

Horowitz, Uri

Born 15 October 1926 at Kfar Gileadi

Joined the Palmach in 1944

Joined the British Army and in 1945 joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang")

This is the Way it Was

I was born in Kfar Gileadi, a kibbutz that was founded in 1916 by members of the Shomer. That, is what was special about this settlement and these settlers. They created the environment in which I grew up and was educated. and were the ones who influenced my personal code of ethics and values.

In 1939 there was a Bar Mitzva ceremony at an evening in which I received a rifle and a bible, and from that day of my 13th birthday I was a member of the Hagana. I studied at Kfar Gileadi through the eighth grade and then went on to secondary school at Yagur. My last three years were at Mikve Yisrael where I finished my studies in 1944. When I was 15 years of age, the first companies of the Palmach were formed and I was attached to the Mikve platoon of "D" Company, which consisted mostly of people from Tel Aviv. "D" and "E" Companies were caught training by the British Police in the Ben Shemen Forest. We were released by the British Army as the training was under their aegis. This was the period when the British were waging battle against the Germans in the Western Desert. After this incident, all training of the Palmach moved to the forest at Mishmar Ha'emek. When training was over the companies were spread, for the first time, among the kibbutzim.

I talk to Yigal Alon and he gave me permission to return to finishing my studies. When this were done, I was called by Yigal who wanted me to go directly to a course for squad leaders. From the course I went to the British mobilization center and signed up for the British Army. I was put into the Jewish Brigade. When our training period was over, and in accordance with the dictates of the Hagana, I joined the headquarters of the Brigade as a driver for the Chief of Military Intelligence of the Brigade. Actually, I was a member of the Hagana group working within the Brigade.

In 1947, when my work in Aliya Bet in Italy was over, I returned to Palestine as part of the team of Palyamnicks on the Aliya Bet vessel "The 14 Fallen (Palmachnicks) of Geshet Aziv". I then married Ruth who had waited for me for two and a half years at Kfar Gileadi. We had two children, Nimrod and Racheli. Ruth died of cancer in 1968.

Before the War of Independence began I was a platoon leader of an auxiliary weapons unit, and during the War of Independence served in the 9th Brigade. After that, in the 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade. I was discharged in 1953 as a company commander. When I was put into the reserves, I went over to tanks. I have taken part in all the wars of Israel and ended up as a battalion commander.

Grisha Sherkman and I built the quarry business of Kfar Gileadi, its most important industry.

In 1960 I was requested to work at the center of the Union of Kvutzot and Kibbutzim, which later became TAKAM (the United Kibbutz Movement). I was in charge of the Security Division for 5 years. I pushed for cooperation in the various kibbutz movements in everything connected with security. In 1969 I was again called upon to work in security, and this time it was in connection with flight safety all over the world.

In 1972 I married for a second time to Shosh, and we had Tamar and Avner. In 1983 I returned to the quarry of Kfar Gileadi where I was in charge of the department for earth-moving, asphalt and contracting jobs. Most of the work at that time was in Lebanon, building bunkers and roads until we left the area. In 1987 I directed a museum and was a director of the Israel branch of the International Union of Museums for 9 years. In 1998 I retired completely, and today as a hobby, lead groups particularly teachers, in subjects of the early years of rural settlement, the Shomer movement, Arab tribes of the Galilee, Aliya Bet, etc.

About the Soldiers of the Jewish Brigade in the British Army Who Joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang") and Worked for Aliya Bet in Italy:

When infantry training of the Jewish Brigade was over in Egypt, the soldiers of the Brigade were sent to Italy. They landed at Bari, fought their way north together with the British Army, and drove the Germans further north as they advanced. During the fighting on the banks of the Sanio River the soldiers of the Brigade came across survivors of the Holocaust for the first time. Before the end of the War, soldiers of the Brigade were sent by the commanders of the Hagana within the Brigade to look throughout Europe for survivors of the Holocaust. When the Brigade was moved to Belgium and Holland where it did guard duty, the members of the Hagana within the Brigade intensified their efforts to find and assist Holocaust survivors and at the same time find and hunt down Nazis and do away with them. Weapons were also collected and sent to Palestine for the Hagana. Soldiers of the Brigade were concentrated in Ghent and from there they were sent back to Palestine.

