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Born 25 December 1926 in Niederohle, Germany

Made Aliya in 1939

Joined the Palmach in 1943

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

The episode of the weapons of “J” Company, HaPortzim Battalion, Harel Brigade

The story starts with a prelude...

I made Aliya from Germany when I was 13 years old. This was just three months after the start of World War II. I arrived in Haifa on December 20, 1939. My brother, who was three years older than I, made Aliya three months earlier within the framework of Youth Aliya. My parents and two sisters were killed by the Germans, but this only became known to me some time later.

In 1940 I was accepted as a student in the Max Fein Technical High School in Tel Aviv and started to learn metalworking. In 1941-42 there seemed to be a danger that the Germans might invade Palestine from the direction of Egypt and the sea, under the command of Field Marshal Rommel. I was a bit young but enlisted with almost the whole class, in the Hagana. I swore my loyalty to a fellow called Al Dema in the Borochov quarter of Givataim. Al Dema was the director of the Herzliya Gymnasium in Tel Aviv. We began training, with light weapons during the day and had field practice on Saturdays. We often stood watch at strategic locations to make certain that the Germans didn't try to land paratroopers there. The peak of our service was during the vacation period of the summer of 1942 when we were taken to an English camp at Tel Litvinsky and swore our loyalty to the English monarch. This was done so that we would be able to use weapons from English police stations. We were called 'special forces'. We completed our training, returned to our studies and to our great luck, Rommel never did come.

When my studies were over on 1 May 1943, I joined the Palmach. Those who came to encourage us to join were Yisrael Galili (RIP), Benny Marshak (RIP) and Chaim Guri. I wanted to join the German Company of the Palmach, so took some tests and passed them, but on the day that I showed up to be accepted, was told that that company was full and was sent to Ashdot Yaakov instead. I found out later on that the Jewish Agency and other Jewish authorities had decided to offer the German Company to the British Army, to help in the fight against the Nazis, but the British were not interested in sending too many Palmachniks.

“A” Company

At Ashdot Yaakov I was assigned to “A” Company. Our company commander was Mart and my first platoon commander was Assaf Simchoni (RIP). My squad leader was Chaim Guri. After Mart, Nachum Sarig became company

commander. We fell into the routine of work and training, usually two weeks of work and ten days of training. About six months went by in this manner and then our company went to the Haifa Bay area, to Yagur, Gvat and Ramat Yochanan, and "C" Company took our place at Ashdot Yaakov, Afikim and Kinneret. After another half year at Yagur, Moshe Lipson (Nachshon) came to see me and told me that by order of Nehemia Shane (then commander of "A" Company), I was to report to the 'special squad' at Ayelet Hashachar. I did not know much about this squad. When I and others arrived at Ayelet Hashachar, we were told that our job would be to meet Jews who arrived at the border of Israel from Arab countries, and bring them to Ayelet Hashachar. The border crossing was done by the Arab platoon of the Palmach and they were at Kfar Szold and Kfar Gileadi. When 20 people had gathered, we took them by truck to within 3 kilometers of the border checkpoint at Rosh Pina. The checkpoint could not be crossed without a suitable ID, so the Olim were brought into Rosh Pina by a circuitous route. I met an old friend there. Sherry, who had been with me in "A" Company. He was in the Palmach reserves and a member of Egged (the national bus co.)

From Rosh Pina, the Olim were taken by bus to Kibbutz Yagur. The Kibbutz could not be reached via Haifa as the checkpoint was blocked, so we went by way of Kfar Hassidim. At Yagur the Olim were given ID's and taken to Haifa. We almost ran into trouble at this point because I and two other Palmachniks arrived at Yagur the night that Atlit was broken in to and the Olim freed. There was danger that the Kibbutz would be surrounded and blocked by British police or soldiers. We had a bit of luck here too, and no one had to pay for the lack of coordination between our forces.

Three of us were sent from Ashdot Yaakov (one of them was Yosef ben Sa'adia from Ashdot Yaakov) to the Western Galilee. We had a base at Kibbutz Hanita. We went on scouting forays from Hanita, Eilon and Matzuba, to make ourselves familiar with paths through which we would lead Olim. The Olim were to arrive at Nahariya and from Nahariya they would be picked up by vehicles and taken to Yagur. The road from Nahariya to Hanita was also impassible if one did not have a proper ID. We each had a five Pound note in our pockets. In the event that we were caught we could bribe our captors, because it was made clear to us that if we were caught and a file was opened, we could no longer remain in this unit. Once the flow from Arab countries had about dribbled to an end, I asked for a transfer to the Naval Company. I had to wait a short time but was then accepted for the 5th course for small boat commanders. This was within the framework of the 10th Company of the Palmach.

The 10th Company and the weapons incident.

The 5th Course was a long one because in the middle, when the "Berl Katznelson" arrived, 12 of our men were caught; among them Yossale Hoover (RIP), my instructor, and Nimrod Eshel. During the course we also participated in various land operations. We left from Caesarea to attack the Givat Olga police station. The commander of this operation was Morris and my squad leader was

Shlomo Miller (RIP). He was from Givat Hashlosha and was killed in a later operation of retaliation at Fadja, near Petach Tikva. I was a machine gunner there and had a Bren. When the course was completed we went to Maabarot and as soon as we got there, we were given weapons at our base at Bitan Aharon and went to attack the police station at Kfar Vitkin. The commander of my squad in this action was Mula Cohen. (On the same night the police station in Sarona was also attacked and the operation there was given the name "Sarona Night") From Maabarot we left in the direction of Ein Hachosh. We, a squad of 12 men, set out from there for Kakoun, near Tulkarem, under the command of Sergei. Our objective was to blow up the railroad tracks in six places. We placed sacks of TNT on the tracks, lit a fuse and left the area. As we retreated we could hear the explosions and guards firing their weapons, but no one was hurt.

