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Paul Kelly

Meet the shy man
behind the songs

The hunt for Tokyo Rose

Kind of bossy

Miles Davis in the Outback

Giving birth

Should your friends
be there?

Peak Experiences

**How Peggy Lipton went from Mod Squad
and Quincy Jones to the lotus
position and damn fine cherry pie**


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soldier • Anna Maria Dell'oso on cinema
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Israeli soldiers and Palestinians come to blows in the occupied West Bank. Opposite, reservist Leslie Wand, later court martialled for refusing to serve.



The Gaza Strip: tear gas on the wind, rats the size of cats, eight-year-old "terrorists", a place where violence is the language of both the occupier and the occupied. Chance and duty propelled Israeli citizen LESLIE WAND to the front line, where he discovered just how easily an average person can become a brutal oppressor

diary of a

reluctant soldier



■ IT WASN'T CHOICE OR SOME VAGUE ZIONIST IDEAL THAT PUT ME IN the role of oppressor. It was a sense of duty towards an adopted country, and chance. As a Jew who had come to live in Israel, I had taken up citizenship, which meant I was in line for mandatory national service. Then the Israeli army — misreading my medical profile — put me in a frontline unit and, while I battled bureaucracy, I was posted to Rafiach in Gaza.

It was, to understate the experience, an eye-opener. While my preconceived ►



Masked Palestinians display the improvised weapons of the "intifada". Far right, children wander the grimy alleys of Gaza when they're not playing war games or throwing stones.

image of the average Israeli regular soldier turned out to be accurate — he retained that macho image he so effortlessly projects to the world press or uses to impress the girls on Tel Aviv's beaches — I was shocked by the reservists, that vast body of Israel's active army required to serve for between four and eight weeks every year and to which I now belonged.

I'd considered the reservists to be normal, everyday sort of people simply doing their duty, but what I found in many cases were normal people transformed into barbarians, throwing their weight around like power-crazed warlords in a no-man's land of hatred...

