

Adam, Munia (Melech) RIP

Born in Bulgrad, Romania, June 30, 1915

Made Aliya in 1935

Joined the Hagana in 1936

Died 27 July 2000

Written by: Tamar Herman (niece)

This is the Way it Was

Munia was one of the first radio operators of the Hagana and built the first radio stations in the "Tower & Stockade Settlements" and for various Hagana units. He also set up the communication systems for the first vessels of the Ma'apilim that made their way to the shore of the country.

Biography

Munia (Melech) Zafransky was born on the 30th of July, 1915, in the town of Bulgrad. At the time, the town belonged to Romania but after WW II it went to Moldava in the Soviet Union. He was the first born and had two younger sisters. His father had a shop in his home that made wagons and carriages. Melech displayed an affinity for technical things at an early age and could manage to repair almost anything. He was known as having "golden hands".

As a youth he was active in Hapoel Hatzair and in Gordonia and continued participation even while studying in the fields of electricity and mechanics at the Technicum in Kishinev.. After also having received agricultural training he was chosen by Hechalutz to go on Aliya. He boarded a ship in Constanza, Romania, and stepped off the ship in Haifa on March 7, 1935. Soon after landing, he changed his family name to Adam and that is how he was known by everyone in Israel. He started his career at Kibbutz Kfar Hachosh. He was there for a half-year but then left as he didn't feel that he could progress in his knowledge of mechanics. He went to Haifa and worked as assistant to an electrician working in the building trades. A half-year later he moved to Rehovot.

While working in an electrical shop to earn a living, he accidentally met some men of the Hagana who dealt with communications. He impressed them with his ability to find technical solutions for problems and was co-opted to the Hagana. This was the start of a romance between Munia and the State that was to continue for many years. Munia became the chief technician and instructor in the communications department of the Hagana, and in that capacity took part in many underground activities. When the State and the IDF came into being, Munia served in the Intelligence Branch of the Air Force until he was discharged in 1952. After that he worked in the Military Industries and was active in building the Lachish region settlements together with Lova Eliav. He helped set up many secure areas in the south of the country.

Munia then worked at the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon from the day that hospital construction started. He was in charge of maintenance. He installed a system in the operating room which opened and closed the water faucets with an electronic switch, without hands touching the faucets. After he retired in 1980, he was active in the retiree organization of the Communications Branch of the Army. He recorded the military history of that section of the Army, and volunteered to serve in the Police Force. He gave time and energy to inculcate in the youth the history of the settlement of Israel in modern times. He had many hobbies; photography, building oil lamps from clay, collecting coins and stamps, building clocks and more. Above all, he invested energy in what he considered his main goal in life; publication of the book, "Brave Contact" which he wrote with the aim of commemorating the days before the creation of the State. The book was published in two editions, in 1986 and 1987, and is a veritable historic document. It describes with many anecdotes, activity in the field of communication before the creation of the State. He was busy translating this book into Russian until the day he died. He thought it important to explain the history of modern Israel to the nations of the Soviet Republic.

Munia was honored for his achievements with the medal of the Fighters of the State, with a medal from the Communications Branch of the Army, by the City of Ashkelon, and more. Munia paid a high price for his public service and never settled into family life, but forever remained a bachelor. He died suddenly on July 27, 2000, in the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon, where he had worked so many years.

Signaling by Sight

In 1936, when Munia first met men of the Hagana, signaling between units was done by stations that had eye contact with each other. Essentially, signaling was by flashlight that used the Morse code. There was such a signaling station on the water tower of Rehovot. Men on top of the tower would yell down to men on the bottom, what the message was. Bike riders would then carry the message to wherever and whoever was supposed to receive it. Munia, who was then 21 years old, was astounded by the inability to keep anything secret in such a system, and suggested to the commanders that they set up a closed circuit telephone system between the top and bottom of the tower. Although he had not had any business with telephones until this time, Munia put in a closed circuit system which worked very well and so, won the confidence of the commanders there and they recommended that he be drafted into the Hagana. In his first job as a member of the Hagana, Munia worked in communications in Rehovot. There too he helped solve other technical problems that cropped up.

The Beginnings of Wireless Communication in the Hagana.

During the years 1936 – 1937 the Hagana became interested in the subject of wireless communication by the use of Morse code sent via radio. In 1937 Munia participated in the first course in wireless communication of the Hagana in Tel Aviv and, despite financial difficulties, he built receivers and transmitters

according to the technical data that he learned from books. He was successful in this venture and was asked to go to Tel Aviv to take care of equipment in the communication center of the Hagana. This was done with the support of Shaul Avigur, the right-hand man of Ben Gurion in the Hagana and under the command of Simcha Even Zohar. During this period he started to work in cooperation with the engineer Misha Gordin, advisor on communications in the communication service. Misha the engineer was called the “big engineer” and Munia the technician was called the “little engineer”.

