

Goren, Uri

Born 1926 at Nachlat Yehuda near Rishon LeZion

Joined the Jewish Settlements Police in 1943

Joined the Mossad for Aliya Bet as a Gid'oni (radio operator) in 1946

Joined the Palyam the same year.

This is the Way it Was

I was born in a Moshav and was the son of farmers engaged in growing various kinds of produce. My parents had come to Palestine in 1912 (the Second Wave of Aliya). My father was born in Lithuania and was a veterinarian, and my mother was born in Russia and was a nurse and midwife. I went to elementary and secondary school in Rishon LeZion. I joined the Jewish Settlements Police when I was 17 years old, and worked as a signalman for the Hagana. I was brought into Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet ("The Organization for Aliya Bet", a.k.a the Mossad in short) for that reason and sent to Europe at the beginning of 1946. In Europe, the Palyam took me into its fold and used me as a Gid'oni. I became responsible for the network of connections of the Mossad in Europe. I was also in charge of camps of Olim in southern France and commander of the "Latrun" (October, 1946). I was also in charge of a camp in Cyprus (Camp 63 from October, 1946 until February, 1947). I came back to Israel on the procurement ship, "The Mountain" (Montechiaro), as a Gid'oni in August, 1948, and immediately signed up as a communications officer in the Signal Corps of the IDF.

Some stories from Aliya Bet (1946 – 1948)

Hagana Ship "Yagur": This ship, which carried 750 Olim, sailed on the 29th July 1946 from the port of La Ciotat, a small French port and shipyard on the western edges of the French Riviera. It is about 30 km southeast of Marseilles. The Olim had been housed in a beautiful villa about one km from the port. Groups were organized at the camp by number and nature of the groups and conditions prevailing on the ship. This was done in order to display as little change in camp activity as possible before the olim left. They left the camp after midnight and walked silently in the darkness to the port, and to the ship which was anchored at a jetty at the end of a boardwalk. At dawn all the Olim were onboard, and the ship was connected to a tug that pulled it out to sea. We, (the Palyamnik managers of the camp who stayed behind) remained near the water and went into a café that had just opened its doors for a cup of coffee.

The old couple who were the café owners had witnessed previous sailings of Hagana ships from that spot, and friendly relations had developed between them and us. They greeted us and expressed a wish for our success. They asked us very discreetly how many passengers had we put on the ship. As I had mentioned, there were 750 Olim but I told them that there were 150 passengers on the ship. They rang their hands and exclaimed in awe, "Oh, la la – 150 passengers on such a small vessel!!"

Hagana Ship "Latrun": This dilapidated old ship carrying 1,250 Olim left from the port of La Ciotat on the 19th of October, 1946. Bad luck started at the outset, when the ship was being tugged out of the port. She ran onto a rock, and it took a strenuous effort to get her off and out to sea. Although she was supposed to be able to do 8 knots, it soon became evident that she could not do more than 4 knots per hour. That meant that instead of sailing for 8 days, she would have to sail for two weeks. That meant that water and food would have to be measured out accordingly. But these were the minor problems. It turned out that the ship was not stable, and tilted to one side to an extent that gave us a great deal to worry about.

This problem became increasingly worse as we sailed, and as we used up coal and water stored in the lower holds. Without that ballast the angle of the tilt increased. Bob, Binyamin Strasberg, Shalom Schwartz and I stood on the bridge every time Olim came on deck to get some fresh air. We gave them instructions in broken Yiddish through the megaphone; ten people to starboard, or to port, as the situation warranted, so the ship would lean first to one side and then to the other. Even today, if we happen to meet Olim from that voyage, they remind us of our calls to them to move to the right or to the left.

In addition, we discovered that water was leaking into the storage space, and had groups of Olim working steadily to remove the water in buckets, for hours on end. But the worst was still ahead of us. As we approached the island of Crete we ran into a terrible storm. The decks were covered with water that penetrated into the holds where the Olim lay, and wet everything. Many were seasick and the situation was awful. The Spanish Captain and his crew demanded that we go into a nearby bay until the storm weakened. We Palyamniks, who were all in our early twenties, were against it. We feared that this might be the end of the voyage. The British Navy might enter the picture or some other unforeseen development could spoil things for us. Luckily, the storm subsided rather quickly and the ship lurched and leaned, and continued on its way. We soon approached the shores of Palestine.

