the occupied territories any more, and those that do stay on main roads that avoid concentrated areas of population. If only a few years ago people still spoke of a United Land of Israel that was the result of the six day war, today the land is tangibly divided and only ideology clouds the view of those who don't want to see this obvious truth.

I'm in no position to talk for the average reserve duty soldier. In numerous ways I'm almost totally different from the norm — if there really is such a thing as a norm. My overall impression is that, although there are now (once again) "the territories", the average miluimnik doesn't feel anything out of the ordinarily about being here. It's just another job, though of course it's a job with very clear and present dangers. And now I've been writing for about an hour (on and off) and this is the first time that I've used the word "danger" in describing things here. Yes, it's distinctly dangerous (and lots more on that to come, I expect) but somehow (and here, of course I'm extremely different from the rest of my compatriots) my first thought is about my being an occupying power, and only as a result of that do I think of the dangers.

Miluim are always an inconvenience, and not only for me. Once we're here we complain about just about everything. It's cold, we don't sleep enough, we work too many hours a day, the food is no good, we can't get leave for when we want it.

Thursday, December 15, 8:10, at home

It's become clear beyond any doubts that there's no way in which I'm going to keep this journal in any chronological order. I have numerous things to report about from my first week in the Ramallah area, but there always seems to be something new to report. As always, that's because things have a way of being hectic, but they actually seem quite a bit calmer than what we've become used to in the territories. Be that as it may, there's a lot to report.

Yesterday morning I left our base at a bit after 7:00. I'd thought that I'd get off earlier, but after returning at 5:00 from a full night of patrolling I preferred to sleep for a bit and crawled into bed, waking up about half an hour later than I'd expected to. I caught a ride to a main road

with someone who'd just returned to the base with his car and then hitched a couple of rides to Jerusalem and from there to Tel Aviv and to the university. I got to my first class only a few minutes late, and exhausted, even though I'd slept in the car to Tel Aviv. After my first class I had some time off and went to the library where I browsed through a book I need for a class and then put my head down and slept for at least an hour. Though I had a bit of unexpected trouble getting home I still arrived home at the expected time of slightly after 21:00 — in time to sit with Eitan for a bit and read him a couple of stories before he went to sleep without any difficulty.

I've been calling on the phone every evening, and among other things speaking with Eitan who has started speaking quite profusely into the telephone. A couple of nights ago he excitedly showed me through the phone his new pajamas that he was wearing that he got from Savta Bee, but he also gives me quite a bit of play by play. Eitan is very excited about his father being a soldier and takes special interest in my uniform and (how could it be othewise?) my rifle. I have no doubt that he's very aware that I try to not answer his continual questions about the rifle, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't remain interested. When he sees something that interests him, he asks about it — again and again and again. Thursday evening we returned home from the chadar ochel where I'd met Tzippi and the boys when I returned home from the university. I was in civilian clothes since I'd been home Wednesday night. The first thing Eitan asked when we got home was where my rifle was. It seems pretty clear where his interests and priorities lay, and this is, of course, a new and rather strange sort of situation for me to be in. Over the years I've had a good deal of experience with weapons and I'm not really worried about Eitan being near the rifle. At an older age he might be able to put the magazine into the rifle, take off the safety, cock the trigger and shoot. Those aren't really very complicated things to do and there's reason to be fearful that a child could do them all, but at present he's far from having the ability. Thus my fear about his expressing an interest in the weapon isn't a fear of what might happen were he to handle it, but rather the fear that he'll too easily adjust to the idea that weapons are a common and integral part of our society.

On a bus on the way home yesterday evening I heard the 20:00 news which reported, among other things, that a reserve duty soldier had driven through the wrong areas of Ramallah that morning and had been attacked by a mob. My plugah is responsible for that area of Ramallah so I'm sure that they had their hands full for part of the morning. Tomorrow when I get back I'll get a fuller report of what happened. In this morning's paper there's a picture of the various officers who arrived on the scene to get a report of what happened, and standing among them I think that I can make out a medic from my plugah who is presently my replacement as the on-call medic who's always with our plugah commander's jeep. I guess that I'm lucky that I didn't have to get my picture in the paper as an occupier. (When I later showed this picture to members of my unit I learned that I was wrong about whom I'd thought I'd seen, and nobody from my unit was in the picture, though some of them definitely were at the scene of the action part of the time.) And of course it goes without saying that I'm really not disappointed about not having gotten into the center of this action either. Quite frankly, I'll be happy when I can simply put all of this fully behind me and out of mind, even if that means that I'm closing my eyes to an ongoing injustice.

In terms of variety and interest I guess that I've got about the most interesting job I can have here. Since our plugah commander has to react to just about everything that happens I get to see a great deal of the territory and be involved in a broad spectrum of activities. If nothing else, things are at least not particularly boring.

There are numerous aspects of these miluim which don't exactly seem surreal, but are still, in the least, incongruous. A couple of days ago we were outside in the late evening, keeping our eye on the various jeep and foot patrols that our plugah is responsible for. We were paying a visit to our foot patrol, and ordinarily when we stop the jeep I get out and "guard" which basically means that I try and avoid making myself a sitting target and try and keep my eyes open and observing while doing so. Our plugah commander was talking to someone perhaps 25 meters away and I mentioned to our driver that I hoped we'd get home soon because I didn't want to be too late to call home. He took his cellular phone out of his pocket and offered me to

use it, which I did. So there I was, in the dark in the middle of Ramallah, with my rifle at the ready, talking to Tzippi via a cellular phone as if it were a perfectly logical situation. And actually, I got adjusted to it quite easily. In our plugah there must be about five cellular phones that their owners carry with them everywhere, and they're becoming more and more visible, and almost mandatory, all the time. In the standing army they've become a definite problem, though in miluim it seems to be a phenomenon that there's no reason to try and fight, as long as people don't stop advancing on a hill they're supposed to be conquering in order to answer the phone.

And I've got until here in my reporting and I still haven't reported on the thrills and excitement of being an enlightened occupier.

Sunday, December 18, 17:30

I'm not getting anywhere with my reporting — and I admit that all I really do well in my miluim journals is report. When I fall too far behind on events, things become confused and lose their distinctness, and they then begin to lose their significance as being worthy of being reported. And now, even though there's still more to report on the period before my leave, there seems to be even more to report on what's happened since my return.

I don't know why I do this sort of thing, but I returned to my base early Friday morning. I could have stayed home another hour, but I had a ride to Jerusalem which made things much easier on me, and since I still had time to see the boys in the morning (and take Eitan to S'nunit) there was no reason to draw things out. I left home at 7:00 and was back at my base before 9:00 — in time to eat breakfast and then take back my place as medic in my plugah commander's round the clock stand-by jeep. It was only a bit after 9:00 that we got a report that an officer from a nearby base had been shot while on his way home in his private car. The officer was only slightly wounded, but that doesn't change the SOP of cases such as this. All of the various forces in our unit were called on either to set up roadblocks or to carry out patrols in various parts of Ramallah. I thus had a chance to travel through some parts of Ramallah that I hadn't seen before as we ostensibly searched for someone matching an overly generalized description whom we know that we had close to no chance of finding. After a couple of hours things returned to "normal".

Things are, I guess, very quiet here — but that doesn't really mean anything. Actually, from the papers we get the feeling that at the moment the Ramallah area is perhaps the most problematic in the territories, and hardly a day goes by without something happening. It was on Wednesday that a soldier in his private car mistakenly drove into the center of Ramallah (I've already mentioned this but the entire issues deserves being expounded upon) and then the next day a cement block that was pushed from the roof of a building in the area of jurisdiction of our plugah just slightly missed a jeep that was passing by. (The jeep was from a plugah other than ours, but still from our g'dud.) The next day a soldier was shot, and then on Shabbat nothing of particular significance happened, but there were numerous reports of kidnapping, stolen cars that were reportedly to be used in bomb attacks and the like, or perhaps shots in the dark that just might have been gunshots, or simply caps or firecrackers. Today has been quiet, though that doesn't mean that I've had time to do much. Almost my entire morning (until around 13:30) was wasted while our jeep was supposedly being checked and repaired. I'd put a pad of paper in my pocket when I left our base in the morning, expecting to find time to write during the repairs, but I couldn't find a dry (let alone quiet) place to sit and write, let alone the time.

