

PREFACE

Date: February 4, 2016

Time: 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Place: Department of Geography, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR

Interview duration: 54 minutes, 6 seconds

Interviewee: Shaul Cohen

Interviewer: Nina Greene and Adam Stephens

Transcriber: Nina Greene

Biographical Details:

Shaul Cohen served in the Israeli Army from 1983-85. He was in the Golani Brigade, infantry recon.

TRANSCRIPT

Nina Greene:

Today's date is February 4, 2016 and it's 10:30am. My name is Nina Greene and I'm with Shaul Cohen and Adam Stephens in the Geography Department. So Shaul, why did you decide to join the Israeli Army?

Shaul Cohen:

I'll try not be a smart ass. What I'm thinking is, why is that your first question? But you're not here to explain that part.

I was raised in a family that was very aware of the vulnerability of Jewish people in the world. A family of refugees and survivors. And we were raised with a diet of material written by scholars, by politicians, by generals, that was about Israel's struggle to defend itself and its ability to defend itself. Alongside a diet of, it's not just over there, that throughout the world and throughout history we've been vulnerable. And it seems that diet was one that took hold within me. Part of what we were taught as kids was about the accomplishments of the Israeli State. And Israel was in a different place in the world than it is now. And I feel like I claimed those accomplishments. I claimed that place in history where an apparatus allows you to defend yourself, rather than going into the gas chambers defenseless. And I felt like I couldn't claim that if I didn't take some of the cost and the risk myself.

Adam Stephens:

Was that education part of public school?

Shaul:

No this was just my father buying us books or showing documentaries or telling stories — taking us to listen to speakers, those kinds of things.

Adam:

How old were you when you joined?

Shaul:

I was probably 20. Something like that. I was also drafted. I joined but I was drafted. That apparatus exists for all of the citizens of the State, so I was one of those.

Adam:

At the time was drafting both for young men and women?

Shaul:

Still is, yeah.

Adam:

Did you get to choose which branch you served in?

Shaul:

Sort of, you got to list your top three choices. And my first choice was paratroopers. And I did the try out for the paratroopers and they really kicked my ass. And they said, "Okay, but if you're going to come be a paratrooper we want you to sign off on some extra years. And you'll go to officer school and all of that." And I said, "That's my intent, but let me get there before I sign on to some extra years." And they said, "Nice knowing you, pal," and they sent me to actually my third choice ... No, they sent me to my second choice, but I had thought I would get my third choice. But they sent me to my second choice. Which turned out to be exactly the right place for me. All of my choices were infantry, but they were different units within that broad category of infantry. So you could say I chose, I mean I chose infantry. But it was a little bit of a surprise for me to end up where I did.

Adam:

What was basic training like?

Shaul:

It was six months. The first three months were basically camp based and then the next three months were field based, including a little bit of time up in Lebanon. There was a war going on up there. And you know it's sort of like what you see in the movies but some of it you're sitting there literally studying things, studying weapon systems, or studying strategy, or studying how to navigate terrain in the dark with no light and all that kind of stuff. And a lot of it was what you would anticipate. Them yelling at you while you work yourself to exhaustion, and learning how to fight, and being broken down and molded into a unit, and all of that stuff.

Nina:

So you said the place you were assigned was exactly the right fit. Why was that?

Shaul:

Yes. I ended up in the unit that's known to be the rough and tumble unit of the Army. It draws from disproportionately lower socioeconomic strata of society. Not that many people like me were ending up in that unit back then, but my particular batch ended up being a remarkably high qualified group for that part of the Army. But it was a low on bullshit, high on quality unit. If I'd of ended up being up in the paratroopers, there would have been a lot of "yes" or "no, sir" — and I'm not really that good at that — and more on the spit and polish, which is not to say that they're not good fighters, they're very good fighters. But the unit that I ended up in, calling your officers and your noncommissioned officers by their first name. You're not worrying about how to march in formation and are your boots shined just so. It's a unit that prides itself on being

somewhat neglected by the Army and so it takes care of itself. Sort of outsider status within the institution suits me perfectly.

Nina:

Can you give an example of something specific?

