

Dar Avraham

Born 28 August 1925 in Jerusalem

Joined the Palmach in 1942

Joined the Palyam in 1943

This is the Way it Was

I was born in Jerusalem on a Saturday 28 August 1925. My father was born in Jerusalem and so were my grandmother and grandfather. As you may guess the sea was very far from my thoughts. I would see the sea (the Dead Sea) once or twice a year when I was on vacation with my family. My father had traveled the world quite a bit on ships in his numerous travels but did not know how to swim and it was only natural that I did not know either. Nor were sea adventures part of my childhood dreams.

My parents were the first generation of Israeli born who were educated in Hebrew and in the spirit of "reborn Zionism" they taught their children love of the land and of human beings and our home was a warm and loving one. My father was mobilized to the British Army when the First World War broke out requested a transfer and volunteered to the mule drivers' battalion and was convinced that the Land of Israel would be liberated and the Jewish people would return to the Land of their Fathers. It was on these values that my father, by his words and actions educated his children.

When the WW II broke out in September 1939, my father, who was an officer in the reserves, was mobilized to the British Army and the whole family moved to Haifa. Each of my new friends in Haifa dragged me to the youth movement that they belonged to so that when all this was over I found myself as a member of the Zvulun Marine Group and through this connection I started to dream of becoming a seaman.

In the summer of 1942 I concluded my secondary high school studies, I was just two months short of my 17th birthday. In the spirit of those times I was anxious to "join up" so it was only natural that I volunteered for radio operator in the British navy. I had completed a course in signaling in Zvulun and I was a British citizen, which was a necessary condition for what I wanted to do. However, because of my young age I was not taken so I looked around to see what else I could do in the interim and that is how I came upon the Palmach. I realized its importance as the nucleus of the future Israeli army and joined "D" Company. In January of 1943 I was sent by "D" Company to the first marine course which was at Caesarea and looking back, one can say that that is where the Marine Company began. For the first time I found myself in a group of men who were older than I was, and who were also of a different background. Most of the men in "D" Company had come from the city, but most of the men in this course were from farming communities or from labor union background. I was drawn to these men and friendships were formed that have continued to this day. Such was the case especially with Zalman Perach (of blessed memory) who was my spiritual teacher and with whom a special bond was formed.

At the end of 1943 my mother passed away and I had to help my father. I was discharged from the Palmach so that I could go to work and help my father cover the expenses of the household, as my father had his military obligations and still had to care for my younger sister and brother. In 1944 I got a job in the "Anglo-Iranian Pipeline" in southern Iran, near the Iraqi border. The salary and conditions were quite satisfactory. Shortly after I established myself in this location, with the help of the Israelis who were there and with my experience in the Palmach, I met as often as was possible with young Jews from the city of Basra and I would talk to them and tell them about Israel and I saw that they did have an intense desire to make Aliya to Palestine. This was a very difficult thing to try to accomplish.

News from Palestine was very disturbing and I was asking myself more than once: "what am I doing here when everything is happening there?" So, as soon as the opportunity arose for me to stop work, in line with what was written in my contract, I quit and returned to Palestine in May 1945. As soon as I was back I contacted my old buddies in "D" Company who had in the meanwhile gone to settle at Ramat Naftali as a part of the 11th Company, and I also contacted my friends in the Marine Company. Next I had to contact the Commanders of the Palmach to see to which outfit they would send me. I would have liked to go immediately into the work of bringing new Olim to Palestine. When I saw that that might not happen I was advised by friends to try to get to Europe on my own, and from there I would have more chance of success. I did not know at the time that my brother was a member of "Lechi", and the Palmach thought that I also may have connections with that outfit and was only trying to infiltrate to the Palmach for negative reasons. This was told to me years later by Nachum Sarig who knew me and knew of my friendship with Zalman Perach. He did all he could to help clear my name, but was not too successful in that endeavor.

As a British citizen it wasn't difficult for me to join the British merchant marine, and one month after I had returned to Palestine I had a job on a Liberty ship called the "Sanberian", as an able seaman. We sailed to various ports in the Mediterranean in the service of the British army and carried supplies and soldiers, and when the situation in Greece deteriorated with the strengthening of the communist forces, "ELLAS", we sailed frequently between Italy and Greece. In Saloniki we were allowed to go ashore and in my search for Jews I met the caretaker of the synagogue. I speak Spaniolit and so was able to earn his trust; and through him I was introduced to the secretary of the Jewish community.

