

Milo, Meir (Melnick)

Born 16 September 1924 in Vilna, Poland*

Made Aliya in 1925 (aged 1 year)

Joined the Palyam in 1943

Died 1 May 1999

Written by : Shulamit Milo

This is the Way it Was

Meir was born to Tova and Benyamin Melnick. In 1925, when he was one year old, his family made Aliya and settled in Tel Aviv. His father was a certified technician for repairing typewriters and soon found work in his trade. There were not many technicians then in Palestine, or perhaps there were none at all, so he worked in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Tel Aviv, and worked for the Mandatory Government, for the City, the Electric Company, the courts, banks, etc.. Their economic situation was good but was dependent on the father's work. The father was an ardent socialist and did not believe in investing his money in property or land. Meir's youth was spent in this liberal home, which was always open to visitors and friends.

When the children were young they spoke in Yiddish at home, but after they attended school the language spoken became Hebrew. While Meir was a student at Achad Ha'am he joined the Noar HaOved youth movement and continued in that movement after he attended the Max Fein Technical School. In 1938, while in Noar HaOved, Meir came in contact with the nautical company of Hapoel and was active within its framework for many years. In 1939 he participated in a course and became an instructor. After completing secondary studies in 1941, Meir joined his father in his business and became expert at repairing typewriters and other machines. He was a very responsible and conscientious worker but his heart was with his friends who were volunteering.

I had already made Meir's acquaintance at this stage, and I recall one conversation that we had after we had parted from our friend Avraham M. who had joined the British Army. One of his friends said: "He's crazy. You can go down, something goes wrong and you don't come up." Meir said quietly and without hesitating, "I would gladly exchange places with him at this moment." When asked why he did not also volunteer, he said that he could not leave his home at the present time. His mother became ill with cancer, and his father had stopped working to be with her when she was operated upon. Expenses were very high because his family was not a member of Kupat Cholim (The First Health Fund in Israel.). All the care was by independent doctors. Meir had the responsibility for the business on his shoulders. His free time was devoted to the nautical company.

In March, 1943, Meir took part in the 2nd course for small boat commanders of the Palyam at Caesarea. It seemed that his mother would recover and everything was back on track. At the end of 1944 when the end of the War seemed close at hand, Meir was sent to instruct Jewish members of the Shore Patrol on how to unload people from vessels at sea onto the shore; so that they

could help in this task when needed. He did this for close to a year, with his base on the shore near Nebi Rubin.

I do not know much about the period after this and until the "Black Saturday", of June 1946. I only recall that when so many members of so many kibbutzim were arrested, Meir went with friends to Kibbutz Sdot Yam to help by working at wherever the kibbutz deemed necessary. He remained there for a month. We were then close friends and I knew all that had happened to him. His mother's health deteriorated and while his friends were going to Europe to work in Aliya Bet, he had to stay home because of her condition. In June, 1947, we were married but some of our closest friends could not be present because they were in France or Italy. Five months later was the momentous declaration of the UN to partition the Land of Israel into two States. While everyone was extremely happy, the first shots were already being fired.

The Jewish authorities in Palestine declared a mobilization and Meir immediately reported but was not accepted, because only bachelors were being drafted at that time. He contacted his friends in the Palyam and they suggested that he join them at their base in Sidna Ali, which he did. At the end of March 1948, and in preparation for the Nachshon Campaign, Meir went with a group of ten Palyamnikim from Sidna Ali to the Kirya in Tel Aviv, were given Czech rifles and taken to Hulda. On March 31st the convoy left Hulda for Jerusalem and was attacked by a large Arab force. The wounded were moved to an armored vehicle which sank in the mud. Arab forces attacked in heavy numbers and the defenders had to retreat but were unable to move the vehicle with the injured despite repeated attempts to do so. It was left where it was and the injured who could move on their own, left the vehicle and retreated with the rest of our forces. The more seriously injured remained, and were butchered mercilessly by the attacking Arabs.

Meir told me about many of the battles in which he participated as a fighter in the 4th Battalion, "HaPortzim", of the Harel Brigade, the unit to which the men of the Palyam belonged. I do not recall all the details. By the time of the first Cease Fire, there was already a State and an IDF. Meir became a Navy man. He was an instructor at Tantura and then stationed in the port of Jaffa. While he was there, at the end of 1949, our first-born son Amir was born. I do not recall exactly where he went and what he did in his regular Navy service, but once the Military became organized and the amount of paper work increased, it became clear that there was a dearth of Hebrew typewriters and a surplus of English ones. His expertise was then used in rebuilding the machines so that they could write in Hebrew. He did his reserve duty in the Navy.

In 1951 his mother died and in 1953 our daughter Tirza was born. Meir became ill in 1980 and we went to live with our son and his family in Kibbutz Tel Katzir. Meir felt much better in the kibbutz and enjoyed work in landscaping. As a father he had had little time for his children but as a grandfather he thoroughly enjoyed the two grandchildren in Tel Katzir and the five in Givat Chaim. In 1995 he was diagnosed with cancer and died on May 1, 1999.

(*) Vilna was part of Poland in those days.