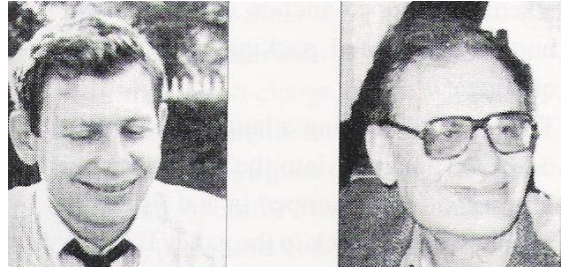


Dr Lawrence Kolberg (RIP)

Volunteer from the USA on the "Geula"

Born October 1927, Died January 1987

He wrote his memoirs in 1949/50

**This is the Way it Was**

As I left the Hagana office in New York City, I could see that it was all a matter of routine. We were the eighth or ninth ship being sent across to take refugees to Palestine illegally.

As the Hebrew name for this blockade-running ship, the Aliya Bet showed, it was not a matter of conspiracy. Everything was done legally in America, and American Dollars made it legal in Europe. As for keeping it secret from the British, well, we could always hope, but we'd be satisfied just to get the people out of Europe, even if it were only to Cyprus.

I took a launch out to the ship and, being the only passenger, I began talking to the man at the wheel. "What ship are you on?" he asked. "The Paducah" I replied. "Does she fly the Panamanian flag?" "Yes". "She isn't running Jews to Palestine?" "Hell no, we're going to carry bananas." What was it that gave our ship away? Well, the harbor pilot didn't notice anyway. He turned to our Jewish second mate with a puzzled look and said, "Christ, there's a lot of Jews on this ship!" The ship was an ex-Navy training ship, 45 years old, speed 10 knots, tonnage 900. Even I couldn't believe she'd hold 1500 passengers, more than the Queen Mary! If we ever got that far. I used to wonder about that. You would too, if you'd have been aboard as we ploughed across the Atlantic. You might have gone below to the fire room and found me looking at the boiler gauge glass. No water in it! The engineering regulations would be running through my head! "If the fireman loses the water, cut out the fire and secure the boiler. When the boiler is cool, have it inspected for burned out or sagging tubes."

"Cut out the fires Len!", I'd shout. "Don't get so excited, Larry, the water will be coming up in a while." I'd shrug my shoulders and walk back into the engine room. The bosun, an ex-Navy boy from Brownsville, probably would be looking for buckshot. We called him Buckshot because he had such a load of lead in his tail. He had left college to make this trip, and he still retained the student's horn-rimmed glasses and four syllable vocabulary. He was a Trotskyite, and had brought along huge stocks of literature to convert the crew and refugees. Buckshot had come with a friend, Eli, and since they were inseparable, Eli suffered for the sins of his comrade. Collectively, they were known as the "Gold Dust Twins". To watch them when it was their turn to clean the "heads" was a privilege! Each had his own idea of how it should be done, and they would spend an hour discussing the merits of their respective systems. Finally, Buckshot

would say in a voice full of noble sacrifice, "All right, have it YOUR way", and then hand Eli the mop.

Eventually we called a crew meeting in which a motion was made to move the two of them into the galley where they'd really have to work. Thereupon, the Gold Dust Twins began a long filibuster providing the fundamental rights of man were at stake, and in the end, they stayed on deck. I used to ask Buckshot if he got angry at his persecutors, but he'd answer, "It isn't the individual, it's the system that's at fault."

It was Heavy, our 300 pound Gentile third mate, who was their chief persecutor. He was one of our three crew members who had been on the notorious "League for Free Palestine" ship, the "Ben Hecht". After making one trip for the newspapers, these boys had decided to make one for the Jews. The explanation for Heavy's unpaid service seemed to be a soft heart, which he kept pretty well concealed from our volunteer sailors. It was the policy of the Hagana to hire a few regular merchant marine officers, and depend on them to teach the volunteers how to be seamen. Most of the boys were not connected with any Zionist organizations. They had read the papers about the immigrant ships and hunted around until they found somebody who could tell them how to get in touch with the Hagana.

