

Shoshan, Yitzchak

Born 1930 in Belgium

Came to Palestine in 1946 on Aliya Bet ship "Ha'chayal Ha'ivri"

Joined the Palyam in 1947

This is the Way it Was

During World War II, I was able to survive in Belgium due to preparations by my father. When German soldiers, wanting to deport all Belgian Jews, were about to enter our house, he took us up to the top floor and from there led us onto the roof. We walked along the rooftops in the direction of houses that had already been searched. My father returned to the basement of our house and hid in the coal bin and wasn't found.

I knew of course that I was a Jew but I hadn't the faintest idea about Judaism and even less about Zionism or the Land of Israel. After Belgium was liberated, and after a serious demonstration of anti-Semitism in my school for the second time, I asked a Jewish friend who I knew belonged in some Zionist movement, to take me with him to the next meeting. That is how I made my acquaintance with the Gordonia movement. After a year I became a leader in the movement, and I was not yet 16 years of age.

A group of Belgians was preparing to go to Palestine and I joined them. That was the Sharon group, which went to Ramat David and later to Yifat. My parents vetoed my going and as I was only 16, I was not accepted because of my parents' objection (I was an only son). Some time later I went to the Zionist Federation offices alone and did not tell them that I had parents. Shortly before I was to leave I told my parents what I was planning to do and, this time, they decided to join me.

We came to Palestine on the "Ha'chayal Ha'ivri," which sailed from Antwerp and landed in Haifa on 26th June 1946. While on the ship I was captivated by the three young men who were the Palyamniks in charge of the ship. One of them in particular caught my eye. This was Alex Shur, who later became a good friend. British soldiers boarded the ship, took it into Haifa, and tied it to a pier where we remained for about a month. We were taken from the ship to the Atlit Detention Camp and I saw, from a distance, other friends of mine who had left Belgium earlier and had come to Palestine on the "Hagana". I was freed about six weeks later and again joined up with the Sharon group. From Atlit we went to a camp near Hadera where we changed our name and became the Segev group.

In February 1947 the group received notice that it had to supply one person for 'public service', as was demanded of every such group. In this case it was to be someone who would go to the Palmach's naval unit, the Palyam. As soon as I heard this, I recalled the picture of the 3 young Palyamniks on the deck of the "Ha'chayal Ha'ivri", and thought that there would be no better way for me to

contribute to the building of the Jewish State. I immediately volunteered. Although I was not yet 17, I was chosen over a different candidate. I still had to appear before a committee of the Palyam before being accepted. I still recall the appearance before Samek who was then commander of the Palyam, and Chana Yaffe and two others. After the meeting I was given a note and told where and when to report.

I came to the appointed place at the appointed time and found an entire group of young fellows there. We went into a hall and someone made a long speech about nothing that I understood, and there was a heated general discussion afterwards which I also did not understand. I was bored by it all but dared not leave. When it was over and we were on the way out, someone asked me if I understood what had gone on. I answered: "Not 100 %, but mostly." A few days later I received a note to go to Kibbutz Naan. I spent several days there and was then transferred to Caesarea and informed that I would take part in the course for small boat commanders. This was the eighth course of the Palyam. The commander was Yossale Huber (Dror). We were divided into teams and the leader of my team was someone called David. The reason I was put on his team was that he was Rumanian and spoke French. However, he never tried to speak to me in French.

All of the others on my team were born Sabres, but one. I listened to them converse for hours, and fairly soon began to catch on to their conversations and started to speak Hebrew, not too well, but spoke. Our boat was the "Tirza" and at the beginning did not feel well on her, but after a short period I got used to her, felt much better and even started to like her. I learned the jargon of the sea, and soon understood everything that was said, and knew how to do whatever had to be done.

At the end of the course I was transferred to Kibbutz Yagur. There I worked together with the other Palmachniks according to the system – 2 weeks of work and two weeks of training. Most of the time I dug trenches from house to house. From Yagur I went to Sheikh Abreikh where we underwent basic Palmach training for fighting on land. One evening a truck came and picked us up. We didn't know why, nor did we know where we were going. We ended up at the shore near Nahariya, in a storehouse for marine equipment. Samek and Benny Marshak were there to give us the lowdown. A vessel named "Aliya" was about to arrive with 182 immigrants on board. Palmach units were stationed all around Nahariya to insure that British reinforcements would not interfere. We were given various jobs and I was placed on one of the rowboats. The ship did not appear until almost daylight, and it ran right into the shore so that the unloading of the immigrants would take less time.