Sunday, December 18, 23:00

Gunshots, caps or firecrackers. This evening I was outside, on the roads, in my basic job of simply being available (my plugah commander, myself and our jeep's driver). As we have for the past two evenings as well, we were essentially backing up a couple of small groups from our unit who were waiting in ambush around the area where the stone block had been thrown on a

jeep. This spot has been a popular one for attacking IDF forces, and only three weeks ago a soldier was wounded there by a similar boulder. So for the past three evenings we've been setting an ambush at that spot, in the event that someone might decide to climb onto the roof and prepare to roll down an additional boulder. Last night our jeep heard a sound like a gunshot and tried to find where it was coming from. We questioned someone who was outside, but quickly reached the conclusion that the sound must have been a firecracker. And then this evening, as we were wrapping up the ambush, calling it a night and heading back to our base, we heard two shots. We quickly got organized and searched through a few side streets, looking for culprits, even though it was clear from the beginning that not only were we not going to find anyone, but that these weren't gunshots, but only caps or firecrackers. So we trekked through a few back alleys, Battle for Algiers style, and then called it quits. I don't know who's causing these shot-like sounds, but it's quite obvious that a few kids with a bit of initiative and guts can keep an entire plugah of soldiers on its toes.

Monday, December 19, 11:00

Ordinarily I've been phoning Tzippi and the boys every evening at around 21:00. Nadav is ordinarily asleep by then, but Eitan is still up and happy to report much of his day to me over the phone. He even shows me the pajamas he's wearing or a dreidel that he's just spun. It's a good time to talk, but for the past two evenings I've been outside at that time. Saturday night I was able to use a cellular phone while outside (there's nothing very novel about that anymore), but yesterday evening I phoned early. The weather had been miserable throughout the day and my mood was pretty much in suit. While we were outside, however, the weather improved greatly — the skies cleared, the moon shown, and the wind subsided. When I got back at 22:00 I was happy to give Tzippi a call just to talk for a few minutes when my mood was better. The rest of my tent went to sleep and I stayed up to write a bit before doing the same myself. It was during the night that the winds started up again, in full force. My guess is that I slept relatively well, but I still heard the wind much of the night, and I had to brave the cold a few times in order to urinate. It was slightly before morning that the rains started again, and when we got up, at around 5:30, our oil-burning heater was on its last legs and the electricity was out. (The army generally runs on 24 volt generators.) It was too rainy for most of our activities but all the same I was outside for about an hour and a half on our jeep — getting wetter and colder as we continued.

I started writing this after I'd dried out enough to be comfortable, sitting huddled close to our heater that was making more of an impression than real heat. My writing was interrupted by a couple of heater technicians whom to our great relief quickly succeed in getting our heater to work as it should. Since then I've enjoyably wasted the rest of the morning and early afternoon over coffee and bullshitting with compatriots whom I haven't had much time for while here so far.

One of the special aspects of these miluim for me is the fact that I'm serving for a very short time. I have altogether 18 days to serve, and since we only took responsibility for the area we're in on the fourth day of our service (I was here the first night we started as well, but had close to nothing to do other than sleep) and since I had leave for 48 hours, I'm actually serving only twelve days. I don't know just what it is about that fact which causes me to relate so differently to these miluim, but there's no denying that despite the fact that these miluim are in the territories, and that there really is a clear and present danger, I don't get the feeling that I usually do when on miluim.

An additional reason for this is how close we are to Israel proper (though I'm among the few who makes such a distinction) or to the suburbs of Jerusalem only slightly over the green line. Our base is about two kilometers south of a town named Bitunia which is essentially a Ramallah suburb, about two kilometers itself from the outskirts of Ramallah. The base is also about two kilometers northwest of Giv'at Ze'ev which is a growing Jerusalem suburb about a ten minute drive from Jerusalem proper via a road which goes through numerous similar

suburbs. Giv'at Ze'ev is more or less the last of them to the west. When we get leave, those of us without private cars (which doesn't seem to be much more than about 60% of us, though I guess that I exaggerate — there must be as many as 75 - 80% of us here who don't have cars with us) catch a ride with someone who brings us to Giv'at Ze'ev, which though in the territories is pretty much part of Israel proper, where we can quite safely hitch a ride. Giv'at Ze'ev has a shopping center which we get to with a good deal of frequency, and our plugah members who are from Jerusalem and who have cars with them seem to constantly be requesting a short leave to get home for a couple of hours between their various patrols and other similar activities.

Last week a new officer in my unit and myself, both of us still hungry after a highly unsatisfying army lunch, phoned a delivery pizza parlor in Giv'at Ze'ev and within 15 minutes our pizza was delivered not only to the gate of our base, but to our tent itself. It wasn't the best pizza, but it was certainly worth it. What's strange is that we thought it was necessary to phone to have the pizza delivered. Those of us with cars probably make the trip without asking permission. So in many ways we hardly really get the feeling that we're in the territories.

If I've already mentioned a highly unsatisfying army lunch, I guess that this is the place to list a few additional problems related to our conditions. We're serving during the winter, and conditions are always more difficult then, though this is far from the first winter that plugot have been stationed where we are, meaning that the army should have learned how to take care of us already. Our tents have heaters, and they seem to work even more than half of the time, which is I suppose quite an achievement. Our tents, however, don't close well, meaning that the heat is always escaping, leaving us quite cold. The "floor" is covered with stones which almost keeps the rain from turning everything into mud. After a substantial rain puddles cover the floor. I guess that things really aren't that bad, but if that's the case, it's hard to explain why everyone immediately identifies with me when I remark about the conditions that we're part of an IDF experiment to test how much the average soldier is willing to take and yet still perform his duties. We definitely get the feeling that we're simply thrown here and that nobody really seems to care what happens to us, or perhaps that we're really expected to fill in for whatever's missing from our own pockets — like ordering a pizza when you're hungry.

Though we're not overly elated about our conditions, we can live with them. Sometimes we're frightened to think that we can't really do the same thing when it comes to the conditions of the vehicles in which we ride around. Each jeep or command car is supposed to be brought to the garage some ten kilometers away once a week for an overhaul, and of course if something breaks down it gets there more frequently. We're supposed to have two jeeps from our unit on the roads at all times, but if one is being repaired then that leaves only on jeep to patrol. About a third of the time that's the situation since something is almost always breaking down, if not something mechanical about the jeep then the field radios that are on them that without which we can't really do much. Once we bring a jeep to repair it's a good guess that it's going to stay in the garage for at least four or five hours, though the amount of actual work time devoted to it is much less.

When we first met with the commander of the area in which we're stationed the day we enlisted he mentioned to the doctor of our g'dud that he was going to be very busy — not because of attacks, but because of the almost constant automobile accidents. He wasn't far off from the truth. Almost every other day there's an accident of some sort, most of them civilian but some involving our vehicles. Much of the time the fog is very thick and you almost expect an accident to occur. And of course there's rain as well. During a couple of days of rain our windshield wiper broke down. It's not particularly safe for an army jeep to pull off the side of the road in the rain and fog, but it's not very safe to continuing driving either. We were in a bind. We attached a string to the wipers which we pulled manually from inside the jeep and in that way were able to creep along. When we brought the jeep for repair the repairpersons were very impressed with our improvisation — it seemed as though they preferred that we continue to use it rather than that they would fix the wiper. It took them a long time to get around to fixing it and then, when we were back on the road, the repair held for about ten minutes and needed to be fixed again. Sometimes we don't know what to be more afraid of — a terrorist

attack or simply driving around.

Motz'ei Shabbat, December 24, 23:30

I've had most of the evening to myself. Tzippi left for a concert at about 18:00, and (admittedly a bit to my surprise) the boys went to sleep without hardly any difficulty. Most of this evening I've devoted to typing what I've already written, but I've got a number of notes which I'd like to include in this "journal" before I conclude it and send it off in the mail. The problem with doing things in this way is that I'm always finding new items that I want to report, so that until the time that I'm fully caught up I'm always falling behind. Of course my intent here is to deal solely with my miluim, but some of what I've already written hints at why that's actually rather difficult to do. It's hard to draw a line that divides between what relates to miluim and what to civilian life. Even under "regular" conditions it's hard to find that line, and all the more so in miluim such as these where I'm a student jumping over to the university part of the time and where the dividing line between the territories and Israel proper is somewhat blurred.

And that of course effects the way I relate to the various things that happen around me. When I go to the university to study while in my uniform and with my rifle, do I study differently than I might were I in civilian clothes? On the first Wednesday of these miluim (before we'd taken charge of our area in the territories) I left the base we were stationed at, about half an hour south of home, at around 6:30 and hitched and rode a bus to the university. The rest of the plugah was going to be spending the day in various exercises and I'd gotten permission to go and study. I'd slept well the previous evening so I wasn't really tired. From the university I'd spoken with Tzippi on the phone and we hadn't decided whether I'd stop in at home on my way back to the base or not. As things turned out, I had too good a ride quite a bit of the way home so it didn't make sense not to stop in, and while at home I found the phone number of someone from my plugah whom I knew was returning the next morning and arranged to meet him so that I could spend the night at home and still arrive in time at our base. It was that next morning that we assumed responsibility for the area in which we're stationed.

