Surviving a Massacre: Eyewitness Report Of The Massacre In The Sabra and Shatila Refugee Camps, Beirut, 1982

Including A Report About The Situation In Beirut During The Months Before The Massacre, And The Invasion Of Western Beirut By Israeli Forces.

This account was originally handwritten, approximately 4 weeks after the massacre in 1982. I have recently added a few lines about the political situation for the younger generations that may not have any knowledge about the events, as well as some lines about the psychological effect of the events have had on my life. (Nov. 2006),

It is now the year 2007, 25 years have passed since the massacre, and I have added some more comments as well as some reports about paramilitary activities. As a citizen of Germany, and what was then the BRD or Western Germany, enrolling into foreign armed forces and services was illegal. I hope that after so many years some of the truth can be told without to many repercussions. 25 years have passed, and I feel that we need to be able to speak more frankly about our own experiences with this part of contemporary history. I wish the government of the now united Germany would grant a general amnesty to “all” who were engaged in activities that could be related to Germany's status as a divided country and conflicts that arose due to the confrontation between the Capitalist and Communist camps. Much more truth could be told, needs to be told, and many more aspects of history uncovered. Truth is in my opinion the best basis for reconciliation. In many respects I feel that my advisory work on health and mental health issues as well as peace and reconciliation, and politics has been successful. In respect of South Africa it was. With respect to Palestine I feel somehow that I have failed miserably. I hope some future publications and work will have more and very much needed effect for these wonderful people. (Nov. 2007)
Dr. Christof Lehmann

July 2012. 30 years after the events that changed my life forever, and the events stand as clear for me as 30 years ago. It is very seldom that I am looking at this report. It still hurts. What hurts the most is that my pledge and strive for preventing that events like the massacre in Sabra and Shatila are repeated have been utter failure. The war that is being waged on Syria, as I am writing, is a repetion of those massacres. The cast of actors has changed. The victims are not Palestinians but the people of the sole Arab Nation which consistently and consequently has supported the Palestinian Cause. They have paid and are paying a price in blood and devastation now. If there is anything I want to convey to young Palestinians and people world wide at this time, it is that a defeat or substantial destabilization of Syria will be equivalent to the end for realistic aspirations for a free and independent Palestine. Besides that, I hope, that some of you will pick up the torch and strive for true justice with respect to war crimes and the most serious crimes known to mankind. As long as the bullies can murder with impunity, there will be a thousand Sabra and Shatila’s yet to come, and that thought is for me unbearable.
Dr. Christof Lehmann

N.B.: Please notice, that this is a very personal account and does not represent my political, or professional thoughts today. Please also note, that discretion may be advised and that reading the text may be emotionally distressing. Due to legal considerations, and considerations of privacy, some passages had to be altered for the public edition.
The days from June and up to the 15th of September
The training, friendship and first baptism of fire.

A very good friend of mine, Nadim El-Khadoumi, who was a young Palestinian from Syria, had invited me to come to Lebanon through Syria in June 1982. Nadim was part of a prominent Palestinian family, politically active and a young, idealistic as well as pragmatic communist. We were very good friends and comrades. My plan was primarily to volunteer in the health services that were established by the PLO in Beirut, namely the Gaza Hospital, and to gather data for a study about the feasibility of community based mental health services in Palestinian refugee camps. I was to undergo some basic military training too, since it was considered that defending the camps might become necessary at some time.

Many, especially younger people today, have little understanding about the fact that the civil war was not a conflict about nominations, between Christians and Muslims, but a conflict between rich and poor, between a capitalist camp that was mainly backed by the USA and Israel, and a socialist camp, that was mainly backed by the USSR, Syria and Egypt as well as the GDR or Eastern Germany. The majority of the socioeconomically deprived people in Beirut and Lebanon however, happened to be Muslims. In Beirut the majority of the socioeconomically under-privileged were in were living in the western part of the city.

I arrived in Lebanon via Syria. Friends of Nadim met me in Damascus, Syria. We drove along the Damascus – Beirut road until we came to the area near the border. One of Nadims friends, who also was a member of a Syria based Palestinian organization, the XXXX-XX, which is designated a "terrorist organization" in the West, took me across the border at night time and on foot.

We crossed the border to Lebanon via the hills, not to have any problems with anyone on the main road. Traveling along the Lebanese part of the Damascus – Beirut road was everything but safe at that time. We met Nadim on the Lebanese side. He had a car and we drove to Beirut via some necessary detours along smaller roads and areas that were relatively safe according to what ever information he had.

When reaching the outskirts of the city it took us hours to get into western Beirut and we were shot at on several occasions. Shooting came not only from the barricades and checkpoints like that at Horch, which one was wise to avoid; It could come any time, anywhere and out of the blue.

We knew one another rather well and both of us were young, idealistic communists. I was 23 years old, Nadim was a year older and would have become 25 that November if he had lived that long. He had made a kind of home in south-west Beirut. A friend of Nadims father had a yacht that had been standing on land for years since he couldn’t get it down to the water safely and if he brought it to the water it would be stolen or destroyed. The harbor area was an area of intense clashes between the christian side and the progressive forces.

