

Manor Nachum (Monderer)

Born in 1923 in Krakow, Poland

Joined the special Haganah's course for Gideonim (wireless operators) in Marseilles, France, in 1946

Made Aliya as the Gideoni (wireless operator) of Aliya Bet vessel Hatikva in 1947



A few words about me until 1946, I think that they are somewhat unusual. I was brought to Palestine as a baby and spent my early years in the Borochov neighborhood. When I was 5 years old my family and I returned to Krakow. I learned Polish quickly, went to a regular public school and to a Hebrew gymnasium, and was a leader in the scout movement. When the war broke out I was mobilized into the Polish Army for a short time. Later I was imprisoned in the ghetto and went through the regular series of degradations, persecutions and torture, including several concentration camps. To my great luck, the last one was the one publicized in "Schindler's List", and that is how I was rescued from that hell; the only remaining member of a family of six souls.

After the liberation I wandered among several Displaced Persons camps in Austria and Germany. I then joined a group that intended to make Aliya and arrived at another camp in Belgium. One day there was an announcement: "Anyone who knows electricity and Hebrew should report to the secretariat." I and four other fellows were smuggled across the French border and arrived in Paris. The smuggler placed us in a house for the homeless and disappeared. The police raided the place that same night, to our misfortune, and we found ourselves behind bars. We didn't know what we were doing there so invented a cock and bull story. For some time we had to be at the police station in the morning for interrogation, and the rest of the day we were allowed to roam as we wished. This "home" for the homeless was in the middle of the Jewish neighborhood of Paris, known as the "Pletzl". Somehow, through people we met there we were able to make contact with the Hashomer Hatzair movement, and through people there, with Hechalutz. We were given a trial for having entered the country illegally and told to leave within 24 hours. We were given new ID's by someone, and someone to accompany us, and we boarded a train and traveled toMarseilles.

We arrived at an isolated house on a street not far from the sea, which had previously been a meeting place for the Jewish Sea Scouts. There was a group there of about twenty fellows and girls from various camps all over Europe. Finally, we started to understand what we were supposed to be doing. The people in charge of Aliya Bet had decided to use us as additions to work transmitting stations for the ship and shore stations of the Mosad for Aliya Bet,

as there was a severe shortage of people in this activity. It was more difficult to train men for this job secretly in Palestine than to do this in Europe. Work in this field was so secret that even today one finds that our course is hardly mentioned anywhere. I believe that our group was called "MATZAV" which was an acronym for "The Young Guard in Europe".

We began our studies in an Israeli atmosphere. We spoke only Hebrew and were given lectures about Zionism and Palestine, and had training in sport and judo. This was a huge jump for us, from the persecuted to members of the Hagana, and emissaries of the Jewish settlements in Palestine. (One day, Nachum Shadmi arrived and in an impressive ceremony swore us in as members of the Hagana; we were 'proud as peacocks'.) We tried our best to resemble our teachers and to act like Sabras (native-born Israelis, actually, the fruit of the cactus plant) and to look like them. Dan ben Amotz was a stereotype to imitate, but he regarded us with his nose in the air. Later we were surprised to learn that he was more 'like us' than 'like them'.

The study of Morse and signaling was very intensive and quite tough. We studied for ten hours a day and at first the 'di-di-dida-di was amusing but then as the speed increased and the going got tougher, some of the people dropped out. The head of the course was "David" – Chanoch Beltzen, a former soldier in the Brigade, and the one who handled all the material necessities was Moshe Vardi, known as the "Housekeeper". The chief instructor was Bob, Nachman Burstein, who was the one who made Gideonim out of us. Four months after it began, the course ended and we were given a treat; a trip along the Riviera including visits to Nice and Monte Carlo. This was a great experience for us and after that we scattered. Some went to help in camps of Ma'apilim, others went to prepare vessels, and some to work at transmitting stations.

In April, 1947, my turn came and I was assigned to the "Tradewinds" which had once been an American Coast Guard cutter. It arrived from Portugal where it had been overhauled to take on Ma'apilim. Its code name was "Amalia" and the crew was made up of young Jewish American volunteers. They would speak to me in a mixture of Yiddish-English, which I did not always understand. Unfortunately, it turned out that I was not an experienced 'sea dog' and was terribly seasick for most of that first voyage. I became something of a laughing stock as I sat at the transmitter with a pail beneath my feet. It took some time to get used to the sea.

