Kaplan, Aryeh (Kippy) Born in 1924 in Pinsk, Poland Came to Palestine in 1939 Joined the Palmach in 1941 Joined the Palyam in 1942

This is the Way it Was

My parents were Moshe Kaplan and Rachel (Cohen) Kaplan. They were divorced when I was two years old and I remained with my mother. My father migrated to Montreal, Canada and when I was 8 years old my mother and I made Aliya to Palestine.

In Pinsk I had studied at the Tarbut school, and in Palestine I went to the Tachkimoni in Jerusalem, the Achad Haam in Tel Aviv, and to the youth village of Ben Shemen. I also studied at Beer Tuvia, at Tichon Chadaash in Tel Aviv, and at Kadoorie. I studied in many places because my mother was a nurse and worked in many different places.

I was also a member of the Gordonia youth movement.

Palmach - Palyam

In mid-1941 most of my class in Kadoorie was mobilized into "A" Company of the Palmach. By 1942 the class was a fully operational Palmach unit. We went through a course for squad leaders and were then stationed at Kibbutz Kfar Menachem, in view of the imminent invasion by Rommel and the German army. At the end of 1942 I volunteered for the first course for small boat commanders at Sdot Yam.

My seamanship training from January of 1943 and until I sailed on the "Dalin" to Italy in August 1945, included that first course for small boat commanders which

lasted three months, and working as a launchman at "Ogen" Co. in the port of Haifa. I also served for three months as a deckhand on the "Amal" and was a fisherman on kibbutz fishing boats. I also worked as a stevedore and took part in the first officer's naval course in Haifa.

Activity in Aliya and Procurement

In August, 1945, five Palyamniks and Gideonim and 15 emissaries of the Mosad for Aliya Bet arrived in Bari, Italy on the "Dalin". From there three of us, Moshe Rabinovitch, Yedidya Tzafrir and I, went on to Greece. On the 16th of November,1945 we sailed from Greece on the immigrant ship, "Berl Katznelson" with 211 Olim. We reached the coast of Palestine opposite Shefayim on the 22nd of November. While the immigrants were disembarking, a British destroyer appeared and shortly thereafter, a launch carrying British sailors and officers boarded the ship and took control. There were still 11 olim on the ship and we three Palyamniks. The British saw that I intended to jump into the water and put an armed guard on me. I was, in any case, able to find the moment to jump into

the water and when I reached the shore, Sara Yaffe was there to take care of me. Moshe, Yedidya and the 11 Olim were taken to Atlit. The Greek crew was tried in court but later freed and returned to Greece. The ship's captain was sentenced to eight months imprisonment in Acre. Moshe Rabinovitch had been commander of the "Berl Katznelson," which was the first ship to be captured by the British.

"Chaviva Reik" – I returned to Greece in the beginning of '46. I was busy most of the time with the Israeli committee for UNRRA and with Levi Shvat in collecting and absorbing survivors. In time, we were joined by Samek, Avraham Lichovsky and Shalom Bornstein. On June 2, 1946, we took 312 Olim on the "Chaviva Reik" and 150 on "Rafi 1". Samek was the commander of the "Rafi 1" and Avraham Lichovsky was his Gideoni. The "Chaviva Reik" was under my command and Shalom Bornstein was my Gideoni. When we were close to the shore of Palestine, those on the "Rafi 1" transferred to the "Chaviva Reik," and the Greek crew on the "Chaviva" went to the "Rafi", which immediately headed back to Greece. A crew of volunteer olim relieved the Greek crew and as some of them were Salonikans with sea experience, they were not ignorant as to what to do. This was a pleasant voyage with good weather and healthy young people who were well organized.

As we approached the coast of Palestine we were discovered and captured by a British destroyer. The immigrants were taken off the vessel at Haifa and incarcerated in the Atlit Detention Camp. I recall this trip well as it left me with a good feeling. We had excellent weather, the ship was in good condition and the young immigrants were well organized.

