

Keiny, Zaki (Zecharia) of blessed memory
 Joined the Palmach in 1944
 Joined the Gid'onim course at Shefayim in 1945
 Died on 13th April 1995
 Written by Shosh Keiny

This is the Way it Was

He grew up in Tel Aviv and spent much of his time on its white shores. He studied first at the "Education House", and then at the "New Secondary School". He joined the Palmach in 1944 and as soon as he completed his school exams, went to the 8th Company, Kiryat Anavim Platoon. In 1945 he was sent to the course for radio operators (Gid'onim) at Kibbutz Shefayim. Afterwards he instructed others and set up transmission stations at several locations. He also served as radio operator for Palmach headquarters at Kibbutz Mizra until the fateful "Black Saturday" in June 1946. In May 1947 he was sent abroad by the Mossad for Aliya Bet and worked as Gid'oni in Marseilles, Paris, Rome and Milan. It was there that he wrote:

"I was jealous of my fellow Gid'onim who were travelling about on the high seas and exposed to so many challenges and had to prove their ability to meet the unexpected. I managed to go on some trips transporting arms shipments. This was already after the State had been declared and the War of Independence was progressing. Some vessels of the American Navy entered the port of Haifa in order to maintain the embargo on military equipment that had been applied by the UN."

"Tirat Tzvi"

This account of the vessel "Tirat Tzvi" was written by Zaki himself. We have chosen it as representative of his role as Palyamnik *[editorial note: the following account is about an attempt to use the ship as an arms ship during the Independence War, and not about her Aliya Bet voyage]*:

"The vessel was of about 150 tons and built of wood and driven by a diesel engine. As there was no boiler or steam, some of the equipment was operated by hand, such as the steering mechanism, which was attached to the wheel by a chain belt, cranes, pumps and other items. The crew, most of whom had no seagoing experience, had been assembled from various countries. The captain and chief engineer were Italian and experienced seamen; the second engineer, Alex, was an instructor at the Haifa Naval School; the first mate, Uri Tahun, a graduate of the Haifa Naval School, had previously worked on several cargo ships that had come to Israel. Chaim Gamzu (Gugale) who was a company commander in the 5th Battalion of the Palmach, took a break from the fighting in Jerusalem so that he could join the crew on this trip. We can also add the chef Tzvika, and seamen from Haifa and Tel Aviv, plus cadets from the Naval School, and lastly, your humble servant. We also carried an American tourist couple, who were getting a ride home on our ship.

As with every Gideoni I had been outfitted with a standard transmitter set in a wooden box which had been brought on board prior to our sailing. It was my

job to set up the instrument on the ship. There were also crystals in a separate carton to determine which wavelength to use plus a list of wavelengths and hours when to contact a particular station on a particular wavelength. There was also a key to the codes to be used for transmitting and receiving messages. We raised anchor and set out from port, darting between the lighthouses, and made good time as we headed into the open sea. Those of the crew who were not on duty enjoyed an excellent meal which our chef had prepared.

I also finished my meal and downed it with a whiff of the fresh sea air. I gazed at the sky and the myriads of stars and alternatively, at the sea, with a million traces of light reflecting themselves in the water. I went to bed feeling at ease and contemplating the peaceful sea voyage that awaited us. I was awakened in the morning by the galley boy who brought me a hot cup of steaming coffee. I looked out of the porthole and saw a cloudless sky and a calm sea. That is how the voyage progressed and there was little for me to do. The men of the crew made each other's acquaintances and there were pleasant exchanges and conversations between newfound friends. The only trouble that we had was that from time to time, bolts for flanges to hold the engine shaft in place would work themselves loose and the engine would have to be stopped and the bolts retightened. The reason for this was probably that the alignment of the whole ship might have gone off center. The machinists replaced the bolts and fixed the problem several times but then ran out of bolts. Various alternate solutions had to be found for the ship to keep going on course.

Despite this problem we had been making fairly decent speed of about 5 knots and were now about 24 hours sailing from the Straits of Bonifacio. Meanwhile, the weather also changed lightly from Mediterranean to European and there was a bit of rain and cooler temperatures. The sky was frequently overcast. The following morning I immediately felt the severe change in our sailing. The vessel was rising and falling, and it shivered in its motion from side to side, and the wood creaked and squealed loudly. Water was seeping into the cabin from one side and leaking out the other. As the ship swayed, the stream of water changed, from one side to the other. Through the porthole one could see rain pouring down from a dark, gray sky. It seemed that we had been in the midst of a storm since early nightfall. The waves were six-seven meters in height and it seemed as if the very next wave would send us to the bottom of the sea. So far though, we were not sinking, but were being tossed from the top of the waves to the bottom, like a cork. The boom had moved from where it had been tied and smashed a large hole into our only lifeboat. Once the engine died, the bilge pumps also failed to work and water was quickly rising within the ship. If water flooded the engine room, we would really be in trouble. Aside from all these things, Tzvika our chef, was down with a bad attack of recurring malaria, and there would be no hot meal that day.

