

Vaadi, Gideon

Born 15 November 1927 in Israel

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

I grew up in the Borochov quarter of Ramat-Gan (Givataim of today), and belonged to the Noar HaOved youth movement. When I was 18 I went to Kibbutz Sdot Yam with a group to do nautical training and as a company, we all went into the Palmach. I became more interested in our activities than most of the others in my group and participated in unloading the first Ma'apilim on the shore at Caesarea. I participated in most of the unloadings of vessels that managed to get to shore. After taking part in the 7th course I acted as instructor for the 8th one.

Some anecdotes of events in which I participated.

Blowing up patrol boats in the port of Haifa: At that time I was in the crew of fishermen working on the "Aliza", which belonged to Sdot Yam. It was almost midnight when Yossale Dror and Yochai ben Nun (both of blessed memory) appeared and "asked" that we take them in our lifeboat toward the patrol boats. I volunteered, and rowed in the direction of the patrol boats. When we were fairly close Yossale and Yochai slid into the water with explosives on their backs. I rowed back to our vessel in my empty rowboat. Several long minutes later the two men swam back to our ship. I am not sure whether we heard the explosion but the next morning we were able to read about it in all the morning newspapers. *[editorial note: Vaadi mentions Yossale Dror here by mistake; the one he should have mentioned instead is Shaul Oren, whose story can be found under his name].*

Preparations for blowing up the bridges: We went out to sea in a falucca (Nile-type sailboat) from Sdot Yam's bay and headed north. A north-westerly wind was blowing. Progress was slow and we sailed all night. By morning we were opposite Nahariya. We continued northwards and passed Rosh Hanikra at which point we turned in toward the coast. We were dressed with Arab kafiyas on our heads. When we were about 100 meters from the shore two swimmers entered the water and headed for the railroad tracks that ran through a tunnel. Our sailboat distanced itself a bit further from the coast and we heard the whistle of a train heading toward Acre. We were worried and studied the land with our binoculars. When we saw two swimmers in the water we again headed toward shore to pick them up and headed for home.

This was their story:

"We approached one of the air vents and then heard the train whistle. We hugged the ground until the train went by. We then crawled through an opening that was 10 or 12 meters long and came to the tracks. It was pitch dark all around, but we could feel the tracks and estimate the length of the tunnel by the

light coming from each end. We then headed back out and started swimming and waving to the boat until we saw you heading in towards us”.

The tension was over and we headed back to our base. At about 22:00 the wind died down and we, with our “Sima” sail, were unable to make any headway. We remained, more or less, where we were and when morning dawned we were opposite the Carmel. Only at 10 am did a summer breeze come up and by early evening we were back at Sdot Yam. Of course, all those on shore who had waited since we left, were in a constant state of worry because we had had no radio contact.

Unloading the Ma’apilim of the “Shabtai Luzinski”: Preparations began in the afternoon. It took a long time to get to the Nitzanim shore because we had to take a roundabout road to avoid British checkpoints. There was absolute silence and radio contact with the ship was also forbidden. I was close to the receiver when I heard the voice of David Maimon , who commanded the ship: “We are approaching from the south”.

It was a bit past midnight and a strong westerly was blowing. The waves were high and the sea was rough so it was decided to run the ship aground as close to shore as possible. As the seabed was shallow the ship did not get very close to shore but was stranded on a rock about 100 - 150 meters out. We saw that it was necessary to use a rope to link the ship to shore. Two swimmers and I went out in a small lifeboat to bring the rope to the ship. The waves were high and strong, and rowing was very difficult. I weakened before the others and received permission to leave them and swim back to shore.

I was completely exhausted by the time I got to shore. More accurately, - the waves threw me onto the shore, and I lay there, blue with cold and shivering. After some girls gave me a brisk rubdown, I went back to work. The end of the story was that the British came along and caught us, and we were all taken to Haifa. (I have a photo showing the British trying to identify the Israelis who had come from nearby settlements to help the Ma’apilim.) The following morning we were all deported to Cyprus.

Olim from Egypt during the “Kadesh Operation”: The task given to fishing boats during wartime was to patrol the coasts. They were armed and given a defined section of coast to patrol. At noon one day we were suddenly ordered, without explanation, to return to port. We tied up at the pier, our weapons were removed, and a large amount of food supplies and blankets were taken aboard. We were then instructed to sail to the south. When morning dawned we reached a point opposite Jaffa. We were joined by two naval vessels and ordered to follow them. They left us when we were opposite Gaza and we continued alone to El Arish. The name of our vessel was changed to an Italian one and we hoisted an Italian flag.

We then continued to Port Said and were utterly surprised by the sight we saw. There were tens of warships of the French and English navies anchored in the harbor. There was even a British aircraft carrier. We were stopped but after a short exchange, it seemed that we were a part of the French contingent. We

were told to wait outside the port until the following day. The next morning we were directed by a French patrol boat to a place alongside a pier. Twenty minutes later two canvas-covered trucks pulled up to the pier and unloaded a group of men, women and children. They immediately came aboard the two fishing vessels, and as soon as all were aboard we were escorted out of the harbor by a French police patrol boat. We headed directly for Haifa, but the sea was of no help. The waves rose high and our passengers didn't feel too well. We had one four month-old infant and the mother felt terrible. The baby cried for milk so I went into the galley to prepare a bottle. I used corn flour instead of powdered milk and it came out thick, the baby didn't want it, and continued to cry. I took her in my arms and spoon fed her and lo, silence! The following morning we reached Haifa and the episode ended.

Twenty five years later at a nostalgic reunion, I again met that young lady.