

Einav, Azriel (Treibetsh) (of blessed memory)

Nicknames: Azrilik, Barak

Born in 1927 in Tel Aviv

Joined the Palmach in 1943, transferred to Palyam in 1947

Died 9 December 1996

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This is the Way it Was

Palmach and Palyam

In his parent's house in Tel Aviv Azriel met many activists of the Hagana, among them Moshe Sneh and Yitzchak Sadeh. The charismatic nature of Yitzchak Sadeh and of his older brother, Ben Tzion, who was a Palmachnik, had a strong influence upon Azriel. When he was 17 and had not quite completed secondary school, he joined the Palmach and went to Kibbutz Yagur. From Yagur he continued with "D" Company of the Palmach at Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh. That was where he was on November 16th, 1943 when the British Army made its big search in a number of kibbutzim. The search was violent but Azrilik's young looks protected him from harm. In 1943 - 44 his company moved to Sdeh Nachum, Beit Hashita and Ein Harod. During this period his company settled at what later became Ramot Naftali, a moshav in the Galilee.

He had been in the communications squad of Tzvika Zamir in Kibbutz Ein Harod, and Tzvika sent him to a signaling course of the Palmach. Azrilik was proud of the confidence that Tzvika had placed in him when he appeared for the course in Juara and learned well, along with the other young men and women. His first trial as a Gideoni was operating a transmitting station in Egypt. He remained in Cairo for ten months, disguised as a British soldier and passed instructions on to other Hagana men working there. He also passed on instructions dealing with Aliya Bet on land and sea from Egypt. As a result of his contact with Moka Limon and his activities in Aliya Bet in Egypt, it seemed natural that Aliya Bet work should have been a continuation to what he had been doing. When he came back from Egypt, he prepared to settle on the land with others of his group.

While he was at Moshav Kfar Yehoshua learning about farming, Grisha (Tzvi Sheinkman, a man active in Aliya Bet) appeared one day and took him to the port of Haifa. There, without any personal effects, and without an explanation of instructions, he and Alex Shur, a Palyamnik, were put on a ship that sailed to Marseilles.

At La Beguine, near Paris there was a camp for Jewish orphans who had been collected after the War. The Gideoni, Yedidya Tzafrir had operated a transmitting station there by himself for two months. Now, the three of them operated the station and kept contact with Palestine. The Paris branch of police caught and arrested them and they spent two months in prison where they were interrogated and beaten. After then, and probably with the intervention of Ben

Gurion, they were set free. While waiting for a small vessel named "Barak", as was his code name, to be prepared for Ma'apilim, Azriel taught signaling to a group of 23 young men of the Hagana in France. This was done in a house in a neighborhood called Zvulun, near the waterfront of Marseilles.

Azriel conducted the course in the same style as the one he had undergone at Juara. He had very little time, so the course was very intensive. The young participants were eager to learn and took their job seriously. One of them, Max Binet was his assistant on the vessel, "Exodus". Afterwards, Max was an officer in Intelligence in the 131st Unit. He worked independently as a spy with a network that covered Egypt. The whole episode surrounding this activity was later known as "The Fiasco" or "The Lavon Affair" (see Benny Morris, "The Wars on the Borders of Israel" 1949 – 1956, Tel Aviv 1996, p.347). He was caught with them in 1954. Max did not wait for the execution of his sentence. He committed suicide by jumping out the window of the Secret Police Building where he was being questioned.

In the interim the "Barak" was purchased and prepared for its voyage. Its job was to bring Ma'apilim of the Chaim Arlosoroff to the shores of Palestine. The Hagana did not want to lose the larger and better ship to the British after a single voyage. No sleeping pallets were installed on the "Barak" as it was only meant to carry the Ma'apilim for one day at the end of the trip, to the shore. Azriel installed the transmitter. The crew of the ship was half French and half Turkish and the one half could not understand the other. In any event, they set out and Alex and Azriel tried to act as intermediaries between the two halves. They both knew very little French and no Turkish at all. Fire broke out in the engine room several times so they had to lay over in Italy for a time for repairs. When Azriel was informed that he had to go to Milan, he was glad to leave the ship and get a new assignment

The "Exodus"

The story of the "Exodus" is recounted often and we shall only deal with Azriel's part in the event, as told by him in many conversations and as recounted in the book, "Exodus Transmitting" by Nissan Degani. In July 1947 a vessel anchored in the port of Sete in southern France. This was a ferry that had been prepared to carry 4,500 people to the Land of Israel. Its voyage was in contravention to British policy, which was to allow in only a very limited number of immigrants per month. As was the case with most vessels of Ma'apilim, it was given a name that had a meaning, and since it was the largest vessel that the Hagana had had until that time, it was called, "Yitziat Eiropa 1947"; in English, the "Exodus of 1947". This was also symbolic of what was to come. This name, which was taken from the well-known story in the Bible, was appropriate. The vessel was intended to bring Ma'apilim to Palestine, but the British knew of its existence from the beginning. It was obvious that there would be a showdown with the British Navy, and there was no necessity for secrecy.