During this voyage an incident occurred that became a well-known joke among all the Gideonim (radio operators). All communication was in code and the key resembled the matrix of the multiplication table. There was a vertical and horizontal row with the alphabet arranged in pairs chosen at random. The codes had been copied by a machine copier but my copy must have been one of the last to be made and was hardly legible. One message that I received ordered us to proceed to Porto Chara (Port Shit). I showed this to the captain and he said: "There is no such place. Check again". I asked for a repeat and this time came

up with Porto Here. Once again the captain said, "There is no such place but maybe it has some meaning in Hebrew." I told him what 'here' meant in Hebrew so the captain sailed for Porto Venere at La Spezia , and sure enough, that was where they were waiting for us.

We anchored in the middle of the bay opposite the town and soon there were boats of hawkers all around us. There was such a crowd that we feared for the secrecy of our arrival. Every one of the crew was selling cigarettes and making money, until Ada Sereni showed up, made a little speech and collected what remained of the cigarettes and all the money that the fellows had made. The crew were quite ashamed and turned over everything to her. She declared that she confiscated it in the name of the Hagana. No one objected.

During two nights we loaded Ma'apilim from two different points. Ropes were drawn and tied to the shore and rubber boats were drawn along them. The refugees looked worn out, pale and unsure of themselves. Each one guarded his backpack and I felt that it was only yesterday that I was like them. I thought how lucky I was that now it was in my power to help them. That feeling was even stronger the following day when I met a friend of my youth on board the ship. In the camps we had shared our bread but now I could repay him with a bottle of whiskey. The situation below deck was close to insufferable as there was not enough air and people would come on deck and stroll as much as they were allowed. The vessel lost its even keel easily if there were too many people on one side so one of the Ma'apilim would stand on the bridge and yell in Yiddish through a megaphone: "Everyone over to the other side!" So all would go to the other side and the vessel would tilt to the other side..

Several groups of Ma'apilim helped in running the vessel; some worked on deck, others in the kitchen, and still others in the engine room. Some who worked on the bridge planned to go to Kibbutz Negba when they reached Palestine, and I was most friendly with them. Later, when I also had to decide where I wanted to settle, Kibbutz Negba was an obvious choice. Every vessel had its plan how to fool the British and get ashore before being discovered. This plan was not always carried out because the British did not cooperate and caught most of them. We were hoping to be able to beat them to shore because we were able to achieve high speed fairly quickly. We sailed northeast in the Mediterranean, parallel to the shores of Turkey and Lebanon, so as not to arouse the suspicion of the British. We planned to make a dash for the coast on the last night. This did not work out because a plane discovered us

Tension arose, and soon a destroyer appeared on the horizon. Shortly after the first one, a second one arrived. There ensued a traditional exchange between the destroyer and our vessel. One of the young Ma'apilim put on the captain's hat and yelled back at the destroyer in Yiddish: "I am the captain". I then received a message from our headquarters in Tel Aviv: "The name of your ship is now "Hagana Ship Arthur James Balfour". Several seamen got busy painting the new name on the vessel. We had a woman on the ship who was on the verge of giving birth, but for some reason the motions of the vessel seemed to interfere

with her contractions (That was the opinion of our doctor). Suddenly the two destroyers surrounded us and gave our vessel a squeeze. Everyone panicked, there was an uproar on the vessel, and the baby's delivery quickly took place. The infant was named "Arthur", but then what did fate do?. I received an additional message, "Your name is henceforth "Hatikvah". And again, members of the crew had to repaint the new name. Balfour did not win out, and I never found out what happened to the name of the baby.

Our crew prepared some surprises for the British. Our lifeboats were raised over the sides and the next time that the British tried to attach themselves to us, the lines were cut and the boats plunked down onto the decks of the destroyers, causing some damage. When the soldiers came aboard and took over the bridge they were surprised to find that the helm did not work. We steered the ship from the hold. Cans of food had previously been given to teams of Ma'apilim and they now threw these with great effect at the boarding team. The British replied with tear gas and resistance soon ended.

At the very last moment before I was to wreck the transmitter, when fighting was at its highest, I received the last message from the receiver and barely had the time to decode it. I ran to the bridge and declaimed as everyone stood around me expectantly: "The Hebrew settlements in the Land of Israel welcome and greet the "Unknown Ma'apil" who is forging his way to the Holy Land ...blah blah blah..." Today, this sounds like a joke, but then, people stood there with tears in their eyes, and not because of the gas. The fighting was over but everyone burst into the singing of "Hatikva" there on the deck, opposite the shore of Palestine.