Shaul:

Sure. Paratroopers got all kinds of nice equipment. We didn't get what they got. So if we needed some things, they would drive us to other bases and give us a list and say, "Be back in 45 minutes and don't get caught." We went and stole things. You know that's how we provisioned ourselves. If we got in trouble with military police, they said, "If military police stop you, give them a running lesson. And if you get caught we'll come and break you out." So it wasn't quite as extreme as that, but that mentality worked well for me. I don't have a lot of patience for formality or authority for authority's sake, and because they were very good fighters I knew that I was being trained and that I was going to be fighting alongside people who were really well trained. And that's the most important piece and then less fuss about the rest of it.

Adam:

And this was in the Golani Brigade?

Shaul:

Yeah.

Adam:

And I did some research, it's known as the First Brigade and there are five brigades in the IDF. Is that correct?

Shaul:

The number doesn't mean anything.

Adam:

It doesn't?

Shaul:

So I was in the 51st battalion of the 1st Brigade of the 369th infantry division. All of that is crap which means nothing. They're just creating speak like armies create speak. The numbers don't mean anything. My battalion was very good. Fifty-first battalion was a very good battalion.

Nina:

You said that your unit was especially high quality when you were participating. Is that a coincidence?

Shaul:

It was a coincidence. They do aptitude testing of everyone in the Army, so that's IQ and some psychological testing and whatever else. And the company that I was in tested higher than

company had tested to date in the Brigade and then the platoon that I was in was above the other platoons so I just lucked out. Not that there weren't numskulls and assholes, there were. But on average it was better than one would have anticipated.

Nina:

So what did you do in the Golani Brigade?

Shaul:

I was a soldier in the infantry unit. Each of us had some specialized training as well. I had what's called "a LAW" [Light Anti-Tank Weapon] I think in English. In addition to my regular gear I had some light anti-tank rockets that I carried around that actually wouldn't have done much to a tank. My unit moved around between Lebanon and the West Bank and the Golan Heights and Gaza. Most of the time that I was in ... we were in Lebanon. And what they did with us there was, wherever the paratroopers were getting their asses kicked, when they cycled out, that's where they sent us to tighten it up a little bit. So we kept getting whatever was the worst of it up there. And that meant a variety of things. Like many other things you can be involved in, there's a lot of time that there's not a whole lot going on, which is good if you're in the Army. But patrolling and ambushes and roadblocks and extractions and all of those things that you do when you're doing that stuff.

Adam:

And you joined in 1982?

Shaul:

1983.

Adam:

1983, okay. And this would have been during the Lebanese civil war and the Lebanon war.

Shaul:

Mostly the civil war stopped when we got there.

Adam:

Okay.

Shaul:

Both because we dominated and because then everyone turned their guns at us. So that war began in June of '82 and Israel withdrew from Lebanon probably about, I don't remember, 1992 or something like that.

Adam:

My understanding, Israel kind of took over Lebanon and retracted back to southern Lebanon.

Shaul:

It never took over the whole country. The furthest north it got was Beirut and then it did pull back. So I spent several months in the town of Sidon, that's how you pronounce it in English, which was at that time the front line. There was a bunch of stuff that happened in Beirut which was very bad. They decided to wash their hands of that part of the country and so they came to the south. Like the rest of Lebanon that was a very mixed area. It was dominantly Shiite but there were Sunni and Christians and Druze there as well.

Adam:

And that's where you deployed, the majority of your service was in Sidon?

Shaul:

No, we were in Sidon, we were in valleys to the east of there, we were in the town of Tyre, we were in smaller villages. The first extended deployment was in Sidon so right literally on the Awali River which was the front line. But they move you around so I think after three months on the Awali we were just bouncing back and forth. So it would be Lebanon, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, West Bank, Lebanon, Golan Heights, like that.

Adam:

How often did you rotate to different areas?

Shaul:

It depended on what was going on. The overall matrix was three months in the field, three months in training, but that training would be training that took place in the Golan or in the West Bank. But they could shorten that because they'd just send us back to Lebanon when they needed us up there.

Adam:

So you wouldn't go back to Israel, after you're done with the tour ...

Shaul:

It's a different kind of Army. You'd go back to Israel for the weekend, not every weekend.

Adam:

Right, because it's so close.

