

Schwartz, Shalom

Born in 1924 in Poland

Came to Palestine in 1935

Joined the Palyam in the USA in 1946

This is the Way it Was

I came to Palestine with my parents in 1935 and studied at the Tachkimoni School in Tel Aviv. I joined the nautical section of Hapoel Tel Aviv and took a course for instructors that was led by Dov Magen (Berchik), Shmuel Tankus and Avraham Cohen. Other students in that same course were Yosef Almog, Moka Limon, Shai Nitzani and Avraham Miretzki.

In 1941 I volunteered to be an instructor in seamanship for British commandos. Dov Magen was also an instructor. I served as a seaman on the "HMS Saad" a small vessel of 70 tons used as a mother ship for training sailors, mostly Greek, who also used Hagana boats "Dov" and "Tirza". The commander of the "Saad" was Lt. Beardson. Other commanders also arrived at the "Special Training Center" on the Carmel. There was a Lt. Hammond, a professor of Greek, sent to serve on Greek islands captured by the Germans.

In 1943 I worked on a Norwegian vessel, the M/S Falkefjell as an able seaman. We roamed the Mediterranean supplying fuel to warships of the Allies as they advanced from Sicily to Italy and to France. In 1945 I worked on an American tanker, the S/S Bems Heights which delivered fuel to India for aircraft to bomb Japan. I took a course in New York City and qualified as a 3rd mate in the merchant marine.

While in New York I heard that ships were being readied to carry olim. I joined a crew of American volunteers, most of them ex-soldiers, but not sailors. They learned their seamanship at sea. Only the officers were veteran seamen. After we left New York, sea water entered the boilers and we had to put in at the Azores islands to fix matters. We continued on through the Straits of Gibraltar and then to Savona where the ship was to be prepared for taking on olim. The Palyam men boarded the ship at Savona with Berchik (Dov Magen) as commander.

We loaded olim at Vado, a fishing port. There were about 1250 immigrants. We sailed for Palestine but were discovered by planes and soon had the company of several destroyers. We were taken to Haifa and the olim were transferred to the detention camp at Atlit. Berchik, the ship's captain Jerry Lichtman, and I managed to get away and leave the port area.

I had several weeks' vacation and then was on my way to Marseilles as a passenger on the Greek ship "Cadio". In Marseilles I joined the "San Dimitrio", then in preparation for taking olim. Its name was changed to Hagana ship "Latrun" and sailed from La Ciotat with 1250 passengers. We sailed via the Strait of Bonifacio, and from there headed south of Crete. When we were off the

northern coast of Cyprus and not far from Turkey, we were discovered by a British plane. Everyone was allowed up on deck, I ran the Jewish flag up the mast, and everyone sang Hatikva. The ship lost its even keel and listed dangerously 27 degrees to its side. When we neared Haifa we were attacked by four British destroyers. We were sprayed with tear gas and streams of water, and I was blinded for a time by the gas. The olim put up a fight but the ship was towed into Haifa..

In Haifa the olim were transferred to deportation ships to be taken to Cyprus. I had prepared a hiding place for myself and remained there until after the ship had been searched and the olim were gone. I waited until I heard the deportation ship leave port and then came out of my hiding place. An Arab policeman, left to guard the ship, saw me but I managed to run and hide, as I was familiar with the ship and the port. Once on land I contacted the people of Solel Boneh at the port and they helped arrange my leaving the area of the harbor.

After this escapade I continued to sail with American ships and returned to Israel as a seaman on the "Marine Carp". I wanted to leave the ship and join Tzahal but the ship's captain refused to allow me to leave. That being the case, I left the ship by getting onto the moving belt that removed passenger luggage and went to join the Israeli Navy.

I served on the ships: A-16 "Eilat" as deck officer, and then on the K-18 "Wedgwood" as navigation officer. I participated in the bombardments of the El Arish coast, Rafiah, Gaza and in other operations. I also served on the K-28 and the K-30. I then commanded the A-16. In 1960 I was appointed commander of the officers' school. I completed my education and received a B.Sc. degree in economics from the Hebrew University. Additional studies followed within the department of industry and administration at the Technion. I served as a staff officer at Naval headquarters and was discharged at the age of 44 with the rank of Lieut. Commander.