But parading around in uniform with a rifle over my shoulder doesn't make me into a soldier. My self image seems to be very clearly established as a civilian. The next Wednesday I was again on my way home from the university. I thought that I had a ride a good part of the way, but something went wrong and I found that I had to take the bus. I was very upset because I wanted to get home before Eitan went to sleep, and when I have to take the bus home chances are good that I don't get there in time. In the end things worked out okay and I met the ride in to the kibbutz from the road at 21:00 just in time, but that's not the interesting part. What was interesting is that at the time I was in uniform and with a rifle which meant that I probably could have hitched a ride without too much difficulty, or at least gotten on a bus to a spot from where I could have hitched, but I didn't think about this at the time. It didn't occur to me that I wasn't a civilian.

While on my leave a miluimnik from a totally different unit than ours, but stationed somewhere near Ramallah made the mistake of travelling through the center of Ramallah to get to wherever he was headed. This isn't a very easy mistake to make. Signs quite clearly state which roads should be travelled, and which not, and large cement blocks do a good job of blocking the entrance to the wrong turns. There's also a yellow line of paint on the middle of the correct road, meaning that a civilian or a military vehicle that's not on duty can't really go wrong if it sticks to where the yellow line leads them. But all the same, this miluimnik made a wrong turn somewhere, and not only ended up in the middle of Ramallah, but arrived there at the same time that a demonstration of the Hamas was taking place. Bad driving, bad timing, bad luck.

It's hard to say why he wasn't killed in the lynch. Military and police forces were close by (including my plugah commander's jeep who only by chance happened to be in the area) and they apparently heard a commotion and rushed to check out what was happening. It also seems

that some of the Ramallah residents came to this soldier's aid and helped keep him from being killed. But the major question that got asked was why he didn't use his rifle, either to defend himself, or, more simply, to shoot into the air and in that way keep the crowd at a distance. The soldier himself says that he was in shock and didn't really know what to do (which is pretty understandable) but that he didn't want to use his rifle because he thought it would only create more of a problem. This second statement is generally scoffed at by Israeli popular opinion which tends to think that shooting a rifle is a pretty good solution for just about anything. What's more, we tend to like dead heroes much more than we like live anti-heroes, so that had this soldier been killed after shooting his rifle we could say that he did all that he could to defend himself. This leads me to reflections on the Nachshon Wachsman case in which to my mind (and I'm once again a minority in Israel) Israel had no real reason to rush into a rescue operation which was quite obviously doomed from the start. But of course the same mentality was in charge, and it led us to having more dead heroes rather than at least having the chance of living survivors. As is, since this soldier didn't use his rifle (and thus didn't do anything to defend himself, since "not using the rifle" isn't considered a possible or legitimate form of defense) we have no good explanation for why he's still alive other than luck. It seems to me that luck is a pretty large factor in either of these cases.

As the left-winger who wants to give back the territories I'm asked what I think this soldier should have done (and of course how I would have responded). I don't really have a good answer. I don't have the assuredness that says that the rifle would have fended off attackers, so I would probably have tried to delay using it, but once again, luck seems to have been a more predominant factor than anything else. At the least, I think that we can say that I would have avoided getting into such a situation in the first place, and it really was avoidable, but that's not necessarily much of an answer. It's a good guess, however (and we don't really have confirmation on this one way or the other) that this particular soldier, not being a combat soldier, never really thought of using his rifle even from the time he left his house. Chances are good that his rifle was next to him at the seat of the car, but that the magazine was stuffed away someplace with his clothes which were in the trunk of the car. I prefer not to know that that really was the case.

While I've been typing and converting my notes into almost concrete sentences the boys have been asleep. Eitan hardly ever wakes up at night (even to urinate — he's been consistently wet now for a number of months). This evening he woke up sobbing quietly and then started crying louder and louder. In order to calm him I had to lift him out of bed and hold him. When I asked him if he'd had a bad dream he said that he had, though he couldn't tell me what it was. I know what sort of things would be considered bad dreams for me, but I have no idea what sort of things Eitan dreams of.

Monday, December 26, 1994, 9:15
at the university

As planned, I got out of the army on Thursday. I probably would have had no problem getting out on Thursday morning but preferred to stay around until the afternoon because a couple of us from the plugah and a number of others from the g'dud were going to Kibbutz Nachshon for our annual memorial for Miki. I had a ride from the base and from there intended to work my way home, so it made sense to stick around. I had a relatively full night's sleep that last night, meaning that when I went to sleep at around 23:00 I was expecting to be awakened at 5:00 and instead slept until about 6:30, which certainly didn't give me any reason to complain. Actually, I knew that there were a number of activities planned for late in the night or early in the morning and I had a feeling that I'd be awakened early, and that actually did happen. At around 1:30 I was awakened and told that our g'dud commander needed a medic for some back-up work he had to do and I struggled to wake up, get dressed and put on my shoes. When I finally did this (after no more than ten minutes) we got a call telling me that I could go back to sleep because a medic from the plugah that was supposed to carry out the planned action

unexpectedly showed up. I didn't complain as I took off my shoes, undressed and crawled back into bed.

The next morning was very regular, if a bit long, and by 10:00 I was back at my base, ostensibly finished and able to return my equipment and get released. But I was the on-call medic, and I thus had to be replaced by someone before I could become off-call (is there such a thing as that?) and the other medics in my plugah were off the base involved in other activities (not in a capacity as medics but simply as regular infantry soldiers). I knew that the medic who was due to replace me was due back at 13:00 so I had no reason to hurry about anything, and since we intended to leave for Kibbutz Nachshon at around 14:30 I had no reason to feel pressured. I read the paper, visited with friends, shaved (I was saving my shower for later) and generally felt relaxed. And perhaps most surprising of all, nothing went wrong. I returned my equipment on time, was released, and left as planned. That sort of thing is such a rarity that I suppose that I should be surprised, though actually, when it's only one or two people who have to be released it's really not a difficult process at all.

The yahrtzeit's for Miki and Sefi came out on Shabbat this year, and each family decided on a different day for the memorial. About ten of us from what used to be our plugah showed up at Nachshon, along with other friends, family and members of the kibbutz. It's now ten years since Miki and Sefi were killed, and for ten years we've been coming to these memorials, to a certain extent without knowing why anymore. Those who came for the first couple of years and then dropped out felt no pressure to continue or to return, but those of us who have continued to show up every year now feel as though we can't really stop anymore, even though memories have faded, our lives have changed, and we really don't do much other than sit around and talk when we show up. So that's what we did this year as well, saying hello to the family which is of course very pleased to see us continue to arrive.

While sitting around and visiting after the memorial someone, I suppose seeing me in civilian gear, asked me if I'd finished with my miluim. I chose to understand the question slightly differently – not whether I'd finished my time on these particular miluim, but instead whether I was finished for once and for all. The present law states that front line soldiers have to serve in miluim until the age of 45, but this past week the papers carried the story that starting next year (January 1996) they'll serve only until the age of 42. Since in January 1996 I'll be 45 I basically lose out on three years of not serving. I thus directed the question put to me to our g'dud commander who was sitting with us (we've been together since he was second in charge of our plugah some 16 years ago) and asked him whether I'd finished. He thought about it for a minute and then said "why not", took out a pad of paper from his pocket, wrote a letter to the effect that I shouldn't be called up anymore and handed it to our officer of contacts who deals with this sort of thing, telling her to type up a few copies and have it taken care of. It's perhaps still a bit early to tell for sure that I'm finished, but it certainly seems to look that way.

But as a number of the older members of my plugah, who have been aware that this just might be the last time I'll serve on miluim, have asked: do you really mean to say that you're not going to come with us the next time we're called up? Of course the simple answer to this is an immediate "yes". Enough is enough and there's no reason for me to volunteer to continue to serve. If I really to have the opportunity to finish there's no question that I really intend to make the best of it. Yet there's still something about finishing which has a strange feel to it. As much as I'm happy to simply say "goodbye" and forget about serving, after so many years in the same plugah it's hard to picture other people being called up and me not being part of them. Yes, I'll get over it, but there's no denying that there's definitely an almost tangible attraction to the idea of continuing, of remaining a part.