Shaul:

Right. So I would say every three weeks you'd get a 36-hour pass or something. I didn't have a home there, but everybody else did. So I would go wherever I would go, but people would go home and then come back.

Nina:

And would you go home with people that were a part of your unit?

Shaul:

Sometimes. I mean after a while I had an apartment, but 36-hours is not enough time. I would have to go home, shop, do laundry, see people, get ready, go back, sleep. And that would be over the Sabbath. By about four o'clock Friday all the businesses would be closing and then you're due back somewhere by about 6:30 on Sunday morning before anything opens, so it was very hard to be able to have time to buy food, get my laundry done, whatever, so it wasn't actually all that advantageous to me. I mean I wanted to get out when I could get out, but it was a challenge in itself.

Nina:

What ethical issues did you face while you were involved?

Shaul:

You know it's interesting, the day that I got drafted the first thing they did with us was give us some clothing, cut our hair, take x-rays of our teeth, and our fingerprints and our footprints — in case we got blown to smithereens, [it was] how could they identify us. And all of that kind of stuff. The very next thing that they did was to sit us down with people doing their reserve duty who were I think most of them psychologists to have the conversation about what's a legal order and what's an illegal order, and what your obligations are as a soldier to obey orders particularly in the case that you might think that they were illegal. And I thought that was a really interesting thing to do and we got into a debate with them. The thing in Lebanon and Hebrew was *הגליל שלום מבצע*, "the Peace for the Galilee Action¹." And some of the kids that were being drafted alongside me were saying, "Why call it an action? It's not an action. It's a war." And we'd get into this debate with these officers about what's going on, and did we have a choice and didn't we have a choice. It was a very interesting introduction to the Army.

Along the way, I was exposed to the inevitable frictions between a superior military force and lesser military forces and between any military force and civilian populations. And there were a fair number of cases in which it really was sensible to ask: Do the rules apply? What are our objectives and how does that fit ethically with the circumstances? What am I entitled to do in order to stay alive? Those kinds of things, I wouldn't say they were every day, but they weren't all that uncommon either. So I would say the ethical challenges, some of them were specific to the rules of warfare and are those rules, some of them were just what do you do with power, some of them were just how to be with people. And at times the tension wasn't between me and people who were the populations around us, sometimes the tensions were between me and people in my unit. Different interpretations, or, there's no interpretation here, there's right and wrong and you're doing wrong and what am I going to do about it.

Nina:

Can you give an example of that?

Shaul:

You know I can give you a very benign one, there are others. So we would man checkpoints and I was eager to treat people well at those checkpoints. At the very least they were going to be inconvenienced. And they certainly didn't view us as their friends. And often they were older than us in cultures that teach respect for your elders. We're punk kids with guns. So I always try to treat people well. The one that came to my mind was that we would have trucks

¹ "Action" is equivalent to an American campaign.

going through with produce on them. And one time a couple of the guys on my unit took, each of them, an orange off of a truck that was loaded with oranges. And I saw them do that and I came over immediately and I said, "Put 'em back. You know you can't do that." And they said, basically, "There are 10,000 oranges on this truck. Every time it hits a pothole oranges fall off. He's not going to miss two oranges." And I said, "It's not about him. It's not about the quality of the road. You can't do this." And we got into an argument about it and the guy got out of the truck and he said, "It's not a problem, it's not a problem," and he began loading up a bag to give us more oranges, and I said to him, "It's very nice of you. Get back in your truck. These are your oranges and we're going to continue our argument." So those kinds of things. You know me, I tend to be a purist. So I've picked one that's benign but they weren't all benign. Sometimes a pure application of the rules doesn't work and sometimes people are in life and death situations and you're not going to be able to stop and parse out the details. So it does put you in those situations where theory and reality might be neighbors but they're not necessarily going to overlap all that well.

Nina:

To go off of that — the theory and reality not overlapping — the first thing that they introduced you to when you signed up was the illegal vs legal orders and [they] gave you the theory behind when to follow an order and when not to. Do you feel that could be applied practically?