One must understand that the division was less between Christians and Muslims but amongst rich and poor, conservative and socialist forces. The PLO and it’s member organizations were belonging to this progressive, revolutionary, socialist bock. Western Beirut was an area that was denominationally mixed of Muslims, as well as Christians, whereas Eastern Beirut was almost exclusively inhabited by Christians. Horrible “ID-Card killings” at checkpoints and barricades had almost emptied east Beirut for Muslims as well as members of progressive fractions.

As a matter of fact many people who fought with the Muslim, Socialist, and Communist and Palestinian forces were Christians. The true division was the division between Capitalism and Socialism, rich and poor, conservative and progressive. To a large extend the blocks also reflected
the involvement of the USA and Israel and others on one hand and the USSR, Syria, Egypt and others on the other side.

The yacht that we called home at that time was an intermistic, cheap and relatively safe home where we intended to stay until we would find other accommodations. It was especially safe because the man who owned it had hired people to protect his precious yacht and we often cracked hilarious jokes about our “bodyguards”. In fact they could not have cared less about us or the yacht. It was a paid job with a gun. There were plenty of guns and little work, and guarding the yacht was probably better than fighting at the front line.

In spite of the civil war and the IDF troubles we actually had a rather good time together and I figured that I would look at the first weeks as a kind of vacation in which I could gather some military experience before I would go and volunteer for the health services and begin gathering data for my study.

Both Nadim and I took part in military training organized by the XXXX-XX, which is a Syrian backed organization with traditional links to the PFLP and PLO. Training was hard but effective, and we knew by then that we would possibly need all skills that we could pick up in combat soon. So, we paid attention. Besides that I was particularly interested in, how the very realistic training and training in so close proximity to actual combat would influence the prevention of combat related post-traumatic stress and similar difficulties amongst the troops. Well, I am sorry, but I am a psychologist, and like my profession.

We were full of ideals and hopes for a better future for the Palestinians, for Lebanon, for Germany and for the world, and we were willing to act on our ideals. I was grateful that Nadim had introduced me to people of the XXXX-XX which was not exactly easy for a foreigner like me.

Khalid was to become my next commanding officer who was glad to see that a German boy was willing to work for the Palestinian cause. We developed an intense and close friendship. We had regular trips into the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, not fare away from our intermistic but cosy home.

We often visited Khalid and his wife and daughters in the Shatila and I felt like being accepted into their family. Under the instructions of Khalid we prepared for taking part in the defense of the camps, should the Israelis decide to enter West-Beirut and enter the camps.

It was under the leadership of Khalid, that Nadim and I took part in two battles against the Israeli army, and Khalid was a great officer and leader who knew to inspire us, to win our confidence, and man who would never demand any actions from us, that he would not be willing to take on himself. The first serious battle we experienced was in the Khalde area where we tried to stop the advancing Israeli forces. After we opened fire and stopped the advance of the troops and tanks we were pounded by air, from the sea, as well as from artillery and tanks for hours. The entire Khalde area was literally turned into rubble before the Israeli forces could advance any further. It was terrifying, and I missed many comrades there. Most terrifying was the brutality with which the obviously civilian houses and people who tried to flee were pounded from the air. It was intensely frustrating to be so hopelessly outgunned.

In the end we could not stop the Israeli forces from advancing any more. We ran out of supplies, and were simply overwhelmed. I remember having seriously mixed emotions about the battle. On one hand we had succeeded in grinding the advance of one of the mightiest armies to a hold for a while, but at what cost. Most who took part in this battle on our side had died. It was terrible to see how few we were when we finally withdrew.
The second battle Nadim and I took part in under the direct command of Khalid was at the Horse Track in Beirut. The Israelis began advancing under the cover of a cease fire agreement. The Israelis used to use cease fire agreements for advancing, and when met with resistance they would blame our side for breaking the ceasefire agreement. And of course the free press of the West would buy the stories. On this particular day though, they ran into a brilliantly prepared trap.

I am not in the business of glorifying war. It is dirty and cruel. However, war is a fact of life and one should be allowed to relate to the brilliance of strategy and tactics as well as to it’s cruelties.

I really admire the command that was responsible for our tactics that day for their courage, for discipline and for brilliant planning. Again we were pounded by the Israeli air force and artillery. The barrage was so heavy and intense, that staying in our positions seemed to defy all logic. It was horrifying, but we were told to keep our heads as low as we could and stay put, so we stayed.

After the barrage the entire area was in flames. It was so hot that almost everything flammable caught fire. Breathing was almost impossible and it felt as if the lungs were burning. It was hard to resist the natural response of the body – panic. At one point my gun was so hot that it hurt touching it. The asphalt was melting and even the streets were burning. The barrage stopped only when the Israeli troops were about 150 – 200 meters away from our positions and advancing. We only began opening fire when the Israeli soldiers were about 100 to 75 meters away from us, and we really hit them with everything we had and we hit them badly.

I have never taken pride in shooting at any human being, and it is terrible, I don’t even like hunting, I am a vegetarian because I love animals, but we stopped the Israeli Army that day, and in spite of everything it felt good to celebrate victory that day. That one day we felt, that we had defeated one of the world’s mightiest armies in a battle.

