

**Tahon, Uri**

Nickname: Chaim Abutbul

Born 1927 in Palestine

Joined the Palmach in 1945

**This is the Way it Was**

In 1932 my parents and I moved to Baghdad, Iraq, and in 1936 we moved to Cairo, Egypt. This was because of my father's work which had to do with these countries. From 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade I studied in Arab schools and is why I can speak Arabic. In 1939 we returned to Palestine and I attended secondary school in Beit HaKerem, Jerusalem. In 1941 I went to the Naval School in Haifa, specializing in navigation. Shmuel Tankus was one of my instructors.

When I had finished my studies in 1945, I joined the Palmach – “B” Company, in Kibbutz Naan. My commanders were Yeshayahu Gavish, squad leader; Matityahu Sternberg, platoon leader; and Motke ben Tzur (Pinchevsky), company commander. After several months I was transferred to the Arab platoon in Alonim and my commanders were Yerucham Cohen, Aharon Spector, Shimon Somech and Shmarya Gutman. I participated in training and hikes, and lessons in Arab customs. The battalion commander, Yaakov Salomon, sent me to Syria in 1946 to check the possibility of bringing Ma’apilim from Syria and Lebanon on Arab vessels. I boarded an Arab vessel, “El Ma’amoun”. The captain was Muchamad Amwan from the island of Rawad. We sailed from Haifa to Tripoli, Latakia and Iskenderun in Turkey, laden with cans of benzene, and brought back sheep. I told Yaakov Salomon and Yigal Alon that I did not think Ma’apilim could come in that way, and it was never done.

Since I don't look Oriental, I was sent as a sailor on the ship, “Norte” to Benghazi, in Libya. This was still in British hands and the goal was to buy from the Bedouin weapons which they had found and gathered from the fields of battle. My contact in Benghazi was a Jew named Gueta, a junk dealer. We were able to get rounds for Italian rifles and Bren guns with ammunition. The weapons were packaged and labeled ‘agricultural machinery’. I sent all of this stuff on a Norwegian freighter, the “Kronprinsen”, to Haifa. Pinny Waze received it there.

From Benghazi I traveled to Italy and spent some time on the hill at Gaeta and was then given command of the procurement vessel “Tulia Christina”, a 246 tonner. The vessel was laden with explosives stolen from a British Army camp, and they were not properly packed. My crew consisted of two engine room people and two deckhands. We managed to get to Haifa in one piece. The one responsible for procurement was Issachar Chaimowitch, and for the Mosad there was Zakimowitch (Zaki). The cargo was not caught by the British. We were welcomed by Davidka Nameri. The vessel was returned to Italy by Wingy Weinstein, a Canadian. After the State was established he worked for the Mosad as a pilot in the Suez Canal.

I was next sent to Istanbul to command the procurement vessel, "Prato". This was a landing craft and a sister ship to the "Af Al Pi Chen" which is now at the Naval Museum in Haifa. The crew of this vessel was Turkish. We ran into a terrible storm and had to seek shelter in the island of Scarapantos, in the Dodecanese. The "Scio" was also there with Dan ben Amotz. The ship was met in Haifa by Borshi and Yaakov Ziniuk.

I was then sent to Italy to prepare and bring to Palestine the motor launch, "Haportzim", which was later on active duty with the Israeli navy. The vessel had been bought by Zeev Hayam in Messina and I brought it to Trapani in Sicily. There was some trouble with the ship's papers which had not been properly taken care of by the Mosad in Rome. We brought the boat to Venice to complete repairs there. We were met by Lova Eliav and then sailed from Venice to Fano where we were joined by some Olim studying there in a school for fishing. My Gideoni (radio operator) was Reuven Oren (Pupchen).

We arrived in Tel Aviv on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1948. The "Altalena" lay on the beach still burning. Cushi (Aliyahu Shachar) relieved me.

In July 1948, after having been sworn into the IDF at the San Remo Hotel in Tel Aviv, I received command of the "Tirat Tzvi", which had brought Ma'apilim, been caught by the British, and had been laid-up in the graveyard at Haifa. Our job was to bring the ship to France, and my Gideoni was Zaki Keiny. The seamen were workers from the Tel Aviv port and injured members of the Harel Brigade. Among these were Chaim Gamzu, Tzvika Belhorn and Hadar Frumkin. In a bad storm near Corsica the ship almost sank but was saved by an Italian ship that towed us to Naples. The ship underwent repairs and we continued to Marseilles. Zaki described this voyage in a diary that he kept, and after his death it was published as a memorial to him. Avi Shwartz and Poli (Shaul ben Zeev) received us in Marseilles and I returned to Israel as an officer on the "Eilat", now used as a foundation for the pier in Caesarea. I continued to sail on ships of the Zim Company until I went to work for Mekorot.

I was later CEO of the company for the Development of Caesarea, in charge of research for the University of Haifa, and consultant for Arab Affairs to the deputy prime-minister, Yigal Alon. My last position was as manager for development of the Arab sector in Koor, which was headed by Yeshayahu Gavish, my squad leader when I first joined the Palmach. That closed the circle.

I am married to Dori and the father of Irit, Anat and Assaf.