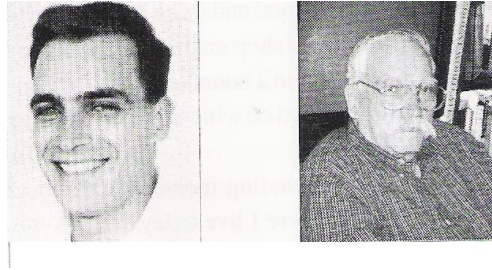


David (Dave) Baum

Volunteer from the U S A on the "Hagana"

**This is the Way it Was**

I was born in Brooklyn New York and graduated from high school there. I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. I entered the US Merchant Marine Academy as a cadet in 1943. I made a six-month trip on an American Export ship, returned to the Academy, completed the course of study, graduated, passed third assistant engineer's license exam, and received a commission as an Ensign in the U S Naval Reserve. I chose to serve in the Merchant Marine rather than the navy and sailed as third and second assistant engineer on Liberty ships. We carried ammunition during WW II.

I returned from a trip in March/April 1946 and was told to check with the Hechalutz office, where I was informed about the corvettes, the first ships purchased for the Aliya Bet in the USA and joined the crew of the Norsyd which became the "Hagana". Except for the Captain, Chief and First Assistant Engineers, all were volunteers, many were from Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair. All the remaining officers were experienced Merchant Mariners. We also had some ex-GI's. We sailed from New York to Marseilles, where preparations began for accommodating the passengers. Our first contacts were Rudy (Shmarya Tzameret) and the Baharlia Brothers (ship chandlers), all very impressive people. The crew worked on normal maintenance while a shore gang installed the wooden shelves which served as bunks for the Olim.

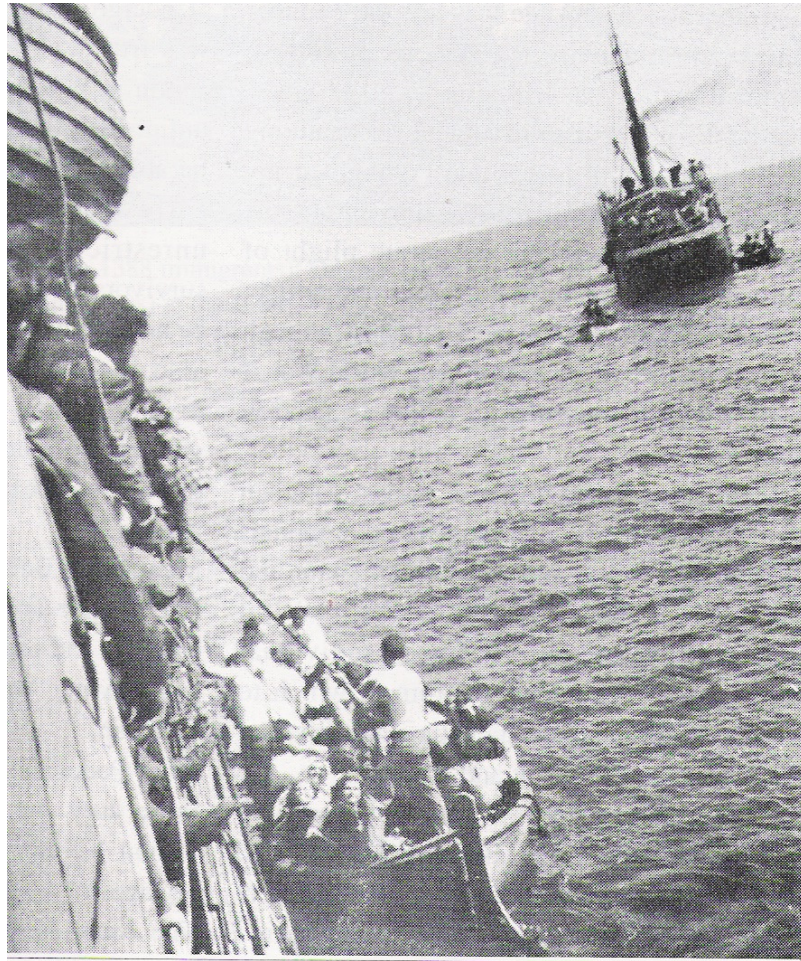
Visitors from the Mosad for Aliya Bet came to see the first volunteer and Jewish crew. We were taken to the camp at St. Jerome and met with staff and our future passengers. This was a mutually beneficial experience: for us, the first contact with survivors anxious to get to Eretz Israel; for them, surprise and appreciation of the Jewish American crew. Upon completion of preparation we boarded 999 Olim at Port-de-Bouc and set sail. Our commander was Yehoshua Rabinowitch (Baharav – Kibbutz Ginosar). We met the "Akbel" and transferred our Olim passengers in motor launches, as has often been told. All facts considered the transfer was a very successful operation. Our next port, an anchorage at Milos, was where we refueled from oil drums. Aryeh Paar, Larry Silverstein and Bernie Marks rigged a boom and added blocks and tackles. They used the anchor windlass for power. They lifted the drums to the deck where Sammy Applebaum and I rolled them across a trough and spilled the oil into the double bottom. Next, we sailed to Bakar in northern Yugoslavia with an overnight in Split. Another deck platform was built forward of the deck house and the aft accommodations were improved.

