

Harel Yossi, Yosef Hamburger (of blessed memory)

Born 1918 in Jerusalem, died 2008.

Member of the "Hagana" from 1935.

Jerusalem Hagana in 1936.

Platoon leader in the "Fosh" (Special Forces that defended the Jewish settlements in Palestine under the command of British Major Orde Wingate).

Volunteer for Royal Air Force, 1940-1942.

Permanently assigned to the Hagana service, 1942-1945.

The Settlement of Kibbutz Hanita.

Military Secretary to Dr. Chaim Weitzman and Yaakov Dori.

Aliya Bet, 1946-1947.

Commander of Aliya Bet ships "Knesset Israel", "Exodus", and the "Pan's".

Israeli Navy in 1948.

Studies in the USA 1950-1954.

This is the Way it Was

Hagana Ship Knesset Israel:

It took us a few weeks to get the ships ready. Benyamin (Ben) Yerushalmi¹ was the commander of "Knesset Israel" and I was his second-in-command and responsible for the care of the immigrants. [Yoash Tzidon](#) was our Gid'oni (radio operator). The date was set for leaving port. The plan was that on the ship "Athena" we would place between 800 and 1,000 young people without children, and no elderly people. The "Knesset Israel" would take aboard about 3,000. We would then leave together, and when we approached the shores of Palestine the "Athena" would transfer its passengers to the "Knesset Israel" and then head back to Europe.

The Adriatic coastline near the port was a huge mass of rocks. As we stood in the port we could see the train with immigrants coming down the slope of the hill and into the city. There were about 4,000 immigrants and it was no small matter to take them onto these two ships and feed and care for them. This was the first time that I was to meet survivors of the Holocaust face to face. A shiver ran down my spine. These Jews had been saved from the fire, they were homeless refugees; they stood bunched into small groups, some had little children with them. We had the feeling that they were precious treasure that had to be handled with care. They had been given into our custody not so that we would pity them, but rather that we and they were bound in a mutual pact; that we were partners. At the same time, to think that the British did not intend to allow them to reach Eretz Israel was a ridiculous anomaly which only served to make us more determined than ever to fight for these peoples rights.

We organized their lives aboard ship according to the particular youth movement the immigrants belonged to. We also appointed heads of groups of immigrants to facilitate the passing down of commands or instructions. There were people from Gordonia, Hapoel Hatzair, Hanoar Hatzioni; there were those who were religious and those who were not. They had their own natural leaders

¹ A senior in [Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet](#)

and that made matters easier. We set up committees with representation from all the organizations, and we formed groups for self-defense. We awaited the day we would sail, and when all were aboard the ships a cry rang out: "Zhivo Tito" ("Long Live Tito"). This was the first time that a country really came to our aid and helped us prepare the journey for our passengers.

In order to understand why the Yugoslav government was willing to help us, one must keep the historical perspective of that period in mind. Tito, as did the rulers of the Kremlin, viewed our resistance to British imperialism favorably. So, we left port on the two ships and I was on the "Knesset Israel". There was radio contact between the ships. Shortly after leaving port we were caught in a terrible storm. The winds were so strong that they blew our slow-moving, coal burning ships toward the shore. We had no choice but to return to port.

The following day the storm died down so once again we set out. After one day's sailing the engine of the "Athena" died. We passed near her, threw her a line and towed her for a time. The engine started up again, while we were still sailing among small islands near the coast. The engine conked out a second time and before we had a chance to help, the wind tossed her onto the rocks and the ship quickly broke apart. It was fortunate that we had put only young people on that ship, because they were able to jump onto the rocky shore of a tiny island and all were saved.

We could not help them further so we sailed to Dubrovnik and arranged for small boats to pick up the survivors who had spent the night on the island. They were all taken aboard the "Knesset Israel" as we could not possibly leave anyone behind. All the food and other supplies on the "Athena" went to the sea bottom. We contacted Shaike Dan², who contacted the authorities. As a result, we took on more water and the whole town was mobilized to bake bread for us and we were given more fruit and vegetables. We stayed a day and a half in Dubrovnik and left fully supplied with foodstuffs for the journey. Until today, not only do I remember how the city mobilized to help us, but the citizens themselves recalled the incident, as I found out when I visited there several years later.

