

Katznelson, Tzvi - (Miri)
 Born 22 February 1922 in Mir, Poland
 Came to Palestine in 1938
 Joined the Palmach in 1942
 Joined the Palyam in 1943

This is the Way it Was

I was born in Poland in the town of Mir. Besides the well-known Yeshiva of Mir in which students from the USA and Europe came to study and be ordained as rabbis, the town also had a number of other synagogues. I studied in a Jewish kindergarten and later on in a Polish government-run elementary school. I studied Hebrew with a private instructor.

I came to Palestine when I was 16 in the framework of "Youth Aliya" and went straight to the agricultural school of Ben Shemen. There, in a colorful ceremony I joined the Hagana. At the conclusion of study at Ben Shemen I went for training to Kibbutz Beit Zera and from there to Kibbutz Hazorea. We were joined with others there and were slated to join Kibbutz Kfar Menachem. I got there seven years after my friends because of my years in the Palyam.

In the Palyam I was put in B Company, under the command of Meirke Davidson which was stationed at Shaar HaAmakim. I was sent to a non-com course in Shefayim and afterwards the company was transferred to Ein Harod (where I was responsible for the cache of hidden weapons) and Tel Yosef. In 1943 the Palyam platoon was organized at Caesarea and many of the men of B Company joined it; Moshe Rabinovitch, Dudale ben Chorin, Gad Lasker and I. We took a course for small boat commanders and we sailed far and wide, by day and by night. After that we started training men from the Palmach in rowing and sailing, so that they would be able to help in taking immigrants from ship to shore. In 1944 there were economic problems in keeping the Palyam going, but Zalman Perach was not going to let that stop our activity so we went to work as stevedores in the port of Haifa. With the help of the Salonikans we were able to do the work and also make a comfortable income.

Palmach – Palyam

In 1945 the first naval officers course began and when it was over the graduates of the course took the yacht "Arlosorof" out to sea under the watchful eyes of Shmuel Tankus and Berchik. Some of the graduates of this course sailed on Jewish merchant ships that sailed the Mediterranean and I joined the crew of the fishing vessel "Karish" with the position of helmsman and fisherman. This furnished me with a good knowledge of the coast of Palestine.

In August 1945 the graduates of the course who were in Palestine at the time, were brought together at Caesarea. On the 29th of that month the ship "Dalin" arrived from Italy with 37 immigrants on board. The captain of that ship was the Italian Jew, Enrico Levi, and his second was Yisrael Chorev; the Gideonai was Arik Cheikind. After the immigrants had landed we loaded barrels of diesel fuel

on board and she sailed back to Bari with Moshe Rabinowitz , Yisrael Rotem, Eliezer Versh, Peter Hofman and me, Tzvi Katznelson. Near Bari a truck was waiting for us on the shore and it was loaded with Israeli soldiers. We were driven to the camp that we called "Dror" and there we were received by the camp commander, Chaim Chayatt. Several days after our arrival, Yehuda Arazi came to visit and with him was "Rudi", a member of Kibbutz Biet Hashita. They chose from amongst us Eliezer Versh, (Dani) who spoke Italian and me, as I spoke Yiddish. While we were in this camp I met one of the immigrants who came from my home town and he told me of the terrible things that had happened to my parents and to the whole Jewish town. Only my brother was alive, all the rest of my family had been wiped out.

The Ships that I Accompanied to Palestine:

"Petro", "Enzo Sereni", "Wedgwood", "Chaim Arlosorof", "Yetziat "Eiropa" ("Exodus") and two other ships that had been bought. On the "Petro" the Palyamnikim were Tzvi Katznelson, Eliezer Versh and Avraham Raiss as Gideoni. On 12 September 1945 a convoy of 171 immigrants arrived at Santa Margharita. They were brought to the ship by Italian fishing boats without a hitch and we took off immediately. The only thing that did go wrong is that somewhere on our journey we lost the anchor. When, during a storm, we stopped at the island of Cossu unknown assailants opened fire on us. We left the anchor where it was and took off in a hurry. On September 19th we arrived near the coast at Shefayim and noticed that there were fires burning. Berchik came out to the ship on a boat and told us where to unload the immigrants. We dropped them off and sailed straight back to Italy, once again to the port of Bari and then to the camp at Dror.

