

Avraham, Meir (Meirke)
 Born January 1st 1925 in Braila, Rumania
 Came to Palestine in 1941
 Joined the Palmach in 1942, joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

Meir was the son of Dvora and Shabtai. In 1931 the family moved to Bucharest and in 1941, immediately after the anti-Semitic Iron Cross Revolution, the 15 year old youth made Aliya to Palestine and was absorbed in Kibbutz Ashdot Yaakov within the framework of the fourth settlement group of Youth Aliya. His parents and sister remained in the Diaspora.

Joining the Palmach:

In April of 1942 his whole youth group volunteered for the Palmach and became part of A Company under command of Nachum Sarig. Their platoon commander was Asaf Simchoni. Two years later, when their term of service had expired and the platoon was discharged, Meir and two others were asked to continue their service. In February of 1944 he was sent to a non-com officer's course and his squad commander was Yitzchak Rabin. After that course he was sent to Kibbutz Yagur and served there under Nechemia Shein. This was a period of much activity: There was the convention of the Palmach at Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek and the operation to free the inmates of the Atlit Camp. Nechemia was killed on the "Night of the Bridges Bombing" and Yoske Rivkind took his place. Meirke became his second-in-command.

The Palyam and "The Struggle":

In October of 1945 Meir volunteered for the 5th course for small boat commanders, whose commander was Avraham Zakai, and among his instructors were Yisrael Averbuch and Yoske Pinchuk (Almog). This was a period of much action. The Palyam attacked the weapons armory of the British Army, sabotaged the train station and the camp of the P.M.F Police Mobile Force at Kfar Vitkin and the police station at Sidni Ali. Between one action and another they helped unload immigrants off the ships that managed to slip through the British blockade. When the 5th course was over, Meir was named an instructor for the 6th course. At the same time he participated in other activities of the Palyam. In February of 1946 Meir was transferred to Kibbutz Maabarot and appointed commander of the headquarters platoon of his battalion. There was a great deal of action by the Palmach and of severe counter-action by the British at this time. One morning, the Kibbutz was surrounded by British soldiers and Meir and a number of others were arrested and incarcerated in Latrun. After about one month most of the men were released and Meir was sent to a course for ship commanders in preparation for his being sent overseas.

on mission

During this period the Czechs were sympathetic to our cause and helped the Jewish Settlement in Palestine in numerous ways. In March 1947 a number of

Palmachnikim were flown to Prague via Amsterdam. Among these, in addition to Meir was Ossie Ravid and Motti Hod. The latter was sent to an aviation course whereas Meir remained there in order to assist the Israeli representative, Y. Carmi in his work.

At the same time Meir heard that his family had arrived in Germany and he requested some time off so that he could meet them and arrange their Aliya to Palestine. This was granted to him so he took off and crossed the border into Germany and met his family in a displaced persons camp near Stuttgart. Two days later his family had to split again and Meir returned to Czechoslovakia. As soon as he arrived, he was ordered to go to Hungary. They had intended crossing the border legally, near Kosice but their Israeli passports were not accepted and they were told to return to Slovakia. That same night these four men stole across the Hungarian border in the company of a Slovakian guide. They were welcomed upon their arrival by Yaakov Salomon, the representative of the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Hungary. Two days later they organized a course in self defense for the local Jewish youth there. The course was concluded successfully and Meir was on his way back to Rumania.

Preparations for Aliya from Rumania:

The Rumanian border was also crossed at night in the vicinity of the city of Oradia. A Rumanian Captain was waiting for them there and he accompanied them for the rest of their journey. They set themselves up in Bucharest and acted according to orders that they received from Moshe Agami, the representative of the Jewish Agency there. The end of November was a critical period for the Jewish settlement in Palestine and the Rumanian Government was interested in eradicating the aura of anti-Semitism that clung to it during the era of rule of General Antonescu. It was therefore willing to allow 30 000 Jews to leave Rumania. Since this would also create a huge problem for Great Britain the whole Communist bloc supported the move. It had the additional advantages of being a humanitarian gesture and there also fiscal benefit was to be derived.

