

**Paz, Ze'ev** (Zevka)

Born in 1926 in Tel Aviv

Joined the Palyam in 1945

### **This is the Way it Was**

I was born in Tel-Aviv, Palestine in 1926. I loved the sea from the day I was born, as we lived in a neighborhood that was near the water, and all my childhood games were on the shore or in the water. When I was young I was active in the Tel Aviv branch of the Scout movement, and in the Sea Scouts. That is where my love for boats, sailing, and sailboats blossomed. When I was 15 years old I joined the Hagana, and when I completed my studies at the Max Fein Technical School, I went with a group of scouts for training to Kibbutz Heftziba in the Jezreel Valley. This was in 1943. It was during WW II and the severity of the calamity and annihilation of our people was not well-known.

In June, 1945 I decided to do my part in opening the 'gates of the country' to the survivors of the Holocaust. Since I felt so close to the sea I joined the Palyam. Few months later I was sent to the base camp of the Palyam at Sdot Yam and was accepted into the 5<sup>th</sup> Course for small boat commanders, for which there were 45 candidates. I felt very good about all that we did. and with the atmosphere of camaraderie that developed among the trainees, instructors. and commanders. We learned how to row boats and sail boats by day and by night, in a calm sea or a stormy one. Sometimes we would go out to sea for a voyage of several days. We learned to use the compass and to understand maps of the sea. We learned to recognize constellations, and to know the coastline of Palestine. Sometimes there would be social evenings and the celebrations of the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month were a well known tradition. We would raise a toast to all who were raising a toast anywhere on the face of the globe, and to the ships that were en route on the high seas. During the course, we took part in a number of actions against the British having to do with Aliya Bet.

On the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1945, we took part in the Palmach attack on the railways all over the country. On November 22, 1945 we received the Ma'apilim who arrived at the beach at Shefayim on the "Berl Katznelson". On the night of November 26, 1945 the Palmach attacked two police stations at Sidna Ali and Givat Olga. We members of this course participated in both actions. On the night of December 25, 1945 we received the Ma'apilim of the "Hannah Senesh" who had arrived at the shore of Nahariya, where their vessel had run up onto a rock near the shore. Sometimes we participated in moving weapons or explosives from one settlement to another during the night. In January, 1946, I began my studies in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Course for naval officers, in which there were 16 trainees.

We lived at Kibbutz Yagur and the studies were in a special classroom of the School for Naval Officers in Haifa. There was a great deal of highly concentrated material that we studied; geography, navigation, including navigation by the stars, tables, instruments, international rules, the construction

of ships, fuel consumption, preparing ships for carrying Ma'apilim and their control, matters of nutrition and health and more. The aim was also to aid us in handling foreign crews and, if necessary, to take command of a vessel. All this had to be covered in six months.

When the course was almost over I remained with some friends one Saturday to prepare a vessel in the port of Haifa for a training voyage of a week. To my dismay, this was the infamous "Black Saturday", 29 June, 1946. Kibbutz Yagur was surrounded by British troops and I was arrested along with many other members of the kibbutz. We spent one week under investigation at the Atlit Detention Camp after which I was classified with those who were sent to a military prison at Rafiah. Most of the people in this group were young and there were many kibbutznikim and Palmachnikim, and a strong feeling of camaraderie and unity developed among us. We elected a few to be our representatives and we made a schedule of activities that would keep us busy all day.

At the same time there was underground activity as well, to determine the order of the camp security system so that we would be ready for a getaway when the appropriate time came. This never came and I was released in September, 1946.

I was back in action in the Palyam as an instructor in the 7<sup>th</sup> Course for small boat commanders which was held at Kibbutz Neve Yam during the last months of 1946. The course was made up of two groups of participants and was efficiently run. Concurrently, a course was conducted at a base near Michmoret. Every so often we would arrange to go to various points on the coast in expectation of meeting and helping vessels of the Ma'apilim, that were due to arrive. Unfortunately, the British had reinforced their blockade and no vessel broke through during this period.

At the beginning of 1947, I was transferred to the Mosad for Aliya Bet. My underground name was 'Noah'. I was given a mandatory passport, a suit of clothes, and left for Italy on a passenger ship together with a friend. As a "Sabra", the capital city of Italy, Rome, made a great impression on me. The wide piazzas and broad avenues, the tall buildings, the Vatican, and ancient Rome; were all remarkable.

I was now given a new identity and became a Polish refugee named Shaul Meiblum. My passport was handed in to the Mosad for Aliya Bet for someone else's use. My first meeting with survivors of the Holocaust was in a camp south of the city of Bari. This was a very emotional encounter for me as I listened to their stories; each one more terrible than could be imagined. What had been rumor and hearsay, until the present, became reality. My desire to help them and to help open the gates of Palestine, received more fuel for the fire and intensified my efforts to help.