For those accompanying the vessel, a hideaway had been prepared beneath the water tanks deep in the hold of the vessel. We crawled inside in the last moments before reaching Haifa. There were four of us; Srulik Rotem (RIP), Meir Falik (RIP), Alex Shur (may he live a long life) and me. However, we had only prepared room for three. Alex was the tallest so he stretched across on top of us. Every so often the British would drop a depth charge near the side of the vessel and the blast was awful! Likewise, every so often Alex would light a match to see if we still were breathing air – that's what they do in every movie! The whole night went by that way and also quite a few hours the next day, until the Solel Boneh team came to clean up and get us out. The Ma'apilim and the crew were transferred to the deportation ships and sent to Cyprus.

The first thing we did when we left the port was to eat a falafel from the stand of the redhead near the entrance to the port. (Later, this became a standard ritual for me every time I returned from a voyage). I was really very excited. I had returned home; the lost prodigal son, the only surviving member of my family, a survivor of the Holocaust, a Ma'apil and also a member of the Hagana, the underground. It was very important to me to strike roots in the country and to feel that I belong. After visiting the few relatives I had who were scattered throughout the country, I went to Kibbutz Negba as I had planned, and joined

the group there whose acquaintance I had made on the ship. By day I worked in the vegetable gardens. In the evening I practiced Morse code on the secret transmitter that they had in the kibbutz, under the watchful eye of the experienced radio operator of the Kibbutz.

Several months went by and I received a message to report to Headquarters on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv. I knew both Yan and Moshe Zik (may they both RIP) who worked there. I was told that within a month I would be going to Marseilles. I received a magical note to Oswald & Hass and noticed how the clerk grabbed a valise and threw in all sort of clothes. Whatever I asked, she answered, "You will need this". I said goodbye to the kibbutz, to the vegetables and to the fellows in my tent, and now, with a false passport, boarded the ship "Providence" and sailed westward.

In Marseilles I joined the team at the station that was quartered in a little isolated house on a large estate that had seen better days. This quarter of the city was known as Madrague so, naturally, our station was called Mizra. The acquaintance that I made with the other members of the team there became a lifelong friendship (Malka Rofeh, Zaki Keini, Viko Pachevitz – they are all gone now unfortunately). I lived in a room with Malka and besides working my shift, I also had to tend to her leg which had been injured. (She had been in an accident in the port of Toulon when the ship "Exodus" that had been returned to Europe, had anchored there.)

Our life in Mizra was rather bleak and Spartan. On the table in the dining room below was a can of preserves. Anyone who was hungry, day or night, could go and open a can of preserves and eat. He would leave what was left for whoever came after him. There was a mountain of cans on that table, of every kind of food, and from every date. One day a week there was a 'night out'. We would go to town and eat hot food at a restaurant. Thursday was also a special day, as we would go to a public bath. There was no such luxury in our 'villa', until Viko got upset about the situation one day, and installed a shower that worked only with cold water. He was the only one who was brave enough to use it. In the public bath there was a room with two baths that was cheaper than using two rooms with two separate baths, so we would go in pairs, and the bathhouse workers would wink at us knowingly. Some, who still had a bit of their own money, would go to a record store nearby owned by Jewish couple and hear a concert in a private booth for a small fee. Once in a while we would go to the opera in town, and we would stand out in our JDC clothing among all the finely clothed city dwellers. Once Geda came late and yelled out in his thunderous voice: "Where are the guys from the Palmach?" The pittance we received for our work was hardly enough to cover these few expenses so finally we rebelled and invited one of the bosses to a meeting on the subject. He gave us a speech about the hardships of the Jewish settlements in Palestine while we are relaxing in the fleshpots of Europe. We shut up, while the boss ordered a cab and took off, back to his 5 star hotel.

In this big house at the estate there lived several families of Olim with children, and the seamen. The Olim were usually either coming or going and did not stay there too long. One large room in the house was used as a library and also had a record player in it, and a closet full of old classics. There was always activity in this room. That is where I became fond of classical music. Our Seder for Passover was organized as it was in the kibbutzim, and the girls worked hard preparing and cooking all the food and they also decorated the room very nicely. They also prepared a little song book for the evening. That same day a bunch of us went to see a bull-fight at Arles (The town that Van Gogh made famous). This was the first and last time that I saw that exotic spectacle. Unfortunately, by the time we got back for the Seder we arrived a bit late and were met with dirty looks. The girls still haven't forgiven us for being late, and I am sorry to admit – they were perfectly right.