Six days out we reached Fayal in the Azores, where our first hitch developed. We were supposed to get oil and water there, but the British had control of all the oil on the island and tied it up. The agents demanded cash for the water and stores, so we were held up for a week waiting for the money to come through. Finally, we left, bound for Lisbon where we were supposed to definitely get oil, and a few days later arrived and anchored in the Togos River. While we were waiting there, the key man on our ship decided to quit. He was Max, our cook and steward, an old seaman hired from the union hall. He was half-Jewish but he was a Catholic, the religion of his mother and of his wife in Alexandria, Egypt, whom he had married by telephone and hadn't seen since. He was determined to get to Palestine and then to Egypt, but our independent minded and educated galley hands were too much for him! The only way he could handle them was by getting drunk and throwing the meat cleavers around. However, sometimes even this didn't keep them in line and he took more and more to drink. So when we dropped anchor, he downed a couple of bottles and started packing his bags. He was quitting.

Then, without calling a launch, he calmly went down the gangway and into the river, bags in hand. The 2nd mate jumped in and fished him out and soon he was back in the galley fixing supper. That evening the crew called a meeting, in which it was decided not to go ashore, so as not to get the ship in trouble with the authorities. Beer was then served as a consolation for our sacrifice, after which we all went ashore. Again it was impossible to get oil, so we got orders to proceed to Bayonne, a small port on the Atlantic coast of France, near the

Spanish border. By this time, the chief engineer's report of the amount of oil on board was preceded by a minus sign, but luckily his calculations were wrong and we got into Bayonne under our own steam.

There we tied up to another Hagana ship, the "Northland", which was to accompany us until the end. However, her crew was in such a confused state that we looked like a model of discipline beside hers. Their attitude was represented by Labal, a writer from Greenwich Village. It was claimed that he had come on the trip since he couldn't keep up the \$12 per month rent on his apartment in the Village. Most of his writings were a little too obscure to have a wide popular appeal. However, one story had appeared in "Death Magazine". This was a journal of which only the first number appeared, edited by Labal. Shortly after its publication he was forced to leave town to escape the printer who was dunning him for the bill. Along with most of the other boys on the "Northland", Labal had not gotten along with the Captain, so leaving with an ultimatum that it was either him or the captain; he left for Paris where he continued to receive spending money from the Hagana. Eventually Labal was triumphant! The Captain caused too much trouble and was sent back to the States.

In the meantime, three shu-shus came aboard our ship. The shu-shus were the Palestinians of the Hagana and our real bosses. John, who was the one in charge of the whole ship, was a tall, quiet, deliberate man in his early twenties. Chaim was a great talker, full of Yiddish gags and an operator with the women, but underneath, hard and calculating. He was to organize the people for the distribution of food and work when they came aboard. Menachem, a small, quiet genial man with a wife and child in a collective in the Galilee, was to be our radio operator, since he knew the Hagana code. The Hagana was a large organization in France but they worked completely without ceremony. I was amazed later when I found the chief of the organization, who had negotiated with cabinet members and commanded ships, washing dishes on a collective settlement in Palestine. These shu-shus handled huge sums of money without any possibility of proper bookkeeping, but they lived just as we did, and none of us would ever have dreamed of doubting their complete honesty. They were driven by a seriousness of purpose that made them look on us as playboys and adventurers.

French carpenters and shipfitters started to take out all the useless fittings and put in wooden bunks, three high, like shelves, while the crew was pretty much free. But we could always depend on Max, the steward, to be on board by six a.m. even if he had been heavy on the cognac the night before. We were all badly shocked when we heard that he had suddenly died. The sorrow we all felt was somewhat mitigated when we learned he died a true sailor's death. He had been found dead in the hotel bathtub, a cognac bottle clenched in one hand, and a girl in his room. The next day we learned the Hagana arranged to give him a Catholic funeral with all the trimmings in the ancient Gothic cathedral of Bayonne. No work was to be done on the "Northland" and the "Paducah" during that day.

