

F. Theft

When the IDF Wants, the Investigation is Quick and Professional The Theft of Jewelry and Gold Coins from Suad Issa

Summary

On August 11, 1991, around 21:00, soldiers entered Suad Issa's house in Al-Khader village, in Bethlehem District. They came to arrest her son, Khaled, and conducted a thorough search of the premises. After they left, Issa discovered that the blue plastic box containing her jewelry and gold coins, normally in the verandah, was on the floor – empty. The jewelry was gone.

From complaint to investigation

- The next day, on August 12, 1991, Issa filed a complaint with the police.
- On August 14, 1991, Issa complained to HaMoked. That day HaMoked attorney Rosenthal asked CCAG Politis to investigate.
- On September 11, 1991 Politis transferred the complaint to the MPI.
- On October 7, 1991 three soldiers from the unit that conducted the search were questioned: 2nd Lt. Hannan Azoulay, Staff Sergeant Ariel Asbag and Staff Sergeant Meidad Vaknin. From their testimonies it was clear that Vaknin conducted the search in the verandah. When Vaknin was asked by the IMP investigator about a blue jewelry box, he denied seeing it during the search. At this point he was being questioned as a witness and not as a suspect.
- On October 8, 1991 a MPI investigator asked HaMoked to find out if Issa would be willing to be questioned with a polygraph. She agreed.
- On November 24, 1991 Issa arrived for a polygraph test, but since she had open heart surgery in the past, the test was canceled.
- As a result of comparing testimonies – that of Issa, who said that her jewelry box was in the verandah, and those of the soldiers that it was Vaknin who conducted the search there – the MPI investigators reached the conclusion that the main suspect in the theft was Vaknin. On December 2, 1991 Vaknin was questioned again, this time as a suspect, under warning. He again denied stealing the jewelry.
- Issa was questioned again on the same day, and she repeated her version.
- At some point (date unknown), Vaknin was questioned with a polygraph machine, and the results showed that he was lying.
- As a result he was questioned again – under warning – on December 4, 1991. This time he confessed to the theft. Afterwards the hiding place of the jewels was discovered, and the jewelry was recovered.

The investigation was successful, three and a half months after the initial complaint was filed. This is a very short time compared to other cases.

The charge sheet and conviction

- On December 23, 1991 CCAG Politis informed HaMoked that he ordered the Chief Military Prosecutor to submit a charge sheet against the soldier.
- On January 22, 1992 the Central District Military Court convicted Vaknin of theft and inappropriate behavior. He was sentenced to six months in prison; two and half to be served, and the remainder suspended for two years. He was also demoted in rank from Staff Sergeant to Private.

From the end of the investigation through Vaknin's conviction, only six weeks passed – also a very short time.

Conclusion: The MPI knows how to investigate professionally when it wants to

The description above of the investigation procedures, filing of charges, trial and conviction reveal a correct, rational, and goal-oriented process. In other words, the case was dealt with professionally. When an investigation is handled this way, rather than out of a desire to cover up someone's criminal acts, then the process is rapid and efficient. It only took five months from complaint to sentencing.

The conclusion is that when the MPI is motivated to investigate, it can locate the unit whose soldiers were involved in an incident that was the subject of a complaint. Afterwards, once the investigation is done properly, there is no particular difficulty locating the suspect(s).

Comparing the treatment of this case with others, some of which are mentioned in this report, is not encouraging. The contrast sheds light on the true role played by the MPI in other investigations. The treatment of this complaint of the theft of Issa's jewelry in particular, strengthens the suspicion that in the other investigations – related to killing, wounding, and abusing civilians – the role of the MPI was to prevent the truth from being revealed. The MPI in those cases delayed, and covered up, and investigators did not bother to address the conclusions or contradictions from within the testimonies of witnesses or suspects in order to reach the truth. This case proves that the MPI does not lack professionalism, but rather the motivation to carry out proper investigations.