We pushed our rowboats into the water and made for the stranded vessel. A rope was dropped down to us and we towed the rope to shore where it was fastened and stretched. We then used the rope to get to the boat and back to

shore more quickly. A load of immigrants were put into the rowboat and the rowboat was then pulled to shore with the aid of the rope. The immigrants helped so enthusiastically that we almost capsized. We noticed that a coastal patrol boat was heading in our direction from Haifa and ordered to sink the rowboat. We went out some distance from shore and removed the stopper from the bottom. When we saw that it was filling with water, we left and swam back to shore. On the way back I lost my underpants, which was all any of us had been wearing. I did not want to be caught "with my pants down" by the British, so I ran in the direction of Nahariya where a truck was supposed to be waiting for us. Luckily, there were not many people about on the streets and out of the corner of my eye I saw that an elderly lady was waving to me from the window of her house. I ran toward her and she threw a pair of short pants down to me. I waved my thanks to her and headed back to the truck.

When our field training sessions were over our leader, Solel, gave us a practical exam to prove that we had mastered what we had learned. This was also in preparation for entry into a course for squad leaders. I and my partner were to steal a pair of chickens from Kiryat Tivon. We tried to convince Solel that there were no chickens in Kiryat Tivon but we failed. He said: "I don't care, bring me a pair of bicycles from there." I will not go into detail but the end result was that we did not find even a quarter of a chicken in the town but did bring back two bikes, in the midst of a pouring rain. Solel was flabbergasted. He did not think that we would take him seriously. The rest of the bunch were rolling in laughter. They had all brought chickens and we had a great kumzitz. The following day we shouldered the bikes and brought them back to Kiryat Tivon. We added a note of apology.

A short time after the other course had already begun, we were awakened one night by a tremendous racket that seemed to come from all directions. At first we could not figure out what was going on but Solel was the first to realize what it was. "Chevreh, we have a state!". Soon after we were back in Yagur, and from there by bus to Tel Aviv. We were taken to a large room in a school where we met friends from course no. 8, and Samek walked in. He told us that a ship was approaching the shore of Tel Aviv, called "Ha'portzim". The ship was carrying 167 immigrants.

We left the schoolroom and went down to the beach. The squad that I was in was assigned to tie the ropes that the first boat would bring in, to a large drainage pipe that lay on the shore. This would make it easier for the other boats with immigrants to get to shore faster. The ship came in, the action was faster than contemplated and we had no time to tie the rope but helped the immigrants who were coming in droves.

On the way back to Yagur the bus stopped somewhere in the middle of the road and Samek came aboard. He said that of all the regular courses were now over and we would be sent to carry out necessary jobs in various places. My luck was to be sent to a platoon medic's course and following that, to a company medic's course. When that course was over I was stationed at Yad Mordechai and I accompanied trucks that traveled between Yad Mordechai, Rehovot and Nir Am. My vehicle was hit four times by mines that were placed under drainage pipes that crossed the road but luckily, I was wounded only once and lightly. I served until Passover 1948 and was then called back to serve in the naval unit that had just been formed. Only then was I officially drafted into I.D.F (Tzahal) as part of the Navy.

Synopsis of my army career:

- 1948-1949: Instructor at a medic's course; served on the K-20 and the K-24.
 - 1949-1950: The second officers' course.
 - 1950: Communications officer in Naval Headquarters.
 - 1950-1953: Student at the French Naval Academy in Brest, France.
 - 1953-1954: Operations officer on the K-30, First Fleet
 - 1954-1955: Operations officer on the K-28, First Fleet
 - 1955-1956: Second-in-command of radar operations. Member of the mission to England to repair destroyers.
 - 1956-1959: Chief of Radar Operations, Naval Dept. 7
 - 1959-1960: Commander of Squadron 914-915 (coastal patrol vessels).
 - 1961: Student at the 8th course for commanding officers.
 - 1961-1966: Chief of Naval Dept. 7.
 - 1966 -1967: Commander of the Destroyer Eilat.
 - 1968: Chief of Naval Training Camp. Retired as Commander
- Bibliography: "The Last Battle of the Destroyer Eilat" ; publ. Ma'ariv