Both battles were ferocious battles and I would not wish the hell of those battles on anyone. Not even my enemy. Nobody in his right mind would wish to experience war on anyone. However this was war, battles in warfare, and incomparable to slaughter and war crimes. They can not be compared to the murder on, the slaughter and rape of innocent civilians that took place in Sabra and Shatila.

In the end an international agreement was brokered and the PLO soldiers were leaving Lebanon. Responsibility for the safety of the Palestinian Refugee Camps was now transferred to an international force. An international force that left Lebanon fare too early, leaving the Camps and Western Beirut open for atrocities from the Christian militias and the Israelis. One of the consequences was that the massacre in Sabra and Shatila became possible.

After the PLO soldiers were evacuated there were several arms caches left in west Beirut, and it was relatively easy to be supplied with necessary equipment if wanted or needed. However, most of the people in the camps were unarmed; many of them were either in their teens, old man, and women.

The defense of the camps, after the evacuation of the PLO-soldiers can at best be described as rudimentary. That there should have been any organized military structure of 2000 man left in the camps or that there had been 2000 terrorists hiding in the Sabra and Shatila camps, as some put it, was nothing but a lie that should justify the unspeakable acts that took place during the massacre.

The fact of the matter is that we basically had nothing but small arms, old Kalashnikovs from Bulgaria and a variety of other mostly older equipment. Khalid had presented me a used German made Heckler and Koch MP5, and seemed rather proud about the fact that he could present a German made gun to me, a German who was willing to defend his people. We really appreciated
one another and I grew close to him, his wife and children. Khalid was a fantastic officer and a wonderful friend to Nadim and me.

I began my study and volunteer work about three weeks before the battle in the Khalde area. It was a fantastic experience to help at the Gaza and in the camps, and we were quite a few foreigners there. The Gaza Hospital was a wonderful place even though Psychiatric and Psychological Care was rudimentary at best. It would be an enormous challenge to take part in developing a community based psychiatry and psychology program. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn, and I learned a lot, not least about working in international teams, with many languages as well as many different cultural backgrounds. I learned the deep meaning of Levine’s concept about “Worry Work”.

Had I not been too traumatized after the massacre, and had the Gaza not been devastated, I would probably have stayed there for two or three years, but it was at and around the hospital that some of the worst atrocities took place, and I could never make myself return to the hospital with confidence after the massacre. To this very day I have not been able to return even to Beirut. I simply can’t. The massacre, following the assassination of Bashir Gemayel was a turning point, not only in respect to my immediate plans, but a turning point for my entire life.

The assassination of Sheik Bashir El Gemayel, newly elected President of Lebanon.

The bomb blast that killed Sheikh Bashir El Gemayel the 14th of September was quickly blamed on the Palestinians. If any Palestinians really can be blamed for his death is a question that is puzzling my mind that day today. Gemayel had won the Presidential elections in Lebanon with massive support from Israel and the West, but first of all he was the leader of the Phalangists militia, who were the ones that were committing most of the actual killings, rapes and atrocities during the massacre following his assassination.

Of course, he was Israel’s man in a certain sense, Syria’s man in another. Most importantly in context of his assassination is to remember, that is was Israel that helped him to win the Lebanese Presidency, that Israel tried to force him into signing a peace treaty with Israel, and that he denied signing a peace treaty with Israel on the grounds that he could not do this without proper legislative procedures.

Besides, signing a peace treaty with Israel would have been political suicide. It would have cost him too dearly in respect and sympathies inside the fragile Lebanon as well as in terms of support from Lebanon’s Arab neighbors. Signing a peace treaty without consulting the regional Arab governments would have been perceived as betrayal of the Arab cause.

The Israelis were obviously disappointed about the fact that the man whom they had helped to power in Lebanon did not pay his debt or give in to Israel’s blackmail attempts. Signing a peace treaty with Israel would have alienated his Arab neighbors and would have destabilized the already explosive situation in the country, but beside this, I think Gemayel was a true nationalist who loved his country and a man who had his pride as well as his price. As to the question who actually assassinated Bashir El Gemayel, and if it were the Palestinians that stood behind his assassination, I will say this:

“Anybody who had studied the Mossad and it’s tradition of False Flag Operations has at least some reasonable doubts about, whether his assassination was not the work of the Mossad.”

One thing is certain though. Whoever really was to blame for the early death of the young President of Lebanon, Sheik Bashir El Gemayel, the proxy of the Israeli’s and the West, - it were the
Palestinian people who where the ones who had to pay for it in their blood.

So, when we heard the news about his assassination Nadim and I knew that it would be a matter of days, maybe hours, before defending the camps could become a necessity and we coordinated our activities with Khalid. We were nervous, everybody was nervous, but people were used to war and most people went on with their daily routines. So did Nadim and I.

The Massacre  
Wednesday, 15th of September.

When the Israelis entered west Beirut the main question for us was not whether it was worrying, that the Israelis could enter west Beirut without much or with almost no resistance. There was spread fighting going on but everybody was aware that it was a loosing battle and that there was not much of an organized front. Also we were not meant to be defending west Beirut but to defend the camps themselves if necessary. We were fare more concerned about the fact that the Israelis seemed to have an exact picture about where to look for arms caches,- that some friendly people, like a vendor at the market suddenly turned out to be working with the Israelis, pointing out arms caches and defensive positions for them. This worried us, and the question if they had as many spies and collaborators inside of the camps.