The Weapons

One day I was called to the company commander (if I am not mistaken, he was Avraham Zakai) who told me that 10TH Company needed a man to be responsible for weapons. Since I graduated from a technical school I should be suitable for that job. I accepted the job and from that day on, that was my responsibility. It was an interesting job and I had some interesting experiences. One day three sea mines were brought to Maabarot and I was asked to fill them with gelignite. Mines like these were used to blow up police patrol boats. We started to work with the gelignite but forgot that this should not be done with bare hands. We had terrible headaches for several days.

I had at my disposal a pick-up truck of the Palmach with a hideaway built into it and always some weapons in it. When a vessel with Ma'apilim approached the shores of the country, the headquarters of the Company, which was in Kibbutz "D" near Hadera, would decide what type and how many weapons should be used to cover the operation. I had plenty to do: We would take the weapons out of the deep "slick", clean them of excess oil, and store them in a more accessible upper hideaway until the day of the 'action'. They would then be brought to the site of the landing. Unfortunately, many vessels were caught before they could reach shore. The "Shabtai Luzinski" was a special case. She came in on the shore of Nitzanim in the south. Since it was decided to supply a large amount of weapons sufficient for two companies, I was given a larger vehicle to move the weapons. This was a truck that had an attachment to press asphalt onto a road. We filled these rollers with weapons and set out for Kibbutz Nitzanim.

We went through the British camp near Nitzanim. The soldiers were surprised to see this vehicle as there were very few paved roads in the kibbutz, but let us pass. In the evening, weapons were passed out to the waiting Palmachniks and then we heard that the vessel had been caught. We also learned that the British intended to surround the whole area. It was decided to return all the weapons to the hideaway and instructions to do so were given. All the weapons were returned to the big rollers and when the British appeared, everything was hidden. The British arrested all the Ma'apilim on the ship and all the people who came to

the shore to help or to hide the refugees. Members of the Palmach intermingled with the Olim so that they would not be recognized. We were given specific instructions not to identify ourselves and all the Israelis burned their IDs. Each one, when asked to identify himself said, "I am a Jew from the Land of Israel".

Of course, everyone did as ordered. However, my commander (I believe he was Yousuf) told me not to burn mine, so I took my ID and hid it between my sock and my boot. This did not prevent me from spending two days, together with many other good Jews, in the Nitzanim camp after which we were freed. We caught a ride back to Gedera and from there we separated and each one went back to his base. The British organized a convoy which brought all the Ma'apilim to Haifa and they were deported. The Palmach had intended to attack this convoy but the British must have sensed something because the route was altered. Instead of going via Beit Lid, they went via Kalkilia and Tulkarem. After that we had a problem of how to return all the weapons from Nitzanim to Kibbutz Maabarot. I thought that the British might recall that the truck had arrived before the landing and was leaving after the vessel was caught, and no new road had been paved. I asked Palmach headquarters to send me something else to use as a hideaway and they agreed to do so. I was sent a hay-baler with an elevator and another truck. The weapons were concealed in this package, brought back to Maabarot, and everything turned out fine.

Another interesting story was the arrest of two British army sergeants by ETZEL members (the right wing underground resistance movement) of the Netanya region. A vessel was supposed to arrive off the shore of Kibbutz Shefayim, and the British set up roadblocks on the road from Hadera to the Raanana Junction. There were 3 kilometers between each roadblock. We rode along this road with an electric generator used for welding, filled with arms. Most of the time, this vehicle was driven by Simcha Falck of Moshav Merchavia. As usual, we were dressed in dark blue work clothes and looked like we were welders. We also had an assortment of metal parts strewn about the vehicle. As we rode around Raanana, a Scottish officer climbed into the back of the vehicle and started to bang on the generator and listen. Perhaps he thought that we had the British sergeants inside. He never imagined there were arms inside.

There was a little episode of a mine that had been placed in a fire extinguisher. It had been decided to place a mine on one of the larger vessels that was scheduled to make port in Tel Aviv. I was sent by Chaim Zinger, the chief demolition expert of the Palmach, to Ein Hashofet, where a demolition course was in progress and bring back a mine from there. I wrapped the mine and inserted it into a fire extinguisher of my vehicle. We then set out on the way back, traveling via Haifa. A police patrol stopped us on the main street. They recognized Hagana vehicles and checked everything. Finally, an Arab policeman took the fire extinguisher and shook it vigorously. He heard some noise, but the handle did not work. He wrote us a ticket but no one could read what it said. When we appeared at the trial in Haifa, the charge was for not having an

extinguisher in the vehicle that worked properly. We paid the small fine with no objection. Our activities, adventures, and misadventures, continued almost until the War of Independence.

The 4th Battalion was created, the 10th Company became a part of it, and headquarters were moved to Sarona near Tel Aviv. Shortly before the Nachshon Campaign I received orders to transfer all hideaways and equipment in the Sharon region to a fellow named Amnon Lederer from Kibbutz HeftziBah. I went up to Jerusalem with the 4th Battalion and was Battalion armorer until the first Cease Fire. We did not have enough weapons, even after receiving those from Czechoslovakia, and this complicated my job. I was then sent by Yossale Tabenkin (RIP) to an officers' course. After that and until the end of the war, I fought in the Aouja el Haffir region, and Rafiah.

This is only a small part of my adventures, but it suffices for the time and the place. When the Palmach was disbanded, the staff of the Harel Brigade continued to serve for about another six months at Camp Bilu. We were then sent to various courses of the IDF. I found myself with 120 mm mortars and with cannons, and after that was called upon to be a military judge. I ended up in the History Department of the IDF. I also participated in the "Shlom Hagalil" Campaign in 1982 with the rank of Major.