Yesterday I left work at 11:00 and went into Tel Aviv where the memorial service for Sefi was to be held. I arrived a bit late, but in time to see my g'dud commander walking to a phone to try and phone Sefi's family which hadn't shown up. There were ten of us there from our unit, and after waiting a while we drove out to Sefi's parents home to visit, and try and figure out what had happened. I should add that when I got to the cemetery another funeral was being held for someone killed in Lebanon on Friday. Over the ten years we've been showing up at this

military cemetery, although there haven't been wars in the interim, we've seen it grow much too substantially. When we arrived by Sefi's parents his mother was at home and received us graciously, but also explained to us that for various reasons they'd decided to forego the memorial service. My guess is that among other things it becomes too stressful to take care of seeing to it that everyone knows when to arrive, and then to wonder who won't show up this year. So they preferred to simply visit the grave site by themselves that morning. They'd told the army about their decision, but word of this hadn't reached us. Personally, I find it much more satisfying to sit around in their home and visit for a short while.

I caught a ride home with someone who lives in my area, and of course I asked him what was new at our base. I've been released, but the others still have about ten more days to go. I was surprised when he reported to me that the previous night a jeep from our g'dud (from a different plugah, but not far away from ours) had been shot at. Nobody was injured, and no damage was done, but that was, I guess, obvious because this sort of thing only makes it to the news when somebody gets injured. When no damage is done the various units get activated, try and respond in some logical (though military way) to what happened, and then slowly but surely get back to "normal". Incidents of this sort can happen almost every day, yet for those of us who aren't there and who only hear the news on the radio or read the paper, all is quiet and nothing special has happened. So I'm at home, rather oblivious to what's still happening there, but that's as it should be. Once the rest of my unit finishes its miluim none of us will think about what's happening there, and a new unit of miluimnikim will go through what we did.

Monday, December 26, 18:00, at home

That seemed to be a rather logical, perhaps fitting, place to conclude this journal. It has a sense of closure which I suppose is attractive to any writer. But things don't seem to work that way. Although these miluim are fully behind me, they're somehow very alive in my thoughts, and I've got quite a number of additional notes that I want to report on and that are necessary in order to give a fuller and more accurate picture of what transpired during my miluim.

There are numerous aspects of Ramallah that I'd like to try and describe. Around the time of the start of the Intifada Ramallah was considered to be among the quietest of Palestinian towns. My guess is that this quietude had a lot to do with the fact that Ramallah is a relatively wealthy town which seems to thrive mostly from trade. Though I didn't cover the entirety of the city, I can't recall seeing anything that had the flavor of being even semi-heavy industry. The city has a relatively large Christian population, and apparently they are the more wealthy group. A report we had told us that today Ramallah's Christian population feels threatened by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and that they're leaving for the States. I don't know to what extent this is true, but I can certainly understand that this is a logical trend. We passed by numerous very impressive villas, some of them old and a number of them very new. I've always liked the old-style Arab houses and there are a number of them in Ramallah that attracted me. On the other hand, some of the new villas are attractive, but most of them seem so out of place and so overdone that they lose any sense of taste they might have. We saw many satellite dishes on the roofs of the houses, and this seems to be a fairly good measure of wealth. Ramallah, along with a good many other towns and cities is full of copies of the Eiffel tower that hold up television antennas on the roofs of buildings. I've never much felt the urge to be photographed while in the army, but I could imagine myself posing for a picture under one of these towers. I could attach a caption next to it that said "I visited Paris on my miluim."

I was on miluim around Christmastime, and there are a good deal of western style decorations for Christmas that show up through the city. The first time I saw these I didn't really understand what I was looking at, and only a bit later did I realize that the strings of colored light bulbs in trees on the street were related to the holiday. Numerous houses had colored light bulbs in their windows, there was mistletoe on some doors, and a number of plastic Santas decorated doors and windows. A number of times I saw cars with trees in their trunks which were undoubtedly on their way to becoming Christmas trees in their owners' homes. There was

always an incongruous feeling when I'd see Santas on doorposts and only a couple of doors away a Palestinian flag. It almost always caused a double take. (Perhaps here I can add that umbrellas in black, green, white and red, the colors of the Palestinian flag, were very popular. Perhaps once this might have been a sort of protest since displaying the Palestinian flag was considered an offense by Israel, but today it simply seems to be a proud way to keep dry from the rain.

I'm sure that there were numerous other aspects of Ramallah that caught my eye, though I don't remember many of them any more. My notes cover only a few of them. During our patrols through the city I suppose that I must have seen about ten "supermarkets" — that's the name that was written out in English above the entrance to a number of what seemed to me to be Mom and Pop stores. One of these was actually very impressive. It was a bit bigger (still, not much more than four rather short isles) and had the front of a pink VW bug protruding from the front wall. It was the sort of affect that seemed right for Melrose Ave. Interestingly, this particular store didn't have "supermarket" written above it, but instead "ubermarket". It was very clear that the "s" was missing, but I found the "b" instead of a "p" particularly interesting. Arabic doesn't have a "p" sound and when one is called for it's pronounced "b", but I was still surprised to see it written that way.

While searching through parts of Ramallah I hadn't been through before when we looked for the culprit in the shooting of the Friday when I returned to my base, I noticed one theater. It didn't seem to be particularly big, but I have to admit that this was the first time I'd seen a cultural institution other than schools. A number of times I saw a poster on telephone poles the design of which had a quite distinctly western feel. One time I got close enough to one of these to read what it said. It was an advertisement for the "Palestine International Festival". It sounded like a good thing, though I have no idea whether it was really held, or what sort of things took place there if it did.

Almost the entire period of my miluim I was in the "urban" areas around Ramallah, and on the road. The day before my last we had a surprise exercise sprung on us by the khativa to which we were responsible. The screenplay was that terrorists had supposedly shot at and injured someone at a settlement to the northwest of us and our entire g'dud was called on to try and find the culprits. At first we didn't have much to do other than set up a roadblock in order to try and stop the getaway car from getting into Ramallah, but as things developed both the jeep of my plugah commander and that of our second in command were called upon to move forward until we turned out to be the forces that had face to face contact with the culprits and ultimately "finished them off". There was nothing particularly interesting about this exercise, except for the fact that it was a beautiful day and we were both driving and hiking through very green and attractive territory which we hadn't seen hardly any of during these miluim. (Actually, we caught the culprits in the general vicinity of where we'd spent a month in the territories three years ago.) We enjoyed the opportunity to be out in the open and moving around.

This reminds me that one morning early in our service my plugah commander, our second in charge and myself took a long ride in our jeep for the purpose of getting to know the territory. We passed through much of the territory we were responsible for three years earlier. The town of 'Ein Arich is still a picturesque little hamlet at the low-point of a riverbed, but IDF troops are no longer stationed there. In general, the army tries to stay clear of towns and villages and tries not to interfere in people's lives if it doesn't have to. I remarked that I'd be happy to spend a weekend of vacation at the Hotel 'Ein Arich that might be built after the establishment of a Palestinian state. In general the territory we passed through was very familiar to us and almost each spot we got to brought back distinct memories of activities and events.

Thursday, December 29, 1994, 10:00
at the university

Tzippi didn't have to go to the orchestra today, and that meant that I could catch an early

ride to the university where I had a better chance of getting some work done. But though I've devoted over an hour to a project I'm working on I only started spoiling things which made it preferable for me to stop what I was doing. I've got a backup of the project at home and it seems to make more sense to simply start again from that backup than to even more waste time now trying to reconstruct things here. That being the case, I've got some time to write and try and finish my miluim notes. My page of notes is on my desk at home, but I remember most of the items I wanted to report quite well without them.

I'm not sure to what extent I've succeeded in explaining how different these miluim felt from previous miluim in the territories, and I'm not really sure that I know how to explain myself better. If I haven't emphasized this yet, one reason has to do with the fact that we really don't deal with kids throwing rocks. We don't carry rubber bullets with us, nor tear gas, and frankly, we're not really concerned about what the residents do among themselves. Though we patrol at night, our major job is to be visible during the day, and perhaps this is as much for the sake of the settlers who commute to work via the roads we patrol than for the Arab residents. Each day one member of the plugah was giving the job of accompanying the bus that passed by our base and went to some of the settlements — almost always very close to empty. There's no bus on Shabbat, the settlers don't go to work, and since most of them are religious they don't travel at all, so we didn't have to be as visible, or available then and as a result Shabbatot were very quiet days on which we were able to release a number of members of the plugah for a few hours to Jerusalem or even farther.