We heard that some of the ladies of the town whom he had befriended and supported would attend. The next morning 48 Jewish mourners marched into the great cathedral and took their seats before the bier surrounded by candles. Our Gentile first engineer had been born a Catholic but long since left the Church, but we depended upon him to show us when to make the proper responses. It was all very rusty in his mind and he too sneaked looks toward the back of the Church at what the only other mourners, the ladies of the town, were doing.

Bayonne was one of the most attractive towns I've ever known. It had been an important city in the Middle Ages and later, a center for pirates; but now it was only a town of about 35,000 people, with quiet streets, decaying battlements and a beautiful old Cathedral. At 21:30 the little Toonerville Trolley that took us out to our ship stopped running and we walked the deserted streets. We never guessed how crowded those streets would be one month later when a six-day fete was held, with confetti throwing, fireworks, bicycle races and dancing on the cobblestone streets. The fete really centered around the bullfights, held in the stadium, for there were many Spaniards and Basques, and courses de vaches were held wherein cows were let loose in the streets to be faced by the many amateur matadors in town.

The crew's pace was set by Lewis, our mate and now skipper of the "Northland". His first act upon landing in Bayonne was to go to the police station and introduce himself and describe his important position and connections, so that if we were brought around to be locked up, he'd receive good treatment. And he didn't have too long to wait. Shortly afterward we saw him in the square in front of the Town Hall where a UN celebration was being held. He was leading the parade of soldiers and giving commands, which they took good-humoredly. Then, the Marseillaise was played which Lewis sang lustily, getting the words mixed up with hinky, dinky *parlez vous*. Later in the day he bought \$20 worth of candy which he took out to the local orphan home and started a riot among the children. That was when the gendarmes stepped in. they didn't mind the riot but when a man gives away \$20 worth of candy, the French knew he should be locked up.

Our spiritual side was represented by Buckshot who managed to fall in love three times during our six week stay. At first we seemed to be accepted as a cargo ship by the people of the town, but after a while, our real purpose became known and French reporters and photographers began coming around. They asked what the wooden shelves were for and we told them we were going to carry bananas on them. The next day the Bayonne paper was headlined "Couchettes pour les Bananes" with a story that we were going to run refugees to Palestine. Of course the French officials had known all along who we were, so they came out with a public statement that we were ordered not to load people aboard, which we had no intention of doing. This was in July, just after the "Exodus" had been captured. The French officials "discovered" that it had left with fake visas and clearances from Sete, so they fined the shipping company which owned it,

\$80 000. The "Northland" was owned by the same company and it was to be held pending payment of the fine.

We were afraid they might hold us also, so we worked feverishly to finish the new water tanks and put in the air vents and bunks. We left all our good clothes and passports and papers for the Hagana to keep in France and left at dawn one morning for a destination unknown to the crew. As soon as we left the harbor we turned south and the bet was it was to be the Black Sea behind the Iron Curtain. We were all tense as we approached the Straits of Gibraltar; since one ship destined to carry refugees had been seized there by the British. We timed it so that we would arrive at night and we hugged the North African coast as far from the Rock as possible. We weren't challenged and we went to bed exultant in having slipped through the Lion's claws. But the next morning as I came off watch I saw a British destroyer about a half mile behind us. There was no accident about it. She had been trailing us since daylight. Soon she began to overtake us and began signaling. The bosun started playing a record over the PA system, the popular song that goes: "Welcome welcome we've waited and waited and now we are elated to welcome you home". The DE flashed over the question, "Where are you bound?" and we answered "Leghorn, Italy". She stayed alongside us while her crew lined the rail to look at us. A couple of our boys in a playful mood got out a couple of sheets and towels, dressed as Arabs and salaamed towards Mecca. We were so close we could hear a couple of the English sailors say, "Blimey, they've got bloody A-rabs aboard!" after a while she fell behind us again and followed in our wake.