"Henrietta Szold" – At the beginning of July, 1946, I returned to Athens. Yani Avidov had taken the place of Levi Shvat as representative of the Mosad for Aliya Bet. Besides gathering adult olim, we also gathered young and mostly orphaned ones. A short time later Samek arrived; He had traveled to Greece as a stowaway on a ship. We were asked if we would be able to carry 3 and 4 year old children, most of them accompanied by their mothers, as well as others traveling alone. We said that we would take them all. On the 30th of July, 444 olim came aboard, almost all of them Greek, and another 150, mostly Hungarian, boarded the "Rafi 2". Actually, we had a total of 456 olim as two babies were born en route.

I was the commander of the "Henrietta Szold" and Samek was commander of "Rafi 2" Yoske Lazarovsky was Gideoni for both ships. We had 28 infants on the "Henrietta" including the two that were born on the ship, and 19 pregnant women. There were also 180 children under 16 years of age, many of them orphans. The physical conditions were worse than could be imagined.

The engine went dead when we were near the island of Nisini. We wanted to anchor in the harbor of the island but the inhabitants told us to move on and

suggested that we put in at the island of Kamelia for repairs. They did allow us to draw water from their well. We asked Yanek Avidov for spare parts, food, fuel and water. We also needed medicines and additional people to handle the children. A ship did come with the supplies we had ordered. Benyamin Yerushalmi of the Mosad for Aliya Bet also came, as well as two nurses to look after the youngsters. They were Rivka and Busia.

On August 1st we moved the passengers of the "Rafi 2" over to the "Henrietta". The sea was calm and all went smoothly. Once again the Greek crew of the "Henrietta was sent home with the "Rafi 2" and olim who were already trained, took their place. Since the engine was still not totally in order the Greek engineer volunteered to stay on.

We arrived at Sdot Yam but saw no preparatory signs for unloading the immigrants. We headed northwards and ran into a destroyer that directed us to Haifa, where we were ordered to anchor outside the port, next to the "Yagur". Not far from us were two British cruisers, the "Ajax" and the "Mauritius". There were also three destroyers and several coast guard vessels. The British put a squad of soldiers on board the "Henrietta" but the children surrounded them and prevented them from doing anything. It was very hot and the immigrants were hungry and tired. To our delight, a port vessel came alongside and distributed food, water, milk and fresh rolls. In a loaf of bread was a note that we were to be deported to Cyprus. We were ordered to fight against the deportation and to sabotage the ships with explosives that had been placed in one of the cans of milk. Conditions on our ship grew worse by the minute and at one stage a father who was a survivor of a death camp wanted to end the life of his baby, but other immigrants succeeded in preventing him from doing so. On the night of August 13th the British tried to tow us out but one of the immigrants jumped into the water and cut the tow rope. Further efforts of the British to board the ship were stalled by the vigorous resistance of the immigrants. Three British officers came and tried to convince us to enter the harbor peacefully but they failed.

The commander of the British fleet approached in a launch and requested that I board it and talk to him. I told him that we knew of their intention to send us to Cyprus and we would not go willingly. He was astonished by my announcement and denied it. I told him that if he would give his word that we would not be sent to Cyprus we would go peacefully to Atlit. He said that he was sorry but that he could not make such a guarantee. The British made great efforts to board the ship but the resistance of the young people was fanatic and the British did not succeed,. It was only when they threw smoke bombs into the quarters of the infants' ward that resistance ended. The transfer to the deportation ships went quietly. The explosives were found and confiscated, and that very night we sailed to Famagusta. We were sent to Camp 55, near Caraolos and on the 14th August we began a new chapter.

