*(Noam Tsuriely singing “Another Day in Gaza” in Hebrew)*

**Noam Tsuriely:** After two weeks on *miluim,* I wrote a song, it was like

*(Noam Tsuriely singing “Another Day in Gaza” in Hebrew)* ...stays for like 400 days…

*(Noam Tsuriely singing “Another Day in Gaza” in Hebrew)*

So I wrote it in half an hour, but then I put it on Instagram and it blew up, and I have half a million views. And actually, with half an hour of work with a silly, funny song, I managed to give people a reason to smile. And this is the most biggest thing I did in my life.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, we're continuing our series of Wartime Diaries, which is an attempt to collect slivers of life during these dark, dark days we're all experiencing.

Some 350,000 Israelis have been called up to reserve duty since the start of the war, in what has been the largest mobilization in the country's history. These are people who are plucked out of their homes, their families, and their daily lives, and inserted into a totally different world. One, which is in most cases, to add to the confusion, just a short car ride away. And those transitions back and forth between the craziness of the frontline and the veneer of normalcy at home can be dizzying, and unsettling. We're hearing more and more about that juxtaposition, now that large numbers of reservists are being released from their service, and are returning to their regular lives.

One of them is Noam Tsuriely from Jerusalem. Noam is a rapper who recently put out his debut album and had pre-war, a string of big time gigs all lined up. He was summoned for reserve duty on October 7th, and has spent most of the last four months in Gaza. Our producers Mitch Ginsburg, and Yael Ben Horin spoke to him just as he came out of Gaza, and began his readjustment to civilian life. Here he is.

**Noam Tsuriely:** I’m Noam Tsuriely, 28, born and raised in Jerusalem, a rapper, and musician. And since the 7th of October a *miluimnik* and a combat soldier. My parents: my mother came from France when she was 18, she made an Aliyah; my father was born here, his parents come from Yemen. And since the age of six, I started writing songs. At the age of seven, playing the piano. And I knew from that moment that this is what I want to do in my life.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So you went on to serve in the Duvdevan unit, an elite undercover unit in the army. And when you got out, you launched a musical career. And a couple of years ago, you sort of broke out with a few singles like “Nus Nus.”

**Noam Tsuriely:** Yes. So what I did is a song, “Nus Nus” is half and half *(hetzi, hetzi)*. I write one line in Hebrew, line in Arabic. *(Clip from Nus Nus)*

So it's a picture that if you understand only one language so you understand 50, maybe 60% of the picture. And that was the point of the song. That is what happened in Israel. But since the war started, I did like… I don't know, I think 10 shows or 11 shows already. I didn't perform with “Nus Nus” because I think…I still believe in this message very much. But now, for me, it's still time to just focus about my people.

**Yael Ben Horin:** So where are you on October 7th?

**Noam Tsuriely:** In Jerusalem, in my grandfather house. I’m from a religious family. Me myself, I'm like in between, you know, searching. But I was with them, and I honored the holiday, so I was without my phone. So we went to the synagogue: Simchat Torah. And right before the start of tefillah the *gabai* went up and said: “There's a war,” we're going to make the tefillah short, no dancing, no nothing. All the soldiers go home, open your phones get ready.”

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So you were called up on that day, on the seventh, and trained for a couple of weeks before the ground invasion began at the end of October. Can you describe actually going into Gaza?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Yes, it was middle of the night. It was like five to six kilometers of a walk: three kilometres in Israel, three kilometers in Gaza until we got to the first line of houses. We were in Beit Hanoun. We started in Beit Hanoun. And I think the first two or three days the amount of, how you say *heres*, destruction was overwhelming. Is things you see in the movie.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Can you talk a bit, Noam, about the fear?