I cannot judge how much it worried the ordinary Palestinian who was trying to make a normal living; somehow, most of them probably never noticed such details or were not bothered by them. The fighting men had left, and there were not many people left who actually were concerned with the security of the camps.

This night Nadim and I were woken up at by the screaming sound of jets. We used to listen to them and to look where they eventually would bomb or attack. Getting up we observed rather much air activity overhead. Our “bodyguards” told us about increased military movements and activities, people told us that the Israelis moved into south-west Beirut in force and closer to the camps; and that some troops from the Lebanese army were being transported towards the camps too.

Something was going to happen, that was sure, but there was very much confusion about what was going on, who was moving, from where to where. Another thing that was sure was that we should hurry towards the camps without delay and contact Khalid.

The closer we came towards the camps the more military presence we could see. There were Israeli troops and Christian militia from the Phalangists. Seeing them we ”knew” that it was now they wanted to retaliate for the death of their leader, Bashir Gemayel, and that they probably wanted to be paid in Palestinian blood. We were nervous, but ready to put up some defense with whatever means there were left; we were prepared, but nothing, nothing whatsoever could have prepared me, Nadim or any other person for what was going to happen during that and the following days.

When we came closer to the camps we could already see checkpoints in the North of the camps, so we decided to get to a small southern entrance that was not so well known. There were checkpoints there too, so we went on trying to find our way in without being spotted. I was carrying the gun I got from Khalid and didn’t have any wish to explain to some Phalangist or IDF man why I was carrying it around.

We were sneaking around, trying to find a way in. Close to the Arab University we were spotted by a soldier who was standing beside a light tank. He shouted at us. I didn’t understand what he
shouted, but Nadim was running, and so was I. It took us a while before we could make our way into the camps from the West. There were Israeli tanks close to the Sports Stadium and some Phalangists who were having a kind of break were obviously to busy drinking and smoking hashish to see us. So, we managed to sneak our way around them and to enter into one of the smaller entrances into the small alleys of the camps western side.

Inside the camps life seemed surprisingly undisturbed by the over flights the military movements and the checkpoints. In the alleys we talked to some people, and some were not aware of what was going on at all, some told that they had been harassed by some Phalangist militiamen, some were nervous, and some were calmed down by the fact that the Israelis also were there. The day seemed to be perceived as just one more day of the seemingly endless war. I recall telling Nadim: “It is surprising how people maintain some sense of normality in such conditions”, and that we were laughing about my use of the word normality, giving the fact that the “normal” situation in Sabra and Shatila was desolate.

It was approximately 7:30 in the morning when we arrived at Khalid’s house, close to the main square in Shatila. I never really understood why, but Nadim and Khalid had a very vivid discussion. Probably it was about Khalid, complaining about our late arrival. They were seriously mad at each other and none of them bothered to translate anything, so I didn’t bother to interfere and decided to wait until someone would tell me all about their discussion.

After they had calmed down a little, Khalid left the building in order to bring his wife and his two daughters to a safer place. Nadim told me that we were close to a radio station and that Khalid said the station would probably be one of the first places to be shelled if anything serious would happen. That is why he wanted to bring his wife and his daughters to a safer place, outside the camps. Nadim and I would never see any of them again. I wish they had gotten safely out of Sabra and Shatila and gotten away but I doubt it. I never managed to find any of them later on.

Shortly after Khalid had left the building with his wife and his two daughters we heard the first artillery fire and some grenades that exploded in close proximity to the house we were in. Probably Khalid was right about his worries about the proximity to the radio station. The house had two floors. Some friends of Khalid and a couple of XXXX-XX people were downstairs, having a meeting about the situation. Nadim told me that the general consensus was that the Phalangists probably wanted blood and they were discussing details about what to do. Then somebody came to the house and one of the people downstairs came upstairs and told us about the radio station close by, being targeted.

Nadim took two rifles and ammunition and other gear from the cupboard and passed me one of the rifles and an ammunition vest and lots of rounds. So, I prepared the gun I had gotten from Khalid and the Kalashnikov for combat. Honestly I was scared like hell, but I think I wasn’t the only one who worried. We were rather nervous and we were talking a lot of nonsense, trying to cheer each other up until a grenade exploded very close to us. I don’t know how, but somehow we rapidly developed some form of nonverbal communication, not to be confused with close combat hand signals. This was something else. An understanding that our lives depended on each other and assurances.

We were used to use close combat hand signals and often made jokes using it as sign language. A look at one another or gestures was often saying more then words ever could. We were waiting for Khalid to come back and tried to get some rest meanwhile. Nadim told me that Khalid had made an agreement with some Fatah people about what to do if the camps needed to be defended.

It was about 09.30. Khalid had not yet come back and intuitively we understood that he wouldn’t.
The shelling had now become more intense. Khalid had instructed Nadim to go to some Fatah people if he wouldn’t come back in time, so Nadim went and when he came back we went into the direction towards the stadium, where some Fatah people some of the men who were in Khalid’s house and others had organized a defense position.

People there were rather badly armed by any standards. Some old Kalashnikovs and that type of weaponry. I remember one guy in particular, who had nothing but a shotgun so I gave him the Kalashnikov I had and kept the Heckler and Koch I had gotten from Khalid.