Once again we left port, not with the 3000 immigrants we had intended taking, but closer to 4,000, all on the "Knesset Israel". Usually we did not take pregnant women because conditions were not suitable for the birth of infants, but such a rule was very difficult to enforce. As it was, from the fourth day at sea and until we reached the shores of Palestine, 11 women gave birth and we had to enlarge our hospital ward in a corner of the ship in order to care for the newborn infants and their mothers. One baby was born dead during a storm and we wrapped it in a sheet and lowered the body into the sea. The father was religious, and said Kadish and cried.

The immigrants, as one might imagine, were in a terrible state. The crowded conditions, the storms, vomiting and sea-sickness all took their toll. We sailed

² A senior in [Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet](#)

fairly close to shore most of the time, and I could see that the ship's Greek captain and his first mate were always making the sign of the Cross. It was almost impossible to turn the ship's wheel and the shore seemed much too close most of the time. We sailed that way all night and only the following morning were able to get up some steam and distance ourselves from shore.

At this point, the Greek seamen refused to continue on to Palestine because they had been warned by the British that they would face lengthy imprisonment if they were caught. Yurgo, from Piraeus, had promised to meet the ship and help the seamen disembark. He was a day late but arrived at the appointed meeting place and took off the seamen. Benyamin left the ship with them and I remained as commander. I begged them to leave the head engineer room man with me, but had to settle for the number two man.

The food on the ship was terrible; sardines and apples three times a day. If we had stuck to the original plan, then eating that stuff for one week would not have been so bad. But this continued for 23 days! We headed out to sea again and our route took us along the southern coast of Turkey and the northern coast of Cyprus, with the aim of reaching Nahariya. This had been decided previously. In the meantime we started training the immigrants, to make "warriors" of them. We also gave them "weapons"; that is any bar or stick. We had no real weapons on the ship. Incidentally, Yitzchak Artzi, the immigrant who became the father of the singer Shlomo Artzi, was very active on various committees on the ship.

I assigned several immigrants to work at the helm of the ship; among these was a tall, strong girl who did an excellent job. Needless to say the ship did not sail in a straight line because these were not professional seamen. The immigrants also worked in the engine room. The miracle of it was that the ship, without a professional crew or captain, continued onward despite all. When we were quite close to the Turkish coast a British plane circled overhead. All of the passengers took cover below deck. The plane signaled us to identify ourselves. I signaled back that the ship is the "Saint Anna" and is headed for the port of Iskenderun to load bales of cotton. As soon as the plane disappeared, we broke up the showers and toilets that were on the deck and threw everything overboard. Several hours later another British plane appeared but this time I did not answer it. We continued on our southerly course and sailed by the towering snowy peak of Musa Dagh, a name stuck in the memory of my youth, like Tel Chai.

As night descended and we neared Beirut, two British destroyers surrounded us and lit the deck with their projectors. We called the immigrants to come out on deck. The British cautioned us not to incite the immigrants, since it is not they, but we who are the law-breakers. We answered that we are headed for our homeland and we will fight them with everything we have. We continued south and passed Tyre and Sidon, accompanied all the way by the British destroyers. On the last day, an immigrant told me in Yiddish that one fellow had jumped overboard to swim ashore, which was still about 17 miles distant. I turned the ship about and told the British destroyer that someone had jumped overboard.

They about-faced also and set off in pursuit. Shortly afterwards they informed us that the fellow had been caught and was in good condition. Once again I turned the ship about and headed for the port of Haifa. Our ship was tied to the pier and then the British tried to board the ship and remove the immigrants.

Company after company of British soldiers tried to climb with ladders, but we were able to topple over the ladders and prevent them from boarding. The immigrants threw whatever they could, at them; wood, coal, tin cans etc. There was one man on board whom we had put in quarantine during the voyage because he had syphilis. When it came to this clash with the British he behaved like a wild animal that knew no fear. For half an hour, three companies of British troops could not manage to board the ship. They then started throwing tear gas canisters at us and it was almost impossible for the immigrants to breathe. Some people jumped into the water from the ship (a height of 11 meters) in order to escape. There was shouting and panic. A teargas canister fell into the infants' room but we managed to toss it back. At this point, resistance came to an end and the British started to transfer everyone to the three deportation ships which had been waiting in the port.

I was among the last to be taken from the ship, and like all the rest, received a generous dose of DDT. This was a disgusting feeling, I felt like a bedbug. I was dressed like the other immigrants and was taken with them to Cyprus. That was what happened to 4,000 immigrant refugees, survivors of the Holocaust. They were saved from the Incinerators by a miracle. They spent 23 days at sea under terrible conditions only to be treated despicably by the British upon arrival in Eretz Israel. While waiting at the port one girl started to sing Kinneret, Kinneret, and many people burst into tears.

