

Malkiman, Ben Ami RIP

Born in Safed in 1920

Joined the British Army in 1941

Joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang") in 1945

Murdered on 25 January 1956

Written by: Dafna and Yoram Malkiman

This is the Way it Was

Ben Ami, the son of Tzipora and Nachum Malkiman of the Second Wave of Aliya to Palestine, was born and raised in Kfar Yechezkel. From his youth he was very involved with and identified with the life in the Moshav, in the land, and in the various branches of farming. He was in the third graduating class of the Kadoorie Agricultural School. During his short life Ben Ami volunteered for national service at various times, despite the fact that it was difficult each time to leave the people and place that he loved. When he completed his studies he joined the Jewish Police forces and the local guard (1939 – 1940). During WW II (1941 – 1944) he was among the first to volunteer for the Hebrew units in the British Army and in that capacity spent several years in the Egyptian Western Desert. He faced death several times but continued his service at the front in Africa and in Europe. He was in the forefront of mobilization for service in the Moshav and when there was a discussion on what was more important, "meshek or neshek" (Hebrew for farm work or arms) his reply was: "I cannot sit still when I am called". When he took his farewell of the moshav, he spoke in the name of all those who were volunteering and his point was that 'because of their love for the moshav' they are volunteering to go. His words:

"My tongue is too clumsy to express how my heart feels. We do our daily jobs, each in his own corner, and it seems there is little that binds one to another. But at the moment of parting we feel the hidden bonds that connect us as in one large family. For us, the sons of the moshav, this is doubly difficult; parting from the family and parting from the moshav. I always valued the connection to the farm and to the land but I never imagined that the connection would be so strong and the parting so grievous. I rode out to the fields on horseback yesterday, after the rains, and it was difficult for me to believe that I am forced to leave this land which only yesterday I plowed and planted. I beg the members not to pass judgment on us lightly".

In 1943 Ben Ami, together with hundreds of other soldiers, boarded the British ship "Erinpura" which carried them from Tobruk to Malta. The ship was attacked by the German Air Force and 143 men were drowned. Ben Ami was saved by his bravery. When the attack started he did not go below to the hold as did many others, but manned a machine gun on the deck and fired at the attackers. Only when the ship was about to sink did he jump into the water.

While the war was still raging he started to work at finding and saving survivors of the Holocaust. He worked for Aliya Bet even while still in uniform, and after that when he was out of uniform. This work was done under great tension

because the punishment for such offenses was severe. All the men of the Jewish Brigade who worked for "The Gang" lived two lives. Their false papers were of a survivor and a survivor took their place in the Army. They tried not to meet other soldiers they knew lest their cover be blown.

Ben Ami was among the most daring of that gang of daring men in "The Gang". He was there at La Spezia in one of the lead trucks when the two vessels of the Hagana had to be outfitted. A small storage area was found near the piers where the "Dov Hoz" and the "Eliyahu Golomb" were tied up. The materials necessary were dropped off at this warehouse and from there taken to the vessels. It was during this turbulent time that Ben Ami met his future wife, Tzipora, who was a survivor. After a short time together they decided to get married. When his service was over they came to Kfar Yechezkel, and that is where they raised their family. They built a nice house and an exemplary farm.

Several years later Ben Ami answered Ben Gurion's call to go to the Negev and help the new Olim. In the midst of this activity he was murdered.

In this last job that he undertook, Ben Ami proved to be an excellent organizer and of course, his devotion to his work had no bounds. At the same time he developed fine relations with the people he worked with and they also became attached to him. As one of the advisors from Kfar Achisemech said of him: "We, the advisors, learned from him the correct approach to the new Olim. He learned to understand them. They would pour out their hearts to him and they laid before him every complaint that they had against the Government and the regional authority. He had patience and understanding and the ability to listen. When they had finished he would explain the necessity for doing something a certain way. He would assure them that the land would return in full what it was given, and in time they would be able to live respected and honorable lives. The settlers went back to their work with renewed energy and the advisors were also encouraged in their efforts.

In Kfar Yechezkel he was one of the first sons of the second generation to be chosen for the council of the village. Yochanan Zaid had this to say of him: "When we were discharged from the army and the whole gang was back home, we would all meet on Independence Day, each year in a different place, and here too Ben Ami was always in the center of the action." He had wanted to get "The Gang" together again when he had finished his job in the Negev, but that never happened. As Arik Nechemkin, the coordinator of the advisors in the Negev, said: "If we only had a few thousand like him burning with the spirit of volunteerism for the good of the State – our State would be much stronger."