Observation post

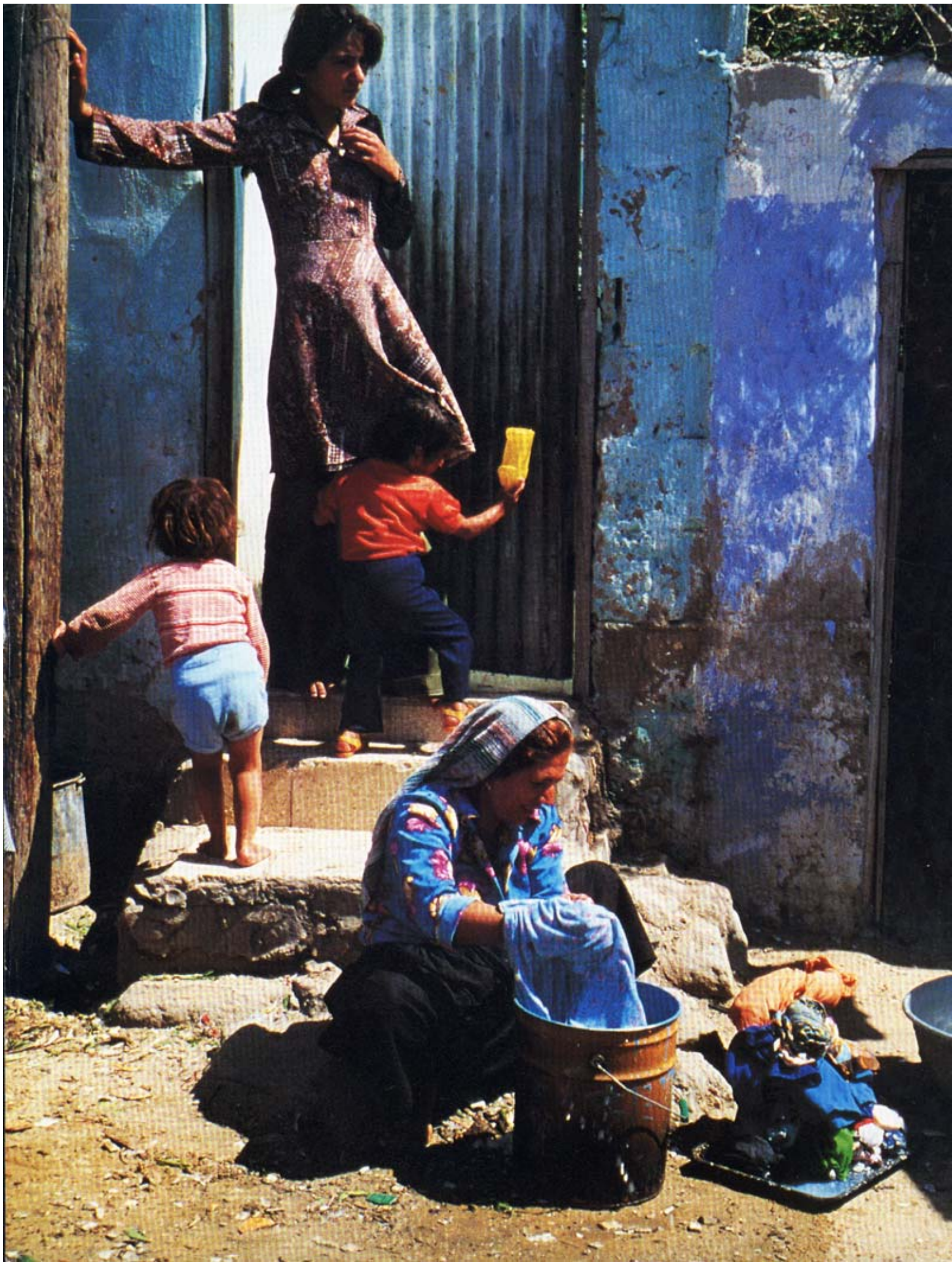
A muezzin cried his plaintive call to prayer through an amplifier system whose speakers were only 10 metres or so from my observation post atop an unfinished but already derelict block of flats. This observation post (the Israeli answer to a spy-in-the-sky satellite) overlooked the mosque and the entire centre of the city, if the heaps of decaying masonry around it could be called a city. Rafiach isn't part of the so-called "miracle on the Mediterranean",

it's an ugly, hostile patch of occupied territory. Arab children played war games in the street below. The bigger ones played the Israelis — swaggering, and staggering under the weight of their arms — while the younger ones played themselves, throwing stones and running away. If they were caught, and they always were, unlike in real life, they took a beating from their elders. Violence seemed to be second nature to the children.

A child of eight or so gave me an angry V sign which I returned good-humouredly. The child stared in astonishment, then hesitantly smiled. I smiled back. After all, what does an eight-year-old know of power politics, borders drawn in the sand? The child grinned and gave me another, less malicious V sign. I returned it again and we both laughed, the occupied and occupier sharing a joke.

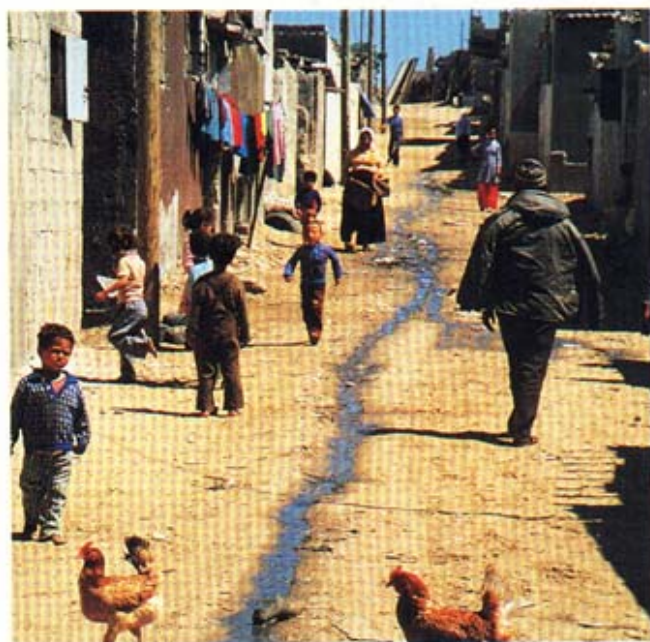
Our friendly exchange lasted but a moment; it was shattered by a reservist who appeared quietly behind the child and clubbed him across his shoulders with a baton, reminding the child in a none too gentle manner who and what he was — a "dirty one". Guilt overwhelmed me as the child stared at me, betrayal and hatred glittering in his tear-filled eyes, and I, the perceived Judas goat, turned away in shame, unable to communicate my sorrow.

