

Rabinovitch, Moshe (of blessed memory)
Born 26 March 1922 in Novogrodok, Poland
Came to Palestine in 1936
Joined the Palmach in 1941 and the Palyam in 1943
Passed away at Moshav Hayogev on 14 March 1994
As written by General Uzi Dayan

This is the Way it Was

Moshe was born on the 26th of March 1922 in Novogrodok, Poland (today, Belarus). His parents were Nechama and Yoel Rabinovitch. When he was still a child, his parents moved with him, his two older sisters Yocheved and Malkah, his younger brother Yosef, and his grandmother, to the nearby town of Mir. Moshe studied in a Polish grammar school but knew Hebrew from a very early age, as well as Yiddish, Russian and Polish. He had a natural talent for picking up languages and in future years added several more to his knowledge. He belonged to Hashomer Hatzair and with the aid of the movement, made Aliya to Palestine by himself and went to Ben Shemen to study. He was fourteen years of age at the time. His family remained in Poland and was wiped out in the ghetto of Mir or in the forests, where some fought with the partisans.

The trip to Palestine was an interesting experience. First he traveled by train to Constanza, Romania and then by ship, the "Polonia" to Haifa after a short stopover at Kushta. This was his first trip away from Poland and the first time that he saw the sea. He fell in love with the sea immediately. Upon arrival in Haifa he traveled by an armored bus to Ben Shemen.

The period of his stay at Ben Shemen influenced him strongly and affected his character. He loved history and enjoyed seeing plays and listening to classical music. He enjoyed working in agriculture and earned his graduation certificate in agriculture. While there, he also learned English and Arabic. He joined the Hagana and took part in basic training and also joined the Jewish Settlement Police. Ben Shemen was one of the Jewish settlements that was severely attacked during the riots of 1936 – 1939.

In 1939 he went to Kibbutz Beit Zera, together with a group of others, in preparation for joining a kibbutz. This was a period of hard work in the fields of the Jordan Valley, and of doubt and deliberation to volunteer for the British Army. His doubts were put to an end by Eliezer, the (Hagana) commander of that area of the country, who secretly suggested to him that he volunteer for the "special outfit" (later to become the Palmach). Yitzchak Sadeh came from Afikim to see and talk to him, and he was accepted into that unit. One week later, Moshe Dayan came to his tent and gave him his first briefing. The following day a taxi picked him up, and also picked up his bosom friend, Zalman Perach, and the two of them rode to Tel Chai where preparations were made for the invasion of Syria. He also started smoking while he was there and never stopped. In the invasion

itself, Moshe led a company of Australian soldiers together with two other Israelis to the Banias River. He and the other two Israelis were armed with pistols given them by Yigal Alon.

After the Syrian invasion and a period of recovery from malaria, Moshe joined a training course for A Company of the Palmach in the Ginosar forest. This course ended with a long trek in the Carmel forest. After the course, all the men went back to their kibbutzim and Moshe went back to his group, B Company, which was at Kibbutz Hazorea. In the winter of 1941 Moshe was sent to a non-com officer's training course of the Hagana, as the Palmach had not as yet organized its own course. He trained in weaponry, topography, day and night tactics, and worked for the farmers of Givat Ada. While at this course, the words of the Palmach anthem were written by Zerubavel Gilead to the tune of an old folk song. Moshe participated in several more courses, in sabotage at Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek, and another course at Kibbutz Eilon. He also taught at these courses as he was very good at topography.

In the summer of 1942 he received command of a platoon in a company commanded by Meirke Davidson and in October of 1942 he and his platoon moved to Kibbutz Beit Hashita. There, he and his platoon participated in the kibbutz demonstration against the "White Paper" with their weapons brandished, and for this he was mildly rebuked. Moshe then participated in a course for three inch mortars which was held in Juara (near Ein Hashofet). After that he instructed others in mortars at Tel Yosef, where he slept in the attic of the barn with Moishale Albert. It was at this point in time that news came that the Palmach was going to conduct a naval course.

Moshe hurried to sign up for the course as he thought it would lead to working in the field of Aliya with survivors of the Holocaust; also because of the attraction that he felt for the sea. In the spring of 1943 he attended a second course at Caesarea and upon its completion, got himself a job on a ship without permission. Only afterwards did he return to the kibbutz to ask permission to take the job. This initiative of his caused him to be brought for trial before a court consisting of Yigal Alon and Yitzchak Sadeh. He lost his rank of platoon leader and was "banished" to the shore patrol.