On the previous trip we considered the ship to be overcrowded with 999 passengers. Our sister ship, the "Wedgwood" had carried 1,257 passengers from Italy. These are the approximate numbers we expected. The Olim arrived by rail. When they lined up alongside the ship we could see there were more people than on the first trip. As boarding proceeded we were amazed to see a second train arrive. The total number of passengers was 2678. The ship was dangerously overloaded and unstable. The fact that all survived the trip does not obviate the risks which those in charge were willing to take.

We arrived in Haifa after about a week, having encountered water in the fuel and loss of power. Since the "Wedgwood" and "Biryia" had arrived during the preceding weeks, the camp of Atlit was full. Our passengers spread out onto several Aliya Bet ships previously captured by the British which were tied up to the Haifa breakwater. Eventually the passengers were taken to Atlit. I left the ship several afternoons later, as if I were a doctor on the arm of a Kupat Cholim nurse. We proceeded through the gate of the port for a cold beer at the Kings Bar.

I spent the next few months with friends at Kibbutz Mishmar Haemek. I returned to Marseilles and was sent by the Mosad for Aliya Bet to Sweden to check out some potential Aliya Bet ships. From there I returned to New York. In early 1947 I went to Miami to set up another base for preparing Aliya Bet ships. I returned to Mishmar Haemek in 1947 with a training group of Hashomer Hatzair. We moved to Ein Hashofet in January 1948. By March 1948 I found that the Navy branch of the IDF was being organized and I joined up. Meanwhile, my group had settled on the land at Kibbutz Sasa. I left the Israeli Navy in June 1950 and went to Kibbutz Sasa. I married Rezzie (Ruth) in 1951. We returned to the USA in August 1952, lived in the Philadelphia area, had two sons and worked as an engineer. We returned to Israel in 1983 and live in Tel Aviv.

For me, the most important and meaningful accomplishment was doing something for the survivors and for the Yishuv. All the tons of arms which I helped deliver to the former Soviet Union and to the US Army in Europe and to the Navy at Pearl Harbor may not have saved one Jewish life. But the Aliya Bet operation was a positive act. I transported our people to Eretz Israel (a.k.a. Palestine), strengthening both. Personally it gave me an opportunity to meet many "Doers": Danny Shind, Yehoshua Rabinowitch, Yaakov Frank, Haiman Shamir, Aryeh Paar, Joe Buxenbaum and Paul Shulman, in addition to most of the 230 American Aliya Bet volunteers.



Transfer of immigrants from the ship "HAGANAH"
to the ship "BIRIYAH", at sea