There are compassionate soldiers in the occupying forces but unfortunately not nearly enough to change the





Some Israeli soldiers will argue that there is no such thing as an "innocent bystander", that they're all guilty — guilty from the moment of birth, guilty by association, guilty by being Arabs



dismal, endless picture of abuse and misery. The majority of soldiers fail to realise that every time they raise their baton to an innocent bystander or shoot into a crowd, another seed is sown in their own destruction, though some will argue that there is no such thing as an "innocent bystander", that they're all guilty — guilty from the moment of birth, guilty by association, guilty by being Arabs.

A crowd gathered at a street corner, some dispute with a soldier regarding an erring stone-throwing child of six or so. The mob grew as the soldier asked harshly for the child's mother to come forward. The women started to yell, the yells attracted more passers-by, and then the shouts turned to screams as more baton-waving troops arrived, ready to quell the "disturbance", put an end to the continuing "intifada". Unprepared mentally and physically to use force on the frenzied women, the soldiers stood around for a few minutes before retreating, and as quickly as they retreated the crowd dispersed — though had there been camera crews present, the drama would probably have dragged on for hours. The army would have us believe that this minor incident was yet another demonstration in support of the PLO, and nothing at all to do with basic civil rights.

True, the children throw stones, but not only at Israeli soldiers. They'll hurl rocks and pebbles at each other, pass-

ing cars, Arab and Israeli, in fact they'll throw stones at anything that moves. It's just a game to them; there are no Fisher-Price toys, no dolls' houses, no organised games to occupy their empty hours — just dirt, poverty and stones.

Later that day the sky filled with paper kites, held aloft on the gentle sea breeze that tried in vain to clear the awful stench of deprivation. For once, the children's faces were full of joy, their eyes turned to heaven, watching freedom flutter at the end of a piece of string.

My army-issue binoculars were very powerful, but instead of scanning the area looking for potential trouble spots (groups of people standing in one place for too long), I spied on a family through an open window. They were watching *Dynasty*. Nine people crowded into a small, dirty, dingy room watching Krystle acting out the American Dream. What did they think? What did they feel? What did they aspire to? The answer remains a mystery; the Arab mindset is so vastly different from Western thinking that any guess remains just that, a guess.

Night patrol

It was 11pm, curfew was at 10. He was smartly dressed, perhaps returning from a date — could romance blossom in squalor? He didn't run as our jeep approached. Our officer puffed himself up, trying to look frightening, menacing, but it didn't work; there's not much call for ▶



The harsh realities of life under Israeli occupation (left) have given rise to a new generation of Arab militants (above).

such posturing in his regular unit, the artillery. After a few questions our officer started shouting, not at our suspected Palestinian agent provocateur, but at us — no-one had brought the nylon straps that serve as handcuffs.

Another patrol passed by and stopped, looked, and decided it wanted to play with our prisoner as it had failed to catch anybody doing anything. Truncheons tapped enthusiastically against thighs, palms, tyres, obviously itching for a little action. Our officer looked anxious and I kept the pack at bay but didn't deny their officer the pleasure of handcuffing our hostage. He pulled both the handcuffs and the torn cloth blindfold much tighter than necessary, and then butted the man in the stomach with the stock of his rifle. Our officer intervened and pulled the sagging, sobbing, shocked prisoner to one of our patrol's trucks where, much to my horror, an Indian Jew kicked him in the face.

"Why!?" I asked of the usually meek and mild-mannered man.

"He's one of them," he replied in his soft voice.

A flame flickered in the distance. Guns were raised, safety catches were let off, and anxious fingers rested on triggers. Our officer shouted "DO NOTHING!", aware that some fingers were itchy.