There did not happen to be any force of the Hagana at the port to help the immigrants in their struggle, and that was something that demanded further clarification. Toward evening the three deportation ships left Haifa for Cyprus. On the ships, we were kept in some sort of temporary fenced shelters with netting overhead to prevent escape. As the ships sailed away we watched the lights of Haifa and the lights on the Carmel fade in the distance. I was dressed in clothes like all the other immigrants, and had a Russian hat on my head and boots to my feet. The British searched high and low to discover the commander the ship but could not identify me.

The immigrants were terribly disappointed that they did not land in Palestine, but they were not bitter or angry at us, the ones who had brought them from Europe. They had reached the land, Eretz Israel as they called it, they had touched it and now it faded away into the distance. This was very sad and it hurt.

The next day we found ourselves in Famagusta, Cyprus. We went from the ship to trucks which took us straight to the camp, about ten kilometers from the port. The area was surrounded by barbed wire and there were already about 12,000 immigrants there who had arrived on earlier ships. I met the men of the Palmach and the Palyam who ran the camps almost immediately. They had

been sent over to work as doctors or nurses or emissaries of the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee). Dr. Shiba was responsible for the medical care of the camp. A radio transmitter had also been smuggled into the camp, piece by piece and hidden in one of the tents. It worked well and there was always close contact with Israel. The camp was run very well, the food was good and conditions in general were not bad. There were also various groups for studying Hebrew and other subjects. The worse thing about the camp was that we were prisoners there.

Each month a quota of 750 immigrants would be sent to Palestine. That was half the total British quota for a month. My luck was that two days after my arrival there was an allotment of certificates and I was returned to Palestine. Imagine, I entered the country legally, as an immigrant. I was in a pretty unpleasant mood after this difficult voyage and the fight with the British. I felt there had been a sort of betrayal, that the people of Haifa or the Hagana did nothing to help our immigrants when we arrived. They had faced the British all by themselves.

In Haifa I was met by people of the Palmach, Aliya Bet, and Yigal Alon³ who was with them. I told them about the stiff resistance that the immigrants had put up and about the tear gas canisters in the infants room. I told them of my disappointment that not even the port workers gave any signs of sympathy or aid, and how disappointed I was that the Hagana did not show up. Haifa had behaved as if nothing had happened and the immigrants had given everything they had.

Yitzchak Sadeh who, generally speaking, was a very calm and reserved person was very moved by my account of what had happened. He told me that I should repeat my story at every course and every training camp of the Hagana and Palmach. Yitzchak gathered many artists and writers in his house one evening; among them Meskin, Bat Miriam, Natan Alterman and others with whom I wasn't familiar. Over drinks I also told them the whole story. "There is a war at sea, and you know nothing about it", I said. "It is the remnant of the Holocaust who is fighting. Where are the rest of our people?"

Hagana Ship Exodus 1947:

I was sent to Italy and shortly after arrival, Yehuda [Arazi] or Ada [Sereni] notified me that Shaul [Avigur] was due to appear and wanted to see me⁴. I met him at a small café in Milan. He invited me to a cup of coffee – but no cake. "We don't want to waste the nation's money", he said. By him, that was not a joke! He could spend one million dollars on a ship and food for the immigrants, but no cake with the coffee.

"There is a big, fast American ship at Portovenere, he told me. "It is called the "President Warfield" and you are to be its commander". Two hours later we

³ The commander of the Palmach

⁴ Yehuda and Ada were seniors in [Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet](#); Shaul Avigur was the head of the organization.

were on our way in Arazi's Packard, together with Seniora Sereni. At the port we saw this ship with an immense smokestack and we went on board. [Avraham Zakai](#) of the Palyam was in charge of preparing her for the voyage, and Shaul introduced me as the ship commander and "[Ike](#)" [[Yitzchak Aran - Aronovitch](#)] as the ship's captain. Ike, of the Palyam, had worked as 2nd mate on British merchant ships for some time. He had sailed with the ship from the U.S. as chief mate, and in Marseilles, replaced the hired captain. The whole crew was made up of volunteers from the USA except for the chief engineer, who was Polish.