Shaul:

I do, but I actually find it more interesting when there were cases when it absolutely made sense ethically to not follow a legal order. And I got into those arguments too. Somebody tells me it's a legal order and I say, "It's unnecessary and harmful." They say, "But we've given you a direct order and it's a legal order." And I say, "I'm not doing it." A legal order is carte blanche to operate however you can, it's providing some guidelines for things that you can't do, but can do doesn't mean should do.

Adam:

And, um, for the psychologists, were they part of the military for your training? And when would you follow some legal orders?

Shaul:

After you're done with the Army you come back for a month every year to do the reserve duty or two months if you're an officer. So these were people who, whatever they did in the Army when they were kids, ended up being in their professions psychologists. So when they come back in for their month they use them as psychologists to do these kinds of things.

Adam:

Does it pertain to when not to follow a legal order from a superior officer?

Shaul:

I think they were concentrating on legal and illegal. And we talked a little bit about when legal orders might be murky but they didn't tell us when you should disobey a legal order.

Adam:

So that's a personal choice.

Shaul:

Yeah.

Adam:

Okay.

Nina:

Do you feel comfortable giving an example in which there was an order that you could do but didn't think you should do?

Shaul:

Yeah. When you are attacked if you don't know the source of the fire, the um — I'm trying to translate some words in my mind and I'm not getting the right ones — the procedure is to respond in 360 degrees with suppressing fire until you've identified the source of fire and then concentrate and bring your firepower to bear on that point. So we would be attacked sometimes and we wouldn't know where it was coming initially. So the order says if you don't know where it's coming from, 360 degrees until you figure it out. But if I'm being shot at and it's coming from somewhere over here, technically the rule allows me to shoot until I know where it's coming from. It allows me to. But shooting that way doesn't do anything for the thing that's shooting at me. And I tried to make that point that we're operating with lethal force and you should be as discriminating as you can be, not as liberal as you can be when responding when you're attacked. So those kinds of things where technically you've got license, but so what? It's not sensible to do that.

Adam:

Do you think there is a culture in the IDF of liberal use of force?

Shaul:

You know I wouldn't say that at the time. I would say it's a human institution so people have their own ways and those ways also vary with circumstance. So on a day maybe or in a week where some of our guys got killed, and that's our friends, I think people are going to be a little quicker to the trigger, and if it's quieter or we're in a different area where we don't have as much trouble then people will respond accordingly. But there's definitely a gradient, like anything else, of people that are more aggressive or more frightened or more angry. Any of those things. Or any motivators that might move people in the other direction. There's a phrase in Hebrew, טוהר הנשק, "the purity of arms" and that philosophy which I'd say was taught in the IDF, taught as a philosophy, said that you endanger your own people rather than risk harming innocents. And I'd say that that still exists in some places, but it's intentioned with, "Take care of your people." I think the IDF at times does a very good job of not being a blunt instrument. When you think about a military force operating in civilian areas in a time of war, particularly with guerilla warfare — so you're not looking for people in uniforms who are lined up in a particular way — it can come from anywhere. It's really difficult and delicate to operate in those circumstances. In the town of Sidon for instance, we're walking down streets that have five-, six-

, seven-, eight-, nine-story apartment buildings on both sides. There are snipers. So I didn't know how many hundreds of windows there are, but beyond any one there could be a sniper and if they don't have a sniper they could drop a cinder block off the roof onto our heads and that happened too. So the whole place is inherently risky and you're trying to stay alive. You have a specific task to perform and you're moving through there with a lot of stress and often fatigued. And then a car backfires or something and it would not be a surprise if people hit the trigger for that. We were trained quite well I think to be measured in our response, but as I say my unit was a very good unit and there could be mistakes in my unit too. It's just an inherently bad circumstance. And, um, as I said, there's theory and there's everyday. Sometimes they line up better and sometimes less so.

Nina:

You mentioned there was sometimes friction between your unit? You used the word numskull. I'm wondering if you were able to develop the trust you needed to work.