Then, like a scene from some tawdry Christmas card, two Arab women, dressed in black, came lumbering slowly towards us, their single antique paraffin lamp casting menacing shadows all around. One of them was in labour, her contractions quickening. With military speed an ambulance was summoned and the dumbfounded women

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found themselves sped through the deserted night streets to the local hospital with a full military escort.

Day patrol

In the heat of the day the place stank, a vile, loathsome stench of decay, not just from the open sewers running in the streets or the uncleared piles of rotting garbage but something more, the city itself festering, putrefying. Ever present were the rats the size of small cats who were the other "occupying force".

Tear gas on the wind. My eyes prickled, my pulse rate jumped, but the radio crackled an unbroken stream of static. An accident? A riot? What had happened? The radio remained noisily silent and slowly my heartbeat took up its normal pace once again.

Twenty children, aged from four to 12, stood at a street corner throwing abuse at us, safe in the knowledge that they were out of gummi (rubber bullets) range. We had to smile, since their insults were directed at a soldier well known for his rightist views, who waved his club impotently at them like a eunuch in a brothel.

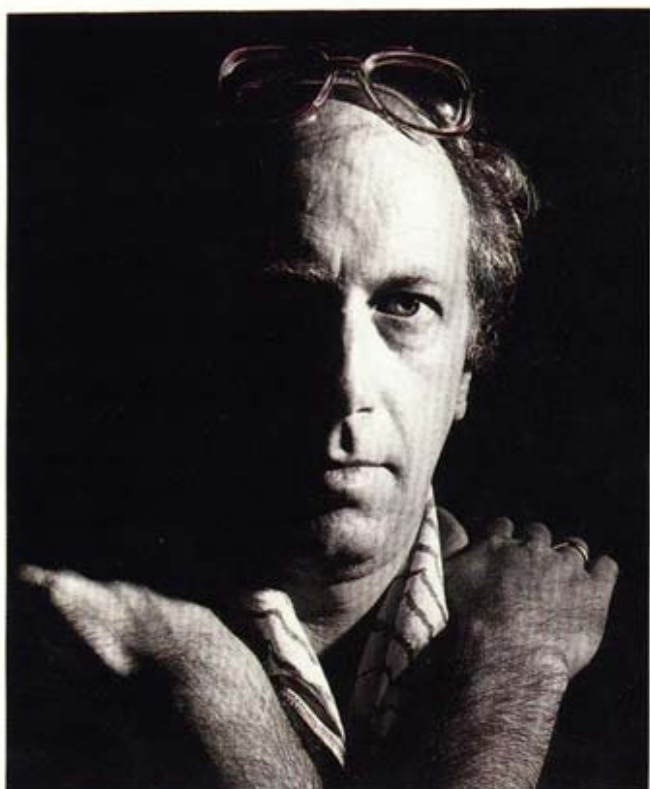
Back at base we heard there had been a disturbance in another part of town, hence the tear gas. "Bastards got away," moaned one reservist, but envious eyes turned to the man who said, "I got one a gummi in the balls!" What did he think that would do, neuter the problem?

Our Romeo, the prisoner we had caught breaking curfew, had been brought back to base and was being held in an open-sided tent surrounded by barbed wire, still handcuffed and blindfolded. The regular soldiers ignored him but the reservists seemed to think he was on public exhibition and constantly taunted him. Finally, one of them threw a gas grenade in with him. He screamed, "My eyes are on fire!" much to the amusement of the spectators who considered this the high spot of the day.

My indignation was tolerated: I was a foreigner after all and therefore had no "real" understanding of the situation. I was told I saw only the milder side of detention; the serious business was being carried out by the security services, the Druse units, and the border police. The stories I heard made me think we were flying the wrong flag over the base: the swastika might have been more appropriate. If we are one day asked to justify our actions, will we too answer, "We were only following orders"?