Across from our estate there was a large camp of Indo-Chinese soldiers (they were not as yet known as Vietnamese). They had not been returned to their country in order to prevent their participating in their country's fight for independence. One day we noticed the activity of the French police in the vicinity of their camp and our estate. Among their vehicles were those equipped with transmitters. We thought that perhaps they had discovered ours and thought that it belonged to the Vietnamese and was in their area. Later, they were sent back and the camp was filled with Jewish refugees. This camp was called the "Big Camp" (big in Hebrew is 'Gadol') but we called it the "DeGaulle Camp".

There were times of some amusing incidents at our station: When Zaki was to take Malka's place and begin his shift, Malka would work with her key with very little leeway, Zaki on the other hand would use maximum leeway for himself and the floor below his table shook with the force of his pounding. He would start swearing in anger and adjusting the key to his position and she would move it up to her position on her shift. After some time, each came to work with a screwdriver in his pocket and fixed the key to his own liking. Zaki also had trouble waking up on time, and an alarm clock did not help. He would shut it and continue sleeping. If he hid the clock he would know where to find it so he was able to shut it down quickly and go back to sleep. Finally, he asked us to hide the clock. He would then have to search with enough effort to waken him thoroughly, so that was what we did. We hid the alarm clock from him.

Since the incident of "Port Shit" our codes improved, and we now used several English pocket books that were then very popular. We would usually work on encoding in pairs; one would read the message and the other would look at the code. Somebody found a knitting needle in the yard and used it as one uses the 'pointer' for reading the Torah. The needle was green and made the work go a bit faster so a green knitting needle became standard equipment for every Gideoni.

Some time later I was transferred to Paris. The Gideonim were then living in a villa that was at a distance from the city and from most of the Israelis. Paris was

the center of a great deal of activity and our station also had much more work to do. The content of the messages was also different. Instead of discussing vessels and equipment and ports of call, we were talking politics and meetings and weapons procurement. We had a laugh from a message that Pinchas Sapir (Kozlovsky) once sent: "In the shipment there are 1,000 pipes of 7.9 caliber and 10,000 nails of the same caliber." We were not partners to his activity; we were only the message runners.

I was once sent from Paris to Marseilles to give a large sum of money to the local office; it was about 12 000 000 francs. To me it was a terrifically large sum. I wore a large coat and I filled all the pockets with wads of money. I traveled by night train. The ride took 12 hours and I could not even close my eyes. I saw a robber in every man who got onto the train. Our pocket money was 500 francs a month and from that I would save some money to buy presents.

In Palestine riots had broken out and there were attacks by bands of Arabs on outlying settlements all over the country. In order to let the emissaries of the Jewish Institutions of Palestine who were active in Europe know what was going on back home, we would listen to the news and produced a newssheet which we spread all over the country. We would signal this news in Morse code but not encrypted. In February 1948 I decided it was time to do what had to be done. I asked for leave so that I could travel to Krakow to see Genia my girlfriend during the war years. She had been caught behind the Iron Curtain and all my efforts to extract her had been in vain. We had sworn a pact that if we remained alive when the war was over, we would get to Palestine and marry in the house where I had lived in my old Borochoy neighborhood. Three years had passed and I had not as yet completed our pact. None of the emissaries or intermediaries had been able to get her out of Poland, and the most we had done during all this time was to correspond. I was lonesome for her and decided to go see her. I received a fake passport and a note saying, "He is one of our boys, help him". It turned out that there was no boundary or border that that little note could not open. When I showed that to a smuggler I could be certain that I was safely across a border.

After an adventurous journey I reached Krakow and met my sweetheart and a week later I returned to Prague. I was a witness to seeing the country overrun by the communists and I took part in the funeral procession of Jan Masaryk, whom they had murdered. I traveled back by train and my partner in the compartment was a kibbutznik who worked for the Bricha. As soon as we were alone he pulled out a screwdriver and removed the signs on the wall of the compartment. He stuffed large sums of money behind them and screwed them back the way they had been...

