

Gilead, Avner (Goldman)

Nickname: Scandy

Born 29th August 1928 in Tel Aviv

Joined the Palyam as part of a mobilized training group in 1945

This is the Way it Was

I grew up in Tel Aviv and studied at the Tel Nordau Elementary School and the "Tichon Hadash" High School. At age 13 in 1940, I joined the marine section of Hapoel Tel Aviv which was based on the Yarkon River. When I was 15 and most of the older members of Hapoel had joined the Palyam or the British Navy, we attended a leadership course conducted by Shmuel Tankus. In 1945 I and my fellow members of the Ha'Noar Ha'Oved movement went to Kibbutz Sdot Yam for training. That same summer we were mobilized and became the first training unit of the Palyam.

While still in an agricultural training group and prior to having any training within the framework of the Palyam, we participated in the unloading of immigrants at Sdot Yam. Those in charge knew that we were from the marine section of Hapoel Tel Aviv. When the "Hannah Senesh," a ship with Olim, ran up onto the shore at Nahariya, we were also among those who helped its passengers to disembark. I was the volunteer who swam out to the ship with a rope, which we used to tie to the ship and help the Olim to disembark.

I completed the 5th leadership course and shortly thereafter was sent to Naval Officer's course No.3 that took place at the Haifa Technion. When the course had just about ended, "Black Saturday" took place and a good number of participants of the course were arrested and sent to Rafiah. I was not among those arrested, so was sent to Moshav Herut for one month and then to a course in sabotage at Tel Yitzchak. Afterwards I was sent as an instructor for course No.7 at Michmoret, which lasted 3 months.

I was then transferred to the Port Company of the Palyam in Haifa. My job was to help clean and guard the Hagana ships there. Before going to Haifa I was assigned to the Mosad for Aliya Bet, so the job in Haifa did not last long. Davidka Nameri came along and placed me and ten others as passengers on a Greek passenger ship that was in port.

When the Olim, who were to board the "Exodus", arrived in the Marseilles area they were sent to various camps that surrounded the city. I was assigned as commander of one of these camps. When the Olim of the "Exodus" returned to Port de Bouc I joined the group of people who gave them assistance. There were three deportation ships and after several days I went aboard one of them, the "Runnymede Park", which held 1500 of the deportees. I boarded by getting to the ship on a launch that supplied vegetables, and carried a box of vegetables onto the ship. I dropped the vegetables somewhere, and went to one of the fenced-off cages which were scattered all over the ship. The only Israeli on the ship was Miri (Tzvi Katzenelson). In fact, one of the Olim,

Mordechai Rosman was spokesman for the Olim and in accordance with instructions which we received from shore, that is how we ran the ship.

I spent one month on the "Runnymede Park". When the ship was ready to sail for Hamburg I was instructed to come ashore, and did so. During the month on board the ship, I kept a diary which I gave to Mordechai when I left. It was only several years ago that I found the diary, which was in the archives of Givat Haviva. I easily recognized my handwriting, so the mystery of the author of the diary was solved.

A short time later I boarded another vessel which sailed to Bastia, Corsica and we began preparing this vessel for carrying Olim. The vessel went to pick up Olim and I left it. This was the "Amiram Shochat" which arrived in Palestine and succeeded in unloading its passengers. In 1947 I boarded a ship which arrived from Italy and which loaded Olim at Bandol, France. We sailed and en route, near Corsica, we met another vessel and transferred our passengers to it. The commander of our vessel was Yehuda BenTzur. On our return journey the engine broke down. We had to do the last 120 miles of the journey with our sails.

We finally arrived at a small bay in France and after several days, a tug came alongside and took us out of the bay. We were instructed to make our way to Italy by sail. En route we ran into a storm and had to take shelter in a bay on the coast of France. We anchored near the city of Toulon. The following day the French police came along and arrested the whole crew including the four Israelis who were on board; Yehuda BenTzur, Melech, Aharon the Gideoni and myself. The 6 members of the crew were Italian. After ten days we were freed and returned to the ship.

We spent about ten days in Toulon until repairs on the engine were completed. During this period Yehuda BenTzur had to return to Palestine (his father died) and I received command of the ship. One month later we sailed for the coast near Bandol where we loaded the Olim and sailed for Palestine. Along the route we stopped at a small bay in one of the Greek islands and changed the appearance of the ship. We took down one of the three masts and painted the ship red. We also prepared a hiding place for ourselves, in case the ship was caught. We proceeded as far as Cyprus and all went as planned, aside from a birth that took place on board. As we rounded the northern end of Cyprus and reached near Famagusta, a fierce storm broke and we were unable to continue our journey. Once again the engine broke down and we had to continue by sail.

When the storm subsided we continued on our way until discovered and caught by British destroyers. The ship was brought to Haifa and the Olim were sent to Cyprus. Melech and I hid in the "slick" which had been prepared, and were freed from there by the cleaning gang, who were Palyamniks. The ship had been renamed "Kommemiyut" and we arrived in February 1948 with 700 Olim. After a short holiday during which I was married, I returned to active duty and was stationed on a fishing vessel called the "South Africa", which became a

warship. When the State was declared we were in dry-dock in Italy. As soon as work on the ship was completed, we returned to Israel where we were outfitted with machine guns. I continued to serve in the Navy which was established about that time, and was appointed an instructor in the first and second naval officers' course. After that, I served for a time on the "K-30" and concluded my service on the "Eilat", which had once been "The Jewish State". I was discharged in May 1950 and returned to my kibbutz which had settled at Tantura in the meantime, and is called Nachsholim.

I worked on the fishing boats of the kibbutz until 1955, and then returned to the Navy for a year. This included the Sinai Campaign, during which I was attached to a squadron of landing craft. The war came to an end while I was at Sharm-a-Sheikh and when that region was given back, I was transferred to a frigate in the Bay of Eilat. There I received my discharge and returned to the kibbutz.

I continued to work in fishing until 1958, when I went over to merchant ships. My first ship was the "Ampal". After several other ships and various positions, I took the examinations for Captain in 1963, and continued to sail on ships in that capacity. My first ship was the "Palmach" which belonged to the Kibbutz Meuchad movement, which at that time ran a shipping company called "Tarshish". I worked for "Tarshish" until after the Six-Day War. Following the War we were the first ship to reach the port of Rotterdam, and were received there with honor. In 1968 and '69 I served as captain and as the one responsible for a course for cadets, on the ship "Eshel", which belonged to the "Zim" Company. I instructed 10 cadets and after 10 months of sailing, all of them became officers and in later years most of them became captains in the merchant marine. In 1969 I joined the Ministry of Transportation and became an instructor of naval officers in the Naval School at Acre. By the end of that year I was appointed examiner of candidates for captaincy.

In 1970 I was asked to be responsible for the security of the merchant marine ships in Holland. I agreed, and served in that capacity for two years. I returned to Israel and sailed for nine months on the ship "Avocado-Kor" which belonged to that fruit company. I was then appointed to be in charge of naval education in Israel, (a position connected to the Ministry of Education). I served in that capacity for five years, and while so doing I established several new naval education centers (which are still in operation).

In 1979 I returned to the "Tarshish" Company and sailed for it until 1982, and then studied at "Efal" for two years. In 1984 I returned to the sea and by 1990 decided that that was enough. I returned to work in the kibbutz until 1994. I then relinquished my membership in the kibbutz but live there today (in Nachsholim) as a pensioner beside my family. I have a son, a daughter and five grandchildren.