One day the order came to sail for the port of Port de Bouc in southern France. The French government had allowed two large groups of immigrants to enter France in order to board a ship and leave the country. There were 1,200 people in each group. Our people collected the documents and used them for two nights so as to double the amount of immigrants who came through. The immigrants arrived by train to the vicinity of Marseille, where we set up a number of camps for them at La Ciotat, Port De Bouc, Grand Arnas, etc. The largest camp was near Marseilles and held 1,200 immigrants. Among them were several hundreds from Algeria.

One camp had the children's' homes, that is, the orphans were housed there. When I arrived they arranged a lineup so that I could see how they had organized things in preparation for the voyage, the date of which was still a secret. When the whistle was blown, all the children between 5 and 15 years of age, ran and stood in a line. I walked down the line and studied them and they looked at me as if I were a giant. They were looking at me as if I was the last thing on earth that they could believe in and trust. Suddenly, it struck me what Aliya Bet really meant. This was what was left of 6 million people. This was my responsibility – to lead them safely and soundly to Eretz Israel. I saw this job as something holy, and there was nothing in the world that I would not have done for them. When I saw them I was also convinced that nothing in the world could stop us. Upon my return to the ship the only image that remained imbedded in me was the look in those children's' eyes.

It was a severe logistical problem to bring 4,500 immigrants in 178 trucks to the port of Sete. It was impossible to do it in one go. The planning took many hours. On top of it all a strike of the truckers union broke out on the 7th July, the day before we were to leave port. We turned to the union officials who were Communist, if I am not mistaken, and explained our situation to them and we asked for special consideration. This was granted. We were supposed to leave at 8 a.m. but there was a delay in the arrival of the trucks. At 12, when we were about to leave, along came a French officer with some other problems. We went to see the governor of the region, I, Ike, and Mordechai Rosenman, the chairman of the immigrants committee. We made it clear that we had to leave and that there could be no delay. The governor was outraged at the situation and was even afraid that blood would be spilt.

To make matters worse, the manager of the port informed us that we did not have permission to leave, and he wanted to remove a part of the engine to

insure that we would stay put. Then, with the eyes of children upon me and two British destroyers waiting outside the port to accompany us, I was called to the phone of a small coffee shop near the port and Shaul Avigur was on the other end of the line. He informed me that the British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin was arriving that day in Paris for a meeting with his opposite number in order to convince him not to allow us to sail. However, Vania Hadari (Pomerantz)⁵ had met with the Interior Minister, Daniel Meyer, and had agreed with him that we should sail out of port before dawn; otherwise we would all be arrested.

I returned to our ship and explained the situation to our Headquarters. Then we asked the Aliya Bet men on shore to send us a pilot as none of us knew the port well enough. We were told that he would arrive at 1 a.m. and they were ready to pay him the huge sum of one million francs.

No one arrived at one, nor did anyone arrive at two a.m. Fishing vessels were already starting to leave port. I told Ike to start up and take off. He asked, "How? I don't know the way out." This port was no more than a small fishing port. I told him that I take full responsibility and that he should do whatever he thinks fit. We started the engines but the propeller would not turn. When we had loaded the passengers onto the ship, it had sunk lower into the water and the propeller was now stuck in old cables that were on the sea floor. After some maneuvering backwards and forwards the propeller freed itself and we started moving forward. There were about six small piers between us and the way out and we bumped into each of them. The ship rocked and shuddered with each bang and the immigrants woke up, not knowing what was going on. There were two breakwaters that the ship had to go between in order to leave port. In order to do so the captain, Ike, told the helmsman to turn left, but the helmsman became rattled and turned right. As a result we ended up on a rock and were stranded.

Dawn was breaking and ShmariahTzameret⁶ and several others were waiting on shore to see what would develop. They immediately phoned Shaul Avigur in Paris and told him that we were stranded. Shaul, when he got excited, his whole face and body would swell up. Today was for him something akin to the 9th of Av. It had taken weeks and months to prepare this voyage and here it was about to fall to pieces.

We tried again and again to get free by inching forward and we finally did manage to get loose after some time. Once outside the port we stopped the engine in order to examine the propeller and to see what damage may have been done. Azriel Einav, our Gid'oni (radioman), sent a message to Shaul and told him that everything was all right and moving forward as planned. Azriel was very good at his job, Micha Peri was in charge of the immigrants, [Miri Katznelson](#) in charge of foodstuffs and feeding, and Sima Shmuckler, a nurse, was in charge of our clinic. That was my staff on this voyage.

