

Lifshitz, Gad

Nickname: Max

Born in 1926 in Germany

Made Aliya in 1938 when he was 12

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

My Aliya with my parents was not a Zionist one. We did not know Hebrew, and we had no Zionist background. As soon as I was put into a school I rapidly learned Hebrew, and very quickly became a 'patriot'. This was because of the influence of the period; World War II, the "White Paper", the riots, and of course the Socialist-Zionist education that I received in Hashomer Hatzair. I remember proudly how my father climbed onto the roof of our house in Neve Sha'anana with a gun on his shoulder, to stand watch with a big searchlight, and make sure that we would be forewarned if there was an Arab attack. My mother would bring him food and something to drink. Like all my friends, I joined the Gadna and practiced how to move in fields, and how to shoot a rifle and a revolver. I was a runner between outposts, and even completed a squad leaders' course. During the summer holidays we hiked all over the country or went to work in kibbutzim. Between 1941 and 1945 I studied communications at the Naval School. In the last term we could choose between going to the British Army or to the Naval Company of the Palmach. A few chose the British Army but most of the class chose the Palyam.

My activities during the period of Ha'apalah

Shortly after my final exams, in 1945, we were drafted and set up a camp at Ein Hayam. We worked in the salt works of Atlit in order to earn our living, and played sports. From there, we split up; the deckhands and machinists went to the camps of the Naval Company and the radiomen, including me, went for further training at Kibbutz Alonim. Our commanding officer was Avraham "Barad", or B.R.D. When the course was over we separated to the various stations of the "Tamar" network of the Palmach. I went to the headquarters of the 3rd battalion at Ashdot Yaakov, and was apprenticed to Chana Sereni. After a time I went to a course for secretaries, where Ramat Yishai of today now stands, and then became secretary of "G" Company with headquarters at Sarid. The company commander was Yochanan Zinger.

At that time, the Company also included the platoon of pilots stationed at Kibbutz Na'an and the Arab platoon at Kibbutz Ein Hachoresh. There was also a platoon of scouts in Sarid, and a unit in Ayelet Hashachar that smuggled Jews across the border from Lebanon. After a period of time I was transferred back to the Naval Company at Sdot Yam. This was when, for the first time, I assisted in bringing Ma'apilim to the shore with the aid of ropes while standing in water.

At the beginning of 1946, Yoash Tzidon and I went to Egypt in order to get from there to Italy. We were dressed in uniforms of British Army soldiers and hitched a ride with a British Army officer who drove us to Ismailia. From there we made

our way to an Israeli transport company on the banks of the Suez Canal that hauled water. From there, we accompanied Alex Shur to a villa full of bedbugs in Alexandria, where we waited for the ship that was to take us to Italy. We sailed to Venice as deck passengers on a small vessel called the "Dorit". When we arrived, the vessel's cook informed the British about us, but we managed to dodge the police and reach Milan before the MPs got to us.

Italy

The activities for aliya and Bricha were well organized by the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Italy. Our soldiers in their various outfits, and in the Brigade, and in the Palyam under the direction of Yehuda Arazi and Ada Sereni were all busy. I was astonished how the organization and transportation of the supply of food, fuel, other necessities, and of people flowed smoothly. The Gideon network also was well run. During the first year I was in Italy I was in "A" camp (Magenta) and in Miriam, the villa at St. Angelo, near Milan. We built transmitters for the vessels and bought parts of receivers and other electronic parts from the Italian Army or American Army surplus. I was in this together with Rani Rubinstein, Lovka, and later the "skinny" Gad, Gad Levi-Mintsi. In 1947 I helped run the camp at Bacoli, a beautiful villa near Naples. From there I went to Aqaba, a camp near Bari. I ran a technical course for Gideonim there. I also helped in loading Ma'apilim onto boats. Sometimes the water was too shallow for the vessel to come in close to a pier and the Ma'apilim had to be helped in getting from the shore to the vessel. This happened in the vicinity of Metaponto in the boot of Italy.

When the "Exodus" first came to the port of Portovenere, I boarded to check its electronic equipment and found to my joy that the Gideoni there was my friend from schooldays in Berlin in 1938, Max Cohen. He was one of the veteran Gideonim in Marseilles.