About this time we found out that our condensers were leaking, which meant that our water would not last until we reached our destination. So we entered Bone in Algeria, to take on fresh water. Our British escort waited patiently outside the harbor like a private detective on a divorce case and took up the trail when we left the following day. By the time we reached the Greek coast, they seemed a little incredulous when we signaled Leghorn as our destination. We finally left them behind in the Dardanelles, where naval ships could not enter, and they flashed us "Goodbye, see you again". By this time the report of our oil supply was again on the minus side and there was only one tank which still held oil and the fuel oil pump couldn't pick up suction on that. The chief engineer ordered the whole crew to form a bucket brigade, passing buckets of oil from one tank to the next. Finally our first engineer rigged up a portable pump and transferred enough oil to get us to our destination, Varna, Bulgaria.

As soon as we arrived a swarm of shu-shus came aboard, along with several Bulgarian secret policemen and government officials. It looked as if our path had already been smoothed out by the Hagana, and a trainload of oil was on its way from Romania. However, we weren't allowed to leave the ship. If the Americans couldn't come to Varna, Varna wouldn't come to the Americans. We were the first American ship to come there since the war, and crowds of curious people came to look at us. Fulfilling the duties of hospitality, the bosun played our latest jazz

records over the loudspeaker and we even gave a few impromptu radio shows, inoffensively, because none of the people understood English. Soon however our oil ran out and we awaited the promised oil train without electricity and running water. Eventually, the oil appeared, diminished from a train to a horse and wagon with a few barrels of diesel oil. We started up the boilers and had electricity for a few hours until we ran out again and awaited the new load.

However we forgot all about these inconveniences when John, our shu-shu skipper announced that he had gotten permission for us to go ashore. In a few minutes the ship was practically deserted and we were all exploring life behind the Iron Curtain. We were lucky to be in Varna, since it was the leading resort in Bulgaria and there were many people who could speak French or German, or even English. Although they were always talking about the secret police and the militia, all of them seemed to feel free to gripe to us about the new regime. I think that eventually everyone in Varna who talked to us asked if we could smuggle him out on our ship. Even the movie queen of Bulgaria, whom the bosun used to take around, said she'd give up her career to work as a housemaid in the States. Odd situations used to develop when Rudy, our captain, who was an old Communist Party member, began telling these Bulgarians how wonderful their new regime was and how decadent America really was. But, after the 'scandal' everybody became cautious about being seen with us. The 'scandal' occurred after we'd spent the afternoon at a roadside in the country. The roadhouse consisted of a barn with benches and tables, where a farmer served up his home-brew vodka. Pigs wandered between our legs, and chickens flapped around, but in spite of these distractions, we managed to keep our attention on the vodka and eventually returned to a beer-garden on the main street of the town.

Everything was fairly quiet until George decided to dance the Hobak on the table. Now George, who was built like an ox, was normally the moral mainstay of the crew, but now he became really inspired, and soon there was a large crowd around us. Eventually, he sat down but then decided to do an encore and when five of us tried to hold him down, he really cut loose, throwing tables and chairs into the air. Soon, a bunch of Bulgarian soldiers and secret policemen appeared and rushed us all off to jail, until John, the shu-shu, came down and pulled us out.

There were quite a few Jews in Varna, but they didn't have much to do with us. Our passengers were going to come down from Romania, since no Bulgarian Jews were allowed to leave the country. Unlike the Jews in Romania, these people were necessary in Bulgaria. They were descendants of Spanish Jews who came during the Inquisition. There never was much anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, and during the war, the Bulgarian Government, as an ally of Germany, was allowed control over its Jews. As a result, they escaped much more lightly than any of the other Jews within the German-dominated area. They were still healthy, useful people, and since most were well-educated, they were useful in peasant Bulgaria.

The English had been putting pressure on the government through the Allied Control Commission to make us get out. Finally on a Thursday night we were ordered to leave Varna. Early Friday morning we left and landed again twenty miles down the coast at Burgas. The Allied Control Commission didn't meet over the weekend and the following week the Bulgarian peace treaty was signed and we were safe. Soon we were joined by the "Northland" which had finally cleared France, and we awaited the refugees together. Each day they were supposed to be on the way, but weeks passed before we received word that the trains were loaded with people and would definitely arrive that night.