When I returned to Marseilles I was surprised to see how orderly and clean the place was. A group of Israeli students who had been studying in Switzerland had come as additions to the "Big Camp". One of them, Sarale was appointed in charge of the kitchen and suddenly we had cleanliness and hot meals. In March 1948 I was sent to Naples and boarded the vessel "Mastrale", which later was

known as “The Old Man”, in honor of Yehuda Arazi. He himself strolled the deck and oversaw the loading of 20 crates that had been delivered from Switzerland. Every crate contained a cannon. These were field guns that had been in use in European armies tens of years earlier. They were called “Napoleonchikim”. The next time I saw them was 50 years later in the Hagana Museum in Tel Aviv. They then looked like something suitable for little lead soldiers to play with, but the word ‘cannon’ made an impression on everybody.

The commander was Dudale and I recall wistfully the months that we spent together. The whole crew was Italian, mostly from Southern Italy. The first mate was Senior Fontana and he was from Tuscany. He would insist that he was the only real Italian in the crew and the others were Arabs. One sailor named Giovanni could not speak Italian, only spoke Neapolitan. The Captain, who was a Sicilian, spoke to him with the aid of an interpreter. Dudale would take out his sextant and then do calculations; this cause Senior Fontana to use the sextant and also calculate. These two were not always identical. I had by now learned that position did not always matter. In the Mediterranean Sea one usually reached the port that one was headed for.

We headed for the Adriatic and made for a small port called Shivnik in Yugoslavia. We were supposed to take on a large consignment of arms from Czechoslovakia. We were treated very well there and the police chief helped us in every way. Meanwhile we waited and passed the time away. We had an old gramophone that we placed on the deck and played Italian songs very loudly. This soon became the center of social and cultural life in the town. In general, the Yugoslavs regarded us as Hebrew Partisans fighting British imperialism and belonging to the family of the socialist bloc. Dudale and I each received a medal with a red star from the Yugoslav partisan organization. Finally, the consignment arrived from Czechoslovakia and was brought very close to the vessel.

We loaded it all and headed south at once. Just to think of what we were carrying could make one dizzy: In addition to the cannons we had 5,000 Mauser rifles and 5 million bullets! The Italian seamen thought that they would have a week in Israel in which to enjoy themselves while the cargo was being unloaded. Haifa was still in British hands so we intended to unload the cargo in Tel Aviv. A few days before we were to arrive in port I received a telegram: If we were halted by an enemy ship, we were to sink the vessel. Dudale and I went to the engine room and found the valves that would cause the vessel to flood.

We intended carrying out those orders but what wasn't clear to me was: Were we to stand at attention and salute on the bridge while the vessel went under or were we to sing Hatikva? Another day we received the news of the Declaration of Independence. We also heard this on the radio from the BBC. We entered the port of Tel Aviv and a surprise was waiting for us there. Everybody who was anybody came to greet us, and even more important, every Salonikan port worker was there to do the unloading. They were so fast that the Italians stood there with their tongues hanging out. Trucks were loaded and took off for their

destinations, one after another. Rumor spread in Tel Aviv that weapons had arrived and crowds came down to the port to see for themselves. That same day the Egyptians bombed Tel Aviv and there was broken glass in many of the streets. Yisrael Galili picked us up in a jeep and took us to a restaurant where there happened to be a celebration in progress. Here we were in work clothes, dirty and filthy, in a room nicely decorated and piles of food on the tables. We were not at ease; we felt we had come from another planet and hurriedly took our leave. Before dawn there was a halt in the unloading and we moved out to sea because we feared that there may be another bombing of the city. The following night the work was done and we left port and headed north once again. The crew was very disappointed as they had expected a longer layover at Tel Aviv. They had never seen anyone work like those Saloniki. The cannons did not sit in their crates very long either. The following day they had been uncrated and reassembled and were already pounding away on the road to Jerusalem and the road to Degania, An article by Moshe Shertok (Sharet) in next morning's newspaper, Davar, attributed this supply of weapons to be a turning point in the war. I also heard that it was Russian Red Army men who operated the cannons as they were experienced in that field.