The Detention Camps in Cyprus

It was decided that I should be the representative of the immigrants to the British. We were taken to Camp No. 55, after the immigrants of the "Yagur". It seems that the British searched the clothes of the immigrants, took their watches and other property and separated the men and the women. I turned to a group of 4-5 officers, one of whom had a red stripe on his hat and demanded that they stop robbing the immigrants, and that they stop separating the men and women. The ranking officer replied: "These are the king's regulations." He added that that was what was done in all the detention camps. I gave him a short description of what these people had gone through in recent years and I said we would never agree to separation of the sexes and if necessary we would resist with force. The officer thought for a moment and declared: "The man is right, never mind the king's regulations." This was a drastic change. The searches stopped and the immigrants organized themselves in their barracks according to their movement affiliations or which camps they had been in. An infants home and a children's home were also set up for the 180 youngsters and infants that had been on the ship.

A Greek partisan named Azariah stood out as a leader. The Greek machinist who had stayed on board was a wonderful character and was soon active in working with the children. I was officially recognized by the British as the camp leader, a term that they used in POW camps. The British agreed within days that the camp inmates could prepare their own food and run the camps themselves. The British did not enter the camps at all.

Within three weeks another four immigrant ships arrived. There were now about 4000 inmates in the camp and 20 Palyamniks and Gideonim. There were also 40 foreign crew members. In our Palyam gathering we decided that we would not seek unnecessary fights with the British unless we were certain we could win. The camps would be run by a camp committee made up of the immigrants. We would try to prevent the British from being involved in the internal running of the camps. There should be free passage between the five camps of Caraolos. We organized a defense organization (this became The Ranks of the Defenders) which trained immigrant volunteers in military matters. Our attitude toward the British was to be one of "Live and let Live". We would try to get the Palyam men back to the Aliya Bet ships in Europe and would try to get the foreign crews back to their respective countries. Samek and others were in charge of that operation.

The rations that the British provided were minimal and people were actually hungry. On the 7th of September a mission of the JDC visited the camps and this led to an improvement in food, health care and clothing. The JDC provided additional food supplies to the camps. Later, we also started receiving food supplies from institutions in Palestine. There was almost daily contact between the officer in charge of all the camps at Caraolos and myself. There was free and unhindered movement of people between the camps during the daylight hours. Children and youngsters were allowed to go to the beach and there were visits to

the hospital in Nicosia. We had an increased supply of drinking water and in general there was an improvement in the conditions of the camps.

Three weeks later there was a visit from another mission of the JDC which included Dr. Chaim Shiba, who represented the health institutions of Palestine. Shortly thereafter, Zeev Aharon arrived with a mission that represented educational institutions of Palestine. They decided to remain in the camp and not at a hotel. This was a very positive step. By December of 1946 10,000 immigrants had arrived and the first camp was opened in the Dekhelia area. Also, in December of 1946, the first 1000 immigrants made Aliya from Cyprus to Palestine. These were immigrants from the "Yagur" and the "Henrietta Szold" and I was among them. Yoash Tzidon was given the responsibility for running the camps. (In 1991 a book by Dr Nachum Bogner was published which described life in the camps in detail between the years 1946 to 1948. This book is highly recommended.)

From January, 1947 to July of that year I oversaw the preparation of the "Enzo Sereni" for its return to Italy. I also found new volunteers for courses of the Palyam and was appointed commander of the Palyam for several months. I then requested to be returned to Europe to work in Aliya Bet.

In July of 1947 I was assigned together with Zeev Rotem, to prepare the "Kadima", then in drydock on the island of Palestrina, not far from Venice. We found a quick method of installing the stanchions and it only took 5 days to prepare the ship. 794 immigrants were taken from Venice and sailed to Palestine. In Magenta I worked for 2-3 months in preparing and shipping weapons to Palestine and helped load immigrants on the ships that sailed. In March and April of 1948 I prepared the "Tirat Tzvi" at a drydock in Naples. On the 3rd of April she left for Palestine with 798 immigrants who were transferred from Haifa to Cyprus as had the immigrants of the "Kadima".

