

Report: Hezbollah says Ron Arad died in 1988

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An Israel Air Force airman captured in Lebanon in 1986 escaped two years later but probably died while trying to reach Israel on foot, the Hezbollah guerrilla group said in a report published by Maariv, an Israeli daily, on Wednesday.

Hezbollah gave Israel the secret report on Ron Arad's fate as part of a UN-mediated prisoner swap in July. That deal went ahead though Israel, which officially assumes Arad to be alive, dismissed the Hezbollah report as "absolutely unsatisfactory".

Arad was seized by Shi'ite militiamen after bailing out of his crippled warplane over Lebanon. Maariv quoted the Hezbollah report as saying that Arad was first held in Beirut and then moved to the eastern village of Nabi Cheit.

"The Israeli pilot escaped from his holding cell on the night between May 4-5, 1988 and headed south, toward what was then the occupied (Israeli) security zone" in south Lebanon, the Hezbollah report said, according to Maariv's front-page story.

"He was in a remote, mountainous and barren area where people rarely set foot. It is possible that he collapsed and, because of natural factors, could not keep going, or that he was injured, suffered fractures, haemorrhaging, fever, poisoning, thirst, a fall from a high cliff, or that he even fell victim to a predatory animal or walked into a minefield."

The report rejected Israeli allegations that Hezbollah or Iran, its main foreign patron, was holding Arad, Maariv said.

In the July swap, Israel released Samir Qantar, a jailed Lebanese guerrilla it had long described as a "bargaining chip" for Arad's return.

Hezbollah has refused any public comment on the Arad report.

Ron Arad Documentary Film Showing him talking in Captivity
{youtube}6eGjwB6ucx4{/youtube}