So our main work was in the mornings when cars were on their way out of the territories, and then once again in the late afternoon when they returned. We quickly learned that it was very important for us to make ourselves visible. At least three or four times we got reports from settlers passing through that they'd encountered rock throwing. They'd tell us where this took place and we'd hurry to the site only to discover that all was quiet. It made sense to assume that the rock throwing had been only momentary and was finished before we arrived, but a couple of times we'd be right in the vicinity and check things out immediately, and we couldn't find either rocks nor throwers. It became clear that what was happening was that the settlers wanted to make sure that we were doing our job and thus if they didn't see us prominently displayed in the places they thought we should be they'd report that rocks had been thrown at them, thus causing us to set up shop in those places even more visibly so that nobody could complain.

It was on my last day, or perhaps the day before my last, that I encountered my only rock of these miluim. Eight members of our plugah were permanently stationed by the Ramallah police station. Their job was basically to be available if there was any need for them, and to perform various guard-duty and lookout functions. Our plugah commander, Yossi, would visit them at least once a day, which meant that I'd visit them as well. (The police station is, pardon the expression, a stone's throw away from the spot where the soldier who didn't use his rifle was almost lynched. This incident occurred while Yossi was visiting our soldiers at the police station, and thus he was at the scene very quickly.) I was standing outside of the police station, basically guarding our jeep but also visiting with the person on guard duty, when a stone, perhaps even only a pebble, landed close to our feet and rolled a bit toward us. The person on guard duty had encountered a few more of these during the time he'd been at the station, so he was first to recognize it as a rock that was thrown at us. We quickly looked around to find where it was coming from, but we almost as quickly concluded that it was hurled from the other side of an open lot and that the culprit had long since disappeared. This was certainly nothing similar to the open and defiant rock throwing that we'd grown to know in the past, and it was the extent of my contact with the phenomenon this time.

In my last miluim journal I wrote about various tactics that the army had developed in order to catch stone throwers. I remember then how amazed I was with these tactics:

Wednesday, June 12, 1991, 13:00

On the other hand, a good deal depends on how you look at things. Occasional incidents of stone throwing by teenagers, even if occasional means every other day, don't define the area as hot,

but two incidents in one month of gunfire directed at the army or at Jewish settlers perhaps do. This area commander probably also knows from experience that though many of the soldiers who serve in his area are interested only in things staying quiet, numerous others are frustrated by not being able to perform as soldiers. He thus seeks out new forms of "action" which will allow his soldiers to feel like soldiers.

One of these actions is a novel method of trying to catch stone throwers. The basic idea is an ambush in which one jeep pretends to get lost near a village, and when kids come out to throw stones, a second jeep, stationed at a distance, can shoot a live bullet from a rifle with a telescopic lens at the leg of an identified stone-thrower. The injured kid won't be able to run away, and when the other kids scatter the first jeep will be able to take the kid prisoner. After the briefing Yossi R., our leftist sergeant, and I looked at each other in disbelief — this is the sort of intelligent response to kids throwing stones that the army has been able to come up with since we were last in the territories. We've since learned that this tactic has been tried a number of times, though special permission and training is required before taking action. I don't doubt that it succeeded in catching a few stone-throwers, though I'm definitely dubious about whether it brought about a decline in stone throwing.

On the day before my last of these miluim I encountered the latest version of this idea. The army now has a special bus with four doors on it – two on each side. This bus is filled with a number of pairs of soldiers who are supposed to ride on the bus in civilian clothing (so that nobody will know they're soldiers, of course) and when they encounter rock throwers they're supposed to jump quickly out of the bus (that's why there are four doors) and catch the culprits. Though the soldiers have their rifles with them, they're not supposed to use them, but instead run after the rock throwers and simply catch them. Thankfully, I didn't have to take part in this game, but I got a rather full report from those who did. They reported that this time they stayed in military clothing, though they didn't think that anyone who would have thrown rocks at them would have noticed, or cared. But no rocks were thrown. The bus apparently traveled to some relatively outlying villages and the kids there were distinctly surprised to see a bus traveling through there. The villages weren't on the route of any buses they knew of, so that either the bus had gotten lost, or this was a trap, and they apparently quickly decided that this was a trap that they weren't going to fall into. So the bus returned empty handed, without any young arrestees that they'd succeeded in catching.

The next morning met with a similar sort of success. A group of soldiers went out early in the morning to a number of roadblocks in the area of the green line. Their mission was to catch Palestinians who were trying to cross over into Israel (Israel-proper?) not at the regular roadblocks where their papers would be checked, but farther away and independently. The general idea is that someone who doesn't want to cross at the roadblock has something to hide and that he should thus be apprehended. This makes a certain amount of sense, except that it seems that those who really want to cross over without being caught have better ways of doing this. Our soldiers reported that they caught a number of Palestinians, about twelve, but that their average age was apparently around 80 and they hadn't wanted to cross at the roadblocks because they knew that their papers weren't in order. So although a number of people were arrested, none of them should be considered dangerous, or of the sort that this particular action was designed to find. The people who took part in this action, when I spoke with them later, all related to this as a laughable episode that definitely didn't justify being awakened early in the morning, and none of them can be classified as leftists.

The topic of civilian dress leads me to a short note from our very first night. Israel now has a number of units of highly trained soldiers whose job it is to dress up as Palestinians and infiltrate. I'm not sure just what they can infiltrate since it's clear that they can't become part of a discussion, let alone a group of terrorists, but what they can do is mingle in a crowd which might be expected to erupt into a demonstration without being apprehended, or hang-out around a building from which boulders might be dropped without causing suspicion, or even relatively readily get close to a house where "wanteds" are known to be, and then carry out a surprise action. On our first night our jeep had the job of being the backup for a number of soldiers of one of these units who were hanging out near a house. This wasn't a particularly interesting activity – nothing happened (nor did we think it would) and we simply waited for a

couple of hours unit their "ambush" was over. What was interesting was the discussion that transpired between Yossi, Oren our driver, and myself. Though far from articulate, Oren is clearly a leftist, and Yossi has never been able to fully digest the fact that he's travelling around in his jeep with two people whose political ideas are so abhorrent to him. I always try and soothe him by reminding him that his are just as abhorrent to me.

I got involved in relatively few political discussions during these miluim. Of course ordinarily I try to steer clear of heated political debate, but this time I hardly had to do any steering. It seemed that nobody was particularly interested in talking politics. That doesn't mean that people didn't express opinions, but that those opinions didn't really develop into discussions. The general tenor of the opinions expressed was quite rightist, but I'm not sure that I really heard a typical cross section of our plugah, which anyway tends to be quite rightist. In general the basic opinion expressed was that our deal with the PLO hasn't changed anything for the better and has instead only worsened security in Israel. There isn't much point in arguing that we knew quite well that Hamas activity would increase after the Israel/PLO agreement since most people are unwilling to accept that there's any difference whatsoever between Hamas and the PLO.

One interesting discussion revolved around the topic of homosexuality. I'm not sure how this topic came up, but I found it rather surprising that almost all those taking part in it (eight people perhaps) were very accepting of the idea that a homosexual couple should have the basic rights that are extended to any heterosexual couple extended to it as well. Only one secular discussant thought that homosexuality was a terrible aberration that couldn't be tolerated, and what was perhaps most surprising to me was that almost all the others related to him with honest surprise and bewilderment – "you really think that way?". Our Chabadnik, of course, thought that homosexuality was immoral and against God's law, but nobody actually expected him to think otherwise.

Though this is often the case in miluim, I got the feeling during these miluim more than at other times that our plugah members didn't really have much of a chance to be together. If people weren't out on duty of one sort or another, they were trying to sleep, and in the middle of the day, when people might have had a chance to visit, there were usually very few people around while all the rest were out on duty. Perhaps because of this we took time when we could for visiting and drinking coffee (I hardly drink coffee at all in civilian life, but in the army it's part of an important ritual which really can't be foregone) and this limited my writing time. I also had a number of articles with me that I wanted to read, and I actually kept up relatively well with my studies, though there's no doubt that I've fallen behind at least a bit. And during my first week of miluim I replaced our "secretary" who was on leave, meaning that in addition to my tasks in Yossi's jeep I also had to make up the lists for each day's activities. I usually do this well, though I tend to waste time by trying to be overly fair to everyone. I'm generally accepted as an impartial authority and people don't argue with my lists, but I was still happy to return the job to the person responsible for it when he returned from leave. Perhaps more than anything else, making up the lists continually deprived me of the little writing time I could have found otherwise.