In Milan I was approached by Eli Mondek (Bar Tikva) and asked if I would like to meet my brother Abu, who was already in Milan and not in uniform. I had not seen him for 3½ years. Mondek gave me a jeep and a driver and we drove to Milan and went to a place known as a school. It was the garage and the storage place of "The Gang" that worked in Italy for Aliya Bet. Under a car I saw a pair of feet and shoes sized 49. it was impossible to mistake those feet. I kicked them and told Abu to come out and say Shalom. Abu said: "Don't bother me now, I have to fix this car." I kicked him again and would not let up so he shoved himself up from under the car. When he saw that it was me he jumped for joy, and we had a very happy reunion after not having seen each other for such a long time.

When the Brigade was finally disbanded I was called to Ghent, Belgium to meet Nachum Shadmi. He commanded the Hagana in Europe. I had known him from years previously, as he had been commander of the Hagana in the northern region of Palestine and was an old friend of my father. He told me that I was not going back home but was to continue working at what we had been doing, taking care of the Holocaust survivors and getting more weapons. I asked Nachum to get permission from Kfar Gileadi to do this job, and several days later a telegram arrived granting such permission.

I told this to Moti Hod, with whom I had been working steadily. Moti also wanted to stay and continue working with me. I asked Nachum, who knew Moti's father very well, and Moti also received permission. The two of us went to Italy together and we started to get down to business. We stole 15 trucks from the Brigade, painted them and gave them new numbers. We gave them authentic licenses but false identities. All this was done in an enclosed refugee camp not far from Ghent, and in the same camp we trained a number of the refugees in British military drill and instructed them in how to behave like British soldiers. A short time later they were dressed in British uniforms and each one was given the ID papers of one of us. They learned particulars of our families, where we lived, etc. so that they could answer properly if questioned by any authorities.

It was difficult to find someone tall enough to take my place but I saw one tall fellow at the camp and spoke to him in Yiddish. I asked him, "Wilst foren kin Eretz Yisroel?" (Do you want to go to the Land of Israel?). His eyes lit up, we sat down and I gave him all the information that he needed to know, gave him my papers and my uniform, and we split. I received a new ID and new papers to match. Each ma'apil who went as one of us soldiers, was given a soldier who was a member of the Hagana in the Brigade as an escort to look after him. They went to Marseilles and from there to Egypt and from Egypt to Rehovot by train. The refugees received the paychecks and everything else that the discharged soldiers were entitled to, which they gave over to the Hagana in Tel Aviv. The paychecks eventually landed up in the homes of the soldiers who remained in Europe.

From Ghent we traveled with our stolen trucks under their new identity to Italy, with no intention of returning. We traveled by way of Toulouse in France. We stopped at a very large camp and army hospital which had been acquired, together with all of their equipment, from funds gathered by Jewish organizations. Everything was packed and sent to Palestine and re-erected at Tel Hashomer. The dismantling and packing was done by German prisoners of war, who were guarded by Polish soldiers. The headquarters under whose command all this was done, was American. An American colonel was in charge and he had 3 officers and six sergeants and first sergeants in his team. Each American had a tent to himself, but under the canvas there were built-in walls, toilets and showers.

The headquarters were in a building close to the camp. We arrived there in a convoy that continued on to Italy. At the camp, Moti Hod, Shaike, I, and a fellow

from Ein Hashofet were told to remain in the camp, supposedly to oversee the packing of the equipment. The convoy continued on its way and we were let into the camp by an Israeli major of the Brigade who was in charge of the entire project. He introduced us to the American officers and we were each given a tent similar to theirs and a German prisoner as a personal servant. We were told that we must develop close personal relations with the American officers, and build up trust between us. With that, he left us and returned to Paris, leaving us a telephone number in case of an emergency.

We were in the camp for about a month. We wandered among the Germans who were taking things apart and packing them. We told the Germans they had to work faster. They complained but the Americans did not intervene. We said that that was what they did to the Jews, and as far as we were concerned, we could use more Germans. In any case they began to work faster. We played basketball with the Americans and relations with them were excellent.

One day we found that there was a beautiful villa in the neighborhood and it had a fine swimming pool. We suggested to the colonel that the Germans clean the pool. We could then fill it with water, use the place for evening dances, put in a bar, and have occasional evenings of pleasant amusement. The Germans also probably had some good musicians who could play at the dances. The colonel liked the idea, so the next day we had 250 prisoners cleaning and fixing up the villa. In two days the job was completed. Not far away there was a large American hospital with many nurses. They brought some French girls along, as well, for the grand opening. All the American commanders in the nearby area also came to the grand opening. We of course sat at the head table and welcomed all comers.