Besides the shelling there was at times rather intense machine gun fire, but what worried me most were the snipers. They were firing artillery and howitzer fire from an area close to the stadium, where the Israelis had their tanks, and I think there were heavy machine gun and sniper positions in the stadium itself too. It was irritating because we felt that there was fire coming in from there, but first of all we couldn’t really find out where exactly it came from, and for the second, our weapons were more or less useless for that distance. The sniper fire was the worst. I saw a young man being killed another one was wounded and yet another one right next to me was badly injured too. The guy who was hit by the sniper was standing up and suddenly his head exploded and he fell over the legs of a man who was sitting on the ground. It was the first time that I saw a man being shot in the head that close to me and it was like in a movie, a real explosion as if a grenade had exploded inside of his skull.

We were hopelessly outgunned. What could we do against howitzers, machine guns and snipers? All we could really do was to keep our heads low and hope to prevent them from entering the camps if they came any closer. Nadim was arguing with an older man, he was about 65 or so. I think his name was Eyad, and a young girl called Haniah. He wanted to move closer to the Stadium but Eyad and Haniah told him to shut up and to keep his head down.

Nadim and I were staying at that position until late in the afternoon, when we went to get some food, some rest, and to clean our guns, and to get prepared for getting back the next day and not to forget to carry more ammunition to the place on our way back.

It was only when we left the position that we realized how extensive the damage around us was and how many people actually had been injured and killed. Some houses had turned to rubble and here and there twisted bodies and body parts were visible amidst the rubble and dust. What was worst than, was seeing the children, injured ones, dead ones, and desperate parents crying out to some god into whom many believed, and whose ears, if he exists, must have been deafened by the shellfire.

When we got back close to the square there was a teenage girl who desperately tried to pull her wounded mother, or aunt or woman out of the line of sniper fire while some others didn’t dare to go and help. Nadim and I rushed to help them, but when we were only a few meters away they both were hit and after we had dragged them to a safer place behind the corner to an alley we found out that all we could do for them was to say a silent prayer for their relatives who had lost them. I was covered in blood from the woman I had carried and I said to Nadim “they are killing everybody, indiscriminately” and it was then that I was afraid that he would loose his mind. He was trying to find words, but started laughing and crying hysterically and then he shouted at me “tell me something new, tell me something new!” and we sat down besides the two women and we cried together, worse then I ever cried in my life before that day. I don’t know if I got insane in that moment, but I was stroking the girl’s hair for her to look a little bit better and held her in my arms as to keep her safe until we were surrounded by a group of people who helped us up on our feet again.

From there on, the way back to the house was like walking in a dream. Only after getting into the
house, after realizing that Khalid never had come back, and after seeing the people, who had found shelter in the house, we regained some sense of reality. I understood that their house had received a direct hit. Two of them were seriously wounded and I tried to help comforting them somehow. One of them, who had been hit by shrapnel in the guts died shortly after we had arrived. He was an older man and I forgot his name now. I did what I could for the other wounded man, he was even younger then I was. He was maybe 17-18 years old. I tried to calm him down; everything would be fine and so on. All the lies you tell in such a situation. I never learned his name though. Then we made a stretcher from some sheets and blankets and two of the people went to bring him to the Gaza hospital. They never returned either.

In the evening the shelling calmed down and we only heard sporadic artillery shots and explosions and some small rifle fire every now and then.

**Thursday the 16th of September.**

I managed to sleep a little bit but woke up from the sounds of airplanes overhead again. The night was lit like daylight from the flares and everything inside the house had a kind of bizarre shape from the intense light and the sharp, wandering shadows.

Somebody passed by to tell us that the camps now were sealed completely and that there was no way in or out any more. Nadim translated for me and we were laughing hysterically when I said “tell me something new”.

We were told to get back to the defense position again by 15’o clock in the afternoon and that we should stop joking and better get some rest now. So, we were good boys and tried to get some sleep again and cleaned our guns when we couldn’t sleep any longer. We were worried because we were hearing some sporadic shooting, closer then expected, silence again, then shooting again, so we prepared ourselves to get out and go to the position earlier.

It was about 14 o’clock, and we were about to get back to the defense position, when the man that came to us at night came back and told us, that the Phalangists and maybe the Lebanese army had entered the camps in force. There was shooting in the streets, that they were massacring people and that there was no way to get back anywhere close to the position we had held yesterday any more.

We asked what to do and were told to protect ourselves and neighbors if we could, or try to hide. Then our messenger went again, probably to get the word around. Nadim and I were at a loss about what to do next. There didn’t seem to be any more or less organized resistance any longer, and if there was any at all, we had not heard about it.

This moment of recognizing that there was no more defense structure to rely upon was extremely frightening. We were on our own now. For better or for worse, from now on we could only rely on our selves, and we were scared. Nadim and I stayed at the first floor, looking out of the window. We were trying to make some sense of what was going on around us. We could hear some sporadic shooting and shouting and crying, interrupted by silence and we discussed that we would better fight then being butchered like sheep.