⁵ A senior in [Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet](#)

⁶ Shmariah was in charge of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet's operations in France

Later on I was told that Shaul did not believe my second message after he had received the first. Meanwhile, we had gone out to sea and from this first day onward we were accompanied by two British destroyers. This was the first time that they had tried to lay siege to a European port, but they failed in this. Our ship was strong and fast and we had excellent communication facilities. We still did not have a name, which was to be sent to us from Palestine.

Many activities took place on the ship during the voyage. There were Hebrew lessons, community singing, and news broadcasts in English were translated into half dozen different languages. The passengers had a committee to represent them and Mordechai Rosenman was chairman of this committee. By the time we reached Malta there were four destroyers following us.

On the third or fourth day at sea, one of the women who had given birth died. We buried her at sea and I and an American minister, who was with the crew, eulogized her. I remarked that when the Jews made their exodus from Egypt, many died during their journey to the Promised Land.

We knew that a tough fight lay ahead of us. The crew members, all of them American volunteers, were excellent. Soon after we left Malta there were 6 destroyers accompanying us; half of the British Mediterranean Fleet. They stayed about one mile behind us but were in sight all the time. We traveled at about 11 – 11.5 knots as we did not wish to give away knowledge of the engines capabilities, of 18-19 knots. We were hoping to surprise them when we would make a run for the shore. We were in constant contact with headquarters in Tel Aviv.

We were informed that our name would be "Exodus", and we were mad. What sort of a name was that? We wanted something aggressive like "The Jewish Revolt". But these were our orders so we became "Yetziat Europa 1947" ("Exodus 1947"). None of us dreamt at the time that this name would become a historical landmark. When we reached the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, we sailed parallel to it from the south northward; Port Said, El Arish, and so on to the vicinity of Tel Aviv. Our instructions from Palestine were to make for the shore opposite Bat Yam. The Bat Yam shore is strewn with rocks and did not seem suitable for landing. We finally convinced headquarters to agree to our landing opposite Tel Aviv, near where the Dan Hotel is located today.

We prepared for the defense of the ship in case the British were to try to board and if they were to capture the bridge, I would be able to remove a pin from the rear of the ship that would put the steering mechanism on the bridge out of commission. That would then leave me in control from the reserve helm. We put a net over the engine room hold so that tear gas canisters could not fall there. We also had a powerful radio with a range of 500 miles on a wavelength that any radio in Palestine would be able to receive. We prepared a talk that gave all the particulars of the ship, and while this was being broadcast, all activity in Tel Aviv came to a standstill and all listened. We also broadcast all the Palmach songs. This was on the 18th of July, 1947. We were informed that at the same time there were two armed battalions of the Palmach on the shore. The plan

was to run into the shore leaving the destroyers behind and then take the passengers off the ship with ropes and boats.

On Friday at 2 o'clock in the morning, while we were still not far from El Arish, and heading north, the cruiser "Ajax" approached the ship, lit it with its projectors, and ordered us to stop. We rang our alarm and everyone ran to their stations. It seems that the British had broken our code and were aware of our plans. They therefore caught us at sea instead of having to fight against the Palmach on land. They started shooting and wounded quite a few of the passengers. We had no guns. Two other destroyers then rammed into the bow of our ship and we raced forward at full speed to escape them. Then two more destroyers entered the picture and we dropped some heavy life rafts onto them, injuring a number of sailors. We had a large number of wounded although the British later claimed that they had only used firecrackers and not bullets. Those 'firecrackers' wounded many of the immigrants. The British also claimed that when they saw that one of our people wanted to throw an ax at a British officer he drew his revolver and shot him.

Pandemonium reigned on the deck. The kerosene spilled and the steam escaped from a hose that had been connected to it. A boy of about the age of 10 was hit by a bullet and died. Meanwhile, the metal sheeting of the hull started to split and leak water. Ike and I went down into the hold and gave the immigrants buckets with which to draw out the water. Despite all the noise I heard a boy yell out that his brother had been killed. He had come out on deck and found his brother lying there. We kept on going with the aid of a military compass, but we moved in zigzag. We passed Tel Aviv and Natanya and reached Kfar Vitkin. Our chief medical officer, Dr. Josie Cohen, from Scotland, informed me that if we did not get plasma to give infusions to 6 or 7 of the injured, they would die.