On the second voyage from Shvnik we had the same sort of interesting load. In addition to 10,000 rifles and 35 million bullets, we also carried 2,200 Spandau machine guns and 1100 Besa large caliber machine guns. We also brought home a group of Palmachniks who had trained Olim in Czechoslovakia. This time we also took on sufficient coal so that we would be able to sail back from Tel Aviv without refueling. The whole deck was covered with coal and the boys who wandered around on deck were soon black with soot. The Palmachniks were not used to the Italian style of eating (pasta 3 times a day) and they demanded salad. Giovanni brought them salad but thought they were crazy. They also could not withstand the temptation to see what was in the crates and when they opened one and saw the Spandau there the ship became a sailing target range. Unfortunately for them though, these Spandau did not want to fire extended bursts, they would only fire single bullets. Everyone took one to his cabin and tried to 'fix' his Spandau to fire bursts but none of them succeeded. I heard later that a kibbutz mechanic worked on the problem and found a solution and fixed them all.

When we arrived in Tel Aviv once again, the unloading was done very quickly. I had requested earlier that another Gideoni take my place while we were in port so that I could go to a family gathering in the Borochov area and in Tel Aviv. Shimshon came and took my place and stayed that night also. I met several of my aunts and uncles who had no idea of what I was doing or why I had left the kibbutz. There was an unpleasant experience on the next time we left Tel Aviv because we took a passenger with us. This was a fellow named Ben Yerushalmi who was sent, it seemed, from the procurement department. He walked around as if he owned the place and liked to give orders and otherwise butt in where he had no cause to be. When we came back to Israel from this trip, we asked to be relieved and were.

I was sent to a villa near Gaeta and missed the “Lino” adventure because of that. Oved was in line ahead of me and he earned the adventure and the honor. I had the lesser honor of establishing contact with him. I myself sailed on several different vessels during that period. One of these “Fabio”, called “The Rebel”. This was a small wooden vessel with a very old captain. He sat all the time in the map room and talked to himself or prayed or I don't know what exactly. Once, because of a storm we ran to a Greek island for shelter. The Greek police appeared shortly. The captain had a British passport but all I had was a medical booklet of Kupat Cholim. I told the police that this was the new passport of the State of Israel. They turned the thing in all directions and finally gave up or gave in, and they let us be.

When I was back in Haifa I went to work on the “Sha'ar Yashuv”. This had been a vessel which had brought Ma'apilim and had been repaired and refitted. The big change in the setup was that now the Star of David flew legally at the top of the mast. The captain and the whole crew was also Israeli. The only thing not legal about the vessel was the radio transmitter, but I was used to that. There were also several cadets on the vessel who had graduated from the Naval School. When we arrived at Messina, the captain forbid them to go ashore as he did not want them to be tempted by the evils of a port.

One interesting voyage that I had was with a vessel that was bought for the Israeli Navy, that we sailed from the port of Marseilles. The name of the ship was the “Yucatan” and it was a submarine hunter that had been bought in the USA. It was well equipped, but unarmed. It had a well equipped radio station and even radar, and could attain a speed of 22 knots, which was excellent for those years. Her code name was Noga which was also the name of the granddaughter I had 50 years later. In our navy she was called the “K-26”. When we entered the bay of Haifa there was a heavy fog and darkness everywhere because of the blackout. We were told that there would be a fire on the Carmel Range to guide us instead of the lighthouse, but there was no fire anywhere on the Carmel, and we did not know exactly where we were. Suddenly, the strong searchlight of a warship was directed at us. We could only make out the lines of the warship and see the cannons on its deck. The ship signaled by searchlight to us: “What ship? What flag? What destination?” We answered but we were very worried because we could not make out just who they were. It turned out to be an Israeli warship and we happened to be at the entrance to the port of Haifa. Our worries were over and what was even more to the point was that this warship happened to be our own former “Hatikva”, now on active service in the Israeli Navy.

In December of 1948 I boarded the passenger ship “Eilat” on the last journey of my career at sea, and also the longest. This lasted for almost one year. We called ourselves; “The Haifa - Bari Taxi Service”. We must have made more than twenty voyages and each time we would carry 400 Olim. The train would come to the pier and the Olim would transfer from the train to the vessel and away we would go. So it went, back and forth. Sometimes we sailed to Marseilles and once we even went to Istanbul. This was the first vessel to fly the

Israeli flag there and the Jews of the city were very, very impressed. In the middle of 1949 our route was changed to Haifa – Tripoli. This was also the first time that one saw an Israeli flag there. The British were just about to pass over rule of the country to King Idris and the Mosad made a very big effort to get all Jews out quickly.