Since there was still time before sailing, it was considered a good time to invest in training the young immigrants in self-defense. Meir and his friends divided the immigrants up into a number of camps in the forested hills and under cover of 'summer camps' ran these courses. These camps were a success and when they were over everyone returned to Bucharest. All the immigrants were to leave and sail on four ships. The first two that were readied were "Geulah" - with 1388 immigrants, and "The Jewish State" - with 2664 immigrants. The immigrants that were to leave were placed on the train and sent to the port.

The Palyamniks left for Constanza immediately after the immigrants. Their job was to prepare the next two ships to leave; these were the "Pan York" and the "Pan Crescent". While the small group of Israelis and some Machal men were working at preparing these two ships, the famous vote in the United Nations took place and when it was decided in the UN that a Jewish State would come into

existence, then the importance of mass immigration to Palestine became all the more important. Each Palyamnik working on the ships was given additional duties as well. Meir was appointed to be the contact with the Rumanian security forces. When the ships were readied the Palyamniks were sent throughout the country to gather the immigrants and bring them by train to the Bulgarian border. There were many difficulties and problems that arose and made their work more difficult. A heavy snow had fallen and this made transportation difficult. There were problems of gathering enough food supplies. Some of the immigrants themselves helped in the organization and control of the others and somehow, thanks to the creativity and inventiveness of the young Israelis, problems were solved and the trains moved to the port. People were gathered from the various corners of the country until finally there was one long train of 40 coaches and two engines that ended up at the port of Giurgiu in the mouth of the Danube.

Accompanying the Aliya:

From Giurgiu, the immigrants were transferred by ferry to the Bulgarian port of Ruse. They were greeted at the port by Stefan, the representative of the Bulgarian Communist Party who brought them to the train station where they boarded a train and rode to the port of Burgas on the Black Sea. That very same night the ships: "Atzmaut" (independence) and "Kibbutz Galuyot" (ingathering of the Diaspora), left port and sailed for the Land of Israel with 15,236 illegal immigrants.

In addition to the captain and the crew, the men of the Palyam who accompanied the ship were Micha Peri and Meirke. On the 31st of December 1947 the two ships left the Sea of Marmara and entered the Mediterranean. They were met immediately by warships of the British fleet whose officers demanded that the immigrants be returned to wherever they came from in Europe. The account of these negotiations has been written elsewhere so we shall not dwell on that here. The two ships docked in Cyprus on the 3rd of January 1948 and Meir ended up in one of the winter camps. While there, he and other Palyamniks were busy training the younger immigrants in preparation for the coming War of Independence. He also worked at digging the tunnel which gave those in the camp access to the beach.

The War of Independence:

Two months later Meir returned to Palestine and joined his battalion, "HaPortzim" (they that break through) and on the 28th of March he participated in the unsuccessful attack on outposts in the Shaar Hagai vicinity. Later he took part as company commander of fighting in and around Jerusalem, was a second in command to Dado and then commander of an armored unit of the battalion. Meir took part in opening up the "Burma Road" and in the battles for Mt Zion and the Old City. When the first "cease fire" went into effect he retired with his battalion to Tel Hashomer to reorganize.

The Mosad for Aliya Bet still needed the Palyamnikim to accompany ships of immigrants to Israel, so Meir was sent to Europe again to bring 500 immigrants from the French port of Sète. Shortly after his return Meir married. Two sons were born to him and his wife, Boaz and Gil.

The Navy:

As with the creation of the State, the Navy was also coming into being and one of its new units was the unit for sea-sabotage. Yochai ben Nun was in charge of this. Meir joined him. This unit became what was later the 13th fleet. In 1953 he transferred to Naval headquarters and fulfilled a number of positions and had a number of courses, and was sent to study Industrial engineering at the Technion. Later he was active in establishing the Naval force at Eilat and when the Sinai Campaign broke out he was commander of the base at Sharm-a- Sheikh. In 1963 he was loaned to the Intelligence Corps and sent to Brazil. He returned two years later and was then discharged from Tzahal.

Meir the Citizen:

Once discharged, Meir was faced with the problem of how to reorganize his life at a not-very-young age, and start a second career. He completed his studies in economics and political science and sent to work for the Jewish Agency in Turkey and in Uruguay. From 1977 he worked for an Israeli company as an expert in administration and organization and from time to time was sent abroad in that capacity and as an expert in rural development. In 1990, Meir retired and settled in Natanya where he commenced writing his memoirs.