Our plugah has undergone a radical change over the past two years with the influx of about 20 new members just out of the standing army. These kids are definitely very good soldiers, and though we're already considered a very good front line unit they add a great deal. The worlds of many of these kids are very foreign to me, as mine is to them, but absorbing them into the plugah is an important task which the vatikim have to take upon themselves. I have to admit that in the case of quite a number of these new members it's also quite an enjoyable task. Some of them are bright and interesting kids whom it's interesting and pleasant to interact with. I've taught kids who are older than they are so it's hard to view them as my peers, but we succeed in establishing a good rapport. Though professionally they're much better soldiers than I am they accept me as the elder of the tribe and often seek out my help or advice. I have to admit that in many ways I'm also rather strange (weird?) and for some of them that's a positive quality which attracts them.

One night one of our patrols found a black plastic garbage bag (filled with something) in the middle of the road and decided that this should be related to as to a suspicious object. The police were called, and they brought a robot along with them to check out the bag. It was my jeep's job to accompany the police on their way to the scene, and then close off part of the area, so I had a chance to watch the entire process from relatively close up. The robot is hardly much bigger than a toy car and is operated pretty much in the same way, via a remote control palette. The robot approached the bag, dragged it to the side of the road, tried to rip it apart, and then shot at it a few times, probably detonators of some type, hoping that if there was a bomb in the bag the shots would explode it. To nobody's particular dismay, or surprise, there was only garbage in the bag, and after about twenty minutes of this robotic examination everything returned to normal. The bag had been found in the middle of the road, but it was also right next to a garbage bin at the side of the road, and it makes sense that someone had thrown a number of bags into the bin and missed with this one which perhaps dropped as he walked to the bin. What also makes sense is that if someone had wanted to plant a bomb it wouldn't have been necessary to leave it in a black plastic garbage bag – it could have more easily, more effectively, and less apprehensibly been left inside the garbage bin itself.

But it makes sense to keep your eyes open, even if danger will probably meet you from wherever it is you're not looking. Another night patrol of ours did a good job of keeping its eyes open, and saw a bottle rolling out of a building and into the street just before it. The bottle wasn't a molotov cocktail, but just the same, it was suspicious. The patrol stayed in the vicinity of the building from which the bottle had been rolled and became convinced that someone on the top (third) floor of the building was turning on and shutting off lights in a way that seemed to be playing with the patrol. They called Yossi and at first he didn't want to respond (we needed sleep that night, and it was around midnight) but they convinced him that he should come and check things out. When we got to the scene we decided that the house should be checked out. I stayed below with three others while four people went into the house. After a thorough check they came out with a fascinating report. The house was a dormitory for women students and most of them woke up when Yossi checked it out. It wasn't clear whether someone had really rolled a bottle, or played with the lights, but if they had, even though these women had no reason to be particularly positively inclined toward us, it wasn't for reasons of possible terrorist activity.

At the start of these miluim we were shown attractive, pocket-sized, green booklets. The booklet contains 32 pages of instructions about our behavior in the area in which we're serving. It covers general issues, the question of life-endangering situations, encountering criminal acts, and dealing with riots. We were told that each soldier was supposed to receive a copy of the booklet, though of course in standard army fashion even when we tried to get additional copies they weren't to be found. So in our plugah of around sixty soldiers we had about ten or twelve booklets, enough to distribute to our officers and a few others. I saw to it that I got a copy.

A running joke throughout my entire miluim was that whenever we'd encounter a situation that was somehow dangerous or that demanded that we consider the use of force or even our weapons, the first step to take was to open your pocket, take out the booklet and read the instructions. A corollary to that joke was that each group of soldiers out on a mission had to have one additional person with it — a lawyer. Many members of our plugah had continually expressed the feeling that the army was more concerned with the possibility that the newspapers would be filled with discussions of how its soldiers had behaved incorrectly in a particular situation than it was with their physical well-being and that they were overly limited in how they could respond to potentially dangerous situations. A sort of corollary to this thought was the feeling that Israel's agreement with the PLO allowed "them" to do what they wanted, while it tied "our" hands behind our back. Arguing about what was really happening in the territories wasn't going to help much.

Perhaps the most important thing which the booklet defined was what a life-endangering situation really was. The basic instructions were that if we were faced with such a situation we had permission, and were even required, to use our weapons with intent to kill. Thus, if

someone was shooting at us, we should shoot back. If someone had shot at us and was then running away with the gun in his hand, or had tried to stab us and was running away with the knife in his hand, we were also permitted to shoot to kill. If, however, someone had tried to stab us and was then running away, emptyhanded, after casting aside the knife, our orders were to stop the person without killing him. If a boulder was thrown at us from on top of a building (a theoretical, but potentially very real situation) or a molotov cocktail was thrown at us, and we apprehended the suspect while committing the act, we were permitted to shoot to kill. If, however, the suspect was running away and there was no longer any immediate danger, our orders were only to try and stop the suspect without killing. I guess that it goes without saying that even though the basic principle of these instructions is quite clear, and ultimately not confusing at all, for a soldier trained to use his weapon, it can be very confusing and even frustrating to be severely limited in how he can use that weapon, especially when he thinks that having to take the time to consider just what the proper reaction is puts him at a disadvantage in relation to the suspect.

Though our plugah only rarely had to set up roadblocks, the instructions in the booklet that related to stopping suspects at roadblocks also led to confusion and even consternation. On the whole, roadblocks aren't considered to be effective as a means of catching dangerous suspects. Often, the only roadblocks that we were instructed to set up were temporary — more like surprise spot checks, and I got the feeling that the major reason that they were set up at all was to let the Palestinian population know that we had our eyes open and were keeping them on their toes. But our instructions were never to shoot at someone who tried to run a roadblock, and instead only to inform someone else about the suspected vehicle and thus try and catch it. Partially this was due to past experience in which Israelis, encountering a roadblock in the territories thought it was set up by Palestinians and thus tried to run it, and ended up getting shot. (It should be noted here that at night there's often very strong fog and it really is hard to see who's setting up the roadblock.) But it was also due to experience in which someone who hadn't paid a parking fine, or his taxes, tried to avoid a roadblock and also ended up shot. It goes without saying that Israel wasn't interested in creating situations of this sort and preferred to let people flee from a roadblock if they wanted to. Anyway, the reasoning went, a truly dangerous suspect probably knew how to avoid army roadblocks without having to try and run them, or turn around and go in the opposite direction if he encountered one. This reasoning definitely made sense, though once again, it left our soldiers with a distinct feeling of being very ineffective, and I guess it's clear why the joke about needing a lawyer became very popular.

'Erev Shabbat, December 30, 1994, 22:30

The boys are asleep, and Tzippi, who had a difficult day today with the orchestra (and with the related travelling) is either on her way toward sleeping or out already as well. And I'm getting closer and closer to finishing my notes, but I'm also getting farther and farther away from the immediacy of being on miluim and being able to give a "you are there" account of what's happening. Most of my memories are still quite vivid, but they've also been filtered through at least a week of hindsight and reflection. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this, but it's a different perspective than what I've tried to capture in the past.

So if one of my notes reads "continual day of activity without sleep", even though I remember the details and am quite capable of reporting them, I'm not sure that I remember just what the point was that I wanted to make about that (at least) 24 hour period. I took my first leave on Wednesday, December 14. As I've already noted, I went straight to the university that morning, after being out on patrol from 21:00 until 5:00 the previous night. At the time I was still responsible for the assignments list, and though I could have listed myself as the on-call medic and thus had a pleasant full night's sleep, I would have been short one person the next morning when I left for the university. So it made sense for me to put another medic on call, thus giving him a night's sleep, and put myself on the night patrol. What I hadn't counted on was the fact that almost until my patrol started I was busy in my plugah commander's jeep with various

unforeseen tasks, and that, after we hadn't gotten much sleep the previous night. So I had reason to be pretty exhausted by the time I left for the university.

One of our activities the previous evening had been an exercise in which one of our plugah's jeeps was supposedly attacked. Though in general this exercise wasn't particularly interesting or eventful, it did give me my only chance of using my skills as a medic, as I took care of those "injured" in the attack. The infusion that I administered to a relatively new member of our plugah went exceedingly well and he reported that though in previous exercises he'd had to get infusions, this was the first time that he hardly felt any pain at all. So though I thought that my skills were very rusty, it seems that I still knew what to do. That night patrol was the only one I had to be on during my entire miluim, since all the rest of the time I was with Yossi's jeep. I have to admit that I really didn't mind not having to be awake through the night, and as far as interest goes, it was much more satisfying to be in the on-call jeep.