It was about 14.30 or 15 o´ clock, when we saw the first soldiers in the streets. We hid behind the window, not to be seen. They were five, wearing uniforms with the Phalangists insignia dragging a girl, maybe 10-11 years old beating her up badly while ripping her cloth to peaces. One of the soldiers was dragging her by the hair, and they began beating her with their rifles and when she fell they held her down on the ground. They started raping her in the middle of the street and seemed to cheer each other up as in frenzy while she was pleading and screaming. Nadim and I had gotten
enough. We knew they would rape and kill her. We were looking at each other as if to get some reassurance from each other. Training took over. We crashed the glass in the window with our rifles and began firing close to them, not to risk injuring the girl. They were really surprised that somebody fired at them and ran. She managed to make a run for her life, so did the soldiers, and we began shooting after them out of the window, as they ran for cover. I will maybe never know, but I think we injured, two of them and I really hope the girl got away and stayed alive.

After 20 minutes or so they still seemed to have disappeared. We could only hear some automatic rifle fire farther away, and we were actually calming down already when there came an almighty bang. And that’s when the lights went out.

I must have been unconscious, and when I woke up the entire first floor where we were seemed to have gone. The sealing was blown off and walls were crumbled. I was hanging across a hole in the floor and Nadim was on top of me. We were both covered by parts of the walls and roof and stuck. Nadim was alive and breezing but obviously badly injured and unconscious. I was so stuck under Nadim and the rubble, that I could not move any part of my body except for my left arm and my head. I could feel that I was bleeding badly from my left leg. I was almost completely deafened, but I could hear some shooting and screaming from below.

I went in and out of consciousness and the next I really realized was that grenades exploded downstairs, and that soldiers came in and killed people there. Then I could hear them come up the stairs, and I tried not to breeze, keep my eyes closed and stay as quiet as I could, not to be discovered or to be taken for dead. They had obviously seen us, because I could hear them whisper something. My ears were deafened, but I could hear that whispering by them. Then they started firing five or six shots and were whispering again. I was holding my breath and kept my eyes close. I could feel that Nadim was being hit in the head since his head was on top of the left side of my head. I could feel his brain and blood running over my face. It was warm. I almost died from fear, and even if I had wanted to shout or to cry I think I would not have been able to make a sound.

When they had gone I saw that Nadim was missing almost the entire right side of his face and head. I can’t explain it, but in a way it was OK as long as I felt his blood and brain was still warm. One gets crazy or insane in such moments. I know that I did. I don’t know if it was the chock, the loss of blood or both, but I lost consciousness again and did not regain consciousness before Friday evening.

I often wished that I had died from the explosion (and many years later this thought is still striking me once in a while). I would have been spared for the events that followed, and which seriously made me have my doubts about humanity. So fare I had seen war and war crimes. War itself seems to be a crime against humanity, and though, it is something very human – or at least, that is what my colleague psychologists try to teach at the institutes.

The fact that crimes of war are committed does not surprise me. But what I had to witness during these days, and particularly what I witnessed after being wounded were not crimes of war. It was crimes against the essence of what we usually perceive as humanity, civilization and culture. It was beyond any normal comprehensibility for man and it was this lack of comprehensibility that was leaving the deepest scars and traumas.

**Friday, the 17th of September.**

I woke up in a bed and it took me a while to come to my senses and to grasp where I was. I was in a hall, in a hospital corridor at the Gaza Hospital. The place was devastated and in chaos. There were
a lot of people there. When I had gathered a little strength I managed to find someone who could understand English. She was a middle aged woman who was speaking surprisingly well English. She told me that I was in the Gaza hospital and that terrible things were going on outside; that she was on the way out of the Hospital because extremely terrible things went on outside and inside the Hospital and that I better should get as far away as possible from the Hospital and the camps. She left and when she went away she told me that she would tell someone speaking English to come to me. I really hope she made it through the hell and managed to stay alive.

After a while two hospital workers came, an Arab speaking Doctor and English speaking nurse came up to me and checked on my leg and my blood pressure. I explained that I was volunteering there and wanted to do something, but they told me that I should get away from the hospital and if possible out of the camps, and that I was in no condition to help anyone; That I was told that I was in no condition to do anything good there came like a chock and also that haunted me for years. I had seen the Doctor before, but did not know her well. When I said I would be OK and wanted to help she became very agitated and told me in no uncertain terms that “She” was the Doctor and that she found that I was in no condition to do any good there now.

The nurse changed the bandage on my leg and the Doctor went away and came back with a pair of trousers which she showed to me before she put them on a bundle with my cloth, pointing out that I should try to get dressed and get out of the place.

The nurse asked me some curious questions about whom I am what I am doing here and so forth and shook her head as if she wanted to tell me that I am crazy, trying to cheer me up. I think she wanted to check how well I was able to handle my situation, how much I was aware about my situation and how bad a concussion I had. I became agitated because I knew that she had seen me working at the hospital before, so why ask all those silly questions.

I was really in a state of chock and don’t know exactly what I answered. I remember that I started to talk about my volunteer work and that I really wanted to stay and help. I also recall that there was a moment when I could not remember the name of the city that I was born in when she asked me.

I simply could not remember the name of the city. I clearly remember the moment when I realized in what a bad condition I actually was, and being wounded and in a chock, and not being able to help was really something that scared me and took hard on my emotions so I cried badly and she comforted me and got me to calm down again. But I was dizzy and when I realized that I could not be of any help I just wanted to sleep.

