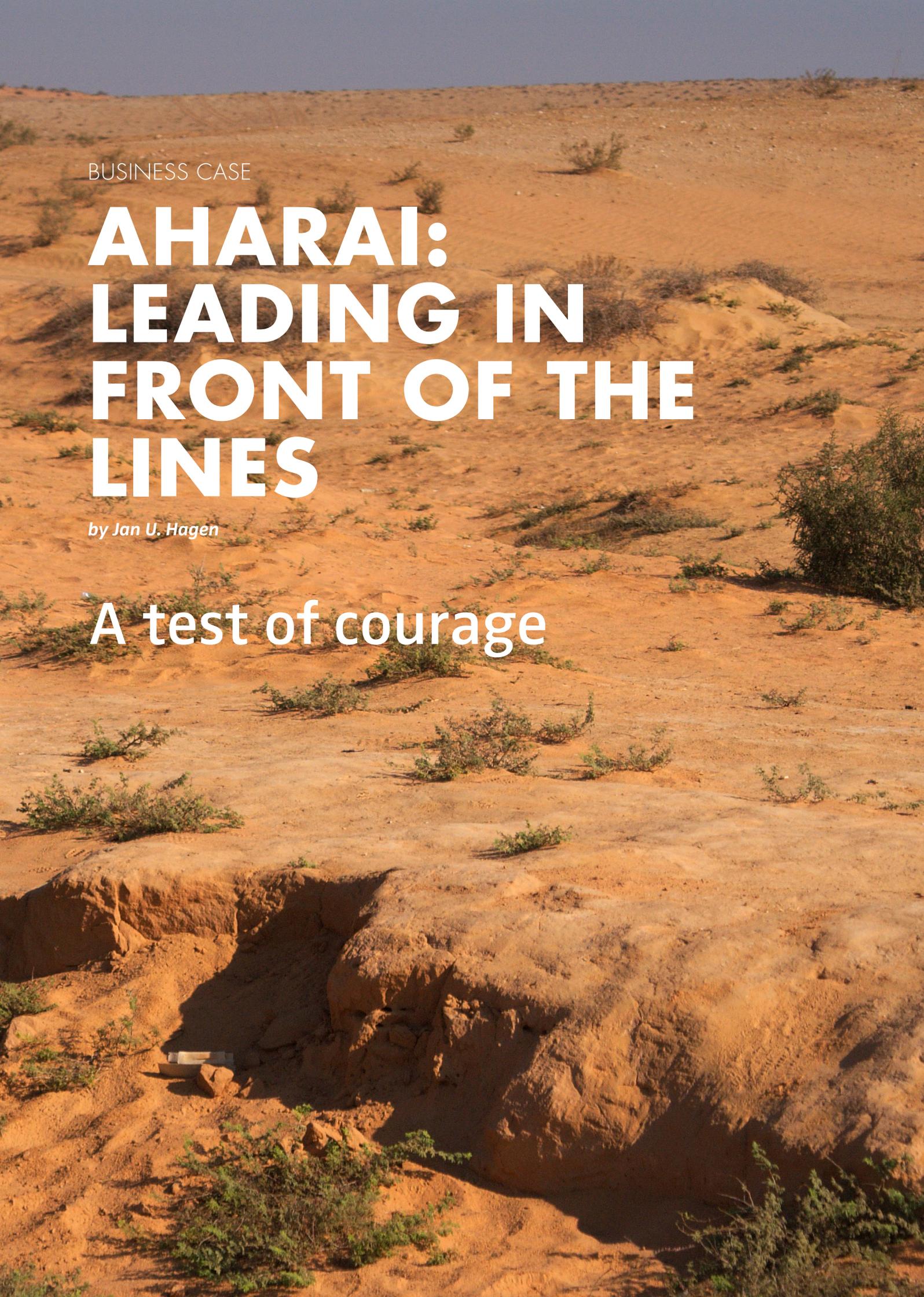


BUSINESS CASE

# AHARAI: LEADING IN FRONT OF THE LINES

*by Jan U. Hagen*

## A test of courage



## BUSINESS CASE

# AHARAI: LEADING IN FRONT OF THE LINES

On July 12, 2006, two Israeli military vehicles were ambushed while on a patrol on the Israeli border to Lebanon. Three soldiers were killed, three others wounded, and two were abducted by Hezbollah. In an effort to free the two kidnapped soldiers, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) immediately deployed tanks across the Lebanese border. Hezbollah then started to fire rockets and missiles from multiple positions into Israel. Soon, civil casualties began to mount on both sides of the border.

As it turned out, the Hezbollah fighters were well prepared for ground attacks and operated in a much more coordinated way than anticipated by the IDF. After two weeks of heavy bombardment, they were still able to continuously fire rockets into northern Israel. As a consequence, the Israeli government decided to start a major ground offensive to engage Hezbollah directly and clear the area of rocket launch sites. Between July 28 and 31, approximately 15,000 IDF reservists were mobilized to take and control the area from the Israeli border up to the Litani River.

On August 7, Captain Nir Levy had to report to his unit. Within a brigade, he commanded a special services platoon consisting of 16 soldiers who – like him – were reservists. On August 11, Levy was ordered to lead one of three platoons into southern Lebanon to open up a path for the brigade that would follow them and secure the area. He briefed his platoon and prepared for moving across the border the following day.

During the next days, along with other IDF units, Levy's platoon entered Lebanon and cleared the path for their brigade by identifying Hezbollah positions and detecting improvised explosive devices as planned. Most of the time, he and his soldiers moved only at night. During the day, they went into ground observation points and tried to rest. Their main objective was to advance undetected, but they did experience occasional exchanges of gunfire with Hezbollah soldiers.

On the night of August 15, Levy's platoon established a ground observation point very close to a known Hezbollah base. The distance between the two was approximately 700 meters if measured in a straight line, but because of the hilly terrain, they were hidden from each other.

The next morning, a large part of the brigade began moving north, exchanging fire with the Hezbollah base. Levy had the order to remain in position to prevent the hostile units from coming out of their bases and attacking the Israeli forces. Around midday, though, he received a new order – to take his platoon and move toward the Hezbollah base to attract fire.

Levy knew how dangerous this would be, but he also knew that he could not just ignore the order. He thought about his task as the leader of his platoon. How could they move out of their position without being killed on the spot? Should all of them go? If not, who should go and who should stay behind? Was there even a slight chance of success, given that it was tough to draw Hezbollah soldiers out of hiding? And how should he explain his order to his soldiers, who would become easy targets? What should he do?