The captain of the vessel was Ike Ahronowitch and the commander was Yossi Harel. Other members of the Palyam were Micha Perry, Sima Shmuckler, a

nurse, and Tzvi Katznelson (Miri). Azriel was the Gideoni and he had two helpers. One of them was Max Binet, who was mentioned earlier, and the other was an American volunteer. They had an excellent transmitter and its signals could reach far and wide. At that time there was a committee of the United Nations(UNSCOP) in Palestine to investigate and recommend on what to do with the country. The “Exodus” was able to broadcast directly to this committee and to all Israelis. They were all party to what was transpiring on the ship. In addition, Azriel prepared three lines of signaling; one was as per the international code for broadcasting to the general public, and one was specifically for the Mosad for Aliya Bet and other vessels of the Mosad. The third was an internal network for those on the vessel, so that instructions could be given and received so that the crew and the Ma’apilim could be activated in a most efficient manner. This station was active for 7 hours a day and was important in making the Ma’apilim aware of what was happening. In addition to radio communication, and in order to transmit messages that were not for the general public, Azriel also organized runners whose job was to deliver messages personally from the bridge to anyone anywhere on the vessel.

On the 7th day of the voyage, Thursday, July 17, 1947, everyone, anywhere in Palestine could hear the transmission from the “Exodus”. For the first time in the history of Aliya Bet, everything that was happening on the ship could be heard by people in their own homes. Somewhere in the middle of the ship a children’s choir sang the songs of the Palmach and of the partisans and people in Palestine listened. Azriel sent a speech describing how the British destroyers were following the ship and a plane of the Royal Air force was circling overhead. There was a Protestant minister on board, John Stanley Grauel, who gave an oral report in English for the benefit of the UN Committee. Journalists published his speech all over the world. When the actual fight broke out between the Royal Navy and the Ma’apilim, Azriel broadcast all that was happening in plain language for everyone to hear. When it was over, Yigal Alon had this to say to him (“Exodus” transmitting, 149): “The broadcasts in which you described the battle and all that happened, in such a realistic way, made history!...”

Azriel played a special role in that historic voyage, in which so many difficult and terrible things happened. The Ma’apilim were returned to Germany, but the plight of the Jews and the necessity of a Homeland for the Jews was an issue in the limelight of European and American politics.

The Navy, the Security Service, and civilian life

During the War of Independence Azriel was the aide of Maccabi Mutzari, chief of communications for the convoys to Jerusalem. When the road was closed to convoys Azriel transferred to the Air Force and was communications officer there as well. In the Battle of Nebi Daniel he was put on a plane as communications officer and the plane was to bomb Arab forces attacking a convoy. The plane could only take two men so Azriel went with the pilot and played the role of bombardier. In the first break during the fighting, he left Jerusalem and joined the Navy. He became chief of communications and during his command, transmitters were procured for vessels of the Navy. The first

radar units for ships were installed on two corvettes, a yacht, two landing craft, a Canadian icebreaker and on several patrol boats and motor launches. In 1951 he was drafted to the Military Intelligence Service, but prior to that took part in and completed a pilot training course of the Air Force conducted in Rome.

When discharged, he turned to business which dealt with importing meat to Israel, and supplying meat to the IDF, to the American Army in Vietnam, and more. He also developed a network of medical centers in the United States, and other enterprises. Along with his economic activity, he continued to do reserve duty in the intelligence field and much of that work is not for public discussion even today. While working in the economic field in Africa he was also a part of the intelligence network of the Mosad. He had close ties to Moshe Dayan (of blessed memory) and to Shimon Peres (may he enjoy a long life) but especially to Yitzchak Rabin (of blessed memory) and Arik Sharon. These ties aided him in his secret diplomatic career. A united government was formed in his home and Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weitzman met important government heads who had no diplomatic ties with Israel, in his home. This was the case, for instance with the Prime Minister of India.

Azrilik and his wife Bella contributed the Einav Center in Tel Aviv, in which there is much cultural activity. He even began a campaign for the erection of a Museum of the History of Tel Aviv, in the old Town Hall, but he died in the midst of the project and his family continues his work.