My work as a technician gave me a great deal of satisfaction and I felt that I was doing somebody some good. My first encounters with the survivors of the Holocaust caused me to feel very ill-at-ease. I asked myself time and time again how was it that I was saved from the jaws of the Devil by a quirk of fate? How close had I come to sharing the same fate as them, as a survivor and a refugee; or perhaps even worse, and I might not have remained alive.

The news from Palestine was very bad. I wanted to go home, and asked for a job accompanying the Ma'apilim on a vessel as a Gideoni. This came towards the end of 1947 when I was sent to the large ship, "Pan Crescent" ("Atzmaut") in Venice. The British had sabotaged the vessel so only after repairs had been made were we able to depart for Constanza. The commander was Berchik Magen and there were a number of Israelis accompanying him from the Palyam, as well as a number of young American volunteers. Chaim Goldis (RIP) who was also a Gideoni was there. (He fell during the War of Independence).

Romania

In Romania we prepared the “Atzmaut” and its sister ship, the “Pan York” (which became the “Kibbutz Galuyot”) for receiving the Ma’apilim. I had to install a loudspeaker system for which we had bought equipment in Italy. My communications room also had to become a telephone center, and we were to be able to broadcast news or propaganda loudly from it to the ship itself or to others. On the 29th of November we celebrated together with Russian soldiers the decision of the UN to create two States. We spent three months in Constanza preparing these ships and then sailed to Burgas, Bulgaria to pick up the Ma’apilim. Loading the 15,000 people onto the two ships was a very successful operation and an unforgettable experience. Just as we had had to be careful of mines in entering Constanza, we also had to be careful of mines when we left Burgas. On the other side of the Dardanelles a fleet of British warships was already waiting for us; and accompanied us all the way. We obeyed instructions from Palestine and turned the ships in the direction of Famagusta, Cyprus.

Cyprus

After the Ma’apilim, and those who accompanied them, got off the ship, I remained on it as one of the crew. (Both ships anchored in a bay near Famagusta.) Despite the fact that there was a platoon of soldiers on the two ships I managed to string an antenna, in the disguise of a clothes line, and maintain contact with our headquarters in Palestine and with the station within the camps. In my free time I was able to circle the camps and check the exits of the tunnels that had been dug. These tunnels were important in getting Palmachniks and equipment into and out of the camps. In order to be present at the wedding within the camp of the captain, Gad Hilb, (or was it the wedding of Werner Salomon) I myself crawled into the camp via one of the tunnels.

I contacted the station in Palestine and asked our chief for money to buy weapons from the British Army. The money and Yoske arrived, but unfortunately the deal fell through.

After 1948:

In May, 1948, I returned to Israel and reported to Palmach headquarters in Tel Aviv. I was given a revolver and told to go to Jerusalem, where I would be communications officer. As it was then impossible to get to Jerusalem, I was placed with the naval service in Haifa. My job was to prepare what had been the British communications base, for our use. Tzvika Beit-Din was commander of that station in Haifa. It was in a building near the Old Egged Bus Station. I was Tzvika’s assistant. “Skinny” Gad also came to work with us.

It was during this period that I started studying radio engineering and after seven tiring years, passed my examinations. I did not care for the new army-style so I got my discharge and went to work as a civilian, teaching radio to cadets in the air force. In 1951 I went to work for “Alchut-Yam”, a company whose manager was Tzvika Beit-Din. This was after I had studied nautical

navigational instruments in England and in Belgium. I was Technical Director of this company.

In 1952 I married. I have two sons.

After the Six Day War in 1967 Tzvika and I set up our own company, "Gideon Electronics" which supplied electronic services for vessels. We also participated in a survey (with very accurate instruments) for oil exploration along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in Israel and in Sinai. This was with the participation of the Institute for Oceanic Research, headed by Yochai Ben-Nun.

Between the years 1972 and 1974 I worked as services officer for the Elsint Company, in Israel and abroad. I then left electronics and began to manage large companies. Between 1974 and 1978 I was manager of Sugar Industries in Afuleh, and from 1978 to 1988 I managed the Tel Yosef Milk Manufacturing Plant. From 1988 until I retired I worked in the central offices of Tnuva.