

Edward Abadi (RIP)

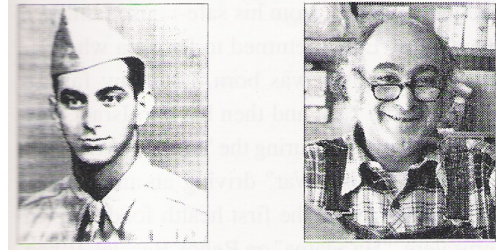
Born 5 March 1924 in Brooklyn, New York

Died 26 August 1994

Volunteer from the USA on

“The Jewish State”

Written by his daughter: Smadar Rina Erez



This is the Way it Was

My father Eddie Abadi's Aliya Bet chronicles: All through my childhood and as far back as I can remember, I used to force my father to tell me more and more about Aliya Bet and his many adventures. He never knew where to begin because he had so much to tell and each time he would add new details to his unfinished stories. His brother sent him a computer from Colombia in order to put down his memoirs in writing and he began to write down one page when he became sick and could not continue. Eddie passed away in August 1994.

Eddie's parents' background is rooted in Jerusalem. His father Jacob was a merchant from Aleppo, Syria, who moved to Jerusalem and had a little shop in the Old City selling fabrics. His mother, Reina, was a native Jerusalemite. Her brother, Moshe Mizrachi, together with his sons, built the Edison Theater, Orion and Orna Cinemas. Eddie's parents were forced to flee Palestine to avoid the Turkish Army draft. They moved to England, the USA (where my father was born) and finally to Panama. The Abadi family numbered 11 children. Eddie, the eighth child, was sent to boarding school in Manchester, England. He and his four brothers spent five years there.

Eddie volunteered for the US Army as soon as he was 18 years old. He was the first American in the Canal Zone to do so. Studying military engineering at Stanford University he became friendly with some Zionists there. The Army shipped him to New Guinea and the Philippines in order to fight the Japanese. He filled his duffel bag with books about Zionism and Marxism. When he was discharged after WW II, he made his intentions clear to his family that he intended to make Aliya. His family was not pleased with this as they wanted him to go into business with them, together with his ten brothers and sisters. He decided to volunteer for the refugee effort. In Autumn 1946, after becoming a member of the Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement and spending time at the movement training farm in New Jersey, Eddie, then 23, boarded the "Northland" in Baltimore. Which was later renamed "The Jewish State".

He was trained by a drunken captain, first and second mates who were Communists and an American Indian third mate (nobody else would hire them). He was one of about 250 Americans who assisted in the illegal Aliya Bet immigration prior to the establishment of the Jewish State. He spent a year as bosun on the refugee ship that was sponsored by the Mosad for Aliya Bet. Eddie helped pilot the ship into the Dardanelles to pick up over 2000 refugees at Burgas, Bulgaria. The first mate did not want to steer the ship, which was an

icebreaker, heavy with a wheel that was hard to handle, so Eddie ended up at the wheel. As the ship emerged into the Mediterranean, it was followed by four British warships equipped with side decks for boarding. The British prepared to board "The Jewish State" when it was still in international waters and far from the coast of Palestine. Their four large warships surrounded the little icebreaker and Eddie found himself at the wheel maneuvering to hard left and hard right until he managed to collide into one of the ships, which crinkled like tin before the heavily plated former icebreaker. The British ship was so seriously disabled that she went through repairs for six months. The battle turned into a race towards the shore. Finally, marines from one of the ships succeeded in boarding "The Jewish State" and to throw tear gas grenades. One person was killed. All the deck hands changed their clothing and mingled with the refugees. The British were handing down ten year sentences for refugee smuggling at that time. The British began evacuating the 2700 refugees back to Cyprus. A shu-shu (slang for Hagana member) who could hardly speak English asked Eddie if he wanted to help him escape. After agreeing, he was asked to wait for him in the sub-deck. While waiting with some other men in the dark, the door was suddenly locked. There were about 10 men stuck in a dark, stinky water tank, together with Eddie, who suffered from claustrophobia! They were locked there for 25 hours. When they were freed they stumbled into the sunlight facing a British naval officer. Eddie said he almost had a heart attack. But when the officer asked them if it was awfully bad down there he realized that he was on their side.

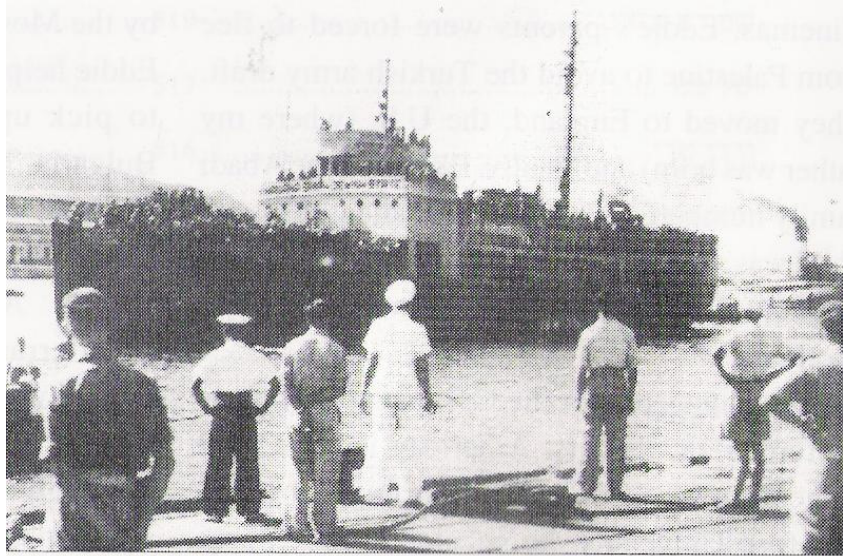
They exchanged clothes with cleaning workers and holding brooms in their hands, they walked past the British guards and out of the port. After Eddie's escape from the British, he received a false Identity Card with an Israeli name and was warned not to speak a word of English. The only thing he learned to say in Hebrew was; "Ani lo medaber anglit", hoping the conversation would stop at that point. Together with his fighter pilot brother, Mike, they managed to bluff their way past the blockade of Jerusalem and hide from the British with friends of the family. Later on he married one of their daughters, Adina, from his safe-house family.

Eventually Eddie returned to Panama where I, his only daughter, was born. Later, my family moved to the USA and then back to Israel. My father volunteered during the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, and drove an ambulance.

In 1976 he started the first health-food shop in Jerusalem, - HaAdama – on Bezalel Street. When he retired, he came to live together with me and his four grandchildren in Moshav Bar Giora, a peaceful area in the Judean Hills. My father always felt that justice was not done to the Americans who participated in Aliya Bet. In the late 80's there was a reunion in which I also took part. I was so surprised to see so many American volunteers who had participated in Aliya Bet. When my father came home from the President's house wearing a tag, his neighbor argued with him that there were no Americans helping during Aliya Bet and she also added that she was involved in recording such things for the

Hagana. He told her that the wheel he had held in his hand was now on display in the Naval Museum in Haifa.

Although my father was himself a very modest person he did think it important that Israelis know of the role Americans played in Aliya Bet and in the War of Independence.



"The Jewish State" (with 2664 immigrants) at the "Peer of Tears" dock at Haifa