The atmosphere in Libya was very tense. The Jewish population was at a loss and suddenly we, the saviors, appeared. They gave us a beautiful welcome and showed us the city. We must have brought about half the population to Israel. The other half was brought by the “Theodore Herzl”, another ship that had brought Ma’apilim to Palestine and then been given a cosmetics job. Sometimes we would meet at sea, each one going in the opposite direction and we would blow our whistles as we passed by. Loading the Jews of Tripoli was a noisy job. First we took all the orphaned children, cripples and the poorest of the lot. After that whole clans would appear from nowhere. The Jews that came from Tigra, a place on the edge of the desert where they lived in underground burrows, came on deck with trays of burning embers, on which they continued to cook their food on the deck. Our captain nearly blew his top when he saw the burning trays on our wooden deck. After the groups of organized youth came on board, the wealthier ones then came, who had waited until the last moment. Most of them only went as far as Italy. The whole Jewish community of Libya is now only history.

While working on the “Eilat” I had another very unusual experience. There was a period when we took Jews from Bari who had come from China to Israel. Most of them had originally been from Czarist Russia or Germany. They had been allowed to fly to Rome and from Rome took the train to Bari. One of these passengers, who was very old, died en route. It was the middle of the summer and we did not know what to do. We received instructions to give the passenger a dignified burial at sea. We did so that midnight, with a small group of witnesses. This made a deep impression upon me, not knowing how many there were who had died so terribly and did not get such a simple service.

Towards the winter of 1949 I left the ship that had been my home for so long and took leave of the crew that had been my family. I joined a course that produced certified and licensed radio operators, the first of its kind there was in Israel, and was held at the Technion in Haifa. There were quite a few veteran Gideonim in this course and others who were from the Navy, and even some who had been with me in the first course at Marseilles. We were called “The Pirates” because despite our years of experience we had never worked according to international rules or standards. More exactly, we had worked against them. The interesting part is that when we were given the exams at the end of the course it was only “The Pirates” who passed with flying colors. We were now certified communication officers and could serve as such in the merchant fleet.

During this period of five years there had been contact between me and my sweetheart only via letters, except for one week. She was stuck behind the Iron

Curtain. Finally, at the end of 1949 she was told that she could leave Poland. She wasted no time and in January she arrived in Haifa on the "Galila". I was at that time discharged from the army and about to sail legally as communications officer on a ship. We were married within a week. As promised of course, and my little wife put a big "ex" on to the continuation of my career as a sailor. She had heard too many stories of sailors with 'friends' in every port. Instead, we went to a kibbutz where my friends from Negba had also gone. I exchanged my sailor's cap for the one that kibbutznikim wear and the Morse key for an adjustable wrench, and went to work in the garage. Genia worked in landscaping and gardening, and planted thousands of trees that are still growing on the hills above Wadi Ara. In my reserve duty I was assigned to the communications unit of the 9th Brigade, the Emek Brigade. I met many of my old friends there and had the honor to go with the Brigade on its historic trek to Sharm-a-Sheikh. In the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War I served with the Southern Command, as we had left the kibbutz and settled in Beer Sheva. Our two children were born in the kibbutz.

We started our life anew from scratch in Beer Sheva. For the first two years I worked in the garage for construction equipment of Solel Boneh and after that I became the technical manager of the Negev Cotton Gin at Ofakim. While on this job I earned the Kaplan prize for the good work that I did, That did not prevent my being fired by my new bosses, the kibbutz movement, after 23 years of work. I also worked for six years in the Dead Sea Industries.

Today, as old age approaches, I try to enjoy every minute. I hear excellent lectures at Beer Sheva University, I volunteer as a teacher for new Olim, I volunteer for work in a group of Polish translators in translating documents for Yad VaShem, I sometimes talk to young people about the period of the Ha'apala and visit my children and grandchildren. I have several circles of friends. There is a group from the days of my youth and another from the period of the war. There is the period of work in Aliya Bet on the vessels and there is a group of old-timers of Beer Sheva. There is of course always somebody who does not fit into any of these categories, but is also a good friend.

My life has been rich in experiences and I have many memories, not always pleasant ones of course. When I look back it is definitely not with anger but with longing and with a feeling of having accomplished something. Despite the suffering and the despair and the losses that I have suffered I had the honor of contributing to the great creation of building a homeland as a representative of those who were destroyed. I did this for myself and for them.