The Israeli major visited us several times and on one occasion told us that we had to buy four trucks from the Colonel (not in any obvious way). These trucks had to have full tanks of gas, spare parts and spare tires, so that they could travel to Marseilles, load a secret arms depot of the Hagana, and move it to Italy. We asked for a meeting with the Colonel and told him that we had to move some Jewish refugees in France to another location and for this purpose we needed four "sixwheeler" GMC's, and also listed the spare parts that we needed to take along. While we were at it, we also asked for spare tires and enough fuel for our trip. The Colonel said that that would be no problem, if we would put \$400.00 in the drawer of his desk.

Our new trucks were freshly painted and three days later had brand new forged documents and proper orders to travel to Marseilles and from there to Milan. As previously arranged, before we got to Marseilles we met with Weissman whom we had known from the Brigade, and he led us to a house somewhere in the hills near Marseilles. There were two girls and four fellows, all refugees, who guarded the house without knowing what it contained. When darkness descended we went to work.

We lifted up a heavy table that was made of poured concrete, and which covered the entrance to an underground room. In this room were twenty tons of weapons, including bazookas and American ammunition. When we moved the table, the entrance exposed was 1 meter by 1½ meters, and the room was 3 meters deep. We worked all night to load everything and we started for Italy at daybreak on a route that we had planned beforehand. That way we would use side roads and cross the border at a small border crossing.

When we were about two hours out of Marseilles we stopped at a small forest as we had not slept for two nights, and had worked very hard. We left one fellow to stand watch and the rest went to asleep. After a 3 hour rest we continued on our way and crossed the border at a small crossing after showing our papers. We were armed with pistols and had orders that if we were stopped and questioned by MP's who wanted to detain us, we were to eliminate them and keep going. Everything went very smoothly. We drove through the French Riviera during part of the route, and at some time during the night crossed into Italy. The following day we arrived at Magenta, near Milan. That was where the central depot of Hagana materiel in Italy was located. In Magenta the weapons were hidden within a shipment of compressors and sent to Israel.

Some time after I finished working in Italy, we sat in the dining hall of Kfar Gileadi and talked about weapons that had arrived from Europe for the Hagana. I told the story of the 'slick' in Marseilles and opposite me sat Sy Kolar an American member of Kfar Gileadi who had volunteered for the American Army during the war. He asked me several questions about the 'slick' (hiding place) and then described exactly where it was located. It turned out that he and several other Israelis in the American Army had gathered weapons from the American army, and stored them in the same spot from which we had taken them.

Italy

The fellows who arrived in Italy from the Brigade were divided into three groups. One small group was sent to work in Bricha (moving the survivors of the Holocaust from inland Europe to the Mediterranean port cities) between Austria and Italy. Another larger group was sent to the area of Turin. They set up a school in the hills of that area where they could train olim in field and weapons activity, and where they could teach olim. The third and largest group joined those from the transport companies who remained in Italy, as we had, and they worked under the command of Eliahu Cohen (later, General Ben Chur) who set up the entire logistic operation of Aliya Bet in Italy.

In due time all the fellows from Israel, from the Palmach, Palyam and the Gideonim, (radio operators) were added to them. We also, who had landed with the British Army at Salerno were added to "The Gang". They were the first to make contact with the survivors of the Holocaust in Italy. They gathered them together, fed them, clothed them, and gave them a home. They were the ones who obtained the supplies and fuel that made it possible to move the ships of

ma'apilim that brought thousands of them to the closed shores of the country and forced them open.

We stayed on in Europe in order to continue the work we were doing while we were still in the British Army. Our job was to save the survivors of the Holocaust. The refugees tried to return to their homes but found their homes destroyed or occupied by strangers (goyim). It was vitally necessary to take care of this stream of refugees, to take them across borders and through countries and to give them a HOME. An effort had to be made to bring them back to a normal life. At first they were brought to camps run by UNNRA and the JDC, and in that framework they were also taken care of by people who came from Palestine, Israelis. From these camps they were brought to the coastal towns and cities of the Mediterranean from which they departed for Eretz Israel.

Despite all the interference of the British we never ceased even to send ships to Palestine. In this whole adventure the true heroes were the ma'apilim. Our operations were made possible by the groundwork which we prepared, by mountains of false and forged papers with which we oiled the machine called Aliya Bet. The money for the operation came from contributions from various funds in the USA. When there was not enough money, we bartered or sold in the black market if necessary, and sometimes men were caught by the Italian, French or British police, and arrested. Most of the time we were able to free those imprisoned, fairly quickly.

