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Pentagon Finds Religious Bias In Army Probe

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Jewish Scientist Was Suspected of Spying

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SOUTHFIELD, Mich. -- It was almost an ordinary Sabbath at David Tenenbaum's home. He had been to synagogue, and he and his wife, Madeline, had invited friends over for lunch.

Then [FBI agents](#) showed up, brandishing a search warrant. They spent hours going through the family's possessions, looking for evidence of spying by Tenenbaum, a mild-mannered, cheerful father and experienced engineer at an Army installation outside Detroit. Some co-workers and superiors had said he had leaked classified information to the Israeli government.

"They took my music books and my daughter's coloring books," said Madeline Tenenbaum, who recalled the fear, anger and worry that the agents might plant evidence in their home.

For weeks after the 1997 raid, FBI agents tailed David Tenenbaum. The Detroit area news media soon learned of the raid and ran articles about the Jewish spying suspect, prompting threatening phone calls.

"It was a witch hunt," said Tenenbaum, 50. "It was a Jew hunt."

This summer, 11 years after the FBI raid, [the Pentagon's](#) inspector general exonerated Tenenbaum and endorsed his assertion that the investigation by the leaders of the Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) in Warren targeted him because he is a practicing Jew.

The inspector general's report suggested that counterintelligence officers at the facility were influenced by a warning from the Defense Investigative Service (now the Defense Security Service) in 1995 that Israeli intelligence officers were trying to exploit nationalistic feelings in American Jews. The report noted that a polygraph test administered to Tenenbaum may have overstepped allowable questions and approaches, and that a request that he apply to upgrade his security clearance was a ruse to investigate his possible espionage.

"We believe that Mr. Tenenbaum was subjected to unusual and unwelcome scrutiny because of his faith and ethnic background, a practice that would undoubtedly fit a definition of discrimination whether actionable or not," the report concluded.

Officials at TACOM, a research, development and supply post, declined to comment on the report, referring queries to the Army public affairs office. The Army said it will comment within a month. "We will certainly review the issues raised in the [DOD](#) inspector general's review for any procedures and policies that may need to be addressed, or other steps that we should take to address the situation," said Paul Boyce, an Army spokesman.

The Tenenbaum investigation, which lasted from 1996 to 1998, raises issues beyond allegations of anti-Semitism. At the time of the probe, he was working on a project to provide armored protection to light combat vehicles such as [Humvees](#). The probe disrupted that effort, which could have prevented American casualties from roadside bombs in Iraq, Tenenbaum's lawyers charge.

Tenenbaum still works for TACOM, though he feels the strain of more than a decade of fighting for

vindication. He was hired there in 1984, two years after he earned a master's degree in chemical engineering from [Wayne State University](#).

From the moment he began work at the post, he knew he was different from many on the staff. While colleagues went to lunch at [McDonald's](#), he brought in a kosher meal. He wore a yarmulke. He carried a backpack, rather than a briefcase -- not an uncommon practice today but highly unusual in the buttoned-down world of TACOM in the 1980s and 1990s. He left early on Friday for the Sabbath.

He was also known as a hard worker, one fixated on solving problems. "He was operating two gears higher than the rest of TACOM. He took his job so seriously," said one Pentagon official familiar with the Tenenbaum case, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk about it.

Tenenbaum was hired to work with officials around the world to identify materials that the Army could use or adapt to improve combat vehicles' "survivability." He worked especially with officials from Germany, Britain and Israel, according to his sworn statement to the inspector general.

He spoke Hebrew and understood Jewish and Israeli culture. Those, according to Tenenbaum, were skills the Army appreciated -- and a source of its suspicion. The Army sent him to Israel three times for conferences and meetings -- in 1985, 1986 and 1995 -- but later, some who worked with him found his trips suspicious.

"The same reason they hired me is the reason they suspected me," Tenenbaum said.

Colleagues at TACOM filed formal complaints about Tenenbaum's behavior. The first came in 1992, just as Tenenbaum was nominated for a prestigious work assignment in a year-long Israeli engineer exchange, and it charged that he raised suspicion because he used a backpack and took trips to Israel. The complaint led to a report by the Defense Investigative Service, but the FBI decided not to investigate, according to Tenenbaum's later lawsuit charging the Army with religious discrimination.

Yet by the fall of 1996, half a dozen complaints had been made against Tenenbaum, including one that cited his speaking Hebrew and one that noted his close relationship with an Israeli liaison officer, who the inspector general's report said had Army authorization to be at TACOM.

Because of the complaints, the post's security staff began to formulate a plan to find out more about Tenenbaum. His supervisor recommended that he request a security clearance upgrade from secret to top secret -- a "ruse for a counterintelligence investigation," the report said.

Tenenbaum's lawyers said many of the complaints were recanted or played down, or came years after the events they alleged. Others involved meetings and activities related to Army projects.

"Every time David's name came up for an assignment or a project, they would investigate him," said Daniel Harold, Tenenbaum's lawyer for more than eight years. His suit was thrown out of court, his attorneys say, after Defense Department officials and former attorney general [John D. Ashcroft](#) said national security could be compromised if the case continued.

Among the documents, his lawyers discovered references to Tenenbaum as the "little Jewish spy."

In 1996 and early 1997, FBI and TACOM investigators were preparing to move in on Tenenbaum, holding meetings and telephone conferences where they reviewed "espionage indicators," according to the inspector general's report.

Tenenbaum was required to take a polygraph test on Feb. 13, 1997. The consent form listed espionage, which chilled him. He says he was not told of his right to have an attorney present, so he went alone. During the test, the examiner accused him of withholding the truth, saying at one point, "I can tell by the

look in your eyes that you're lying."

The examiner also threatened him, Tenenbaum said. "I want you to confess," he was yelling at me," he recalled. "I've done other Jews before and gotten them to confess, and I'll get you, too."

Tenenbaum and his attorneys say the examiner lied about what was said during the polygraph exam, indicating Tenenbaum admitted he had passed secret documents to Israelis. No recording of the exam has been produced.

The next day, Tenenbaum's desk and computer at TACOM had disappeared, and about seven FBI agents and TACOM security officers were "all over everything," he recalled. "They thought they had the biggest spy case in the state of Michigan."

Tenenbaum was put on paid leave for 14 months, and when he returned he was not assigned to any work group. "I always had to fight" to get assignments, he said.

By February 1998, the U.S. attorney's office had written to the FBI saying it had insufficient evidence to bring a case against Tenenbaum. Yet two years later, Army personnel revoked Tenenbaum's security clearance, citing concerns about his trustworthiness. It took more than four years for him to win back the clearance.

Now, in the wake of the inspector general's report, Tenenbaum wants the Pentagon to admit it was wrong.

"You can't let it affect the rest of your life," he said. "But a letter of apology would be nice."

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