

**Sandler, Daniel** (Dani)

Born 2 December 1927 in Koenigsberg, Germany

Made Aliya in June 1933

Joined the Palmach in 1945

Gideoni; nickname: Gil

**This is the Way it Was**

I made aliya at five years of age, together with my parents in June, 1933, when Hitler came into power. I studied at the 2<sup>nd</sup> school for the children of workers in Tel Aviv, and continued at the Balfour Secondary School. I was a member of Hanoar HaOved and, with my group, went to Caesarea and Shefayim for sea training in 1945. From there I was sent to a course for signaling training in Morse code.

**My memories as a Gideoni**

The beginning was in the 'long course' at Shefayim, where I was sent by my group, which was a part of the Naval Company of the Palmach. Why a 'long course'? Because it lasted three full months, whereas other courses had run for only seven weeks. The material that we learned was top secret; and people selected for the course were chosen with great care. Even my parents in Tel Aviv did not know where I was or what I was learning. This was a course for radio operators in Morse code. We practiced many hours in receiving messages and then learned to send messages. Some of our instructors had learned the trade in the British army during World War II. During this period there was cooperation between the Hagana and the British. We also studied secret coding and decoding. While this course continued, 2 other networks of communication were already in existence: one was the Hagana network, known as the "TACHAL" international network, and the other was the "Avinoam" national network. A third network was in the process of being established, which was the Palmach network known as "Tamar". Morse code was a big step forward from semaphore that had learned in school as kids. Of course, radio contact was also a big step forward from use of heliographs.

As soon as the course ended I was sent to Palyam headquarters, the 10<sup>th</sup> Company of the Palmach, in order to establish a station and join the "Tamar" network. I was then sent to Beit Hashita. This was the period of "Black Saturday" when the Palmach was being chased and harrassed throughout the country according to files gathered by the British police. Relations at that time between the radiomen and the commanders of the Palmach (Yigal Alon and Chaim Singer) were very close, and that was also true of local commanders, (Chaim Bar Lev "The Spear", and Yitzchak Rabin) and at headquarters of the Palyam. Nachum Sarig, commander of the battalion, followed the movements of Yochai ben Nun when he was in action, and when Ma'apilim were being unloaded from a ship that had arrived. In May, 1947, I was sent abroad.

Three young men, Shimalai (Shimshon), Micko and I, were all 19 or 20 years of age. We boarded a plane for Prague dressed in the best fashion of the day. The

plane was of an advanced type called a "Skymaster", and had four engines. This was the first time that we left our country. I presented myself (as per my instructions) as a salesman of mineral water traveling to Czechoslovakia on business. The country was still independent at the time. We were scheduled to reach Prague after a stop-off at Amsterdam. When we reached Amsterdam we were informed that the two-engine plane that was to take us on to Prague had a problem, so had to spend the night in a hotel at the airline's expense, and continue our journey the following day. Micko spoke French, Shimalai knew some Russian, and I knew English and German. It seemed that we should have been able to manage. In fact we immediately came up against a problem. In the elegant dining room of the hotel we were given menus in Dutch, and took our pick of what to eat by the time-honored method of "eeny meeny miny mo..." When the meal, arrived it turned out that I had ordered mussels. The luckiest one among us had picked an omelet with mushrooms, which was delicious.

In Prague we split up. Micko went to France, Shimalai to northern Italy and I to Vienna. As I had to wait several days at the Hotel International, time was spent in doing some sightseeing. We spoke among ourselves in Hebrew, but to others in the hotel we spoke English. German was easier but the locals detested that language. In one of our excursions we Israelis, Moti Fein (Hod, later Chief of the Air Force) who was about to begin a pilot training course, I, Avraham Meir, and Ossi Ravid, happened to go for a walk when the Catholic Youth Movement of Czechoslovakia was having a big parade. Jan Masaryk was then President of the country. We visited the Altneushul, the adjacent cemetery and several other interesting places. From Prague I traveled to Bratislava and carried a large amount of dollars that was intended for our people in Vienna. I was met in that city by Yaakov, a member of Kibbutz Kfar Masaryk. Yaakov took me by car to the Czech – Austrian border. There I was put in the hands of Baruch the "Limper," who could manage just about anything. He waved his hand and called the guards. The Czech guards took me into their care and I crossed a bridge with them to the Austrian checkpost. The Austrian guards put me into a waiting car with Austrian license plates. It seemed that this border point had been 'bought' by people working in the "Bricha" which took care of Jewish refugees on their way to Israel. I said nothing and talked to no one until I arrived in Vienna. It was there that I met Arthur, Asher ben Natan, and that was where my new career began, as a Gideoni working for the "Bricha".

The headquarters of the "Bricha" in Vienna was located in a private apartment at 2 Franckgassa near the church called "Motifkirche". Arthur was glad to see me because there were so few Israelis there. The others who worked there were local people who lived in Vienna but had come from Poland and Lithuania. They had studied Hebrew in the Tarbut Gymnasiums so knew Hebrew well, but spoke it with a peculiar accent. The chief activity of the whole group was to move refugees from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Italy, so that they could board Hagana ships there and reach the Land of Israel.