Shaul:

Mostly. But there are different things that can be problematic. There can be someone's attitude and that can be a problem, there can also be, I don't know a perfect English word for this, their "soldierlyness" would be the direct translation, but their skill in their job. So I was very careful to train and then perform, if you will, by the book. There could be a good guy, good attitude, good soldier, but I'm seeing that he's sitting there behind my officer and he's not aware that his safety is off and that his finger is on the trigger. And shit happens in those circumstances. So do I trust him? As a person, yes, as a soldier, I'm hesitant. And the mistakes are hugely costly. There's all the Army rules, and then there is what they called the internal rules, the unit rules. So if somebody was a problem within the unit the officers would say, "Deal with it within the unit." Basically what that meant was that if someone didn't fly right you beat the shit out of them, but in a way that was extremely unpleasant that I won't describe that had a significant effect of humiliating that person in addition to whatever damage would be done to them. And you might say that that was a brutal thing, but actually I saw that it could turn people around and people really could be fundamentally different after the unit said to them, "You need to be fundamentally different." It genuinely had that impact. Whatever was going on inside the person, I don't know, but man, from being a problem to flying right, I definitely saw that happen. The officers trusted me.

And so that was both a good thing and a little bit of a risk. But that was important. I wanted to know what everyone was capable of. I wanted to know what to expect. And those kinds of things, as I say I was quite rigid, there would be times where they would say to me, "Eh, you don't need to do this." And I'd say, "You know the book says do it and we could get killed here but I'm gonna do it." And they'd say, "You don't need to do it, it's highly unlikely." And I'd say, "I'm gonna do it." In that circumstance I would say I trusted myself more than I trusted anybody. I didn't want to cut corners — people died cutting corners. I thought if I get killed, I get killed, but I don't want to get killed because I was lazy or stupid.

Nina:

What did you mean when you said it was both a risk and a good thing that your officers trusted you?

Shaul:

So they got to know that I wasn't going to cut corners. And procedure would have rotation of people in certain positions. So you'd see a movie and there's someone on point and that's a very difficult and vulnerable place to be. They would put me in those positions disproportionate to other people because they knew that I wouldn't screw it up. So that just meant I was out there more.

Adam:

Did you go through any like counterinsurgency training?

Shaul:

You know at a certain level the whole thing is counterinsurgency. I mean we prepared and trained to fight armies. But we also prepared to train and fight guerilla efforts and terrorist efforts. You know it's one thing to prepare to fight a tank brigade with an infantry battalion beside it, it's another thing to fight to take three people out of the house in the middle of a crowded city in the middle of the night and you're just trying to get them out of there and go and not get caught up. So our training covered a fairly wide range in that regard.

Adam:

Because, um, I guess for Israel, fighting, they fought more of a conventional warfare against Syria. And then had to deal with the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] insurgency in Lebanon as well as Gaza and the West Bank.

Shaul:

So in Lebanon, it started off more like a war, but a lot of the people who were able to move north out of the way did that as Israel was coming in, and then some of those people filtered back in behind the lines. So there were times when we were, I would say, operating against organized forces, but they weren't typically large, but they were organized and trained — they were military units. But more often it was sort of cat and mouse, it was sometimes us taking the initiative but often us being the reactive. So we got into static positions and then they attack those static positions and they attack them by sending some RPGs [Rocket-Propelled Grenade] or some rifle fire and running away, and so you respond when that happens and you go out and set up an ambush or you've got an intelligence gathering apparatus and it gives you some information and that identifies some people that are somewhere, and you go and you get them. So we were doing all of that stuff.

Adam:

And, um, I did some research and it seems like the IDF was trying to do some positive things with the people in Lebanon with, uh, civilians in terms of like food and setting out warnings in Sidon to exist before warfare would commence.

Shaul:

Yeah I mean there's that stuff where you would drop leaflets out of an airplane. Those are always tough because there's going to be pressure on the population to not leave from their own military folks of whatever sort they may be. There were projects going on that were infrastructure support projects while I was there. Lebanon is a very complex place. I had the

opportunity to talk to a lot of the Lebanese people while I was there. And at some point I began asking and before long I stopped asking 'cause I kept getting the same answer. I said, "If we could be gone tomorrow, would you want us to be out of here?" And they said, "No." And I said, "Why not?" And they would say, "Because as soon as you leave we start shooting at each other again and it's better to shoot at you." So you know it was a very odd circumstance. We were suppressing a lot of violence that would have been happening there if we hadn't been there, but we brought out own violence. It's a county of different populations, some of which are just constituent elements so they're there and they don't have to like each other. And others who are there, the Palestinians as refugees or interlopers. Very complicated place. Whoever I would have been in Lebanon, I would have been shooting at the Israelis which doesn't necessarily mean that I would want them to leave, but I would have been shooting at them.