We were the first to be loaded since we had to take on oil, but all of us were to go over to organize the loading, since it had to be finished before daybreak. It was D-Day for all of us, and we shared the excitement of Davey, our fervently religious ex-Hebrew teacher. About midnight, the train finally arrived and was shunted down to the dock. There were 3,000 refugees, old people laden with huge packs containing all their worldly possessions, youth marching to the rhythm of militant Hebrew songs, orphan children and at the end a woman with her child born a few hours earlier in a boxcar. Davey, who was supposed to direct the people, began embracing each one of them. Rudy, our skipper, burst into tears, even though it wasn't the Communist line. A soberer note was maintained by Charlie, our Gentile first engineer, who turned to me as the first refugee came up the gangplank and said: "I'm not sure, but that guy looks like a Jew to me."

Soon we were all busy trying to squeeze one more mama or kid onto those three-decker shelves. The people had expected to find Greek or Turkish sailors, so they were really surprised to find Jews, volunteer American Jews. John, the shu-shu said he wished there were 50 more of us, not because we were any good as sailors, but because we gave the people a lift. It took us five hours to finish loading and at six in the morning the "Northland" pulled out with the people singing Hatikvah, the Hebrew national anthem. She dropped anchor in the harbor to wait for us to load, but the people thought it was in order not to travel on the next day, which was Yom Kippur. The "Northland's" deck was thronged with people rocking in prayer, casting the sins of the year into the water. When their skipper, Lewis, appeared on deck with a skull cap and prayer shawl, rocking – although not because of religious ecstasy, they were sure their fate was in pious hands.

Meanwhile, the oil train finally arrived, and, the next night we loaded our 1,500 passengers and set out. The sea was calm and so were the people; they got two hot meals a day, as well as cigarettes and chocolate. The ventilation wasn't too bad, even if the sleeping conditions on the wooden bunks were none too comfortable. Their main complaint was that they couldn't wash, except with seawater. There were plenty of doctors and nurses on board, and we had a

hospital set up. One of the boys even had his teeth drilled by a dentist who had brought along his equipment.

There were a couple of accordions, although there wasn't much room to dance, and everybody was friendly. Soon, Buckshot was in love again. But the most important event of the cruise was a marriage, held on deck under a prayer shawl, and a reception in the galley afterward. Unfortunately, there was no stateroom for the young couple. Most of the people were Romanian, although many were survivors of the German camps and others had been in Russia during the war. We even had some heroes of the Red Army with boxes full of medals. Their attitudes to the Soviet Union ranged from lukewarm to cold. All of them complained about anti-Semitism in Russia, particularly in the Ukraine, although some said that it wasn't the government's fault. Most seemed to take the Russian method of government for granted: ten years of suffering had made them hard-boiled. They could even joke about being sent to the soap factory. We didn't have any native born Russian Jews. Apparently it was impossible for them to get out.

Life took on a more serious note when we went through the Dardanelles, for there was a British destroyer waiting for us. This one was soon joined by several other destroyers and a couple of light cruisers. As we passed between the Aegean Islands with the British behind us, they flashed us a message that the course we were taking would bring us dangerously close to mine fields. It was a terrible problem for the captain, - should he take their word? To us it seemed incredible that they would try to delude us, but the Captain decided to continue on his old course and we passed through safely. All along we had been hoping to transfer our people to the "Northland" about 100 miles off the Palestinian coast, so that we could go back for another load. On the sixth night we got orders to stand by to make the shift, but when the crew of the "Northland" tried to move their people below deck to make room for ours, they found there wasn't room enough, so we had to prepare to be boarded.

The next morning the Hebrew flag, the blue and white Star of David was flown from our mast, which the bosun greased so that the British would not be able to take it down. A large sign was over our side with our new name, the Hagana ship, "Geula" (Redemption). The "Northland" also carried signs with her new name, "Medina Yehudit" (The Jewish State) [*editorial note: the ship name was "Medinat Hayehudim"*]. We had large stores of wooden clubs aboard and all the younger people seemed eager to fight the boarding party, but we received a radio message from Palestine that we were to make no resistance. About noon we made a broadcast to the Hagana radio station which was to be rebroadcast throughout Palestine. Some of the people sang Hebrew songs. Chaim, our official speechmaker, made a speech in Hebrew, and some of us got together and wrote a speech in English. Or rather, we let Lippy, our ex-social director of the Borough Park Jewish Veterans, write a 3,000 word speech which we got down to the required laconic 300 by cutting most of the clichés.