Development of the network until it became the “Gideon” network

The network of stations of the Hagana grew steadily, and Munia was the man who built the equipment, and set up stations in the various settlements. He also advised local operators on how to use and care for the equipment and instructed in courses organized for them. The development of this network gave commanders control of their forces that they never imagined would be possible to have. By 1939 he had built 36 stations throughout the country, as per order of the national headquarters of the Hagana. All this was done with the utmost secrecy but the term most often used for the network was “Gideon”.

During this period of “Tower and Stockade” settlements, when a settlement went up in one night, one of the most important components of the settlement was the establishment of a communication center. Munia would go along with the settlers and set up the station while others were busy with their details of settlement. Among such settlements were Kfar Menachem, Hanita, Shamir and Tirat Tzvi.

Communication with the vessels of the Ma’apilim

In 1939, when the Yishuv started to organize itself for the operation of Aliya Bet, a critical subject for discussion was, “How to communicate with the vessels at sea?” This subject was regarded of cardinal importance and the very best people were mobilized to do what had to be done. Because of the importance of secrecy, only very few people could work on the solution. Munia was called in and gave of his knowledge and experience, and found answers to problems as they arose. Problems at sea differed from those on land. The distances were much greater; there was a necessity of not allowing the British or others to intercept or understand the messages; operators were few and had to manage their stations with a minimum of help from others. Sometimes it was necessary to direct a vessel from a shore station or to change a vessel's course. Munia found the answers, together with other ones. He would determine how the contact would be created, what the security measures would be, and would instruct the Gideonim in the procedures. He was personally involved in the sailings of 13 vessels; several of which sailed more than once. The first vessel was “Poseidon B” (May, 1938) and the last was “Tiger Hill” (August, 1939). After that the Mosad for Aliya Bet cut its connection with the Hagana for logistic reasons, much to the dismay of Munia and his friends. Munia had a complete record of how and what he did on all of the ships that he handled and in his book. There were details of his work. The report in his book of his work on these vessels reads like a mystery

novel and is very exciting. They would leave for ships in the darkness of night, and perform diverse and misleading moves to make certain that they were not being followed. They used music and songs and other tricks to initiate contact or to warn of contact etc. All of this was routine in the daily lives of people working in Aliya Bet.

In the service of the Political Department

It was very important for people working in the political wing of the Jewish Agency in the Diaspora, particularly in London, to have secure and dependable contact on the eve of WW II. Munia set up an office and bought parts for a transmitter more powerful than any there were at the time in Palestine. He completed the transmitter which was installed in a bunker in Kibbutz Gvat. After several failures to make contact with London, they finally succeeded to the satisfaction of all concerned. Some time later this transmitter was moved to Tel Aviv, to the house in which Ben Gurion lived on Keren Kayemet Street. It was called "Sara" after the first operator who worked on it at Kibbutz Gvat. Shortly afterwards the transmission spread to New York where it was of great help to the procurement mission that worked there in 1946.

Another large operation that Munia was involved in, was the building of the radio station "Kol Israel" (the Voice of Israel) in 1940. This was also an underground radio station. The technical part of setting up the station was Munia's department. He had to set up the station inside the city of Tel Aviv and it was an underground station. The British were constantly searching for it. It was so secret, that Munia was forced to give up contact with all of his friends, and all of his friends received notices to cut all relations that they had with him. Even years later, Munia had the feeling that his friends distanced themselves from him.

Munia even contributed to international cooperation. When Charles de Gaulle and his men set up the Free French underground radio station, Munia was the one who set up the station for them, as recommended by the Jewish Agency. The first year that the station began broadcasting, it did so from Haifa and it was Jews who ran the station. Munia also did secret work in Lebanon and in Syria. Munia did so many things in so many places that his personal story is intricately bound up with the story of the creation of the State. When one had to make something out of nothing, Munia was the one called to do the job. When one had to improvise or find a solution to a problem, when there was pressure or unforeseen complications, he was the one to whom people looked for answers.

A month after his death, friends gathered at his graveside in Holon and the following are some of the things that people said about him:

Major General (ret.) Aharon Doron, the chairman of the National Committee of the Members of the Hagana: "We remember you Munia because you were among the first....you were addicted to the work you did....your activity in the

Hagana was a sacred mission for you....you were a dreamer and a builder and a fighter...."

Efraim Bigon, former Intelligence Branch person: "Munia, from Day One treated me as a father does a young son. On the one hand he would show and teach, and on the other hand he was standoffish. He would say what he wanted to say in the form of "I suggest" or "I think". For the two years that I spent in intelligence, Munia was my instructor. His ideas and his technical innovations were something special and unique...."

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