There were transit camps in Vienna and most of these were located in what had formerly been Jewish hospitals. There was the Rothschild Hospital and the

Elserbach Hospital, in which refugees stayed for only several days. Conditions were cramped, crowded, and difficult. Moving the refugees was done in trucks covered with tarpaulins that were borrowed from the American army which occupied the city. It was my job to set up a transmitting station in Vienna that was to become a part of the TACHAL network (an acronym meaning the Diaspora network). For that purpose I was given an apartment in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the city, an area many Jews had lived in prior to the war. I waited for the transmitter that Avraham Reis, the technical man behind the European network was supposed to bring, hidden in the back of a radio. He was also supposed to set up an antenna outside the apartment, but he installed it inside. This did not allow the station's reception to be picked up in Italy or France. This left Innsbruck as the only city in Austria with international connections.

While waiting, Arthur had me help him in organizing a camp of refugees and moving them when necessary. This was my first encounter with survivors of the Holocaust. Among these was Tuvia Friedman, who recorded the evils of the Nazi regime and continues to do so to this day. One day I received an order to go to Innsbruck, a city in Austria, which lies close to the border of Italy. I was to relieve the local Gideoni from his post; this was my good friend Shimalai. He had been shot and wounded when the "Etsel", the rival organization to the "Hagana", tried to capture the station. Eitan Avidov was killed in this attack and Shamalai was wounded.

On the evening prior to the attack, I had invited Eitan to my room and suggested places to visit when he arrived in Vienna. Shamalai's wound was not critical, but it caused him to limp permanently. I spent several interesting days at this stopover, where many refugees started their trek through the Alps to Italy by way of the Brenner Pass. The leaders of the groups that did the border smuggling were now young refugees, who had taken over the job from local smugglers and were much more trustworthy. From Innsbruck I moved to Moreno, a small Italian town near Bolzano. This was where "Bricha" work was done from the Italian side of the border. At Moreno I finally managed to establish contact with my old friends at their stations all over Europe. I also contacted several who were on ships on the high seas. Code 88 (meaning 'kisses' in Morse code) was now used frequently. We could tell who was at the other end of the line by recognizing how the person signaled and he did not even have to mention his name. The moment that "Brad" (code name for Avraham Tanchelson – a member of Kibbutz Dafna) signaled the letter "K", he also gave us his name because no one could type the letter the way he did. Each operator had his own peculiarity and we knew them all. Some of these operators I never met, before or after the war, but I still knew them by the way they signaled. Soon after, I became very ill and several Gideonim came to visit me with flowers, thinking that I was dying or dead. At this point I requested to be sent back to Palestine and this is where my career as a Gideoni on ships of Ma'apilim began.

Everyone connected with Aliya Bet knew the address (Via Unione 5). This was the headquarters of the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Italy. This was the sanctuary of

Ada Sereni. Here it was decided who would be commander of which vessel, who would accompany the ship, who would be the Gideoni, and who would be in the crew. Also, where the equipment for the vessel would be obtained and where and when the vessel would leave for Palestine. The transmitters were built by Raanan Rubinstein, and the transmitting units that were housed in valises were known as Rani Transmitters.

I boarded a vessel while the sleeping pallets were still being installed, about two weeks before the ship was scheduled to sail. While Ma'apilim were boarding the vessel I was listening to "The Voice of the Revolt" broadcasting station which gave news of events in Palestine. The big event was the death of the 35 Palmachniks on their way to aid the defense of Gush Etzion. Two men from my squad were in that group. While the Ma'apilim were being loaded a storm arose and one of the rubber boats bringing out Ma'apilim turned over and dumped them into the water. We were forced to stop loading and leave the coast for deeper water. It was decided to load the rest on the following day at a port farther to the south.

We set out upon our voyage when suddenly shouts were heard from below deck. Moshe Dafni ("The sailor"), one of the seamen, went down to check on what had happened. It seemed that the storm had quickened the labor pains of one of the young women who was seven months pregnant. She was brought up to the crew's cabin and laid on a table (The sick bay was not ready for patients yet). The doctor had not yet boarded the ship so we had to attend to this matter by ourselves. Moshe Dafni had never done this before, but since he had been a dairy worker in Kibbutz Yagur and witnessed many births (of cows), he felt that that experience would stand him in good stead. The commander of the vessel, Yudale (Yehuda Tzfati, of blessed memory) brought up a middle-aged woman from below who had given birth several times, to assist, if necessary. She gave instructions to Moshe and he did the work. A beautiful baby girl was born and I gave her the name Galia, as she was born on the waves (gal means wave in Hebrew.). Galia is now herself a mother, has two children and lives in Bat Galim, in Haifa. When we approached the shore of Palestine I was given the new official name of the vessel, "Yerushalayim Ha'netzura" (Besieged Jerusalem.) The vessel had been accompanied for several days by a British plane and two destroyers. When paratroopers were about to board the ship, two husky fellows who guarded the communications room took all of my equipment and secret codes, and threw them into the sea.