That was enough for me. I stopped the ship and went to several British soldiers that we had captured and told them to request plasma from their destroyers for our injured. Meanwhile, the destroyers closed in and bottled us up like a pack of wolves round a herd of sheep. However, they lowered a lifeboat with a doctor inside, and with plasma and other medicines. We then continued towards Haifa. The ship was battered and our bow had been bashed by the bows of the Palestine. It was not our duty to do battle unto death with 6 British destroyers. We had done what could be done. In years to come Ike would declare that we should have kept on fighting. I was of mind that our orders had been to bring Jewish people to Eretz Israel.

We reached Haifa and the immigrants were in dreadful state. I was told to take off all the men who would be needed for the voyages of the Pans. We had prepared hiding places for the members of the crew and we drew lots to see who would get off the ship and who would stay with the immigrants, who were to be taken to Cyprus to the best of our knowledge. The result was that Micha Peri was chosen to stay with the immigrants. We never dreamed that they would be sent back to Germany.

The immigrants were removed from the ship and given a good dose of DDT. All this took place before the eyes of three Committee members of UNSCOP (the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine). They saw it all, including the dead and the wounded. The American minister, John Stanley Grauel, later gave testimony before this UN committee.

The next day when all was quiet and the ship was empty, we left our hiding places. We were dressed to look like the rest of the Solel Boneh stevedores with proper identification and all. That is how we made our getaway under the very noses of the British. Meanwhile, all the immigrants were on three deportation ships, ostensibly heading to Cyprus.

The sister ships - Pan York and Pan Crescent:

In November 1947, I left the country with a small contingent of Aliya Bet people and Palyamniks. It was a regular, commercial flight to Prague. I had a Palestinian passport. In Prague, Shaike Dan, Pini Ginzburg and Yankale Salomon, the chief of Palmach operations in Europe, were waiting for us. They showed us a detailed and complicated plan of collecting thousands of Romanian Jews from all over the country, not only Bucharest, and to put them on ships. This would also include hundreds from the camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. To this end, [Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet](#) had acquired two very large ships, each of which could hold two or three times the number that was on the "Exodus".

In order to carry out this project all those active in Aliya Bet activity in Europe were concentrated now in Romania. There must have been about thirty people involved, and about eleven different trains that were to reach Bucharest from all directions and would pick up the immigrants along the route. In order to coordinate this mission some of our people were stationed in the headquarters of the railroad. They controlled the time table for all trains Shaul Avigur also arrived in Prague from Paris to check the particulars of the operation. It must be understood that without the cooperation of the Romanian government and agreement of the Soviet authorities, the mission could never have been organized.

In this instance, the Czech government took the same attitude towards us as did the Yugoslav government in the case of "Knesset Israel". Shaul appointed me commander of the operation for both ships. I asked Shaul to give very clear instructions to every one regarding the chain of command and also regarding the measure of resistance to the British. If we were to collide with their cruisers it could mean tens of injured or dead. I told Shaul that I believed the crux of the whole operation was in leaving Europe, and whether the immigrants ended up in Palestine or in Cyprus - that would be of secondary importance. I did not believe that resistance would serve the interests of the immigrants. Shaul considered that for a moment and said, "Act accordingly." Shaul was very sensitive on the matter of putting the immigrants in danger. He never forgave himself for giving the order to activate a bomb on the "Patria" in Haifa.

The whole operation was planned in great detail, including even the menu for each day of the voyage. We met once again with Shaike Dan and with Moshe Agami, who was responsible for Aliya Bet. We also met Amos Manor, who was then still an Oleh (immigrant) but would become head of the Israeli Secret Service. We noticed how they worked together and how they had to coordinate the arrival of all trains at Constanza, where the two Pan ships were anchored. The Romanians were paid for transportation, but in many ways they really did help. Anna Pauker was the Romanian Foreign Minister at the time. She cooperated with the Russians who favored immigration of the Jews to Palestine and were glad to see that that created difficulties for the British. Anna Pauker's father was an Oleh on one of these ships.

The planning for this operation was very good, and in every city and at every train stop, it was known exactly how many passengers were to board the train. The places on the trains were marked with seats reserved. There were of course other, or more illegal immigrants, who had not been marked for this voyage but who wished to try to join. Since it was expected that something like that would happen, a special car was added in which to seat the newly added immigrants. There were so many additional immigrants that we ended up with taking 7,500 on each ship, instead of 6000 – 7000. The passengers included Professor Ashkenazi, a well-known surgeon.