As I said, I arrived in Italy as one of the drivers of the four trucks that brought weapons from France. I stayed in Magenta for several days and from there went for a short stay in Milan. I and three other fellows were sent to Merano, near the Austrian border. We took two trucks with us. Moti and another fellow stayed in Merano and Uri Marfugo and I went to Austria in one truck. We went to a villa in the Alps near Innsbruck, not far from the Brenner Pass on the Austro-Italian border. We would bring ma'apilim from the villa to within 3 km of the border. They would then go on foot, led by guides around the Brenner Pass checkpoint. These guides were themselves ma'apilim who had learned the trade by doing it. Once in Italy, they mounted the other truck that took them to a nearby town where there was a train station. They then took a train to one of our camps in Italy where they awaited their turn to board a ship.

Once, on the road leading to the Brenner Pass, about 2 km before the place where we dumped our passengers, I noticed a small car standing by the side of the road. I thought it might be a police car trying to catch us so I discussed, with the fellow who was accompanying me, what to do. He was much older than I and we called him grandpa. He had a great deal of experience crossing borders. We decided to keep on going and we dropped our load quickly when we got to the drop-off point. The refugees immediately took off on their route around the Brenner Pass checkpoint. On our return we saw that the little car was moving slowly. We returned to the villa. About 3 hours later one of our guides returned and told us that they had been ambushed by the police and that the olim had been returned to the camp. One month later their turn came again, and

this time we succeeded in getting them across to Italy. When we investigated what had gone wrong previously, we found out that we had been betrayed by a group of Jews in the Polish Army. Before our arrival they had done our job for money. We knew who they were and went to meet them. We warned them not do such a thing again or they would be "terminated permanently". The betrayals stopped completely.

After working in Austria for about a month I returned to Merano, where we stayed at a hotel also occupied by American FBI agents. They knew who we were and we knew who they were. Once while eating our breakfast, one of their young officers approached our table and said: "Beat it. In two hours British agents and Italian detectives will be here to arrest you." He left us and immediately disappeared. We knew this fellow; he was Jewish. We did not finish our meal. We paid our hotel bill and took off in our two trucks for Bolzano. From there we went to the border, picked up two loads of refugees, and took them to the nearest train station.

At first the headquarters of the Mosad for Aliya Bet were in a soldiers' clubhouse on Via Cesare Canto 3, but later moved to the fourth floor of a complex of buildings behind, but near the Piazza Duomo, in Milan. We worked as drivers all over Italy, carrying supplies for people and for preparing the ships for sailing. We would get food and fuel from British military bases with the aid of false papers and smuggled flour and carried ma'apilim to the ships or to wherever they had to go.

After the incident of La Spezia, when the ships "Eliahu Golomb" and "Dov Hoz" had departed for Palestine, Yehuda Arazi gathered us all in Magenta and we had a big party. Yehuda handed out medals that he had had made specially for all those who had participated in the operation. The medal was also given to Italians who had aided us and gone with us all the way. There were several police chiefs among them.

When we were finished in Milan and the bulk of the work transferred to southern Italy, Moti and I went by truck to Bari. Moti went back to Milan one week later but I remained in Bari for more than six months. I lived in one of the camps about 10 minutes south of Bari. There was an empty villa in which Germans had resided. This villa had a fence and wall around it and I made it a headquarters for my activity. I stored everything there that was sent down from the north. I took a couple of ma'apilm to live in the villa – Shoshana and Yitzchak, and they help me guard the equipment and the house. I also had a dog who helped guard the house.

I obtained an American jeep. I saw it hidden in the courtyard of the house of an Italian so I dressed up in an American uniform, and asked what the jeep was doing there. The Italian was scared and said that he found it and was guarding it with the intention of returning it. I paid him a decent amount for guarding the jeep, towed it to our garage to fix the motor and anything else necessary, and now was the proud owner of a jeep. There was also a GMC "sixwheeler" from

the Joint that a refugee named Teddy was driving. He would fill it with gas everyday and then sell the gas. I told Teddy that from that day onward, the truck belonged to me, and the fuel that he filled up would go into our barrels. This gave us fuel to run some of our other operations. Fuel was a very difficult item to procure.

The sailings to Palestine were our major activity for a long time. Since our bases in the north were uncovered by the British, in time we moved to various ports further to the south. One day we received orders to find a decent port in the south and set up a base for sailing from there. We went on a scouting trip: Ernst, a member of Givat Chaim (that was not his real name), Avraham Zakai from the Palyam and I. After looking at various beaches for two days we decided on the shore at Metaponto, in the middle of the boot of southern Italy. It was about a two and a half hour ride south of Bari. There was an open beach but ships could not come in too close to shore. This meant that ma'apilim would have to be rowed out to the ships, but there was a house on the shore which contained several rooms.