Observation post

I trespassed, via my binoculars, into the privacy of the family living below my observation post, not that they ▶



could have had much, living eight in one room, or two rooms if you count the blanket suspended across the centre. The husband arrived home at four to be greeted by his wife, a plate of food ready in her hand. He squatted among the debris in the filthy yard (less crowded than the house) and ate with his fingers (no running water). A young man, perhaps his eldest son, rushed in and accidentally knocked the plate from his hand. The father stood up and hit him violently. The son rushed over to his younger brother and gave him a tremendous slap on the face. The brother in turn kicked his younger sister, etc, etc. There seemed to be no communication other than violence.

While we were watching the searchlights play on the walls and passageways below, David, my partner, told me about his boring job as a bank clerk and his two children, aged 10 and eight. The next day, while we were on foot patrol, he continued with his stories of his wonderful children. We turned a corner and surprised an eight-year-old boy playing in the dirt and being idly watched by two 15-year-olds. I suppose in order to impress his elders he gave us a V sign, but the boy's instincts let him down. David ran and caught him, and this supposedly loving father delivered the child a stunning blow with his truncheon. When I argued with him later he had no regrets. I suppose he'll tell his children he "clubbed a terrorist".

Back at the base

I squatted over the hole in the small, hot, tin-walled, putrid-smelling cubicle that served as a toilet and wondered what it was that had given me such an upset stomach. A rat watched me, oblivious to the noises I made to scare him away. The joke going around was that the rats die of dysentery when they bite an Arab.

I was accused by another reservist of being a coward, scared of "physical violence". He was right, of course.

I'd found myself clenching my rifle in sweaty hands, praying for the order that would have allowed me to fire live rounds into the mass of unarmed youths before me. Thankfully that order never came

Armed with rubber bullets, gas grenades and live ammunition, I could easily do someone physical harm, but what really scared me was what all this was doing to the Israelis. The mental attitudes and scars which are left after a month of inflicting needless physical and mental anguish on others don't disappear overnight.

Night patrol

We banged on people's doors with truncheons even though they had bells, we screamed and shouted to wake the neighbourhood. It was 1.30am and as a "collective punishment" for some recently painted graffiti the local residents were to clean the streets of rocks and debris. The scared submissive middle-aged men were made to squat in a line and wait while others were rudely roused to join them. A soldier walked behind this line, occasionally delivering a vicious kick to the kidneys of some of the younger men among them.

At 3am we found a "mental" wandering the street. Lots of jokes were made at his expense but we fed him and gave him our extra rations to take away. Once more we fell into a heated, pointless discussion of the "situation". I listened, wondering who exactly were the really crazy ones around here.

Day patrol

The walls were covered with painted-out signs and slogans but under a thin layer of whitewash the Arabic words could still be read. One of the slogans translated as "Drink Coca-Cola". Since when had Coke been considered anti-Israeli?

A stone thrower! We pulled up in a bone-jarring stop as his last stone raised a cloud of dust some five metres before us. He'd long since disappeared into the dark labyrinth of passageways that criss-crossed the whole area and which he knew like the back of his hand. We never entered the maze.

"Why don't we use dogs?" I asked our officer.

He looked at me with surprise. "Don't be stupid, there's too many associations with the Nazis..."

I was left wondering who was concerned about these "associations". Us? Them? Or the rest of the world?

We never caught the ones that mattered, just the very young, the very old and the bystanders. They were the ones who suffered, and if not at our hands, then at the hands of their own kinsmen for what they said was "co-operation".

It was Saturday morning and our officer misread the

map. Our patrol of 12 men ended up in the marketplace and was surrounded by more than 150 stone-throwing youths just waiting for such an opportunity. Rocks rained down on us from all sides, a hailstorm of hatred. Many of them missed or rebounded off our vehicles and caused havoc and injury among the shoppers caught up in the action. We started firing rubber bullets, a useless and pathetic gesture against the growing avalanche of rocks. We panicked and some live rounds were fired before we crashed our way out, motors screaming, running from "the enemy".

A little while later, tear gas and the smell of burning rubber filled the air, clouds of heavy, oily black smoke drifting upwards, spreading the news. Within minutes every passage and alleyway held a group of stone-throwers. Reinforcements arrived while a helicopter and plane circled overhead. Burning barricades appeared at major junctions, then the generals arrived, viewing the scene in safety from behind the front line. Within an hour the city was closed down, and anything that moved was stopped and checked.