Some time later, Yigal told his wife Mimi about this trial: "We were in a quandary about deciding what to do with him, and also we did not know what he would do". Moshe decided to accept his punishment and took leave of his company over a bottle of good cognac. He reported at Hagana headquarters in Haifa, to the same Eliezer from Beit Zera who had mobilized him for the "Special Outfit". He was sent to patrol the mouth of the Crocodile River for a period of three months. Time passed very quickly with the aid of two barrels of Cypriot wine that had somehow fallen off a boat and which Moshe rescued and hid in the floor of his tent. Moshe was finally pardoned and shortly afterwards returned to his company. His friend Zalman invited him to another course, after which they both went to work in the

port. They worked in the port for several months and finally, when the first course for naval officers got under way, he participated.

This was a very good course and its participants learned a great deal. The course ended with a sailing trip to Cyprus. When they returned the participants were sent overseas, some to Greece and others to Italy, etc. Moshe was supposed to go together with Kipi and Yedidya the Gideoni, to Greece, but the fishing vessel that they were on ended up in Bari and from there they continued south to Grumo.

In the dining hall at Grumo there was a worklist with names of various Olim who were supposed to work in the dining hall that day. Among the names was one, Eliezer Bressley, who was from Moshe's home town and had been his sister's boyfriend. For three days they sat and talked and Leizer told him what had happened to the town and to his family. Moshe had not heard from them since the day of the German invasion of Poland. Eliezer described in detail the life of the town under Russian occupation and then under German occupation. The murders started from the first moment of their arrival. He described the life in the ghetto of Mir, the various "actions" when Jews were rounded up and killed, the flight to the forests where his brothers and sister were killed. All those who remained of his family were caught soon afterwards and the only ones left were those who joined up with the partisans. The only member of Moshe's family who remained, was a brother-in-law who had been in Russia when the German invasion began. Moshe rarely spoke of his family and of what had happened to them all, but he told his close friends that Leizer Bressley's story remained for ever in his thoughts.

The 3 men continued on their route from Italy to Greece. They sailed to Patras and from there made their way to Athens, where they were met by Levi Shwartz. They bought the freighter, "Demetrius" which was later named the "Berl Katznelson", and prepared the ship to carry immigrants. The ship took on 211 passengers, almost all of them Greek and many from the island of Corfu. The point of departure was Laverion, about 60 km south of Athens, and the ship left harbor on a stormy night, the 16/17 of November 1945. Moshe was commander of the ship, Kipi was his assistant, and Yedidya Tzafir was the Gideoni.

The ship approached the shore of Palestine near Shefayim on the night of the 22nd of November and disembarking of immigrants began immediately with the assistance of the Palyam. Before the job was completed, they were discovered by a British destroyer and Moshe, Yedidya, and eleven of the immigrants were caught and brought to Atlit. They were freed a short time later with Certificates which they received. Twelve members of the Palyam who had aided the debarkation with their rowboats, were also caught and incarcerated by the British. Among these were Yosef Almog and Yosef Dror. They were sent to Latrun and were only freed after six months.

In December of 1945, Moshe and Yedidya and some other Palyamnikim were supposed to return to Greece and bring some more Olim to Palestine. The best way that they found to leave the country was by putting on British Army uniforms and joining a large contingent of British troops that sailed from Egypt to Europe. This group also included Ehud Avriel, Riko Lupu from Kibbutz Sarid and Abba Kovner. While they were still at sea, not far from Toulon, the whole group was arrested as it was thought they were planning an act of sabotage under the leadership of Abba Kovner. They were all put in jail in Toulon but Moshe was able to make an escape via the toilet facilities the same night of their arrival. He walked in the rain to the meeting point to which they had previously been given directions, and there he met Srulik Rotem. The two left Toulon and went to Paris. Moshe then traveled by himself through Germany to Italy and there he met Yehuda Arazi who ordered him to stay in Italy and not go to Greece.

After a short period of waiting Moshe and Yochanan Zaid were sent to La Spezia to prepare the ship "Fede", later renamed the "Hagana ship Dov Hoz". Here, the famous confrontation took place between the British government and the immigrants, the survivors of the Holocaust, led by the 22 year-old Moshe. He instituted a hunger strike which received international publicity and forced the British to allow the immigrants to sail for Palestine on the "Dov Hoz" and the "Eliayahu Golomb". After the ships left port and were on their way, Moshe returned to Milan with Yehuda Arazi and they sent a telegram to Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary: "We overcame Haman and we overcame Hitler, we shall overcome you!" Moshe remained in Italy working with Yehuda and later with Ada Sereni in procuring ships and preparing them to carry immigrants.

