Next to the teddy bears: Weapon hidden in Hebron-area nursery school

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Lt. Col. Gilad Mills and his soldiers from Battalion 603 of the 7th Brigade in the Engineering Corps. were amazed by what they found during a nighttime operation near Hebron. The soldiers arrived at a building identified by intelligence from the Shin Bet and the IDF - and discovered during a search that it was a nursery school in which a gun, cartridges, a grenade and dozens of bullets were hidden.

"I have never come across anything like this," Mills said. "The weapon was not even secured, but was simply under the mattress - any crawling baby could have reached it."

The unusual seizure took place as part of a combined divisional operation of the 603rd Battalion, paratroopers and other units. About 150 fighters participated in the activity, the main part of which was seizing weapons and making arrests. As part of the operation, the fighters raided 14 different locations in the Hebron area, when Lt. Col. Mills' force searched several buildings in the village of Deir Tzamat.

Mills describes the scene: "We entered the building, it had one floor and four rooms. At the entrance we actually saw hooks for schoolbags with children's names on them. There were paintings of bears hanging on the walls. We began to scan the rooms. As a father, I saw a room I knew from my daughter's nursery – a room for napping where all the mattresses are arranged in a pile. Next to the mattresses there was a shelf on which there were many teddy bears with the names of the children. One of the soldiers began to search, picked up one mattress - and was amazed. He saw two weapons, one of them a gun, and two more cartridges, a gas grenade and dozens of bullets."

Mills noted that at this point the soldiers put on gloves and gathered up the weapons.

"In the beginning it was quite a shock to find something like this inside a nursery," he said, "It's a skewed reality. It is hard for me to understand at all these people who engage in terrorism and raise children in this situation. I can only feel sorry for such children. As a father, I thought about my children that I haven't seen in two weeks. Children should not see such weapons or live in such a reality. This is very unusual," he added.

The battalion's forces have been in the Hebron area for two weeks, and were there at the time of the attack a week ago that kindergarten teacher Batsheva Nigri. "This is a difficult event that we are still studying and investigating," Mills said. "We are out 24 hours a day, protecting the roads and the settlements. At the same time, every night we are in pursuit of illegal weapons to prevent further attacks."