The commander of the "Enzo Sereni" was Zalman Perach and his assistants were Gad Lasker and I. The Gideoni was Gershon Etzion. We prepared the ship for sailing with the aid of a number of the immigrants. The crew of the ship was: an Italian captain named Miccheno Giovanni and several Italian deckhands and engine room personnel. On the 9th January 1946 the ship sailed with 900 immigrants on board. One of our big problems was lack of enough water and food, since a good deal was stolen by Italian workers. A British plane spotted us and a short time later a British destroyer captured the ship when it was still in international waters.

We continued on our route to Haifa and the immigrants showed passive resistance to their removal from the ship. They were transferred to the waiting buses and taken to Atlit. The Italian captain was expelled from the country. When I was freed from Atlit I reported to our headquarters at 113 Allenby Street in Tel Aviv and handed in my report. Davidk arranged a Palestinian passport for me with a visa to Italy. I was soon in Rome again, and since the passport was legal I was sent to Paris to bring back money. Once back in Italy, the passport was taken from me and the rest of my time was spent working at the camp in Magenta where I prepared immigrants for Aliya.

The ship "Josiah Wedgwood" arrived at Savona. The American captain was called Jerry and his first mate was Franz. The chief engineer was Aryeh Kolomeitzik. The ship commander and the one responsible for preparing for the voyage was Berchik (Dov Magen). His assistants were Tzvi Katznelson and Yisrael Auerbach. Moshe Yerushalmi was the Gideoni. There were also two engineers from the Palyam and the rest of the crew were American volunteers.

The captain was drunk most of the time and he kicked the pilot off the ship. We finally tied up at about 3 a.m. and started loading the immigrants. At dawn, before we were finished loading all of them, Italian police showed up. They wanted to quarantine the ship but we managed to finish loading all of the passengers who were there (some truckloads of immigrants from Turin were late in arriving but we could not wait for them). We cut the lines and left the shore before the police were aware of what we were doing.

When we were near Haifa a British plane spotted us and the next morning a destroyer took us captive. The Palyamniks mingled with the immigrants and were not found. When the immigrants were taken to Atlit, Berchik, and I disappeared, along with the captain and first mate. These latter and I made our way to the Solel Boneh offices and from there I accompanied them to Tel Aviv. They were smuggled out of the country and sent back to the USA.

Berchik took over the driver's seat on one of the Egged buses and at the gate to the port the driver took his seat back and Berchik made his way back to his home in Kibbutz Ramat Hashofet. (Berchik's story was brought here from another place. The editors).

The "Ulva":

Lova Eliav wrote a book about this voyage ["SS Ulva – The Story of Underground Aliya"] so I need not add.

"Exodus 1947":

When we left the Port of Set a British warship was waiting for us and accompanied us all the way. Micha Peri was busy with preparations for the final battle with the British. I took care of the foodstuffs and was in contact with the immigrants (there were 4500 of them). There was a minister on board whose name was John Grauel and he was a great help to me, as was Bergman, an immigrant of Hashomer Hatzair and so were a good number of the American crew.

When we approached the shores of Palestine there was a very heavy battle. When it was over three of our people had been killed and a great many were injured. When the immigrants were removed from the ship I went back and examined the holds to make sure that no one had been left behind. When I went on deck I saw a large number of British paratroopers on the deportation ships. I told Mordechai Rosman, one of the leaders of the immigrants to get a group of them ready for resistance later on as we could not know what to expect. He did prepare such a group. A committee was chosen that would handle matters on the deportation, "Runnymede Park". Mordechai was chosen

as head of that committee and I was responsible for carrying out the orders of our command at Port de Bouc.