Our ship was laden with good food of all kinds so I took a goodly amount of produce and gave it to the community's committee along with several cartons of cigarettes. To my great surprise I was told that there was another Israeli who was helping them who belonged to the commission from UNNRA. When I met this Israeli it turned out to be my old friend Sharik Uri from Beit HaShita. Sharik told me of the efforts that were being made to concentrate refugees and Jewish youngsters in centers or camps where they could be prepared for Aliya to Palestine. When he heard that I would next be in Bari he suggested that I meet Shmarya Tzameret, also from Beit HaShita, and give him several messages

and ask him if I could be put to some good use. Several days later I did meet Shmarya in Bari but he did not know what to make of me or what to do with me despite what I told him about myself, as he had the justifiable suspicion that I might be an agent of the British. At the last moment when I had despaired of convincing him and was about to leave, Aryeh Kaplan (Kippy) and Yisrael Charkovsky entered the room – from that moment on, everything fell into place. My next voyage was to Piraeus and Shmarya gave me a number of messages to pass on to people in Athens. They were working with UNNRA people there. He also suggested that I try to leave the ship there legally if possible, so that I could join the boys who were scheduled to arrive there shortly in order to prepare ships that were to sail from Greece with Ma'apilim.

I became sick even before we reached Piraeus so that when we did arrive I was taken immediately to the military hospital. I continued to be sick until the ship sailed and thereupon made a miraculously swift recovery. I was discharged as a distressed seaman and went to the seamen's hostel under the care of the British consul in Piraeus. On the morrow I met Levi Shwartz, who was the coordinator for the work of the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Greece. When Moshe Rabinowitz, Kippy and the Gideoni, Yedidya Tzafrir arrived, I disappeared from the hostel and from the observant eye of the consul whose job was to put me on another vessel.

It was several months before the vessel, "Berl Katznelson" (Demetrius), accompanied by Moshe, Kippy and Yedidya was ready to leave. Everything was new to me; I learned a great deal and enjoyed working with my three friends and meeting with the remnants of the Holocaust and their leaders. The night the Ma'apilim were brought to the pier and the ship sailed off was at the same time moving and disappointing. This was because I was not able to sail with them. I was hoping that with my return to Palestine I would be able to meld in to the work of Aliya, and go to lands whose language I knew and to be able to contribute according to my abilities,.

Eleven years after that night I stood with Aryeh Eliav on the pier of Port Said when I commanded the operation "Tushia" (resourcefulness) during the Kadesh War. We moved the local Jewish population to camouflaged fishing boats. I was reminded of the situation, so different but so similar, in that little hidden bay in Greece, when we loaded the Ma'apilim on their ship and how one woman begged that we let her take her sewing machine which was her livelihood during all the terrible years, but I could not allow it. We were a handful of young twenty year olds loading the Ma'apilim onto boats. Since then I have matured a bit and the Eichmann trial gave me more insight as to what that woman had gone through. Lova's gentleness with the refugees of Port Said infected me also and taught me a lesson.

In order to return to Palestine legally, I returned to the British consul in Piraeus and explained my absence by my having been involved in some affair with a local girl that came to a sad end. About two weeks later I returned to Palestine

via Egypt and it so happened that that was the same day that the "Berl Katznelson" was caught and brought in to the harbor.

Upon my return I was attached to the Marine Company. I participated in several courses and in several operations but I was refused permission to leave the country and to participate in the Aliya effort. It seems that the fact that my brother was a member of "Lechi" was still a black mark against me, although I still was not aware of it. That still seems rather strange to me because this was not a secret. My brother was injured and captured in the attack on the railroad workshops in an operation in which there was cooperation between the resistance movements.

In early 1947, disappointed and distressed by the opposition to my participation in the Aliya effort, I joined my friends in Ramat Naftali who were in the Palmach reserve force. When there was the Declaration of Independence of the UN and an upscaling of activity of the Arab opposition, I was again called to action as were my other friends from the Marine Company and I was to go to the Negev with the forces under the command of Nachum Sarig. An accidental meeting with Zalman Perach and Yochai the day before I was to go there brought me back to the Marine Company and the 4th Battalion at the port of Haifa, as responsible, together with Zalman for the Department of Procurement, Special Operations and Intelligence. The story of this Department is a story in itself.

When the Israeli Navy was established I was appointed Deputy Chief of Intelligence of the Navy. In this capacity I spent some time in Cyprus. In 1949 I was transferred to the Mosad for Aliya and sent on a mission to Iran and to other Arab countries and after about a year, to the Intelligence arm of the IDF (Tzahal).