

Saly, Amnon (Suslik)
Born October 1929 in Tel Aviv
Joined the Palyam in Tel Aviv in 1947

This is the Way it Was

I was born in north Tel Aviv and grew up near the entrance to the port, near the Yarkon River. It was a neighborhood where many port workers lived. I saw the port being built and fell in love with the sea. I went to the A.D. Gordon Elementary School and to the New Secondary School in Tel Aviv. I was a member of the Machanot Olim movement, and I and my whole group joined the nautical company of Hapoel on the Yarkon River in 1942. David Lev, Ephraim Dubinsky and others were also in this group. We completed the entire course of sea training, including the second stage, at Neve Yam under the command of Avraham Zakai (of blessed memory) in 1944. We took the "A" level course at Caesarea under the command of Shmuel Tankus in 1945. After this course we were qualified to be instructors and small boat commanders. We continued to be instructors in Hapoel and created the Sea Clan of the United Movement, to which we belonged.

Our instructors in Hapoel's nautical company were Shmuel Tankus, Yoske Almog and others. This company was actually a training company for the Palyam (and also trained the '23 who were lost at sea'). The Palyam sent its leading members to work with the Naval Company which included Zalman Perach (of blessed memory), Dudale (of blessed memory) and Samek Yanai. Our group remained connected with the sea in the Gadna and in the Tel Aviv reserve forces. Within this framework, it was also our job to help unload Ma'apilim with our boats, from vessels that managed to get to shore. Although we made preparations on several occasions, no vessel managed to get in to shore during this period. One might say that the Naval Company trained and prepared its members for the Palyam – and most of the members did go to the Palyam immediately after training.

At the end of the summer of 1947 our whole group joined the Palyam and we were put under the command of Gad Asher (of blessed memory). At the end of 1947 I was sent to a course for squad leaders at Kibbutz Maanit. We had our baptism of fire there in encounters with Arab bands. After that I was sent to instruct recruits at Sidna Ali under the command of Melech (Yaakov ben Tzion). When the Arabs left the port of Haifa I was sent, together with Ephraim Dubinsky, Meir Franco and others to take their places in tying ships to the piers. This was in the spring of 1948. We also worked as seamen on small craft that passed the ropes from the vessels so that they could be tied to the wharves. This was already within the framework of the Navy and we were a part of the first base of the Navy at Haifa. The base was near "Shemen" Beach adjacent to the Kishon River.

On 29 June 1948 I was one of the men who represented the Navy and officially received two patrol boats from the British. These had been active in the coastal

patrol that had blocked Hagana vessels from reaching shore, and now were to work for our side. These were the "Dror" (Freedom) and "Sa'ar" (Storm), the first patrol boats of the Navy. We checked out the boats very carefully and then tied them to the "Kommemiyut", which was anchored near the breakwater. On the following day we had the honor of seeing the commander of the British armed forces in Israel leave together with the last of his soldiers. They left the port of Haifa at exactly 12:00 hours. The few ships in the harbor all blew their whistles in a long blast, which was quite exciting.

Now that we had these vessels, Ephraim Dubinsky, Meir Franco and I. plus several others, were assigned to the "Sa'ar" which had the task of protecting the coast from Hadera to Gaza. Our base was in Jaffa. The "Dror" worked the coast from Hadera to Rosh Hanikra and was based at Haifa.

In the fall of 1948 Shmuel Tankus organized the first course for naval officers. I was honored to be a trainee and one of his graduates. I and David Lev, two young officers, were then assigned to be instructors for new recruits among new Olim. Following that, I was assigned to the "K-18" and then the "P-51". By the end of 1949, Yossale Dror took us, together with a number of other fellows, to prepare a course for small boat commanders for the 13th Flotilla. It was to be similar to the courses of the Palyam at Caesarea. This was when Yochai was commander of the Flotilla and Yossale was commander of the course.

The course took place in the spring of 1950 at a base built at Atlit, and became one unit which included those that had been on Yochai's torpedo boats and those in the divers unit of Yossale. This became the 13th Flotilla. The idea was to preserve the spirit of the Palyam in the 13th Flotilla. Even the boats of the Palyam, the "Dov", "Rivka" and "Tirza", served as their training vessels.

There were many kibbutzniks and moshavniks in this course and only a handful of city dwellers. Everything about the course was similar to the Palyam. When it was over the Chief of the General Staff and his second-in-command were invited to attend the closing ceremonies. As we did not as yet have regular uniforms for everyone, even this looked like a Palyam performance. After the visit of the Chief of the General Staff, Yochai was sent abroad to study and Yossale left the service. I am of the opinion that after this visit, the Chief of the General Staff decided to break up the Palyam. He thought that with Yochai and Yossale out of the way, the atmosphere in the 13th Flotilla would undergo a change, but the truth was that their influence lasted a very long time; perhaps that influence is still there.

It is important to say that the men of the Palyam and the fleet of the Ma'apilim, the "Hagana", "Wedgwood", "Jewish State", "Hannah Senesh", "Af Al Pi Chen" and the landing craft "P-39", became the corner stone of the Navy, the key men in headquarters, commanders of the ships, and the combatants of the 13th Flotilla. These were the men who fought the battles of the new State and won!

When the course was concluded, including a training voyage, and after serving as communications officer on the "K-24", I was sent to study naval architecture

and engineering at the Technion, and at the University of Michigan in the U.S. I continued to serve as a marine engineer in the navy from 1954 to August, 1970. I concluded my service as Chief of the Engineering Division of the Navy, with the rank of Commander. When doing reserve duty, I served in various capacities in this area for the Navy. I also worked in the aircraft industry, in research and development of weapons for the aircraft industry and for the Navy. All this was until 1993.

I would like to mention some of the projects that I worked on for the Navy: increasing the size and load capacity of landing craft from 110 tons to 340 tons; increasing the speed of the "Bat Sheva" landing craft by adding outside motors; increasing the speed of, and modernizing craft that had served the Navy for 39 years; conceiving the patrol boat "Dvora" and convincing the Navy to use it; redesigning the mast of torpedo boats of the "Nirit" class, including fitting the vessels to carry anti-missile missiles of the Barak class. I worked in both the aircraft industry and the Navy in developing missiles and anti-missiles. In general I did a great deal in this field, and much of it voluntarily and in the spirit of the education which I received in the nautical company of Hapoel and the Palyam.