Treating the Wounded and Wiping away the Tears

Fighting for the life of a kibbutz member who is already smiling, then a dog from the Oketz Unit arrives wounded, and a paramedic stops the bleeding. The deputy general of the Soroka Medical Center, which admitted some 750 casualties, writes about "a great pride that is overwhelming, and a great pain in his heart, which is a little broken."

I am just now going to sleep for the first time since I was urgently summoned to Soroka Medical Center on Saturday at 6:30 a.m. The field bed in the office is ready. We have treated (as of last night) almost 750 casualties with a team of dedicated and amazing angels.
We witnessed heart-wrenching scenes: lost families looking for their loved ones and a medical team wiping away tears after treating a patient. Among other things, we saw an elderly couple arriving after being held hostage for almost a day by despicable terrorists and the mother of a one-month-old baby who hid for 26 hours between houses and was searching for her husband.

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Kibbutz Alumim and its wonderful on-call emergency squad are dear to me, and suddenly I find myself in the trauma room fighting for the life of a member of the kibbutz who was hit by gunfire. Today he is already smiling. Then the Oketz (canine special forces Israel Defense Forces unit) dog comes in wounded, and our paramedic stops his bleeding.

A soldier gets out of an ambulance and shouts to me, 'Schwartzfuchs, are you Hod's father?' and I nod. And then he asks, 'Doctor, will I live?' And today, he and his parents are smiling and realize that his life was saved. The acquaintance from Beer-Sheva, who was standing and waiting for his daughter, quietly on the side, suddenly collapsed and screamed, "My daughter has been abducted! They called me and spoke in Arabic." And the soldier who arrived and was silent, in his mind still there on the battlefield. An immigrant from France, they tell me, and I address him in French. Perhaps he is drinking coffee on the banks of the Seine.

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And the flow goes on. The son of a man who was one of my soldiers during our compulsory military service arrived in critical condition and was sent to the Intensive Care Unit ... an embrace that began in 1983 and continues now in 2023. And the quiet man who sits in the synagogue while his son, as strong as a rock, lies in Intensive Care, and now it turns out that he is actually a fighter in an elite unit.

Many life events are playing out before our eyes. You meet the mother and father from the religious kibbutz in the North standing in the doorway on the morning of the Simchat Torah holiday and waiting for the arrival of their injured son.

And in my fevered brain, every time I see them, I remember the Nahal Tzafit disaster and the parents who stood at the door and left bitterly disappointed, and I wish for a different ending. At the end of the holy Sabbath, they disappear, but for a good reason. Their son is lightly wounded and has been taken to another hospital.

At night, at three o'clock in the morning, the hospital is quieter, and we walk its corridors, transferring eight of the wounded to another hospital. The stretchers are laid on the grass in the dark. The noise of the helicopter blades cuts through the cold of the night. We shake hands with all the injured, even hug them or take a picture and shed a tear for what happened, and for the pain known only to those who treated them and saw the moment of truth.

I shook hands with the girl from the "NOVA" music festival whose name was given to me early in the morning. She arrived late, and at the end of the day, she arrived, sooty, and I grabbed her hand and told her, "I've been waiting for you since eight in the morning."

A handshake for the young nurse, mother of two little ones, whose husband is a company commander at the front. She comes to her shift without hesitation, works hard, and cares for patients with dedication. At that moment, I also think about my four sons who have been called, their special wives, and the woman who is with me.

I also think of the amazing staff who worked non-stop, who never gave up, who devotedly cared for each and every wounded person, who changed the equipment again and again, who washed the red floor and turned it white like a high priest immersing himself and wearing gold and white in the middle of the day and in the middle of the night, and who was sensitive and alert, attentive and compassionate.
I feel great pride and a great pain in my heart, which is a little broken.

Dr. Dan Schwarzfuchs, Deputy Director General, Soroka Medical Center of the Clalit Group and Director of the Emergency Medicine Center.

https://www.ynet.co.il/health/article/r1gerbwzt

"It reminds me of pictures from the Holocaust": The Doctor Who Operates under Fire in the South

Dr. Alex Geftler, a senior orthopedist in Soroka's Orthopedics Service, talks about the first harrowing days of working under fire: "I'm used to very difficult sights and life-threatening situations … but what I saw on Saturday was much worse."
Since the beginning of the war, more than 800 wounded people have been brought to Soroka Medical Center in Beer-Sheva, and nearly a quarter of them have been seen by Dr. Alex Geftler, a senior orthopedist in the Department of Orthopedics at Soroka.
"On Saturday morning, an unusual number of alarms were sounded in Beer-Sheva. We sat in the protected space for about two hours, and immediately after that, I went to the hospital," he told Maariv in a special interview.

He added: "I've been used to very disturbing sights and life-threatening situations since my service in the reserves, but what I saw on Saturday was much worse. I arrived around seven in the morning and left the hospital on Sunday after ten in the evening after I saw that the work was going well, the operating room was active, and everyone understood their role. We ordered ambulances and helicopters so it would be possible to transfer patients to hospitals in the country's center. We realized that this was not the end of the story, so we did everything to ensure the team was at their best and everyone had enough time to freshen up properly from time to time."

Did you eat anything? Did you sleep at all that day?

