

Forensic Medicine's Role in Identifying Soldiers Killed in Action During Israel's War of Independence

ABSTRACT

The burial of soldiers killed in action (KIA) is a core value in Israeli society, a tribute we pay to the soldiers and their families. This principle is embedded in the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) code of ethics and ethos, as well as in Jewish law. Accordingly, even if it takes many years, every effort will be made to locate the body of a soldier who is missing in action (MIA) in order to give them a proper burial. Today, 96 soldiers from the War of Independence are still defined as MIA, their burial places unknown. All of these cases are under investigation by the 1948-section of the MIA Unit of the IDF. One such case is the identification of two casualties from the Palmach intelligence unit, Gideon Ben-David (Be'eri) from Kibbutz Be'eri and David Shemesh from Kibbutz Beit HaShita A-H, both of whom fell in Jaffa in December 1947 and were classified as MIA. Anthropometric measurements and DNA samples helped to confirm their identity, after their fate had been unknown for fifty years. This paper highlights the complexity in identifying soldiers who are MIA, the ongoing efforts to identify soldiers buried as John Does, and the importance of properly opening a grave in order to obtain scientific evidence.

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