Adam:

It's kind of, so, for them shooting at the Israelis is a way to keep them, keep the IDF in Lebanon.

Shaul:

I think it's just, you know, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. So it's okay that they're here. But I'll tell you the first time I went to Lebanon we were sent to this amazing valley — this was still when I was in basic training and there was going to be a switching of a tank battalion. The one at the time was leaving. The other one was coming in and that's a time of vulnerability so they wanted some extra help just to keep an eye on the route. So they threw us up on a mountain there and I looked down on this gorgeous valley that now had a tank base in the middle of it. And I said, "If anybody dropped that thing in my valley I would shoot it down. It doesn't matter who they are. If anybody did that." It's not necessarily typical, but if anybody came to my place and did that to it, they're my enemy.

Adam:

Do you think that kind of insight was common in your unit?

Shaul:

Um, there were all kinds of things. One of my best friends in the unit, the first time somebody got killed they didn't get killed by us, they got killed by a Lebanese Christian militia called the Phalanges and this was still, maybe we were four months into basic training or something like that, and he said, "What the hell — that persons dead. What's going on here? We shouldn't be here. What the hell?" He just couldn't make sense of it and I was sort of stuck by that, I mean we were in the Army we'd been training, we'd been sent into a war zone, that's sort of what I figured happens and somehow it hadn't clicked for him that we would be involved in that. But his thing then was that he would always minimize, minimize, minimize. And people had different orientations. I mean in my unit there were Druze kids, all across the array of Israeli society, a kid from Argentina, a kid from Canada, a kid from Germany of all places, France, Morocco. So people with different backgrounds and perspectives.

Adam:

Was there, uh, did you face a language barrier? Or did you all speak Hebrew?

Shaul:

We all spoke Hebrew. The Druze kids spoke Hebrew and Arabic and one of them struggled a little bit in Hebrew. But everybody spoke Hebrew.

Nina:

Do you feel like the conflict is a zero-sum game?

Shaul:

It doesn't have to be. And zero-sum suggests some equilibrium. It's less than zero-sum. But the ways that people are losing isn't equal, aren't equal. So I don't know that I want to talk about winners, different degrees and natures of losers. It's a bad business and it's part of the human condition, but it's bad. Any representation that I see of warfare as glory I just find hugely offensive and people who glory in it are constructed differently than I am and they worry me.

Adam:

Was there anybody in your unit that was in it for glory, so to speak?

Shaul:

Yes, but. So I'll tell you about him. A friend of mine, Hussein Amar, was a good soldier and came from a family of soldiers and wanted to have a career in the Army. He was Druze. And one thing that Druze people do is they show their loyalty to the State through service and as a non-Jewish community, there was, there is, a strong ethos of proving your worth. And Hussein did that. He stayed on. He became Lieutenant Colonel and he was killed in a clash on the Lebanese border some years after I was done in the Army.

Adam:

I'm sorry to hear that.

Shaul:

He said when he would go home for leave the first thing his father would say to him when he came in the door was, "Did you kill any terrorists?" So eager for that. That wasn't common. There was another Druze kid, his name is Ziyad Achmad, and Ziyad always felt awkward. He wasn't like Hussein, completely comfortable swimming in the broader Israeli culture. So he would hang back and Hussein was always pushing forward. Oddly when we were in Lebanon, Hussein only wanted to speak Hebrew though Arabic was his first language. And he didn't want us to call him Hussein when there were Arabs around, he just wanted to be one of the Israelis. And Ziyad who struggled with identity and feeling secure, up in Lebanon wanted us to call him Captain Ziyad and he was real eager to speak Arabic and be seen by those people to be with the winners. To be with the strong ones but as himself, as a Druze.

And that was fascinating for me to work with those guys and see their different orientations. Among the Jewish kids there were people who took pride in the unit, and we were encouraged to do that. There were people who took pride in being in the toughest places. There were people who took pride in being officers. We had competitions for various skills: who could climb the rope the most times, who could change the magazine the fastest and the guns, or break down the gun and put it together most quickly. Nobody enjoyed the violence, nobody felt during

or afterwards that there was any glory in that part of it. There could be relief, there could be satisfaction, but not glory.