The preparation of the two ships for the voyage cost at least one million dollars. Each ship had several decks; kitchens had to be installed and toilets and there were also two hospitals, and of course sleeping dormitories for so many passengers. We had excellent crews; ex-Spanish Republicans on the Pan York and Italians on the Pan Crescent. Each ship also had six or seven American volunteers who had served on previous Aliya Bet ships. The Romanians forbid us to sail with the immigrants from Constanza and ordered us to move them to the Bulgarian port of Burgas. That would be the port of departure for the Pans.

That was the start of a scene that became more and more complicated. The American government, via George Marshall, informed Moshe Sharet that the Soviets had planted many spies among the immigrants and if we sail with them then the USA would not recognize the State of Israel-to-be. Sharet telegraphed Ben Gurion and he in turned telegraphed Shaul and asked him to delay the sailing. Shaul informed B.G. that 15,000 Jews had sold all their possessions and were sitting on their suitcases waiting to sail. B.G. gave in and Shaul and Shaike decided the date of sailing.

The British plan was to bottle us up in the Bosphorus. We sent Moshe Perlman, who was a major in British intelligence, to Turkey. He was able to catch the ear of the Turkish general who was in charge of traffic in the Bosphorus and, with the help of a large sum of money, arranged with him what had to be done. The ships were to enter the Bosphorus on a Saturday afternoon, pass through during the night, and were to pass through the Dardanelles the next morning. The General said that he would leave his second in command at the desk with instructions to tell the British that he was on vacation in the mountains

somewhere and would be back in his office on Monday morning. The ships had to be gone by then.

We planned to depart Burgas so as to conform to the arrangements with the Turkish general. Now the trains started to arrive at Burgas and they arrived over a period of two days. Ike came on Friday and boarded the "Pan Crescent" where he was to be captain. Leaving Burgas and going out into the Black Sea in the direction of Romania we had to skirt a minefield which had been cleared by the Russians. Only the Russian pilots knew the route through the field. The Russian pilot did not want to leave at night but wanted to start out the following morning. However, we could not leave in the morning because a baby had died and we had to bury it. We also had to wait for a train with 400 youth leaders and community workers who were to arrive that afternoon. In the end, we left toward evening and not the following morning, after the pilot crossed himself a number of times.

We sailed along at a good speed with the Pan York in the lead and the Pan Crescent not far behind. Once we passed Varna it was already pitch black. We used projectors just to make sure that we do not hit a floating mine. It was one of the longest nights of my life! There you are sailing along and you do not know if, in one more second you will hit a mine and be blown sky high together with the other 15,000 people on the two ships. This was a very heavy responsibility.

When dawn arose, we were able to see the lighthouse that marked the Romanian border. We turned eastwards and traveled at 18 knots, arriving at the entrance to the Bosphorus on Saturday noon. I had prepared a gold pen and a gold watch for the Turkish inspector so that he would sign our papers with as little delay as possible, and sign that we were all in good health, and that the sanitary conditions were satisfactory. He signed.

We reached the Dardanelles, the Aegean, and a northern corner of the Mediterranean. At this point we had won our battle. The British had tried to bottle us up and prevent us from reaching the Mediterranean, but here we were. At daylight the sea around us was seething with British warships. The Admiral in command of the British Mediterranean Fleet was on one of the ships. At that moment I received a most unusual telegram from Palestine in which I was told that if the British should give us orders, we were to obey them, but that we should also add: "God gave Abraham the land, and it is ours by right of our forefathers!" I thought that whoever wrote that telegram must be crazy. It seemed that it had been written by no other than Ben Gurion himself.

We were given instructions by the British to sail for Famagusta. We continued in the direction of Haifa. The British, who were sailing very close to our ships and spoke to us at first by megaphone, again told us to turn for Famagusta. I answered that I had 5 conditions to which they must agree before I would do as they insisted: (1) The command of the ships remains in my hands; (2) Our radio equipment remains with us; (3) All of the immigrants' baggage remains with them; (4) There is to be no separation of the crew from the passengers; (5) They will not board the ship armed.

Three hours later we received the Admiral's agreement to our conditions, except for that concerning the crew. He had to await instructions from London on those terms. I answered that I do not accept his answer and demanded recognition of all the conditions. The Admiral finally gave me his word of honor that he would not search for the crew. We sailed for Cyprus and bypassed Haifa.