We set sail for France, and at Port de Bouc journalists from all over the world were waiting for us. Mordechai, who was an excellent speaker, drew everyone's attention and became our mouthpiece to the world. He let the world know what a base injustice the British had done to the remnants of the Holocaust. The bottom line was that in the end we were evacuated to prison camps near Hamburg, in hated Germany. The resistance of the immigrants on the "Runnymede Park" was very stiff, and Mordechai himself was injured and removed from the ship. The whole ruckus lasted two hours with the British using tear gas and streams of water on the youngsters who were fighting. In the end, all the immigrants were sent to the two British camps at Amstau and Papendorf.

The Ship "Santa Chiarra" – "Bouria 2":

On the 3rd May 1948, my friend Colonel Finge, a commander of detectives in the Adriatic, notified me that there was a problem with the "Santa Chiarra" in Napoli. The crew resigned when it saw that the ship was carrying weapons. He promised to find an alternate crew and to use Captain De Marino, a professional smuggler and friend of his, to command the ship. In accordance with orders from Zaki, I set out for Naples immediately.

In Naples Yehuda Arazi was loading civilian supplies onto the ship as cover; onions and tomato juice. The name of the ship was changed to "Bouria 2" and it flew the flag of Panama. Other changes were made to the ship in order to disguise its identity. We set out on our voyage and soon ran into the British "Pelican". We saluted one another and continued on our journey to Tel Aviv and dropped anchor close to the port.

The agent came on board with the stevedores and I left the ship in a launch and handed in the ship's documents to Fink Vaza. .Soon after, the "Pelican" returned to Tel Aviv and sent a launch to our ship. I ran towards our ship and yelled to the captain: "Sabotage the engine!" As a true professional, he answered me: "Consider it done!" In order to repair the engine the British had to tow the ship to Haifa. At the port, the British conducted a cursory search of the ship and stationed a platoon of soldiers on her. The officer in command was a friendly chap and notified our captain: "At midnight I am leaving the ship and I suggest that you prepare to depart. At midnight the British mandate over Palestine is over!"

The ship was repaired in a few minutes and we sailed back to Tel Aviv. Here we met Broshi and he checked the load. Five 65 mm cannons and 50 000 shells, 8 million bullets for French Hotchkiss machine guns, 10 000 75 mm shells, 200 machine guns and 3 million bullets for them. While we were anchored there the Egyptians bombed Tel Aviv but the ship was not hit.

Hauling Tanks:

On 15th May 1948 our ship left Tel Aviv and on the 27th we were in Marseilles. The ship agent, customs officials and health officials all boarded the ship. I got off and reported at the agent's office the next morning. I was dressed theatrically in a suit and tie and contacted Yehuda's supplier. We arranged to meet the next morning. The supplier told me that we would be carrying ten tanks built by the Renault Company and would be leaving port in a few days. Bob and I were to sail with the ship. All went as scheduled and we departed, and we had good radio contact with Israel. A radiogram arrived from Finik; "Paint the chimney stacks as directed in this message and change the name of the ship to "Amal", (this was so that we could appear as her double because of the embargo of UN inspectors.)

Under the cover of darkness, the original "Amal" left Tel Aviv harbor and we came in and took its place. Finik came on board and collected the documents of the Bouria and gave instructions. He and I then left the ship which had to wait a few days until proper equipment was brought to the harbor to handle the heavy tanks. This was done with the aid of the cranes on the "Mary G." When the tanks were unloaded we sailed for Genoa and en route we changed our name back to "Santa Chiarra". At Genoa a pilot brought us in to a waiting point in the harbor. Soon, the ship's agent arrived and invited Bob and me with the radio equipment to his office. A driver from the Mosad was waiting there and he drove us to Rome. This was the end of my duty on the ships and I continued to work for the Mosad.