We had a talk with the head man of the village, which was a small fishing village, (today it is a town), and explained to him that we wanted to set up a rest camp for the refugees there, develop the beach a bit, and put in a road. At that time only a 4x4 drive vehicle could travel on the sand and dunes there. We gave the headman a sum of money, part of which went to him and the remainder to the village, and signed a lease. We set up two large buildings which had previously been used as storerooms, and two regular sized huts. We also installed showers. Ada Sereni spoke to her cousin who was Minister of Labor in the Italian Government, and as per his instructions a gravel road was built from the nearest existing road to the house. From Bari we brought rubber boats and compressed air tanks with which to inflate them. We tried out these inflated boats for the first time, in Metaponto.

When a ship would come in to be loaded, it would anchor about 150 meters from the beach. We would stretch a thick rope cable from the ship to posts on the shore. About 30 Ma'apilim would fit into the boat at one time and one of us would go along as well. The ma'apilim would then pull their boat to the ship and from there they would climb up rope ladders. In general everything worked well. The refugees arrived at Metaponto, were housed in the huts and fed in one of the bigger storerooms which became a dining hall. Each group would receive its food supply and do its own cooking. While waiting for a ship to sail they would go swimming or play on the beach. One Israeli was in charge of the place and he was aided by a team of ma'apilim.

The loading of the ma'apilim and the sailings went without incident and according to schedule. But one sailing stands out in my memory. That was of the "Shabtai Luzinski", under command of David Maimon. The ship arrived in Metaponto from Marseilles, where it had been prepared. When it became dark enough and we started to load the ma'apilim, the sea was calm with small, quiet waves. After about an hour when there were 250 ma'apilim on board, the sea

became rough and the waves rose higher. The ship rolled from side to side. In the raft in front of mine, two air chambers were punctured by the ladders as the waves tossed their legs above the level of the water. Two ma'apilim fell into the water and we had difficulty in saving them. The raft finished unloading and came back with instructions to stop. My raft was still at the side of the ship and the ladder punctured three of the air chambers (there are 8 chambers in each raft) in mine. Four of the ma'apilim were thrown into the water. We got them out after a struggle, managed to put them aboard the ship, and then we returned to the beach. We had to halt loading the ma'apilim and only the motor launch was able to keep working and loaded food onto the ship. The ship backed off a further distance from the shore to ride out the storm while the launch continued to make the trip to and fro carrying supplies.

While this was going on Yehuda Arazi came over and told me to accompany him. He pointed out a ma'apil who was standing on a barrel and yelling: "Let's take the motor launch by force, and force our way onto the ship. They want to leave the rest of us here!" Yehuda and I forced a path to the barrel and I tossed the fellow off it. Yehuda mounted the barrel and the ma'apilim went silent to hear what he had to say. He told them in an angry tone that the ship had only distanced itself because of the rough seas and would be back the next morning. He also warned that anyone who disturbed the peace would not be allowed on Aliya until the following year.

There had been an incident six months earlier when an aroused crowd of refugees injured two of our drivers, who were themselves survivors of the Holocaust. They were all ordered back to bed and went quietly. The one who had caused the uproar received a thrashing from me, and by force I put him into a room and locked him up. I placed two ma'apilim outside the door to guard him.

The sea was still rough the following day so the ship went to wait out the weather in a small port nearby. While in port it became clear that there was a bad leak near the main engine shaft and near the propeller. It was decided that when the storm was over the ship should come back to the loading point, unload the passengers, and then go to a shipyard for repairs. We also had a problem with the toilets and made some improvements in that area. We had sufficient food on the ship for the journey and also bought fresh food in the nearby town. Three days later the ship returned to Metaponto and all the passengers disembarked onto the shore. The following week we brought the "Chaim Arlosoroff", which had come from Sweden and had loaded there only half the ma'apilim that it was fit to carry, and we loaded it with all the ma'apilim who had been scheduled to sail on the "Shabtai Luzinski".

Three weeks later we again brought ma'apilim to Metaponto. The "Shabtai Luzinski" returned after having been repaired. (The ship was named for a very dear person who had been in charge of the Center for Diaspora Activities in Italy and was killed in an automobile accident.) The ship was loaded with

ma'apilim on quiet seas and once again set sail under the command of David Maimon. The ship sailed close to the coast and was able to avoid being spotted by British naval patrols. It broke through the siege of the British Navy, came into shore near Nitzanim and unloaded its ma'apilim.

After each ship left we would get together and discuss how the operation had gone and see if there was room for improvement or change. This time we also had a report of what was happening in Palestine and also discussed plans for the future. When the meeting was almost over I requested that I finish up and be sent home. I was the last of the soldiers who had served in the British Army and was still in Europe. There were some fellows like Moti who had gone home and come back again. I also requested a leave to visit Venice.