The nurse and the Doctor were again talking to one another and the Doctor went away. The nurse made it very clear to me that I should not stay here, that it was dangerous and that I should get out of the hospital and try to get out of the camp somehow if possible and come back when I am better.

She also told me to get rid of my military ammunition vest since I would be shot at immediately if I was seen with it. I wasn’t really aware of my situation, and neither was I aware of what went on outside the hospital. I was in a state of chock, tired and weak.

After I had agreed that I better not stay she actually became very friendly and warm and hugged me goodbye after we had talked a little about the situation at the hospital and we agreed to meet again when I was in a better condition and returned.

She told me that some of the staff had been killed by sniper and artillery fire and that the situation was bad. That many people had been killed outside the hospital and even inside, and that they expected to be raided again and worse. I think she was called Frederike, but I am not sure. I hope
she survived and that I will meet her some day. We wished each other all the best wishes and I told her that I really appreciated her courage and work. She went away after she asked me a couple of times if I will manage.

All this memory is rather confused. I remember though clearly, that I made a joke before leaving, that “normally” you bring sick people to the hospital and send them away when they are better instead of sending me away to come back when I feel well. What hospital! We had a good laugh then. I had gotten up meanwhile, and I was looking at a little pile with my clothes and some new clothes for me and my things. What probably explains what a bad condition I was in is that I couldn’t understand where my MP 5 had gone?

It was probably good that the nurse had disposed of my military vest. Then I found Nadim`s scarf amongst my clothes and I collapsed in tears again. Some people shook me and the nurse came back and told me friendly, but in no uncertain terms to get out and try to save my arse now!!! There were many, really many badly wounded people at the hospital but I was in no condition to help anyone and it felt terrible to leave. Until this day I have moments when the memory of not being able to help is overwhelming me emotionally.

It was now about 21.00 o’clock, Friday evening. There were many people who had tried to find refuge in and around the hospital but there were also many dead people all over near and around the hospital. Some of the dead were people who probably had died on the way to the hospital and had been left there. But it was also all to clear that there had taken terrible massacres place outside the hospital. Entire family groups were lying dead executed; gunned down after obviously being tortured.

Some girls must have been raped right there outside the hospital and then been murdered. There was one girl, lying dead amongst a group, probably her family, and it was clear that she had been tortured before being killed. Her pants were still hanging on her left food, and it was clear that she had been raped and murdered right there. The image is still haunting me in my dreams, 25 years (now 30 years ) later. I remember stumbling over dead people several times. I was weak and dizzy. I remember moments when I was shaking uncontrollably and my legs seemed to give way under me. The scene outside the hospital was terrible.

I approached a girl who stood not far from the hospital. She was about 20-25 years old and extremely well looking. I had seen her couple of times before near the house where Khalid and his family stayed. I asked her if she had a cigarette, since she was smoking, and she gave me one. We talked about the situation and what had happened since yesterday. Her family had gone to a shelter and had been murdered there.

She told me that they were shooting at the hospital and that shells were fired at it too. She also told me that there were terrible things going on all around and that the soldiers probably would come here again soon to kill people here. I asked her if there was any way to get out of the camps that she knew of but she said, no way. Try to stay alone and hide. I would like to stay with you but we have a better chance to be invisible if we are alone. She told me to find an empty house or a ruin where they already had been, to get in and keep my head down. She gave me a kiss on my forehead; we smiled, wished each other the best of luck and went our own ways.

I could not really concentrate on finding any real strategy for surviving the situation. Probably I was too weak from the loss of blood and too much in a chock to make any rational decision. In spite of the advice given to me by the girl I tried to make my way to the northern entrances to leave the camp. On the way there I actually didn’t see much of the Phalangists and I was wondering if they had some kind of break, if the worst was over or what.
It was dark, and I tried to stay in the shadows, - at least two times I stumbled over dead persons. When I got close to the main northern entrance I saw that there was no way to get out alive. There was one group maybe ten of the militia man and half of them were throwing handgranades at dead people. I decided better to get away from there and follow the advice of the girl I met at the Gaza. The men at the entrance were throwing handgranades at some people who were lying dead in the street. So I figured that they would most certainly throw grenades at me who was alive if they already try to murder the dead. It was madness.

I don’t know why, maybe because it was one of the only places that I really knew well or where I really had close friends, but I was beginning to make my way back to where Khalid had lived. I could hear some shooting and screaming, and sometimes I could hear big trucks. I tried to stay as much as possible in the smaller alleys to have more possibilities for cover. It was terrible, there were many places with piles of dead people, ruined houses and bodies mingled up in ruins, and it began to smell badly. I had gotten used to the smell of blood mixed with cordite, but people were beginning to rot in the streets and nobody gave a damn.

The worst thing I saw was when I came into an alley, not fare away from the main square. There was, I think it was a family lying outside the house and I could hear screams of a woman who was being raped and men shouting from inside the house. Outside the house there were three militia men and they had a child with them and shouted as mad at each other. Then two of them took the child, it was about two years old and screaming. One took the feet and one took the head, and then they pulled in the child and turned around as if they were dancing. The child stopped screaming, they had broken its neck. Then the one who held the head threw it up into the air and the third man was firing at it. They were probably drunk or drugged because the child fell on the ground without being hit and even after it was lying on the ground he had problems hitting it. I didn’t know what to do and kept quiet like a mouse in the entrance until they also went inside the house where the woman was being raped.