Yehuda Arazi appointed me, as representative of the owners, to be the commander of the "Resorrecczio". This ship arrived in the port of Tel Aviv carrying 25 Oerlikon 20 mm canons, 5000 rifles, 200 machine guns and 17 million bullets. These had been ordered, seemingly, by a South American country. This shipment was unloaded on Passover eve in Tel Aviv and was the second ship carrying arms that had reached Israel. She completed ten trips carrying weapons to Israel by mid-1949. With this, my service in the Palyam and the Mosad for Aliya Bet came to an end. This was five years after the first course for small boat commanders.

The Navv

In April of 1948 I was appointed commander of the naval base in Haifa. The first staff of the base was from the company that had been the naval company of the Palyam. Gradually, men who had served in the British navy or the merchant navy and others who had been to the naval school in Haifa were added. At the end of

May I was put in command of the flagship of the navy, the "Wedgwood" (K 18) whose actions were reported in the book by Eliezer Tal, "The Exploits of the Navy in the War of Independence". Several of these included the shelling of Tyre and Gaza, the attempt to prevent the "Altalena" from reaching the shore of Tel Aviv, the "Pirate" operation – catching an Italian ship that had 8,000 rifles and ammunition intended for delivery to Syria. The shipment was transferred to the "Wedgwood" and to the "Hagana" and brought to Haifa in August of 1948.

On the 19th of October the "Hagana", "Wedgwood", and "Noga" under the command of David Maimon, attacked an Egyptian corvette that was unloading reinforcements of soldiers near Ashkelon. Egyptian airplanes joined in the battle. One man on the "Hagana" was killed and five were injured, but the "Hagana" shot down an Egyptian Spitfire. The "Wedgwood" suffered a hit by a shore battery but shot down another Egyptian plane that had attacked it. Some water leaked into the ship but was blocked. The "Wedgwood" got within 1,500 meters range of the corvette and hit it many times with the Oerlikon 20 mm canon. We then broke contact with it and heard from intelligence that the ship had been towed to Port Said. During this whole period we were also protecting the coast of Israel and ships sailing to and from Israeli ports.

In November of 1948 I transferred command of the "Wedgwood" to Moka Limon and was appointed commander of troop landings. We made two landings on the shores of Sinai in order to sabotage the railway lines. The second attempt was successful. After serving as commander of the port of Haifa I was appointed by Shlomo Shamir to oversee the refloating of the "Altalena," and in this capacity also served as commander of the port of Jaffa. By order of Ben-Gurion the "Altalena" was towed 15 miles out to sea and sunk.

In 1950 I was one of ten officers, five from the navy, selected to study in the USA. To my surprise I was asked by the acceptance committee at MIT to register directly for a masters degree in science in Industrial management. After two years of concentrated effort I completed my studies successfully.

At the end of 1952 I was appointed head of the quartermaster's department of the navy and a member of the coordination committee of the navy. The commander of the navy was then Moka Limon. In this capacity I was responsible for logistics of the entire branch of service. The commanders of the Navy, Moka Limon and Shmuel Tankus took it upon themselves to reduce the budget of the navy by 40%, so that the service would be able to buy two destroyers which later became the "MS Yaffo" and the "MS Eilat". I became head of a special team that drew up changes that were to take place in naval administration and organization. This effort succeeded because of cooperation by all the participants.

In anticipation of the "Kadesh" operation in 1956 I was appointed second in command of the munitions services commanded by Amos Chorev. In September

of 1957 I was in charge of the ordnance department of the Navy with the rank of captain and a member of the headquarters staff under Shmuel Tankus and Yochai Ben-Nun. During this period we absorbed submarines into the service and also coastal patrol vessels. The submarine base in Haifa was built and an additional one in Ashdod. We also initiated the establishment of the Museum of the Navy and Aliya Bet. I completed my service in the fall of 1962 and retired in 1964. I turned to private industry which involved mostly shipping and the metal industry.

I have been married to Bina since 1948. She was my childhood sweetheart. We have three children, Debbie, Noga and Boaz and six grandchildren.