And I was interested, I don't remember when it was. It wasn't at the very beginning ... At some point I realized that when people started shooting at us, the first thing I felt was anger. Because they were trying to kill me and I didn't want to die. And my reaction was to stop them from trying to kill me and then later afterwards I could feel fear, I could feel regret, I could feel satisfaction, whatever, I could feel, I could feel. But in the moment I wanted it to stop [voice raised and lays fist on the table] right now. And they had taught me what to do to make it stop. And that was coming more from anger than from fear. In the dispassionate moment, like I said, if I were them I'd be shooting at me. So I didn't feel angry about it when it's not happening, I recognize the dynamics and it makes sense, but in the moment I want it to stop.

Nina:

What led you to leave?

Shaul:

I got married. And I made my wife a deal of sorts. I said we'll give it a try here for a certain period of time and if it works for you great and if it doesn't work for you we'll leave. That's what we did. It wouldn't have been ethical to make her stay having entered into the marriage with that understanding.

Nina:

You now teach a class through the Conflict Resolution [program] on the Northern Ireland conflict and your wife teaches a class on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Why? Why Northern Ireland and not Israel-Palestine?

Shaul:

Well there's a bunch of reasons for that. So her research is over there and she has various strong ties over there, so it's her area as well. So that's the logic in her doing it. My doing Northern Ireland, I got hooked on Northern Ireland initially as an analogue to the Israel-Palestine stuff but then it just became very compelling as a research area for a whole bunch of reasons for me, and then I was asked to teach a course on it so I did. So that's why. But it's also at this point easier for me to teach about Northern Ireland than it is for me to teach about Israel-Palestine because Northern Ireland, though they have a long way to go, is a somewhat optimistic framework and the Israel-Palestine one much less so. And you don't only teach optimism. All the stuff I teach is depressing pretty much. But Northern Ireland doesn't have anything to do with my identity and you know there's a Steve Goodman song — "It's not hard to get along with somebody else's troubles, they're not the ones that keep you awake at night" — so I teach Northern Ireland.

Adam:

What attracted you to teach about Northern Ireland?

Shaul:

I began doing research there as they were finalizing their peace agreement stuff and moving forward and they have moved forward. And so I'm able to speak from my own work

[about] a really interesting period in their history and the people there have been incredibly good to me, so they've given me a whole lot that's very rich that I can share with my students. It's just a conflict where anybody who's interested in conflict resolution — if you're interested in family conflict, workplace conflict, budget allocations and all of these kinds of things — it's all there in the background of their ethno-territorial conflict. So you can use it to teach about all kinds of things to all kinds of people.

Nina:

Did your opinion about the conflict change during your time in the Army and since then

Shaul:

No, I wouldn't say so. I went into the Army believing in a two-state solution, I came out of the Army believing in a two state solution. What the Army did for me in some respects was it told me that even in a very small space the politicians are so removed from the on the ground reality that they're making decisions or they're not making decisions with an adequate data set. So one of the things it did to me was to say, I can maybe study these kinds of things and can generate some information that will help them to make smaller mistakes. That's my objective. I don't know that I can give them prescriptions for solutions. I don't know that there are solutions. But maybe they can make smaller mistakes or make mistakes less frequently so the Army taught me some of that stuff.

I mentioned earlier that I had the chance to talk with a lot of people in Lebanon, so there I am at the roadblock and I'm checking people's IDs and maybe they've got a bomb in the car or maybe somebody's got a gun on the floor, so I have to do my job, but at the same time, I told you, I wanted to treat people with respect and see them as human beings and I felt bad for them. So I'm talking with them — and this is in some respects a lead on into the Inside-Out [Prison Exchange program] stuff — even though I'm on one side, they're on the other side, I'm the one with the power, I'm the one with the gun, I'm the one in their country. We can talk. And that was important to me. Really I think in some ways it flowed from manners. I was raised to treat people with respect, to be concerned for the rights of those who are weak. And there I am with the gun and I'm trying to be decent to people and that taught me a lot.

[End of interview]