I was completely out of my mind and weak from exhaustion, the loss of blood and the chock. After they had gone inside the house I said to myself that I don’t want to sneak around any longer so I just walked in the direction towards the square and found myself a house that was almost totally ruined. On the way there I was walking by one person who was badly wounded, but I just passed him without a word and left him instead of trying to help him. To this day his face is haunting me in my dreams and I often wish that he was alive and could forgive me. I went inside and found a place from where I could look out if I lifted my head up. Then I collected some rubble and dug myself into the rubble so nobody would see me even if they would step on me. After I had dug in like that I realized that there was the smell of a dead person in the air, but I already didn’t care any more. I didn’t fall asleep but simply fainted and only woke up once, while it was still dark. I could hear trucks and bulldozers, but I didn’t even bother to look up. I was going to stay there until it was over or I would die right there on that spot.

**Saturday, the 18th of September**

I woke up on Saturday about noon. There were still some militiamen, there were trucks, bulldozers and there was a lot of activity going on. Some of the trucks and at least one bulldozer were clearly Israeli and had IDF markings on them. I am also 100% sure that I heard some people speak Israeli.

By then it really had begun to smell of decaying bodies and I had to throw up several times. What scared me were the bulldozers, because if they had begun bulldozing the ruin I was in it would have been all over. I was terrified by the thought of being buried alive. I was extremely scared but also
extremely weak and I must have passed out again and didn’t wake up again until it was about 14.00 – 15.00 o’ clock.

When I saw people with a red cross on them I couldn’t believe my eyes. I was so glad to see them that I started weeping. I was crawling out of the ruin and sat down and wept. Then there were two Red Cross helpers who came up to me. They spoke very little English, but it was OK for me. My leg had started bleeding again after I had left the hospital and from all the commotion. They cleaned the wound and put a new bandage. Maybe because I was a foreigner, I don’t know, they offered me to be taken somewhere, but I was sort of crazy and didn’t even really trust them.

Later an English speaking Red Cross worker came up to me and checked on me several times. He was a British volunteer with a terrible Scottish accent and we talked a little. He was himself rather affected by what he saw in the camps. I was sitting there at that ruin for maybe two hours, staring at the scenes. The crying and shouting women, the father with his dead child and dead mother, it was all as if it was passing in front of my eyes but inside I was empty. The stench was indescribable. I was sitting there and it was becoming late. It was already dark before I stood up. Finally I stood up and went to Sabra Street and to the entrance there.

I went out of the camps and to my surprise I was met by an Israeli officer who was sitting in a Jeep, who was asking me in English, pointing towards the camps “have you been in there”. I was afraid OK. I was afraid he would arrest me, kill me or whatever, but I was also like dead inside and thought, OK, kill me if you want to and answered him. Yes I have been there. Kill me if you want to, I don’t care! He said come here and told me to get into the car. To my even greater surprise he had a German accent and he asked me to come up and get into the Jeep. It was an Israeli military Jeep. I wondered, especially when he, probably because he heard my German accent, began talking German to me. I was scared that it was not over yet and more was to come. But I sat down in the car to exhausted to think or to resist. It’s really impossible to explain the emotions that ran through my mind in those moments.

He said I will drive you away from here, and he drove me a couple of blocks away towards southwest Beirut. I was scared to get into the car, but I was too weak and too confused to think clearly so I just did as told, gave him general directions, and was glad to get of again.

At that moment I followed orders like cattle follows orders when lead to the butcher, and honestly at that moment I could not have cared less. Being killed right there at the spot seemed almost like a relief, something to hope for before being able to comprehend the obscenity of the situation. I still don’t understand what made him give me a lift. I went back to the yacht, my protected yacht with my “bodyguards” and stayed inside for a week or so only getting out to get some water and to relief myself.

After some time had passed and I had regained a little strength, I went back to the camps again. I asked about Khalid, about Nadim, I asked at the hospital what I could do to help, I tried to evaluate how I could go on with my project of community based mental health care in the camps, and I tried to find out what I could do to help rebuilding and help with the many physically and mentally traumatized people.

Nobody had heard or seen anything about Khalid and his family. Nobody I met knew what had happened with the body of Nadim or how I could contact his family in Syria. The last time I went there I was trying to rebuild my project and my life, but after a couple of hours I was overcome with such an extreme anxiety, that I had problems controlling my legs. It was as if I would be swallowed by the ground under my feet, and as if there was the risk of some explosion for every step that I took.
I rushed out of the camps and back to the yacht. During the next two months I collected some data for the project, but I also realized that I was in no condition to proceed and needed to get away and some rest. I wondered more or less aimlessly around in Beirut and the camps, trying to comprehend what had happened, trying to make sense of the world. I realized that if I stayed much longer I would lose whatever sanity I had left at that time, and left through Syria and Turkey to Denmark. I never returned. I wish I had, and I want to, but I doubt I can. Sometimes I am ashamed of being so privileged to have a choice whether I want to go or not, but then in a way until now I didn’t really have the choice to return there. I don’t know. It’s a shame.