

**Maimon, Yehuda (Poldek)**

Born in 1924 in Krakow, Poland

Joined the activists in the "Bricha" in 1945

Made Aliya on the "Wedgwood" in 1946 and joined the Palyam

**This is the Way it Was**

When I was born on February 2, 1924, I was named Leopold Wasserman. This was in the city of Krakow, Poland. I studied at the Hebrew Gymnasium and belonged to the Hatzofe Pioneer Youth Movement. During WW II, I was active in the underground youth movement "Akiva" in Krakow. As the war continued I joined an underground group called "HaChalutz HaLochem" (The Fighting Pioneer) that fought against the Nazis. I was arrested in 1943 in the course of my underground activity, and sent to the Montlopich prison in Krakow. I was there for a month, in the cell for prisoners sentenced to death, but was then sent with a group of other prisoners to the Auschwitz extermination camp. At the camp, I was conscripted by other political prisoners for the underground that worked within the camp (in 1996 I was given the "Auschwitz Cross" by the President of Poland). During the "Death March" of January, 1945, I managed to escape with other friends. In March, 1945, with the help of the Bricha and after a tortuous route, arrived in Bucharest Romania and went to work in the Bricha organization.

In Bucharest Abba Kovner organized the "NAKAM" (revenge) platoon, which I joined. In May 1945 I arrived in Italy and there, in addition to work in NAKAM I also worked in Aliya Bet activity. I got to know a number of the Palyamniks who were then in Italy. In June 1946, together with my wife-to-be, Aviva, we made Aliya on the "Wedgwood". On this voyage Berchik, the commander, put me in charge of water. We settled in Kibbutz Ein Hachoshah together with Abba Kovner, and were promised that we would be conscripted into the Palmach and after a while, would be sent to Europe to continue working there. This never happened.

I despaired of this after a while and joined the Palyam, as I had liked the fellows whom I had met in Italy. Even before I joined, they asked me to lecture at the naval officers' course at the Technion. The lecture was entitled, "How to cross borders illegally in various countries of Europe". I had done this many times as a member of NAKAM. The Palyamniks who accompanied Ma'apilim on the vessels were very interested in hearing this subject. I participated in the course for small boat commanders at Sdot Yam, which was under the command of Yisrael Auerbach. About then, in April, 1948. David ben Gurion established the Navy.

I was sent from Sdot Yam to Tel Aviv. Headquarters had been set up in a school building. My job was to help Eliezer Wersh-Armon set up the supply department, together with Gingy, Arie Weitzman, from Kibbutz Beit Hashita.

I stayed in the Navy for 14 years and filled different positions. My last one was as commander of "YACHSAN"(Central Storage Unit) and my rank when I retired, was that of Commander.

In 1963 I was loaned to the Prime Minister's office, to "Nativ" (an underground organization which aided Russian Jews in making Aliya), and was sent to Poland as First Secretary of our Embassy. In 1966, having completed my service there, I returned to the Navy. In 1968 I was again loaned to Nativ and sent to Vienna, Austria as a special envoy. My job was to facilitate the Aliya of the remaining Jews of Poland, and the start of Aliya of the Jews of Russia. This took several months and I then again returned to the Navy.

In May 1972 I retired from the Navy. I found a Swedish-Jewish investor who helped me set up a company in Haifa for metal construction called "Mechanomatics Inc." The company employed 60 workers and 7 engineers. Its main clients included those involved with defense and the aircraft industry. Among other things we also built a fishing boat and did other jobs connected with the sea.

In 1986 the factory was sold and I retired. Since then I volunteer in all kinds of public activity. I am the chairman of the adoption committee of the Navy, and of the army health center of the city of Haifa. In 1998 when the State was 50 years old, I was awarded the medal of Honorary Citizen of Haifa in gratitude of the work I have done for the city.