For the first time in my life I was literally terrified, not of the stone-throwers or the threat of physical violence, but by my own reaction to it — I'd found myself clenching my rifle in sweaty hands, praying for the order that would have allowed me to fire live rounds into the mass of unarmed youths before me. Thankfully that order never came, but in panic some did shoot live rounds. The result: one dead, four wounded.

TV crews arrived like vultures on a new carcass, looking for "action" and seemingly disappointed to have missed it. I joked with one American reporter that it was a pity we didn't use napalm; it would make good, colourful footage for the six o'clock news. He nodded his head in agreement.

Back at base I was interviewed by the military police. What happened? How did it start? Who shot the live rounds? I told my story and added that I would have happily fired live rounds as well, given the order to. The investigator didn't bat an eyelid but simply nodded knowingly — he'd heard it all before.

Night patrol

Everyone was keyed up, nervous, seeking revenge for our "loss of face", our retreat, our defeat.

Four punctured tyres before we even reached the city centre. The roads were littered with "ninjas" — pieces of hose pipe or wood with nails driven through them. Once in the city, people were dragged out of their houses and forced to clear the streets of stones, remains of burnt tyres, and even cigarette ends. But this wasn't enough compensation for our earlier humiliation, so they were then made to paint white lines and zebra crossings on the unpaved roads with whitewash. No-one argued the absurdity of it. There was a smell of vengeance in the air, they knew it, they felt it, and occasionally saw it when some frightened and defenceless youth was dragged into the back of an army truck.

The night faded into daylight, smoke still drifted lazily upwards from the piles of smouldering garbage. By 9am the city was quiet, a ghost town with army patrols every-

where. I received a 36-hour pass, a welcome relief after spending two weeks in purgatory.

It was like a dream, one whole day at home, but no-one seemed to care what was happening in Rafiach; Tel Aviv was light years away from reality.

Checkpoint

Saturday and I was back, manning a checkpoint into Rafiach. Three Tel Aviv businessmen tried to persuade my officer to let them enter the market area to collect the clothing they'd had made up there cheaply. (I'm told the truncheons we used were made in Gaza, too.) The officer explained, quite reasonably, that the men's Golf GTI Special with its Israeli registration plates, their large flashy Stars of David, and their trendy army-style trousers were likely not only to attract stone-throwers but even to set off another riot. They didn't care, all they wanted was our protection while they collected their goods; any other problems that might arise were ours. They were refused admittance and left, cursing us angrily.

There was still a curfew on a certain section of the city. People stood on one side of the street waiting to cross the road to their homes and waiting families in the curfewed area. It was a real-life black comedy, as was the scene later in the day when 40 soldiers and their vehicles stood in the middle of a large square. Stones started flying in from one side and everyone rushed across to flush out the offenders, only to have another barrage come from the other side. Back and forth it went, cat and mouse, with the soldiers playing the mice.

We had orders not to enter the alleys and passageways under any circumstances; we were there as a "show of force", and that's exactly what we were, a show. One unit, frustrated and with three of its soldiers injured by stones, started throwing rocks at the nearby houses. This escalated to smashing shutters and solar water heaters, and then ripping down a porch. The senior officer present looked on helplessly, unable or unwilling to stop the rampage as the soldiers let out their frustration.

Day patrol

We were busy dealing with two taxis and their occupants who'd broken curfew, when we spotted a lone cyclist crossing the road some distance away.

"GET HIM!" screamed our officer, looking at me.

"But..." I stuttered, about to explain I had no idea how to, when Simon, our unit's medic and a confirmed pacifist, ran over to my jeep. "Come on," he yelled enthusiastically, "let's go for king and country!"

We tore off down the road at 70km/h, humming Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" as the wind whistled through the wire net windshield. Simon apprehended the culprit without any force and without any strong language, and we returned to a round of applause. The unit's two "lefties" had proved their heroism — even if our captive was a terrified nine-year-old going across the road to feed the animals...

It was a high point in my military career that can't be repeated because I had to leave Israel last year. I left not because I wanted to — I like the country and its people — but because I was to face a third court martial for refusing to serve in the occupied territories again. ■