By then we could see the coast of Palestine in the distance and the British marines were getting lined up on the landing platforms built on the destroyers. Our crew was busy getting old clothes from the refugees, adopting babies and even complete families, and went about muttering Yiddish phrases. I noticed a young rabbi complete with beard, black coat and hat, prayer shawl and a Bible that he was reading to a group of children. As I approached, without changing his intonation, he broke into "Brooklyn profanity". It was Lou the Atheist, one of the boys who had been on the Ben Hecht and been held by the British. Now I knew why he had nursed that beard all across the ocean.

The chief, Len the fireman and I were to be below when the British boarded, in order to put the pumps out of commission, so that we would have to be towed. Len and I were worried that the British would find us below and try us as sailors with a possible four year jail penalty. The chief said, "My only worry is the Hagana will go broke, I'll be getting paid in jail." But we were all relieved when they sent 20 refugees to mix in with us in the engine room. About 10 miles off the Palestinian coast, south of Haifa, the English came alongside and told us to turn back. There was no answer to this so they started throwing tear gas grenades and then boarded. Below, we felt a crash as a destroyer hit our side. We sabotaged the plant and rushed up the emergency ladder and mixed with the people on deck. The British had gotten control of the wheelhouse without violence and now they stood and looked at us, a little curious and a little worried. John and Chaim distributed the remaining food and cigarettes to the people.

It was night by the time they towed us into Haifa harbor; spotlights glared at us as we pulled in. Lou, the rabbi, and I were among the first to get off and go through the gauntlet of search and DDT. The British were the Red Devils, the British 6th Airborne troops, mostly bored boys of about my age. They directed us in English and it was not hard to understand. When a sergeant told Eli "You look just like my stupid cousin". Another looked at Lou and asked "What's that?" the sergeant answered with an air of wisdom "Oh, he's a very religious Jew". We were worried about Heavy, our 300 pound mate, but we saw him climb onto the British ship with John, our shu-shu. We knew that he was alright for the time being. The ships used to take us to Cyprus were cargo ships with a part of the deck caged off and a couple of large rooms with rows of benches. By some ironic twist they were called the "Empire Rest" and the "Empire Comfort"

It was when we got on board the "Empire Rest" that we first realized the gratitude that the people felt towards us. As soon as we were past the British guards, a score of them ran around trying to make us comfortable, bringing us the crackers and tea the British gave out, making room for us to lie down on the benches, giving us their coats, and even apologized for the shrew who sat across from us yelling at her husband and accusing him of making a scene every time he opened his mouth to say "Yes dear". I regretted the harsh answers I had given some of these people on the ship when they had asked for favors, or when their

manners were not too good. It was nice being a hero and part of the legend of their ship, the "Redemption".

The British guards allowed us to go up for 15 minute stretches of air in the caged off part of the deck, women and children getting preference. As we waited at the door the English corporal said, "Don't look at me, it's that bastard up there who won't let you out," pointing to the sergeant at the top of the stairs. When we left the ship at Famagusta, Cyprus, all the soldiers said goodbye to each of us and patted Lou on the back and said, "Take it easy, pop". When we got ashore a Major asked in English for four volunteers to watch the baggage. No one came forward so he picked them out of different parts of the crowd. Purely by chance he chose Lou, Eli, myself and our Spanish steward. He asked us if any of us spoke English and we all looked blank. Then he muttered something about "these Jews only speak English when they want a cigarette". Finally our Spanish cook said that he speaks a little English. So we listened to the Major's English and pretended to understand when the cook translated into Spanish.