When British planes finally found us and flew overhead, we actually felt relieved. Soon two British destroyers appeared, one on each side. They bumped against us and sailors jumped onto our ship. A fierce battle broke out which ended when the sailors took over the ship and towed it into the port of Haifa. The Olim were transferred to the deportation ships and taken to the camps in Cyprus. Aside from the disappointment at not being able to break the British blockade, there was, at the same time, a feeling of relief that we managed to bring the Olim safely to Palestine. Years later when I was older and more mature, I thought to myself that only young people, daring almost to the point of reckless, were able to take upon themselves the command of those old, decrepit ships – terribly crowded with human beings – and bring them to the land of their dreams. Tens of thousands of Olim arrived in Palestine in such a manner and became absorbed into the life of this nation. Unfortunately, many of them died in the War of Independence. Our nation will always remember them.

Twenty cannons and one little revolver:

My last sailing was as a Gid'oni on the arms ship, "Montechiaro" ("The Mountain"), which arrived in Israel in early August, 1948. It brought twenty anti-aircraft cannons of twenty mm caliber, while the War of Independence was in progress and there was an embargo by the United Nations, on the shipment of weapons. Before we sailed from Marseilles Danny Agronsky (Agron, of blessed memory), who was active in the procurement field in Europe, gave me a new P.B. revolver as a souvenir. When we arrived in Haifa, the representative of the Mossad met me at the ship and took me to the exit. At the exit, this fellow asked me if I have anything to declare to the customs service. All I possessed were my dirty work clothes so I answered in the negative. Suddenly, I recalled that I had this revolver and mentioned it to my companion. After a short discussion between us, we hid the revolver in the car and exited the harbor without incident. The revolver was in my possession for many years. I took out a permit for it, but a few years ago it was stolen. Perhaps I was the first smuggler in the two-month-old State of Israel!

Communication security:

The wireless network of the Mossad for Aliya Bet, the "Gid'on" network, was spread throughout Europe, on all the ships of the "illegal Aliya", and the procurement ships. It was spread from Athens, Bucharest and Prague in the East to Rome, Milan, Paris and Marseilles in the West. This network worked mostly with equipment that was built and assembled by men who were members of the Hagana and the Palmach and I will mention some of them: Raanan (Rani) Rubistein, Tzvika Beit-Din (of blessed memory), Naftali (Nafta) Raz (of blessed memory), Yeshayahu (Ishi) Lavi (of blessed memory), Sam Hillel who came to us from Scotland, and many other good men. The network served Aliya Bet and the procurement network very well. This was due to the devotion and dedication of the men, the Gid'onim. The network was run in utter secrecy and very few knew of its existence. The network gave its people news, instructions and reports in coded messages which we thought were unbreakable.

Years later, I was served as an officer in the intelligence service of the IDF. In view of excellent relations that the Israeli Intelligence service had with Italian Intelligence, I was invited by the Italians to visit their department, similar to our own. My Italian hosts took me on a tour of Rome and in so doing we reached the region of Monte Mario where I had served as a Gid'oni in 1947. I told those who accompanied me of that episode in my career. On the following day one of those who accompanied me, brought me a file, and there I saw messages of ours that had been decoded. They had no difficulty in decoding them and they had only wanted to ascertain that these were not codes used by the Communists or others dangerous to the Italian government.

Activities after 1948:

I was communications officer of the Golani Brigade (1951-1952), commander of the Signal Corps School (1952-1953), and a member of Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi (1953-1955). I was then the first communications officer of the Paratroop

Brigade (1956-1958). After that I was commanded the technical branch of the Intelligence Corps (the 1960's). Following my discharge from the IDF I built and ran an electronics company, ECI, until 1997. I'm now a retiree and a farmer, and busy myself with various business initiatives in the field of farming and technology.

I am married to Marga, born in Brandenburg, Germany. She went to England with the "Children's Transports" organized in 1939, and there joined the Habonim movement. She reached Southern France with a group from Habonim that came from England and was trying to get to Palestine. Marga joined the course for radio operators that we conducted in Marseilles and reached Palestine as a Gid'onit on the Aliya Bet vessel, "Ha'Portzim" (November, 1947) and immediately volunteered for the Signal Corps. We have two sons, Gideon and Avner, and six grandchildren.