

Kinarti, Yehonatan (Kokerbeck)

Born 11 March 1923 in Bielefeld, Germany

Made Aliya in 1939

Joined the Palmach in 1942

Joined the Palyam in 1943

This is the Way it Was

At the beginning of 1938 I worked, within the framework of sea training, on a tugboat in the port of Hamburg. Shortly thereafter, I was offered agricultural training because I was told that there was no need for seamen in Israel. I was at a training farm from March, 1938 to December, 1938. I made aliya to Kibbutz Givat Hashlosha on my 16th birthday in March, 1939, within the framework of Youth Aliya. In January of 1940, I went to Kibbutz Ein Gev where I worked in fishing and in guarding the fields. I was arrested in October, 1941 by the British police and sent to prison in Acre. The trial was before a military court in Jerusalem in March, 1942. The verdict was: "Not guilty, because of lack of proof." That verdict was reached despite the fact that weapons were found in our fishing boat. This may have been a calming measure because not long before, a vessel full of Ma'apilim, the Struma", had been sunk in the Black Sea.

I joined the Palmach in May 1942 and was assigned to "D" Company at Givat Chaim. When the Naval Platoon was set up I transferred to it. We lived in a tent camp at Kibbutz Sdot Yam in Kiryat Chaim, were under the command of Zalman Perach, and worked as stevedores in the port of Haifa. This is where the "13th" was born. When one of our friends was to sail as a seaman on some cargo vessel, it happened to be the 13th of the month. We sat down to celebrate and decided that on the 13th of every month at 21:00, we would raise a glass and drink a toast to our friends, wherever they are in the world.

When we moved to our base at Caesarea I began to instruct in short courses. These were courses that all Palmachniks took, and small boat commanders as well. As with all Palmachniks, we had to pay our way by working part time. We worked at fishing or in various types of seasonal labor at Ein Hamifratz, Sdot Yam, Ein Hayam and Neve Yam. We harvested flax, picked cotton, corn and sunflowers. At the same time I continued my military training, as did all the others and participated in various military actions against the British. At the beginning of 1945 I was transferred to Kibbutz Yagur so that I could study at the Technion in the 2nd course for naval officers. We studied English and mathematics, how to read nautical maps, how ships were constructed, and familiarized ourselves with various nautical instruments. After that we had two weeks of further intensive study at the house of Alexander Zaid at Sheikh-a-Breik. We studied sabotage, first aid, controlling crowds and boxing. When this was over I sailed for three months on the "Amos". Aside from the officers, the entire crew was from the Palyam. We sailed to ports in Lebanon, Cyprus and Egypt. I then returned to Caesarea and continued to instruct and help in unloading Ma'apilim.

On the 29th May 1946 I sailed to Italy on the "Eliahu Golomb". On the evening of the voyage I and two companions were invited to Solel Boneh House (Solel Boneh was a construction company owned by the Histadrut, the Labor Federation of Israel, and also served as a Hagana headquarters adjacent to the port. A.M.) on Harbor Street in Haifa, to take our departure from Yitzchak Sadeh (a former officer in the Russian Army during WW I. In Palestine he was a founder of the Palmach and its first commander, and mentor of Yigal Alon and other leading Palmach officers. He had great influence on the character and development of the Palmach. A.M.). Yitzchak wished us well and reminded us that we were now 'on loan' to the Mossad for Aliya Bet from the Palmach. We were to bring ma'apilim to Palestine, but were **not** to obey to bring them anywhere else.

At first it was difficult for me to establish contact with the olim. I was fearful of speaking with them in German, my mother tongue. They had heard this language for years and probably hated it. My solution was to try to speak it very poorly so that it would sound more like Yiddish. That made things a bit easier for me, and I hoped that what I said was understood. From Magenta, in Italy, I was sent to Marseilles. At the beginning of August I left, together with David ben Chorin (Dudale), and Yosef Lustig on the "Amiram Shochat", and were to pick up our passengers on the night of the Fast of Av, in Italy. I did not know beforehand who the Olim would be, and only when the voyage was over did I learn that more than half of them were religious. Some of them refrained from eating during the day of the Fast and they suffered from nausea throughout the voyage because of that. We were lucky and were able to deposit them safely at Caesarea.

At the end of 1947 I was responsible for equipment and its maintenance in Caesarea. This was my job until I was transferred to command the naval post at the "Lido" in Tiberias. There was talk that that would be a jumping off point for an invasion of Syria. The operation never materialized. After the war I returned to Ein Gev and worked in fishing. During this period I had the honor of having Ben Gurion and a group of his aides as passengers when there was a tryout of a guided torpedo on the Kinneret. The torpedo was aimed at a floating barrel or similar object, but lifted itself out of the water and headed straight toward us. At the last moment we managed to avoid it.

As a result of the split in the Kibbutz Meuchad movement, I moved to Yagur and worked there as a mechanic. I studied at the School for Technological Training, and at the University I prepared to study engineering. By the end of 1961 I remarried, moved in Rehovot, and worked as a mechanic at a tractor station. From 1964 and until I retired in 1989 I worked in the Department of Labor, first as a technical counsellor and later as a supervisor of machinery. I have two daughters and a son, four grandsons and one grand daughter.