Two weeks after that visit I was ordered to take a truck and load it half full with cartons of canned food. Menachem Cohen of the Palyam (later, a captain in the Navy) came with me. We were friends and had worked together before in Bari. We left Bari for Bacoli, a small town south of Naples. There was a large house there that had housed olim, but was no longer in use. There was a large cache of arms and ammunition hidden there. We loaded the stuff at night and covered it with the cartons of preserves that we had brought with us. Once loaded, we headed north to Magenta. We knew there were check points of American military police, and in order to avoid them we traveled a route via small side-roads that had been marked beforehand for us.

When we were on a small dirt road a big wagon came towards me drawn by two oxen. I stopped at the side of the road as far to the side as I could safely go. The cart had large wheels and the axle protruded from them for about one meter. The axle caught the fender of the truck and drew it back. The radiator was screwed to the fender and jammed into the propeller. The oxen were unperturbed and felt nothing and kept pulling. The radiator was ruined and all the water spilled out. We stopped a big Italian truck that came by and for a sum he agreed to tow us past the American check points to the Bay of Gaeta, near the town of Formia. There was a building which we had rented near the shore as we intended to establish a new departure point there. The fellow in charge of the place was Moshe Rabinowitz of the Palyam, and he had about 15 ma'apilim helping him. He designated which room we could use, and we unloaded all the weapons that we had brought, and once again covered everything with the cartons of provisions and then locked the room. We put a 24 hour-a-day guard on the room and nailed the door firmly shut.

Menachem Cohen went to Bari to bring back a new radiator. To get there and back required a trip of 4 days.. In the meantime I had the truck towed to a garage in Formia where the old radiator was taken out and a new one, that Menachem had brought, installed. This whole episode took 12 days. Seder Pesach was now approaching. We ordered matzot, wine and Hagadot from Rome and they arrived on time. We bought 4 ducks and some chickens, and everything else needed for a Seder. The girls cooked and we decorated the dining hall and spread tablecloths. Moshe Rabinowitz sat at the head of the

table and we had a Seder which was very similar to a kibbutz Seder. Certain portions were read aloud and we sang songs. There on the banks of the Bay of Gaeta is where we spent the Passover of 1947.

Menachem had already gone north by the time that the truck was repaired. I loaded the truck again, covered the cargo with the cartons, and took off on a two day journey to Magenta. As had been promised, I was given leave and went for a week's visit to Venice. The first two days I spent on the little beach near the city. I met a group of Italians, fellows and girls, and spent two days with them, swimming and touring. When the week was up I returned to Milan by train.

Ada Sereni was now in command of Aliya Bet in Italy. I acted as her driver and traveled with her to a number of places. Ada was a member of Kibbutz Givat Brenner; I recall her as a beautiful and rather introverted person to whom anyone's door in Italy was open. This was because of the importance of her family and that of her husband who had been killed by the Nazis. She came from one of the most important Jewish families in Rome, and in Italy in general. She had also learned many things from Yehuda during the period that she worked with him.

I recall one particular incident. I took Ada to see the departure of one ship, as there was some fear that the Italians would stop it from sailing because of pressure of the British. We stopped several times along the way and each time Ada debated with herself whether we should call off the sailing. She also asked my opinion. I told her that we should wait and see what the situation was when we got to the shore and that she should phone her friend, the local chief of police and see what he knew. She did that and was assured that the sailing could take place as scheduled without any trouble, and so it did.

In Milan I sat and waited for three weeks for something to take me back to Palestine. I could have returned as a passenger on a regular ship as my British passport was forwarded to me, but I preferred to return accompanying a ship of ma'apilim. In July I was told to proceed to a camp of olim near the town of Alessandria, to prepare olim for Aliya. In this camp I met a girl I knew who was a nurse. There also was a doctor who checked the olim. This camp held about 340 men, women and children. There were also some very young babies and some pregnant women. It had been decided that this ship would take all of these passengers because some had been denied previous sailings because of their conditions. The ship was scheduled to sail directly to Haifa without offering any resistance to the British.

After a week of instructions and preparations the buses came. Each oleh was allowed to take one backpack and one small piece of hand luggage. We mounted the buses and after riding for five hours, arrived at the town of Migliarino, near Livorno. Here we loaded the ma'apilim onto a very large wooden ship. We loaded a total of 860 passengers. The ship was loaded within two hours and sailed out into the sea. There, we rendezvoused with another

ship that had been outfitted at La Ciotat, France. The sea was quiet and we were able to tie the two ships side by side and in mid-sea we transferred all the ma'apilim from our ship to theirs. I stood with one foot on one ship and the other on the other ship, and passed the babies and children from one ship to the other and put each one in his assigned bunk.