Administering an infusion brings up another interesting vignette which merits being reported. I was reminded of this when I unpacked my miluim bag and found inside a pair of rubber gloves. Ordinarily, when we take responsibility for a particular area I exchange a few words with the outgoing medic, checking to see what the general situation is. There was little reason to do so this time since during our first night we quickly noticed that the outgoing plugah was far from organized so that there was little that I could learn from such a meeting. What's more, our plugah was situated along with the command of the g'dud, meaning that the g'dud's doctor was right by us and I could always defer to him. A number of times during my stay we got reports of accidents and quickly got into our jeep and headed to the scene, only to discover that the doctor, with better equipment (and of course more experience) was either just ahead of us or right behind us and that therefore there was little for me to do.

About the only thing the outgoing medic passed on to me was a couple of pairs of thin rubber gloves. When I first studied to be a medic ten years ago we hardly thought twice about administering an infusion, but when I did the second half of my course a year later people were already complaining that they should have gloves on so that they wouldn't come into direct contact with blood. When I administered the infusion that I just wrote about I started taking care of things and then remembered the gloves and joked that perhaps I should take them out of my pocket and put them on. The other medics near me (I was first on the scene but the doctor wasn't far behind) didn't laugh, and instead told me that they'd given infusions in exercises over the last couple of days, and that of course they'd put on their gloves. So I did too. Being a medic under the sign of AIDS has definitely caused a few changes.

Though neither we nor our bordering plugot didn't set up many roadblocks, it still happened almost every other day that some suspect had been picked up who had to be brought to the military authorities at the western end of our area of jurisdiction for questioning or perhaps worse. The job of accompanying these suspects almost always fell on us since we were the closest plugah to the place they had to be taken to. This was usually a time consuming and exasperating task as the proper authorities were hardly ever available or the correct paperwork hadn't been filled out, or something similar and we'd have to stay with "our" suspect for extended periods of time instead of getting back to patrolling or whatever other work we had to do. A suspect was usually simply someone whose papers weren't in order, though that probably didn't prevent him from spending at least a night or two in the prisoners' quarters in the Ramallah military headquarters.

While accompanying a few suspects I had the opportunity to wander over to the gate that led into this compound and get a relatively good look at the conditions. This compound wasn't a prison, and though I don't know how long people ordinarily spent there, my guess is that it was a relatively short amount of time. From these quarters they were probably either released after questioning or were moved on to a more permanent prison facility. Be that as it may, the conditions were exceedingly banal — they didn't seem inhumane, though of course there was nothing particularly humane about them either. Perhaps about 50 people were crowded into two tents that could comfortably hold around 30. These tents were open on the sides so that the guards could see in at all times, and at night the lights on the perimeter of the compound were

on at all times, not giving enough light to read by, but certainly enough by which to be seen. The floors were concrete, and there seemed to be almost the same number of blankets as there were prisoners. A left-leaning officer of ours reported to me (from his independent observations) that there were definitely too few blankets, causing a sort of ongoing battle for existence in which prisoners constantly had to guard their blankets so that nobody would take theirs. I didn't see enough of this compound to get a clear picture of the conditions or of how it functioned, but on the other hand I definitely saw enough for my own taste.

One suspect we accompanied to these headquarters was a 17 year old Jordanian citizen (with a Jordanian passport) who, even though he lived in Ramallah, didn't have papers to be in Israel. He was picked up by chance, for no particular reason, and he proved the law that states that it's easier to get into a rough situation than it is to get out of one. I don't remember the details, but his mother apparently had to go back and forth between Jordan and Israel to continue to receive tourist status in Israel, and he was a minor who's papers had never been put in order. He was lucky. He only wasted about an hour and a half with us and wasn't even detained, but instead told to report the next day to get his papers put in order.

By far our most interesting suspect was an Israel Beduin from near Be'er Sheva who for some reason was wandering around the area we were responsible for. He'd apparently been trying to get to Lod and had gone via Jerusalem and then north and east. Whatever, he didn't have his papers with him, and that created a problem. Though we expected him to be released, it wasn't in our authority to do so. From the time he was apprehended one night until we brought him to the military headquarters the next morning he simply sat out in the cold at the entrance to our base. Our jeep's driver (no longer Oren, but now Rafi who identifies himself as a raving rightist but who has a heart of gold) and I made him a couple of sandwiches to eat when we met him in the morning, though he refused them. We wandered around the military headquarters for perhaps an hour until we were told that he could be released. But that created a problem. Were we to release him at our base he'd undoubtedly be apprehended again before he reached his destination. He had to be accompanied to over the green line before we could confidently assume he was safe from the entire process taking place again. But we were busy later than morning and couldn't give him a lift. In the mid afternoon, when we returned from our activities we found him still sitting at the gate of our base, waiting for a ride over the green line. We ended up giving him 50 shekels and telling him to take a taxi. It may have been his fault that he didn't have his papers, but that didn't justify his wasting two full days. Rafi was quick to explain to me that he had nothing against this person and was thus happy to help him, though if he'd had reason to believe he was involved in terrorist activity he would have murdered him with his bare hands.

I concluded my entry of December 15 with "I still haven't reported on the thrills and excitement of being an enlightened occupier". I think that the time has come for me to fill in the details on the events that led to that sentence but which I never got around to reporting on. In retrospect, though these events took place close to the beginning of my miluim stint, they were still the most significant for me. It was while these events were unfolding that I discovered that I had an urgent need to write, but somehow I couldn't find the time, or the energy.

It was on the night of Monday, December 12, that a group of twelve of us from the plugah was called on to carry out some arrests. Intelligence sources somehow (I have no idea how they work, though I admit that sometimes they really do justify their name, while at other times there seems to be no connection between the name and the way actions are actually carried out) knew to report on a group of people in a house in a village named Bir Naballah who were suspected of something like fomenting dissent. Our base was very close to Bir Naballah, though by road it was about a ten minute drive. The village will be remembered as the village where Nachshon Wachsman was held after his kidnapping and where the rescue attempt took place. Our job was to approach this house and then question the male residents. If they matched (even vaguely) the description we'd been given (bearded, and relatively young) we were to arrest them and bring them to the military headquarters in Ramallah.

I don't know how many actions of this sort get carried out in the Ramallah area each

month, but it isn't a particularly rare occurrence, and one or another plugah of our g'dud was called on to perform acts of this sort about at least once a week. Thus, though we rehearsed how to approach the house and were prepared for the possibility of at some point being met with gunfire, we knew that chances were good that all that would happen would be that we'd question the suspects and then probably bring them in for questioning. Still, this action started at about 23:30 at night, we were still quite new in the territory, and we didn't know what to expect, so we approached the entire action very carefully. Various members of our group were stationed at different corners of the house, essentially covering various avenues of escape while a few others had the job of questioning the residents. I was situated by the front gate and had a bird's eye view of everything that transpired. The house was somewhat isolated, meaning that it's possible that everything that took place didn't wake the neighbors. It's possible, but highly improbable. That being the case, it makes sense to assume that the neighbors simply knew better than to get involved.

We knocked on the door and nobody answered, so we banged on it instead. After about five minutes someone finally came to the door, probably a woman, though I don't recall precisely. She was told to tell all the men in the house to come outside. Once at least some of the men were outside (we didn't know how many there were) Yossi wanted to search the rest of the house. One of the men objected, complaining that there were women in the house and that he couldn't permit Yossi to go inside without him. An agreement was reached in which they searched the house together. Throughout this entire episode most of the men spoke a very good Hebrew, and what's more, they had a very clear picture of what their rights should be. "Who's in charge?" they'd ask, again and again, and "Are you a policeman? — only the police can search the house". What's more, they demanded to know if they were charged with anything, and if not, why they were being searched and questioned. The most vocal of the group protested again and again that the Palestinians wouldn't make peace with the Israelis if they were going to be awakened in their own homes and questioned without any explanation. The only explanation which we gave was to repeat again and again that explanations would come later, from the proper authorities. I don't know if these explanations really came later, but it was clear that we had nothing to explain, since we ourselves hardly had any idea of what it was we were doing, who these people were, and just why someone was interested in questioning them. It put us in a distinctly uncomfortable situation for which the only solution was simply to avoid any arguing at all, and almost any talking either.

I didn't seriously consider the idea of refusing to serve in the territories this time around. The accords with the PLO, though they didn't keep me from being an occupier, made our service in the territories a sort of accepted presence that was only in need of a permanent agreement to finally disappear altogether. It was still occupation, but now only a game that had to be played out until the end. I'd told myself that were I to be called upon to act as a guard while the home of the family of a terrorist was bulldozed or closed off, then I'd definitely refuse, but I didn't know where to draw the line when it came to questioning people who just might be real suspects (of something). And now here I was, a passive participant in a political argument over our right to take someone out of his bed in the middle of the night without any explanation being given. And of course I found myself on the wrong side.