We now went over to an emergency regime. We were divided into groups and each group was given a certain objective:

- One group was to operate the emergency pumps by hand to halt the incoming water.
- Another group repaired the hole in the lifeboat with grease and a piece of canvas that was nailed over the hole.
- A third group prepared a 'canvas anchor' whose job it was to keep the vessel sailing into the wind, and not broadside.
- A fourth group prepared a canvas sail to take us into some bay or port in the event that we could not repair the engine.
- A fifth group prepared hot tea for all the others.

Between our two masts, Semaphore flags were strung out to spell S O S, and at the same time I tried to contact one of our stations that could organize assistance to us. I went to the transmitter and adjusted the headphones and started to search for contact but realized immediately that the transmitter was dead. I examined it carefully and saw that one of the resistors was burned out. I searched everywhere but could not find another one. We had no contact with the outside world. At about 10:00 hours a passenger ship was seen by the lookout sailing toward us. In order to draw the ship's attention we fired a few **red Very** flares and we could see through our binoculars that the ship had seen them. It turned slightly so as to come directly opposite us. When the distance between us had closed, we saw that the ship flew an Egyptian flag... Uri came off the bridge and went to get a submachine gun and magazine with bullets. Because of the war that was raging, even merchant ships carried a minimum of arms with which to defend themselves.

The Egyptian ship, which must have been of about 5000 tons, towered above us. Were it to collide with us at the speed that it was making, it could easily have cut our vessel in two. There was also no doubt that it saw our flag. Uri decided that there was no reason to endanger ourselves so he took aim at the bow of the ship and let off several short bursts. The reaction was immediate. The people on deck disappeared, the ship changed course slightly, and soon disappeared into the distance. We were once again alone on a turbulent sea. We had been so close to rescue that now that the opportunity was gone, all of us were left with a feeling of having been 'let down', and were disappointed and despaired.

In this moment of weakness Uri and I turned to our cabins with a bottle of cognac. We planned that when all hope was gone we would drink ourselves into a stupor and go to sleep. I gathered up the crystals and the secret codes, stuffed them into my kitbag, and figured to throw them overboard at the last minute. Having prepared ourselves for the 'last moment', we somehow recovered our senses and returned to the deck. Perhaps some similar feelings had affected the others, because, for some unknown reason we once more renewed our efforts with the thought that all would be okay in the end. The sail was ready and we stretched it out on the mast. Low and behold, we were moving!

Once again the hot tea made the rounds together with some cans of bully beef. The nourishment gave us renewed energy and renewed hope and our morale improved tremendously. Now we concentrated on the removal of the

water and we sent an experienced seaman to sit in the crow's nest and keep an eye open for passing ships. I was sent to the bridge to man the helm. About two hours before sundown a ship was spotted in the distance and we once again fired some flares and machine gun rounds, in order to attract its attention. We once again hovered between hope and despair as we waited to see a reaction from the ship. Finally, we noted a change in its course as it headed in our direction.

When the vessel came much closer to us, we saw that this was an Italian vessel of several thousand tons named "Miriella". She tried to contact us with a megaphone while still a safe distance away, because of the rough sea. We answered in Morse code with eye contact. We put a rope ladder down from the side of our vessel and they put a motor launch into the water that came toward us. Our captain and Uri went over to the Italian ship to determine the conditions for saving our ship. The negotiations were strictly businesslike and it was decided that we would be towed to Naples.

According to international rules, the company that saves the ship would be entitled to 50 % of the value of the ship and its cargo. A part of this sum would go directly to the captain and the crew of the Italian ship, each one receiving a share commensurate with his rank. With the finalizing of these conditions, a heaving line was thrown into the launch, and the towline was attached to it. The towline was a rope of about 5cm thickness and 50 meters long. We were hitched up and the "Miriella" took off for Naples with us in tow. Toward evening the storm subsided.

The next morning we awoke to a calm sea. The water had been pumped from our vessel and the machinist, Alex, was able to start work on our engine. Parts were spread out and dried and reassembly began. At noon a shout went up on our ship, the engine was working again! The top of Vesuvius could be seen in the distance but we were now moving under our own steam. No one could resist the temptation and one brawny sailor brought out a heavy axe and hacked the towline in half with a few strokes. We entered the port of Naples under our own power despite the calls of protest from our savior, the "Miriella". We moved in and tied up at one of the piers. (Long after, I heard that the owners of the "Miriella" were not willing to give up their claim to 50 % of our ship, and that a lengthy court action followed. I never did hear how that ended).

The crew had a good rest and then celebrated our arrival in port. There was some drinking and some singing that night, which was the end of the voyage for most of us. Uri continued on to Marseilles, where the vessel was put up for sale."