"I was less concerned with eating and sleeping and more focused on making sure that everyone knew what their mission was and focused on carrying it out. The main difficulty in dealing with these events is administrative. It just creates confusion, so I made sure that everyone was assigned an area of responsibility, and that's how we managed to keep everything under control despite unprecedented numbers of patients." Dr. Geftler noted, "Most of the casualties suffered from limb injuries; for those who did not, limb injuries were most often their secondary injuries. In fact, we had to spread patients out in different wards simply because we didn't have room in our ward. At the peak, we were managing 160 patients simultaneously. From the beginning of the war until noon on Tuesday, we performed approximately 180 surgeries, which is a huge number."

I assume that you operated during the alarms.

"That's correct. In the operating rooms, you hear the alarms and the sound of rockets falling. At the same time, you hear the helicopters arriving at the hospital, so there could be a situation where I'm still in the middle of treating one casualty, and I understand that now more wounded people are arriving at the hospital. I knew my family was in the area and thought of them whenever I heard an alarm. Still, I tried to detach myself from my feelings and work technically, without thinking about what was happening around me, focusing on one task—saving the patients."

Is it frightening?

"Over the years, I have developed a special habit that allows me to concentrate on the surgery at hand and not think about other things. So yes, it's frightening, but you don't deal with it until the surgery is finished because doing so could endanger the patient. This war and all the pictures from the last few days remind me of pictures from the Holocaust, only in color. There has been nothing like it in history."

Operation Swords of Iron: The Doctor Who Operates under Fire in the South
Maariv News (maariv.co.il)

Testimony from the Operating Rooms: "All I see before me are frightened eyes."

"The flood of casualties seems never-ending. They're bleeding, their clothes shredded. Unidentified mobile phones ring non-stop on their stretchers. Army boots and dog tags are strewn aside the high-heeled shoes of women from the music festival." Tal Hayun, director of nursing of Soroka's Surgery and Recovery Room Division, recalls the harrowing and dramatic moments that followed the devastating massacre in the South. This is how it looks through her eyes.

Saturday morning. Everything is quiet. Suddenly, a blaring siren pierces the ear. The television screen is orange, and announcements of missile launches aimed at locations all over the country appear. I turn my head, and my husband, already dressed in a police uniform, has disappeared. I wait a bit. I'm used to alarms, but this time, something seems different. Then there are alarms again, and suddenly, videos of terrorists in vans and carrying weapons appear on TV. Is this happening in Israel? The heart hopes it's fake news.

Then I hear the first reports of casualties arriving at Soroka, and it's time to go to the operating room. The children are in the shelter, and the dog is shaking with fear under the bed. The alarms are getting louder every second. I get dressed and take a quick look at the house. I shout to the children, "Don't open the door for anyone!" and leave. I didn't know I would return home only the next day.

In the operating room, I meet only the frightened eyes of the staff. They ask me what's going on, but I have no idea. Not five minutes pass, and a stream of nurses dressed in purple come running to the operating room. "Where to go? What to do?" they ask. Give me a moment to understand, but there is no moment because within seconds, dozens of wounded people arrive in the operating room, and no one needs to be told what to do anymore. Everyone is already highly skilled at this. We've been through this before.

The flood of casualties seems never-ending. They are bleeding, their clothes shredded. Unidentified mobile phones ring non-stop on their stretchers. Army boots and dog tags are strewn aside the high-heeled shoes of women from the music festival. And I'm standing at the entrance, directing traffic with the doctors: the rapid evacuation of rooms, more stretchers, more cleaning staff, unskilled workers, orderlies—everyone is running.

"Maybe he's here? Please check. He has a tattoo on his leg. She has blue streaks in her hair."
The recovery room is full of casualties. Nurses bend over them, trying to calm them amid the screams and unclear words, attempting to alleviate their pain until they go into surgery. Family members knock on the operating room doors, trying to enter after each injured person, showing me pictures of their loved ones on their phones. "Do you recognize him?" they ask, "Maybe he's here? Please check. He has a tattoo on his leg. She has blue streaks in her hair."

But I no longer recognize anyone among the multiple casualties. Suddenly, they all look the same. I look up, and again, stretchers with wounded people arrive. On the way, the eyes of operating room nurses stare at me through the glass window, looks of concern below their hats and under their masks. Their hands move professionally even after so many hours with gloves on, and the equipment is passed at record speed. And their hearts? You see that their hearts are with their homes, the children, the soldiers, and the war. The concern is evident everywhere. I ask, "Does anyone want something to drink?" "No!" they answer. "What are you talking about? There's another surgery."

The minutes pass, turning into hours, and it's already 10:00 p.m., but no one is ready to go home. Everyone is busy saving lives. The legs are barely holding them up. They lie on blankets to rest a bit but continue with all their might. The morning comes, and there is no peace. Everyone worked all night. Pictures of missing people, phone numbers, and worried families pop up all over the hospital. Suddenly, the tears come out on their own, uncontrolled, and I think to myself how much unity there is here. When will it end? It's impossible to know. It seems it's just getting started. I only know that I am proud to belong to this team and this nation. We will win, I'm sure.

Written by Tal Hayun, nursing director of Soroka's Operating and Recovery Room Division

https://www.mako.co.il/health-news/Article-2427c2616b81b81027.htm