In the end, after numerous arguments and protestations, we brought the five or six male residents of the house to the Ramallah military headquarters. Time and again they were told that if everything was in order they'd be released the next day. Whether they were immediately questioned or first imprisoned I have no idea, and we never received any confirmation of what became of these people later. I know that this bothered a number of people who took part in this action, but there was nothing that we could do about this. On the other hand, one of the people I was with remarked that at least one of our suspects "looked guilty", and none of my questions as to just what that meant brought about a clearer explanation, except for the remark that the way he protested to being taken in for questioning proved he had something to hide. So much for being presumed innocent until proven guilty. Had we been met graciously and offered a cup of coffee, I'm sure that there still would have been good reason to assume that they were hiding

something — this time because they were so gracious.

This whole episode was in itself quite disturbing to me — in the least it didn't suggest that the occupation was on the way out. More than anything else it simply seemed to contribute to a continuing situation of suspicion and mistrust. But something else disturbed me as well. Our major concern that evening, after our own safely (which quickly proved not to be a major problem) was with getting back to our base and into our beds. We were tired and didn't want to waste our time with this. We stayed at the military headquarters for some forty minutes until we were told we could go back to our base (leaving our prisoners behind, of course) and without hardly any difficulty put this entire episode behind us. Only a couple of us ever asked what really became of these people, whether they'd been taken out of their beds at night for some justifiable reason, or whether intelligence reports had been mistaken. Crawling back into bed and warming up again was more important to us.

Were we enlightened occupiers? Is there such a thing? We never raised a hand on these people, though of course they were always at gunpoint. We respected their demand that we not search the house while the women were alone, but we searched the house just the same. Though we'd been instructed that if we were to take someone in for questioning we were to blindfold them and tie their hands behind their backs before getting in our jeeps or command cars, we never did this, nor felt the need to. We probably take pride in not having struck them for talking back to us, but such pride can only derive from thinking that it makes sense to strike someone for talking back, and if to our minds doing that makes sense then we're not particularly enlightened. It seems to me that all that can really be said is that the noun occupier doesn't need, perhaps can't accept, any modifying adjective, positive or negative enlightened or heinous— occupation is occupation.

I think that I'm fully caught up. I'm sure that there are some additional short vignettes that I might want to report, but if I can't remember them at the moment, they can't really be very important. And of course I want to put this behind me already. It's already late at night and the boys tend to wake quite early on Shabbat. Though it's Eitan's birthday, we'll be celebrating later on in the week and we don't want to confuse him by commemorating too many different dates. I've got lots of school work to attend to, and I still haven't fully cleaned up after these miluim, but if I've completed this journal I can at least emotionally put them behind me and start to attend to the various tasks at hand. The Palestinians in the Ramallah area now have different occupiers who either behave humanely toward them or don't. I've never claimed that the members of my plugah are nefarious occupiers who sternly repress the Palestinian masses. Basically, political opinions aside, they're the same as me, trying to get through a stint of miluim without being harmed, and without it leaving too much of a lasting impression on our psyches. I don't know whether we succeed, or whether we should. And for the Palestinians, the occupation continues.

Sunday, January 1, 1995, 23:30

I've been finishing a short assignment for school, and then I took a bit of time to copyread a bit more of this journal. Once I've finished copyreading I'll be able to set it up for printing, print it out, get it in the mail, and get on to more immediate matters. But as this lingers, more and more items spring up that demand attention. Today's paper carried a short article that reported that the body of a woman was found in Wadi Kelt. The paper reports that this is probably the body of a woman missing for about ten days from a settlement not far from where we were stationed. The day after this woman (if it's her) disappeared, a group from our plugah, and similar groups from other units in the area, were sent to search for her in Wadi Kelt. The assumption was that she was mentally or emotionally unstable and that late one night she'd left her settlement and gone on a walk for no clear reason. My plugah commander had taken part in this search, but even though he knew that I like hiking, he let me stay behind in our tent. It had been a cold and rainy day and he knew I was tired, and that I wasn't really needed for this search. Needless to say, that day nothing was found, and now, about ten days later, the search is

over. From the way things are reported in the paper it seems quite clear that nobody thinks that any "nationalistic reasons" are involved, meaning that she wasn't murdered, but instead got carried in the current of the river, that gets quite strong when there's a lot of rain, and drowned.

'Erev Shabbat, January 13, 1995, 22:00

This journal should have been finished with my last entry. It was even more or less printed up a bit more than a week ago, and I intended getting it into the mail. But I was also holding back. Though I'd finished my service long ago already, my g'dud only finished on January 5, and during the time since my release and until January 5, I would try and hear news reports that might tell me that something happened in our area before the g'dud finished its stint. I kept myself busy with school and the kids and more often than not I neither read the paper nor saw the news, and it was only last Motz'ei Shabbat, January 7, that I learned that the previous day someone had been murdered in an ambush about fifteen minutes north of the area we'd been responsible for. Of course we were no longer serving, but my guess is that whoever replaced us was very busy for a couple of hours after this incident, setting up roadblocks, conducting searches, enforcing a curfew and the like. We were very lucky that nothing of this magnitude occurred to the Jewish population of the territories while we were still serving. I doubt that the fact that it didn't wasn't due to anything that we did particularly well while serving.

This past Monday evening I was at kibbutz Nachshon. Miki's friends from Nachshon had decided that they were going to hold an evening devoted to him and told me (who was requested to tell the rest of our unit) about a week before. I was a bit upset by this. They asked me to write something (and I knew that if anyone was going to write something from the plugah it was going to be me) and I didn't really have the time. I need more than a week, and anyway, and we were planning not even to be home that evening, though in the end that plan didn't materialize. So Sunday night I stayed up late and wrote something which turned out to be the only reminiscence that was written out. Other people simply spoke extemporaneously, and did a fairly bad job of it. The evening was not a very good one.

But that's not what I wanted to write. Among the people from our unit who showed up was Khanan, our g'dud commander (who used to be our plugah commander but has continued to climb up in rank). After the evening we sat around for a while and I asked him how the rest of the miluim had gone. He then told me a story which I want to relate here. As I've already noted, lately I haven't gotten around much to reading, seeing or hearing the news. Thus I knew (belatedly) that someone had been killed in an ambush a week ago, but I hadn't known that the Popular Front, the group that had carried out this action, claimed that it was in retaliation for the killing of four of their members two days earlier. These four were killed in Beit Lakiyah which is a village within the area of our jurisdiction. Khanan told me that another plugah from our g'dud had been responsible for backing up a group of soldier from the unit that dresses up as Arabs when they, in response to some intelligence reports, were on their way to try and find these four. The soldiers were on their way to a house where the Popular Front members were supposed to be when their informer pointed out a car to them and told them that they were in that car. They tried to stop the car and more or less did so, and then one of the Popular Front members make a fatal mistake — he took out a pistol and fired one or two shots.

Once shots were fired this was no longer a case of making an arrest but of self-defense, so there was nothing keeping them from shooting back, which they did. Khanan got to the scene not long afterwards and reported to me that though he's seen many sights in his military career, this was for him probably the worst. The soldiers (those who dress as Arabs; ours weren't directly involved in any of this) opened fire, with about four soldiers shooting about 500 bullets, at very close range, and then, when all was quiet, making sure that everything was over with an additional bullet to the head. Khanan described this as an extreme case of overkill and added that the soldiers, instead of being disturbed by the sights as he was, were in high spirits and boasted of their exploits. It was interesting for me to observe how Khanan, whom I'm sure is very middle of the road, though perhaps he's even just a bit left of center, described his reactions

to all of this. He, of course, is very well aware of my political bent.

This event took place on the last night of the g'dud's service, at about the time that a party was to be held. Interestingly, another member of our plugah, our quartermaster who is also a superb cook and thus spends a good deal of time in the kitchen, also told me part of this story, but what he focused on was the fact that he'd prepared lots of food and that it all got cold while most of the good was outside and on its feet policing the village where all this took place until it was clear that things had returned to normal. Khanan reported that it turned out that there was hardly any need for military presence to enforce a curfew. Though a fire truck was needed to clean the street from the blood, the people from the village immediately understood that this wasn't the right time to be out on the street and they hurried home, and there wasn't much for our soldiers to do.

I don't mind not having been involved in this incident. And of course there have no doubt been other incidents since our g'dud is no longer serving which I don't know about. But this report belongs in any report on the month our g'dud was in the Ramallah area.