The 1985 Galilee Deal: 1,155 Prisoners for Three Soldiers

On 20 May 1985 Israel released 1,155 prisoners, among them Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, in return for three soldiers captured in Lebanon by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command led by Ahmad Jibril, in a deal called “the Galilee operation” and described as one of the strongest Arab–Israeli exchange deals. [1][2][3]

Contents

1. The deal at a glance
2. The capture of the three soldiers
3. The terms
4. Those freed
5. Timeline
6. Frequently asked questions about the 1985 Galilee exchange

The deal at a glance

Item	Details
Date	20 May 1985
Name	The Galilee operation, also known as the Jibril deal
Palestinian party	The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command, led by Ahmad Jibril
Prisoners freed	1,155 prisoners
In return	3 soldiers: Hazi Yishai, Yosef Azoun and Nissim Shalim
Most prominent prisoner freed	Sheikh Ahmad Yassin

[1][2][4]

The capture of the three soldiers

Sergeant first class **Hazi Yishai** was captured in the Battle of Sultan Yacoub in Lebanon on 11 June 1982, according to Alwatan Voice. **Yosef Azoun** and **Nissim Shalim** were captured at Bhamdoun in Lebanon on 4 September 1982, with six other soldiers, in a joint operation between Fatah and the Popular Front–General Command. [2][1]

The six soldiers held by Fatah were freed in the exchange of 23 November 1983, while the General Command kept two soldiers, Azoun and Shalim, along with Yishai. [2][1]

The terms

The General Command demanded that Israel agree to the number of prisoners required before it handed over the list of names, and that it reject no name put forward, and Israel agreed to all the demands according to Akhbar al-Balad. The piece says the Red Cross contacted the General Command to reach an agreement, but does not describe its role in carrying out the exchange. [1]

The same piece says Israel was forced to keep most of those freed inside the territories occupied in 1967. [1]

Those freed

1,155 prisoners were freed, 883 of them held in Israeli prisons in occupied Palestine, 118 abducted from the Ansar camp in 1983, and 154 transferred from Ansar to the Atlit camp. [1][2]

Among them were 99 from Arab countries and 6 from other countries, including the Japanese Kozo Okamoto, arrested after the Lod airport operation in 1972; Israel rejected an offer to free him for a hundred prisoners and the General Command insisted on his release. The deal included Palestinians from the 1948 territories, the

West Bank and Gaza, among them Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, later the founder of Hamas. Most were serving between 10 and 15 years, and some were serving life. [1][3][5]

Timeline

Date	Event
11 June 1982	Hazi Yishai captured in the Battle of Sultan Yacoub [2]
4 September 1982	Azoun, Shalim and six other soldiers captured at Bhamdoun [2]
23 November 1983	The six soldiers freed for more than 5,000 prisoners; the General Command keeps two [2]
20 May 1985	The Galilee operation: 1,155 prisoners freed for 3 soldiers [1]

Frequently asked questions about the 1985 Galilee exchange

What is the Galilee deal?

The deal of 20 May 1985 in which Israel freed 1,155 prisoners in return for three soldiers captured by the General Command. [1][2]

Who was the most prominent prisoner freed?

Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, later the founder of Hamas. [5][1]

Who were the three soldiers?

Hazi Yishai, Yosef Azoun and Nissim Shalim. [2][3]

Was it 1,150 or 1,155?

Most sources give 1,155, while an Al Jazeera Net piece on Jibril gives 1,150. [4][5]

Read also on Palestinuna

- The largest prisoner exchange in the history of the Palestinian revolution (1983)
- Operation al-Nouris: the 1979 exchange with the General Command

Sources and references

1. Akhbar al-Balad, “Learn about the most prominent prisoner exchange deals with the occupation” (in Arabic).
2. Alwatan Voice, “Prisoner exchange operations with the occupation from 1948 to 2011”, for Palestinian Prisoners’ Day (in Arabic; the link is to the site’s home page).
3. Al-Ain, “10 Palestinian captures of Israeli soldiers in 47 years” (in Arabic).
4. Al Jazeera Net encyclopedia, “The most prominent prisoner exchange deals with Israel” (in Arabic).
5. Al Jazeera Net, “Ahmad Jibril: the arch-enemy of Israel who freed Sheikh Ahmad Yassin from captivity” (in Arabic).
6. Noon Post, “From plane hijackings to the Flood”, 12 January 2024 (in Arabic).