Part of the time I was busy with rubber boats that could be inflated quickly with small bottles of gas or compressed air. Each boat could carry 30 people and we used them often and transferred many refugees to and from vessels with

their aid, in the course of time. I was also busied with surveying and mapping shores, in order to select appropriate locations to pick up Ma'apilim . Sometimes I also moved weapons, that had been procured by others, from one place to another, in order to get them to our men in Palestine as quickly as possible.

In July, 1947, I was called in the middle of the night and told to transport 700 Ma'apilim to a place near La Spezia where a cargo ship was waiting for them. This vessel (which was not suited for more than one day trip) was to meet another one at sea that had to leave port in a hurry, but was outfitted to carry the Ma'apilim to Palestine. The two vessels met near Elba and the transfer from one vessel to another went off without a hitch. I was also supposed to go to the other vessel, but this plan was cancelled because there were enough of our men with the Ma'apilim and I was not needed. The vessel that went on to Palestine was renamed: "The 35 (Fallen) Heroes of Gush Etzion".

At the beginning of November, I was called upon to board a small wooden vessel that was anchored at one of the small islands south of the city of Venice. When this vessel was ready and all the Ma'apilim on board, we sailed on November 5, 1947, sneaking out of port secretly in the middle of the night. This vessel was named "Kadima" and carried 794 Ma'apilim, among whom were 103 infants and children under 3 years of age. Besides the Italian crew, we had six Israelis on board, including a doctor and nurse, who were needed because of the young children. The conditions below deck were difficult and people were only allowed on deck after nightfall,

While we were in the Adriatic, we sailed at half-speed because of the danger of minefields. Some mines, left from WW II, had torn loose from their moorings and drifted with the current. Once we reached the Ionian Sea we were able to increase our speed. According to the original plan, we were to meet the vessel "Aliya" near Turkey and transfer its 180 Ma'apilim to our vessel. However, we could not establish radio contact, so were ordered to continue on to Palestine. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, when we were south of Cyprus, we were discovered by an RAF plane and shortly afterwards, destroyers arrived. At this point the Ma'apilim were allowed to come up on deck, the Star of David flag was hoisted, and Hatikvah was sung loud and clear.

Since our old, wooden vessel was so fragile, and we had so many infants and small children on board, we received orders from headquarters in Palestine not to resist the British. They boarded, towed us to Haifa, and shipped everyone to Cyprus. As per instructions previously received from Tel Aviv, we had prepared a hideout for the Palyamniks in the hold and provisioned it with food and water. When the ship was about to be captured, we destroyed the transmitter and codes, and then stowed ourselves away. A nurse, doctor, and one of the Palyamniks accompanied the Ma'apilim to Cyprus. We were removed later when the cleaning crew came to work on the vessel and we mingled with them. The "Aliya" did manage to avoid the British blockade and reach the shore of Nahariya on 17<sup>th</sup> of November and all the Ma'apilim were unloaded and dispersed successfully.

I returned to active service as an instructor in Course # 9 which was held in Sdot Yam, at a time of great unrest in the country because of the UN decision of the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1947. At the beginning of 1948, I was named head of the 10<sup>th</sup> Course for small boat commanders which also was held at Sdot Yam, This course soon disintegrated because participants went to join comrades in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Palmach, who were now busy trying to keep the road open to Jerusalem. Many of them gave their lives in this attempt (may their memory be blessed).

During this period an invasion/landing unit was created from Palyamniks and members of the "Carmeli" Brigade, and I also joined. The aim was to carry out sabotage behind enemy lines and maintain contact with isolated settlements. Our base was in Neve Yam and the vessel "Hannah Senesh" was given to us for this use. In April, 1948, I boarded the ship "Hagana" (K-20) which had been a vessel of the Ma'apilim and originally a Canadian corvette. She, her sister ship the "Wedgwood"(K-18), and the "The State of Israel" (A-16), had secretly been repaired and refitted, and were now serving as the naval service, the forerunner to the Israeli Navy.

When the State of Israel was established the Israeli Navy was born. I continued to serve on the "Hagana"(K-20) as one of its officers, and was also in charge of the gunners, who were all volunteers from Finland. Their help was invaluable. We protected the shores of the country, accompanied procurement ships into port, and played a role in the "Shoded" Operation when we and the K-18 met a Syrian ship carrying thousands of rifles destined for Syria.

In early 1949 I transferred to the intelligence department of the Navy and was where I remained until the end of the War. In June, I was considering marriage, and decided to switch the direction of my life and resigned from the Navy. My planning fell through because of the death of my father. As I had had some technical training, I went to work in the military industries at a plant that produced weapons. I worked in this field and advanced as I accumulated knowledge and experience until 1976, when I was appointed manager of a weapons manufacturing plant of 600 workers. This was the "Magen" factory which employed workers of the highest caliber and skill in the metal industry. We also used the most advanced and automated equipment in this field including CNC, and sophisticated machinery for making gun barrels and whatever else was connected with weaponry, including target testing.

I derived a great deal of satisfaction from my work as most of our production was for the IDF, but also exported some, at a profit.

In 1990 I retired and since then, devote my time to my family, to study, to trips and to physical activity.