We were loaded into trucks and taken to the other side of the island, near Larnaca, where the refugee camps were. There we passed through an army and C.I.D. control which consisted of a search for arms, money that was deposited by the British and valuables that were occasionally taken if the refugee was too frightened to complain. As soon as Heavy entered there a soldier said to him, "What the 'ell are you doing here Yank?" Heavy just looked aloof but when he stripped and revealed the American eagles, anchors and mermaids tattooed on from head to foot, they took him aside. All he would say was the Yiddish phrases we taught him but they found a draft card sewn into his pants, so he decided he may as well talk English. He was taken to the major's office where a girl from the camp was working who told us that the major had asked him what he was doing there. Heavy answered, "I'm going to Palestine." "Your not Jewish, why do you want to go there". "Everybody's going". "Well, we'll let you go back to America if you tell us who the other crew members are". "I'd like to be alone with you, major, and I'd knock your block off!" They put him in the guardhouse overnight and he had another interview with the major in which the major told him they were going to put him in the camp with the rest of the refugees to see how he would like it for a couple of years. He is still there, watched by the British. He has filled out deportation papers but those things go slowly. In the meantime, the refugees wait on him hand and foot and the Hagana gets a bottle of cognac to him every few days, but none of the other Americans can go to see him for fear of being identified.

Some of the other boys had close calls, for there was a Romanian Jew in the control, a member of the British army, who could speak all the European dialects. However, he seemed to have worked with the Nazis, and the British themselves didn't have much use for him. After the control we were driven into the camp, issued a blanket, a plate, a knife and fork and left to our own devices. The British left the organization of the camps entirely up to the refugees themselves, with the

help of the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency. We seldom saw any British soldiers except those guarding the barbed-wire fences and driving food trucks. The camps themselves consisted of tents, Quonset huts and a few shower huts.

After a refugee has been on the island for ten months he usually has acquired space in a Quonset hut and has probably made himself fairly comfortable. If he is with his wife they can cook their own food but must eat in the mess halls and share in kitchen duties. Food consisted mainly of dehydrated potatoes and macaroni with some meat, local vegetables, coffee and margarine. It isn't on a starvation level but most people's health was fairly low and most of us got dysentery and boils in our two month stay. The starchy diet seemed to have a peculiar effect on the women. They all became very well developed in the upper chest. In fact, there wasn't a girl in Cyprus who didn't put Lana Turner to shame. The boys of the crew lived together in a Quonset hut easily distinguished by its sloppy interior and the large wine barrel inside. The Hagana bought us one hogshead of the local vintage each week and the celebration we held when it arrived was our way of keeping track of the time. The refugees amused themselves more constructively, played soccer, practiced Hagana commando tactics, held amateur theatricals or danced the Palestinian folk dances around a bonfire.

We heard the British claim that there were Soviet agents among the refugees. We ourselves were spotted as Americans by the people before we opened our mouths. Did anyone know of any Soviet agents? The answer was, NO. There were many people who had been in Russia, but most shared the opinions of the American Jew, an ex-Wobbly (Anarchist) who had jumped ship in the early 1930's. He had been too independent-minded and had been put away in Siberia to cool off. He had been released to work during the war and had gotten across to Romania, where he had joined the illegal immigration. He was only 40 but he was completely broken in health and in spirit. The people sympathetic towards Stalinism were members of a Zionist political party called Hashomer Hatzair, which numbered about 15% of the refugees. While we were on Cyprus they celebrated the anniversary of the Russian Revolution by marching around with pictures of Marx and Lenin. But most of the members that I knew winked as they marched by me. They had joined the organization because it was active in getting people out of Europe and because it had a lot of truly socialistic settlements in Palestine, and they took its politics with a grain of salt.