**Noam Tsuriely:** In the beginning everything is scary. Going into houses you see like a rope of electricity, a cable, you think maybe this is going to a bomb or something. One time we were in the second floor and from the first floor I heard noises, so I woke up one of my team and and we went down, like as suspicious as we could, with some night goggles you can see at night through—just to discover it was a cat run all over the kitchen, you know. But that was for me one of the most scariest part of the war. I need to say that we saw like entire neighborhoods…and we didn’t see anybody, like any terrorist for the first two weeks, and it's thanks to the bombing. So yes, we bombed entire neighborhood, but if we haven't bombed, the houses will be used for the terrorist to wait for us to come.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Did you have any clashes with the enemy at all when you were there?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Fortunately, yes. Our company: it's four crews together, we really know each other, we became a family. So in the company we lost two friends, two soldiers: one of them Eyal Berkowitz; the other Gal Eisenkot, the son of Ramtkal Gadi Eisenkot. Gal was 25, from Herzliya, nonreligious, you know, living life, skiing a lot—he was there for months and then come back…partying: He had lots of friends from the Nova. He was also supposed to be at the Nova the same night, at the end he changed his plan. And the other hand was is couple. In the army we call it metal couple, like *tzemed barzel*, like the one you go with and you never leave. So, his couple, Eyal Berkowitz was the most religious from their crew, married, 30 years old: really serious, really always about respecting everybody, learning *gemara* while he can, like he was the little rabbi. And the fact that those two fought together, after all we know what's happening in Israel for a year now, I think, and fought together and died together. It's just a lesson about…we need to be worthy of their death. Like they didn't fight for us to continue fighting one another.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** And can you give us a sense, Noam, of what a day looks like as a soldier serving in Gaza?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Yes, of course. So we wake up at five in the morning or 5:30. And most of the time we have one maybe two missions a day maximum because you're not fighting alone in Gaza, you have…all the army is with you. So each team has its own house and it's going really slow because we prefer to go a little bit slower but to save our lives and not going with a rush to somewhere we don't know what's going to happen and then getting injured or dead, of course. And then we get to our new place. We build our defense like positions in this place. I'm in charge of putting the guards over there. And we started the routine of guarding on this house, and of course looking forward to our next mission. Going to sleep when there's dark, like at night you don't have electricity there. You don't want to use any electricity or lighting because you don't want them to know where you are. So, 5, 6pm, everybody's like almost half asleep and 7pm everybody's already sleeping. This is why it's not so hard to wake up at five because you go to bed in seven, even though you go out during the night for an hour or two. But look, you live in their houses, and you don't have water but after really two weeks you understand that you can use the gas, so you actually make food: you make rice, you make pasta. Like it's becoming a house, becoming a home, and the team become your family. And between the missions, and between fearing for your life you actually have life over there. And when you go back home this is not your life. But I'm talking about myself as somebody who left an album behind him, not somebody with children or a family. But my story is I really felt like Gaza is my life and in home I'm taking vacations from my real life over there.

**Yael Ben Horin:** It sounds like there must be a lot of downtime in between missions. How do you guys spend it? Do you talk? Do you joke around?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Yes, lots of jokes, lots of jokes, really, really good times we had in Gaza, really. We had in one of the houses, we had some old man who we don't know how but he just stayed in his house the whole war. So he was with us for two weeks. Of course under guard and everything so nothing bad happened to him or to us, but he was there and I talked with him.

**Yael Ben Horin:** What did you guys talk about?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Just regular stuff about what he wants to eat…he told me about his family that he's waiting for him to come back after the war is over. Keep saying that we won’t hurt his house and we're like: “Okay, no problem… you're here already for two weeks, I think you understand we’re not gonna do anything to you.” He was a nice, nice, old Palestinian man.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Wow.

**Noam Tsuriely:** So yeah, so we just talk about life— jokes. We started playing poker. I really am a fan of backgammon, but I didn't play any backgammon (*Shesh Besh*) in Gaza, because you know Gaza, it's life and death things and backgammon is more than that. So I didn't bring any backgammon with me. But we did brought books. I was in charge of the library. We had like four or five books. I asked everybody to give me his favorite book, like what he recommend to the other to read, and I had this list, so I was like alright let's do something good with war and educate ourselves. And so I went out and bought some of them. I got a discount for the *miluim* for Gaza, so it wasn't too much expensive.

I was in charge also of gummy. I don't know to say gummy…like the candies.

**Yael Ben Horin:** Gummy bears?

**Noam Tsuriely:** It's not bears, it's everything, yeah. I had four and a half kilos of those every time we entered Gaza.

**Yael Ben Horin:** Wait, what?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Yes. We got every 24 hours we got food. So by night there's six of us or eight of us needs to go grab lots of bags that came from Israel, you know with equipment with food for another 24 hours, with water. So one time we went and in the bags was also gummy bears. And that was like oh my god, everybody wants some, it was so delicious. And really, we feel better after that. And I was like how we don't have it on us all the time. So when I went up, I went to the *shuk* and took four and a half kilos of gummy bears and like all right now we can have in every dark time I can pull it out and give the people some sugar.

**Yael Ben Horin:** And now you're out. I imagine it must have been a huge contrast. How has the transition into civilian life been like?

**Noam Tsuriely:** Look, for lots of *miluim* it's hard when you lose the meaning, because you were for a moment fighting for *Am Yisrael*; and in the other you just in the office going through mails. But because of what I do, because of the music, I feel really meaningful. So for me this transformation is pretty smooth. I think I feel the change or some emptiness when it will be over. Like when actually we won the war. Now what—now nobody needs a hero, and everybody’s in the houses again, you just can come back to be a regular musician.