He returned to Palestine in September of 1946 as commander of the "Palmach", with Amos Fink and Avinoam Kupstein as Gideoni, and 611 immigrants. They had a serious run-in with the British upon arrival and their ship was rammed. More than a hundred British sailors boarded the ship after using streams of water and tear gas canisters. One immigrant was killed and about 30 were injured by the tear gas. Moshe's hand was broken in the fighting and he was also affected by the tear gas. He ended up in a British hospital in Haifa and after recovering, was sent to Atlit. He escaped from Atlit a few days later, hidden among empty crates on a truck.

Moshe returned to Italy, where he was interned on the small volcanic island of Lipari at the request of the British. He was freed after a month due to the efforts of Ada Sereni, and on the 18th of February 1948 sailed once again for Palestine as commander of the ship "Bonim VeLochamim" ("Builders and Fighters") The ship sailed from Bakar, Yugoslavia, with Pinchas (Pinko) Dafni as his right hand man and Shimshon Lotan as Gideoni. They carried 1,002 olim, mostly young people from Bulgaria. While en route a baby girl was born in Moshe's cabin and named Aliya.

The ship was discovered as it approached Haifa, received orders not to offer resistance, so was taken in tow by the British and brought to Haifa. The plan was that Pinko would go with the immigrants to Cyprus and that Moshe and Shimshon would hide on the ship and later make their escape. At the last moment Shimshon approached Moshe and told him that he had fallen in love with one of the immigrant girls, and wanted to go to Cyprus with her. Moshe could not contact land again and therefore it was up to him to decide. When Moshe asked Shimshon if he was really serious about the girl and Shimshon answered in the affirmative, permission was granted. Shimshon and Pinko switched roles and Pinko and Moshe hid away until a cleaning crew of Palyamniks disguised as workers came aboard the ship and took them off. They later, Shimshon married his girlfriend "and they lived happily ever after!"

Moshe returned to Italy where he bought ships and supplies for a time and then returned to Israel in May 1948 on the "South Africa", which carried a 20 mm canon and heavy machine guns and ammunition. He volunteered for the Navy, commanded the "Hagana", and continued to work for the Defense Ministry. In the summer of 1949 Mimi and Moshe met in Rome, where she had gone for a short vacation when the War of Independence was over. Moshe came back to Israel and married Mimi in Kinneret in March 1950. They settled at first in the French Carmel district of Haifa until he was discharged from the Navy with the rank of lieutenant commander. Moshe then insisted on going to work in building the new road to Nesher, and his foremen were very surprised to see Yigal Alon come and visit their new worker to talk things over with him.

In 1949 Mimi and Moshe settled in a new Moshav in the Jezreel Valley, Hayogev, together with Mimi's son Uzi. Zorik Dayan was Uzi's father and he had been killed in a battle in the fields of Ramat Yochanan in April 1948. In addition to his farm work, Moshe also grafted trees, a trade he had learned as a youth in Ben Shemen. He also did surveying, which he had learned while at sea. Mimi did metal craft. In 1951 their son Dan was born (he later became a submarine officer in the Navy). In 1956 their daughter Michal was born.

In 1959 Isser Harel asked Moshe to undertake to be responsible for all Naval activities involved in connection with the immigration of Jews from North Africa. As Moshe put such great value on the subject of Aliya, he gladly accepted the task. He gave up his agricultural activities and during the years 1959 to 1962 he concentrated on his new job, which was called "Operation Yachin". Moshe took on a new identity, Alberto Britti (he spoke Italian fluently, and he now added French and Spanish to his repertoire). He again returned to Italy where he renewed contacts with ship-owners and operators and arranged passages from Morocco to Spain to France and to Italy. All this was done with the same flair and gusto as in the days of the Palyam. The family then returned to Hayogev where he built and ran a shipping firm, "Allseas", and a shipping agency, "Sar-Yam".

His house was always open to his friends from the period of the Palyam and of his work in North Africa. It was only natural that he would be active in absorbing the Russian Aliya into his Moshav. In 1991 he suffered a stroke and his last years were difficult ones. On the 14 of March, 1994, he died and was buried at Moshav Hayogev.