Because of the children we made the bunks a little wider than usual, and they were built in tiers of four levels. Toilet facilities and washing faucets were all on the deck. When all were on board and in their places, we set sail southward along the boot of Italy. The commander of the ship was Eliezer Klein, and the first mate was Shalom Dolitzki. I was in charge of the ma'apilim and had to take care of the meals, and all special problems involving the children, babies, pregnant women etc. We had a doctor and nurse on board with us. There was a not too severe storm the second day at sea, but it was enough to cause seasickness and fainting spells for a number of the ma'apilim. We allowed groups of them to come on deck for several hours of fresh air .

There were three births while we were en route and the doctor and nurse handled them without incident. I was present at all of them and held a light or otherwise made myself useful during the birth, as conditions were far from ideal. For the first time in my life I saw how a woman gives birth with all the difficulty and beauty in the process. On the other hand, there was also an incident of suicide when a man jumped overboard. We realized what he did and stopped the ship. I and two of the Italian crewmen went into the water and found the man. He was already dead. The Italians tied a heavy chain around his body and he sank to the bottom.

Besides the Israelis I already mentioned, we also had two radio operators who were ma'apilim who had been taught signaling in France and had come along with the ship. They had a small transmitting station on deck. The Italian crew consisted of an aged captain who was an experienced seaman and a wonderful person, an engineer who was also not a young man, and two seamen, one of whom was a cook. The food was stored near the bow of the ship, and for the first five days we had plenty of fresh food; bread, vegetables, fruit and eggs, etc. For the rest of the trip, which lasted two weeks, we had biscuits and canned food, and powdered milk for the children. We boiled water for cooking on the deck. The ma'apilim had been divided into groups and each group had two individuals who came and took portions of food for their group for the whole day. When the sea became a little rough, we sailed closer to the shore. We also decided to go through the Straits of Messina even though we knew that it was most likely that the British would spot us there. We were in the Straits that night and at 1:00 am the strong light of a projector lit the ship. We were surrounded by two warships of the British navy. They identified us and from that moment, at least one of them accompanied us at all times during our journey. The day after we had passed through the Straits we ran into a storm that lasted for four days. For a night and half of the following day we were forced to change direction and to sail with our bow facing into the waves. I went down into the holds to take care of the sick, together with the doctor and the nurse, and the air in the holds

was foul from the vomit and crowding. Sometimes we had to force people onto the deck for fresh air.

When the storm subsided the British warships addressed us by bullhorn and told us to return to Italy. I answered and told them that we have women and children on board and were sailing directly to Haifa. We also asked them to give us the exact azimuth to Haifa as we had deviated from our set course due to the storm. The English, in their most gentlemanly fashion, obliged us with exact directions. In effect, we were heading in that direction anyway.

As I said, this was a three-masted wooden sailing ship of 650 tons. Its engine could make the vessel do 6½ knots. Most of the time we were also aided by the sails, even during storms, in order to lessen the rolling motion of the ship. There was a time during a storm when we were afraid that the structure we had built on the deck, and which held a good number of ma'apilim, might not hold up. This structure creaked and groaned and swayed from side to side, but in the end it withstood the strains upon it. The bridge was built on the stern of the vessel and below it were the crew quarters, the kitchen, dining room and the entrance to the engine room. Above the bridge another small room had been added in which Eliezer, Shalom Dolitski and I were quartered.

Two people helped me in doling out the food and keeping order. One was Yitzchak, the redhead who had lived with me and his girlfriend Shoshana in Bari, and whom I happened to find were on this ship. I appointed Yitzchak as responsible for the food storage room. A committee was appointed to represent the ma'apilim. As a result of conditions on the vessel and the powdered milk, the babies suffered from diarrhea and other illnesses. To our luck, the doctor had a sufficient stock of medicines with him. Between his and the nurse's devotion to their duty, they were able to take care of the health problems that arose. The closer we came to the shores of Palestine, the more the British insisted that we return to Italy. We had prepared a hideout in the bow of the ship below deck and on both sides of the water tank. We put a supply of food there and intended to use the place when we got to Haifa. The others were to use the hideout, but I, who was responsible for the ma'apilim, would go with them to Cyprus. During the voyage I had met an Israeli fellow who had been in the Palmach at Kfar Gileadi. When I asked him what he had been doing, I learned that he had worked in the camps of the ma'apilim and met and married one of them, and she was sitting next to him. He did not want to wait a year for a certificate for her, so had come with her and her group on the ship. He was certain that he would be going to Cyprus with her. He agreed to assume responsibility for accompanying the ma'apilim in my stead. I sent a message to Palestine to that effect and received approval for the switch. Before we entered the port of Haifa I described to him what his duties were and whom to contact in Cyprus.