A few days after we arrived, the crew of the previous ship left. Their ship, the "Despite", had been a small landing craft which had left from Italy flying the Egyptian flag. They were about 50 miles from Palestine, still unsuspected by the British, when the captain noticed a light blinking in the aft part of the ship. A few hours later the "Despite" was boarded by the British. Then a girl, who was recognized as the girl flashing the light, stepped forward and proceeded to identify the crewmembers. They were locked in the hold and the girl was put

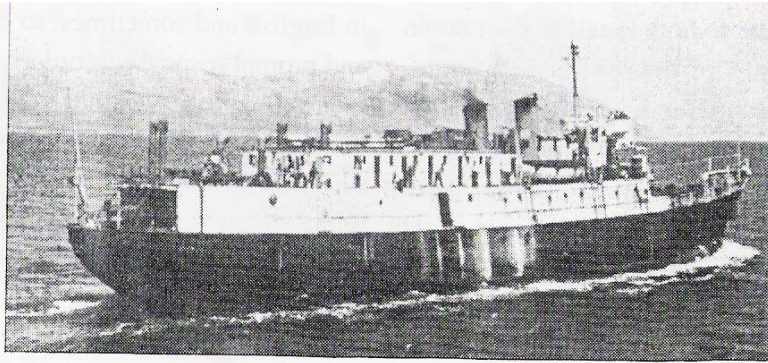
under special guard by the British. However in the mix-up of unloading in Haifa, the crew broke out and mixed with the refugees and the British let it go at that. The girl went to England. Her half-sister, who was on Cyprus, said the father of the traitor was a British military attaché in Hungary and their mother was Jewish. She never suspected that her sister was working for the British. The Hagana of course was interested in finding her, although the red-haired skipper of the "Despite" wouldn't say what would happen if they did!

The technique of getting us out was simple. The list of 750 refugees who were allowed to leave each month was made up on the priority of arrival. We were to assume the names of people on that list, who were therefore set back one month. The people supposed to leave had already waited about a year but it was understood that the sailors would leave first. There weren't enough places for all of us so four fellows volunteered to stay behind until the next quota. Labal, the Greenwich Village writer was the first to volunteer. He was getting three square meals a day without working and was a hero to boot. One of our Gentile volunteers, Dave Blake, also wanted to stay behind. Dave was a graduate chemist who wanted to live as a farm worker on a communal settlement in Palestine, where he felt life would be more natural and just than in America. He was always a little distant from the rest of us. We couldn't understand a man who studied Hebrew when he could go ashore in France and chase women. Nor could we understand it after we reached Palestine, when Dave took the \$100 the Hagana gave each of us and went straight to a settlement and gave the money to the communal treasury. When we visited him there he was working hard in the fields and he was speaking a beautiful Hebrew. He seemed much happier than he'd ever been with us.

Seven weeks after our arrival in Cyprus we again went through the British control and boarded the ship chartered by the Jewish Agency to take us to Palestine. The other people were elated but we were downcast at the thought of still another month in the British quarantine of Atlit, near Haifa. Of course, we could take heroic measures like John, our commander, who had gone the month before. He had slipped over the side of the ship outside Haifa harbor and been forced to stay in the water for nine hours before he could find a place where he could land unobserved by the Arabs or the British. Otherwise it looked as if we'd be stuck, so I stuffed myself on the ships biscuits, not knowing when I would get my next meal. As the ship pulled into the dock, we all began looking for methods of escape, but we all found ourselves on the buses going to Atlit. There were British tanks and motorcyclists guarding us, but there were no guards on the buses and the drivers were Jewish. We told the driver that we were sailors and we wanted to make a break. He nodded his head and soon all the buses stopped, one bumping in to another. The door opened and as I later learned, 16 of us streamed out. I still don't know whether I jumped or was pushed by Action Jackson behind me! We walked straight across the street into an Arab garage where we asked for parts for a '38 Ford. When we saw the convoy had passed on, we walked down the street until a car stopped and asked us, in Hebrew, how

to find some street. Instead of answering, "I'm a stranger here myself", we climbed into the back seat and asked him to take us to an address in the city. He took us there and in a few minutes we were safe in a room in the best hotel in Haifa. There we found eight of the other boys. The others had been captured and sent on to Atlit.

Everything was new and wonderful to us in the hotel – warm water, clean linen, beds, and finally a huge roast beef dinner. Everybody turned to me for I was swearing! I couldn't eat a thing; I was still stuffed with those damn biscuits!!!



The ship "GEULA" (Paduca) in Gibraltar strait