

Ben-Naftali, Aryeh (א"ר)

Born April 1st 1922 in Vienna, Austria

Made Aliya to Palestine in 1939

Joined the Coastal Patrol in 1942

Joined the Palyam in 1944

Died on 16th December 2000

This is the Way it Was

My twin brother and I left Vienna after the Nazis took control of the country and shortly prior to the outbreak of WW II. We were able to get certificates through the Aliyat HaNoar quota, thanks to the efforts of Henrietta Szold and that organization. In March 1939 we arrived at Kibbutz Ein Hachosh and joined the youth group there. Ein Hachosh was then considered a border settlement on the edge of the "Little Triangle", opposite the city of Tulkarem, and not far from the town of Kakun, known for its antipathy to the Jews. A half-year after our arrival we were sworn into the ranks of the "Hagana". We were given training in the use of weapons and did field training in the dunes in the vicinity of the present location of Elyachin. Our respected madrich (instructor) was Maccabi Mutzari (Manny) of beloved memory, who died in the battle for Jerusalem during the War of Independence. When our period of training was over, my brother Shlomo (א"ר) joined the Settlement Police Force and took part in the non-com officers' course of the "Hagana" at Juara. Shlomo fell in the battle at Kakun during the War of Independence.

I volunteered for the coastal patrol as Kibbutz Ein Hachosh had to provide a quota of people for national service. After having served several months at the station in Wadi Falik and training in Wadi Alexander, I was accepted for the 3rd course for small boat commanders, which was to be held at Caesarea in 1944, by recommendation of Maccabi Mutzari. The commander of the course was Berchik (Dov Magen) and the platoon leader was Avraham Zakai. We lived three men in a tent, and my companions were David Baumgarten (Bustanai) and Yossale Huber (Dror). When the course ended we went to live in the Krayot (suburbs of Haifa) where Sdot Yam resided before it moved to Caesarea. We worked at stevedoring in the port of Haifa, and worked very hard.

At the same time there was an old German vessel lying near the breakwater of about 300 tons displacement, called the "S.S.Amos". She used to sail in the North Sea but now belonged to the Atid Company. The company repaired the vessel and fit it out to work in the merchant navy of Great Britain. Its home port was Haifa. It was completely scraped and repainted and sailed with a crew of Palyamniks. As a citizen of Palestine, I was given a British passport valid for Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey; that is the entire Eastern basin of the Mediterranean. I was able to work on the "Amos" as a sailor and go to all these places during World War II. On January 13th 1945 we made our maiden voyage with the refitted ship from Haifa to Mersin in Turkey. The ship's captain was

Martin Hekedish originally from Germany and an experienced seaman. As for the Palyamniks, the deckhands were Yisrael Charkovsky (Chorev) - boatswain, Ossy Ravid Aryeh Bauer (Leibale), and others – also deckhands. I went in the capacity of ordinary seaman. We sailed to various ports in the Mediterranean.

On our first voyage to Mersin we anchored in an open harbor not far from the breakwater. A sudden storm came up and we had to raise anchor and make for the Bay of Alexandria which would offer more protection. Rather than pay the fee for anchoring, the captain preferred to ride out the storm by sailing back and forth for three days within the Bay area. We had several Turkish and Kurdish stevedores still with us, who had been loading produce and had not had a chance to get off the vessel. As it was very cold, these stevedores became frightened. They crowded into the boiler area and remained there to warm themselves, and prayed to Allah.

Our supply of drinking water ran out and we started to use sea water to make steam. The waves were so high that they washed over the deck, and changing watches and getting to the bridge became dangerous. We used ropes that were stretched earlier along the deck in order to get from stern to bow and back. The galley became flooded and meals could not be prepared, so we ate apples in our cargo that were meant to be delivered to Alexandria. When we returned to Mersin after the storm, we saw that a number of other ships that had not left the port had sunk in the harbor.

Several months later when the nautical tenth company ("yod") had expanded somewhat, it became necessary to train a medic for an active fighting outfit of the Palyam. Miriam Zaltzman of Kibbutz Ein Hachoshah was a nurse and social worker, and medical officer of the 4th Battalion of the Palmach. She did her job with devotion and skill. She suggested that I participate in a course for medics in infantry companies that was to be held in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and the instructor was to be Dr Ziv Tzion (the chief of medical services of the "Hagana"). This was to include a period of service in Hadassah Hospital at Mt Scopus in Jerusalem. This attracted me and I accepted her suggestion.

After finishing the course and the practical training, I was appointed medic for the Palyam. I was responsible for the health of the entire company. I went on the hikes of the company (to Ein Gedi, Massada, and elsewhere) and I took care of olim that needed attention after they had arrived, or were brought ashore. I lived in a tent in Sdot Yam and received back-up from the clinic there, and from the nurse, Levana. In the fourth course at Sdot Yam in which Yochai, Shaikhe Ophir and others took part, I taught first aid. I took part in the attack on the PMF at Kfar Vitkin in which Benny Marshak, Morris, Shaul Biber and others took part, and also in the attack on the police station at Givat Olga. I also took part in helping unload the 211 Olim who arrived on the "Berl Katznelson" in November, 1945.

Unloading the Olim from the "Shabtai Luzinski" was a most unusual event. We knew that the ship was to arrive from Italy with 848 Olim and come ashore on the sands at Ashdod. I had to get to Nitzanim the day before the arrival of the ship and bring all of my supplies with me. The only bus to come near the settlement then, was an Arab bus that left from Nes Tziona. The bus was full of Arabs and I was the only Jew on it. Ashdod, at that time, was a busy fishing village. I was dropped off at a point closest to Kibbutz Nitzanim and walked through the dunes to get to the kibbutz.

We lay all night in the dunes watching for the ship's arrival. She came at dawn and a British plane then also spotted her. It was decided to run her onto rocks offshore, get the olim off as quickly as possible, and abandon the ship. The olim got off the ship well enough, but the British had in the meantime surrounded us. Some of the olim managed to get away, but many of the Palyamniks and others who were assisting the olim were caught and taken first to Haifa, and then to Cyprus. (The whole story is told in the "Palmach Book", Part I page 695.)

In July 1947 I ended my tour of duty in the Palyam and married my girlfriend, Yaffa Cohen on 20th August, 1947. She was born in Jerusalem and was a teacher. We settled at Kibbutz Ein Hachosh. My twin brother lived there and he helped immensely in our acclimatizing there. My brother was active in the Hagana and took part in many battles in the area surrounding the kibbutz. He was killed in an attack on the village of Kakun, near Tulkarem, and was buried in Ein Hachosh. On the 7th June 1948 our first son was born and was named Achihu Shlomo. In all, we had two sons and two daughters. Our eldest son trained in the Air Force and died in a training accident. He received his wings and was granted an officer's rank.

At the time of writing I am 78 years old, a widower, and grandfather to 16 grandchildren.

(Aryeh wrote these memoirs in September 2000 and died on 16 December 2000). The editors.