When we were still a day and a night distant from Haifa we were to meet a smaller ship that was to transfer its passengers to us so that it could return to Europe to bring more olim. This was the "Yehuda Halevi", that carried 150

ma'apilim from North Africa. The British however, overcame that ship by force while we were still on the way to the rendezvous with them, and towed their ship into port. The next morning we saw that we were surrounded by six British destroyers and two airplanes circling overhead. At 10:00 we were ordered to stop but continued sailing. Two destroyers came along on either side and slowly moved closer until we were squeezed between them. As I said, we did not offer resistance because of the number of youngsters we had on board. We were the first ship to arrive after the fight that the British had had with the "Exodus 1947". At the last moment the engineer smashed the fuel pump and other parts of our engine, and then hid among the ma'apilim. The radio operators threw their equipment into the sea and destroyed all the codes and other documents. All of us, including the Italian crew, mingled with the refugees. A force of Royal Marines boarded the ship as soon as they had tied up alongside us. Another unit took over the bow of the vessel and a third force took the bridge. When they saw that the engine had been sabotaged they towed the vessel into Haifa.

When the vessel reached port we, Eliezer Klein, Shalom Dolitzki, the two radiomen and I, entered the hideout. The outside was camouflaged and covered with sacks of food and other things, and from the inside we fixed the entrance cover so that it could not be moved from the outside. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible and our biggest problem was that Shalom snored loudly. We had to wake him every time he did so. We all quickly fell asleep as we were dead tired and had not slept properly for days. We had plenty with us to eat and drink. We could hear the ma'apilim on the outside. On the second day Yitzchak knocked on the entrance cover and told us that we could come out. We noticed that there was only one deportation ship; the Palmach had sabotaged the other. The ma'apilim of the "Yehuda Halevi" and one third of those from our ship were put on that ship. The others waited for the deportation ship to return on the following day in order to take the rest to Cyprus. When that ship returned to load the rest of the olim we again entered the hideaway and waited until it left.

We also waited for the British marines, police and Arab police who worked for the British. They all searched the vessel and looked for whatever surprises they could find. Finally, on the following day a group of workers of Solel Boneh was sent to clean the ship and sanitize it. Actually, the fellows who made up the cleaning crew were Palmachniks who worked in the port. They knew where the hideout was but couldn't find it. We heard them knocking on the tank and singing in Yiddish; "Chevre vu bist tu" (where are you guys?) We told them where to find the opening of our entrance, and we freed the entrance cover from the inside. We then came out and joined them in cleaning the vessel. Davidka Nameri yelled out to me: "Hey you, take that sack of trash and bring it down to the tractor. I brought down one sack and then another and then rode with Davidka and the wagon of junk. At the gate to the port we got down. Davidka was known in the port and the policeman was also one of ours. Davidka said to me: "Walk straight ahead and keep talking, and don't look to the side". That is how I walked out of the port.

The first thing that Davidka had me do was to get a shave and a haircut. Then I went with him to the offices of Solel Boneh where the offices of the Mosad for Aliya Bet were located. There I met Grisha Shenkman. I was given a Mandatory ID card and Grisha took me to a hotel where Ruth was waiting for me. She had waited 2½ years. This was a very emotional meeting. After about an hour we went back to the Mosad offices and I was given some money and we left for Kfar Gileadi. Ruth was my wife and the mother of our two children, Nimrod and Racheli and died of cancer in 1968, after a long and bitter struggle.

In conclusion it would be interesting to examine what made the people of Kfar Gileadi, in that era, so unique. As soon as WW II was over the following members went to work to save the remnant of the Holocaust: Grisha (Tzvi Shenkman), Moshe Agami, Abu (Avinoam) Horowitz, Uri Horowitz, Menachem Keller, Meir Yankelewitz, Mordechai Artzi, Yaakov Eshkoli, Meir Sal'i (Brill), Yoav Asushkin (Alon), Gedda Shochat, Aryeh Neuman, Yetta Koller, Esther Gileadi, Ossie (Shmuckler) Ravid and Sy Koller. All of them, including 36 members of Kfar Gileadi who had enlisted in various services of the British Army, and 7 in the Jewish Settlement Police, and 6 in the Palmach and the Hagana, made up 74 members of a total membership of 180. This was an extraordinary percentage and no other kibbutz or other settlement could compare with it.