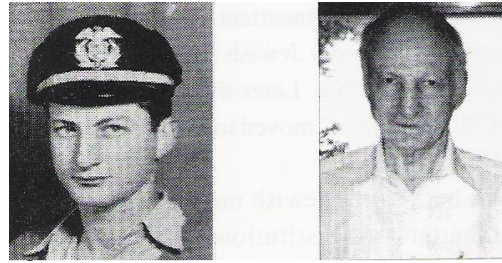


Bernard Marks

Volunteer from the USA on the "Hagana"
Also on the "Exodus 1947"

**This is the Way it Was**

In December 1945, when I arrived home after WW II, I was determined to normalize my life and so I enrolled at the University of Cincinnati. It was there that I met an electrical engineering student by the name of Hugo Schwartz. Hugo, a Zionist was connected to Aliya Bet in New York. When he was called up he informed them about my war experience, It was just four weeks after I had arrived home that I received a call from Arie Lashner (radio operator of the "Hagana") inviting me to participate in the rescue of our people. The next day I was on a train to New York.

I presented myself to Captain Arie Friedman (an Israeli) on board SS Norsyd which was moored alongside the SS Beauharnois in Brewers Drydock on Staten Island. These sister ships were Canadian corvettes and the first ships from America to enter the Aliya Bet "trade". In fact, this situation was so new that we actually picked up bunker oil in British Gibraltar. We departed Staten Island in the afternoon on an early February 1946 day. The Beauharnois "Wedgwood" bound for Italy and the Norsyd "Hagana" bound for Marseilles, France. It was here that our Scandinavian Captain debarked and we all moved up a notch. Arie became captain, Larry Silverstein became first mate and I became second mate.

I will spare you the "blood, sweat, toil and tears" we went through preparing our vessel to carry passengers. Needless to say, we picked up 1200 survivors in Port de Bouc and set sail East, followed by a small Turkish "tub" caller Akbel and renamed "Biria". The ruse was that we were to pretend we were disabled and signal our distress to Akbel, when she came to our rescue, take her by force. We would then install our "cargo" on her and the shoo-shoo would compel her to sail to Haifa, while we returned to Europe for another load. (It was to protect the Turk crew from prosecution, but I don't think the Limeys bought it).

At first we tried to bring our vessels alongside each other (board and board) and even thought it was a beautiful summer day, the sea swells would have caused our two ships to batter each other, so we decided to use our lifeboats. We had two well made power life-boats that could carry 30+ people at a time. Larry Silverstein worked one while I worked the other, and our engineers (Dave Baum 1st engineer and Sammy Applebaum 2nd engineer) kept the two ships close together. It took many hours to complete the ferrying job, but we did it without mishap. (Ours was the only vessel I know of that made a transfer at sea).

Just as we got all the passengers over to the Akbel and started to transfer their belongings, a heavy cruiser appeared on horizon. At first we thought she was

British – but thankfully she turned out to be French. Larry and I wanted to retrieve our power life boats but the shoo-shoo wanted to skedaddle – so we departed at top speed, leaving our lifeboats adrift and at least half the rucksacks still on our ship. Our next destination was the Greek island of Milos where we rendezvoused with some Greek sailing vessels (Mediterranean dhows) bearing bunker oil in barrels. We had to build a trough to funnel the oil into that small deck opening, unloading it barrel by barrel. It took about a week.

I would like now to back up a bit. I F Stone sailed with us on the first leg of our journey and related in his book: “Underground to Palestine” the misery endured on that little “rustbucket”. Akbel was supposed to “raise” Haifa in one day – it took three, and they had food and water only for 24 hours. As Hagana and Akbel parted company – I watched her with my heart in my mouth as she made way with a ten or fifteen degree list and so covered with people, that I thought she would founder. I prayed that the weather would remain fair and evidently it did. Our next port of call was Bakar – a little fishing village, nested in a beautiful valley in Yugoslavia, (presently Croatia) where we were to pick up over 2500 people. As on all the ten ships, we had many trials and tribulations bringing our passengers safely to Haifa from Bakar. The Yugoslavian pilot guiding the ship down the Dalmatian coast from Bakar to Split remarked that he didn’t think we were going to make it because we were so ‘tender’ (top heavy) and overloaded. The shoo-shoo thought that because we handled 1200 so easily on the first leg, we could double the number on this trip. (Overloading was an Aliya Bet virus.)

When we got to Haifa, the crew put on refugee clothing – so that the British could not tell who the Americans were. I was then smuggled out of Palestine on a Greek ship by the Hagana and so I was still unknown to the British. I would like to note here that out of our small crew on the Hagana, two men were killed in the War of Independence, Arie Lashner (radio operator) and Harold (Foxy) Monash (deck hand).

After a number of months at home in Cincinnati, I received a telephone call from Captain Ash of the “Weston Trading Company” (which was a front for the Jewish Agency). I was asked to ship out on the SS Warfield (later “Exodus 1947”) which was berthed in Baltimore Maryland. I remember coming aboard in November 1946 and running into the smiling face of Adrian Phillips (1st engineer). It was the middle of a particularly frigid season, but the engineers were busy repairing the engine in preparation for putting to sea. The ship was cold and we had to live ashore. I stayed at a small hotel called Colonade with my roommate Ben Foreman. The Warfield had already been sold for scrap by its original owners and bought by the Jewish Agency from the scrap dealers for \$40 000 (I was told). A cursory glance around revealed that Warfield had had a very rough life.

I took over my duties as first mate as the crew began to fill out. The men were being sent down by “Weston Trading Co.” in New York, in small groups of ones, twos and threes. Just as the engineers were preparing below deck, we were

preparing top-side and, believe me the original owners knew what they were doing when they sold her for scrap.

A word or two about the men: Most of these men were not sailors but had come from the armed forces of the U S during WW II. (A few were from allied countries). Some were too young to have fought, as young as 17) but all of them were magnificent! Though we had to train them from scratch, most of them took to the sea like Vikings. It is the greatest pride of my life to have served with these men and to be able to call them comrades. (I mean all the men on all the ships). In order to stay somewhat within the 2000 word limit – this is only a synopsis of the Odysseys of both the “Hagana” and the “Exodus 1947” respectively. The Warfield departed Baltimore in January 1947 and before we cleared Chesapeake Bay, we learned that her wooden superstructure was very weak. With every roll of the ship the superstructure swayed 3-5 inches. When we arrived off Cape Hatteras, we ran into a gale and received another shock – the rivets on the sponsons were loose and through these holes we were taking on water. We turned her around and eventually ended up in Philadelphia where we made repairs.

We finally left Philadelphia in March 1947 and had an uneventful Atlantic crossing until we stopped in the Azores for bunker oil. The British, who knew about us way back in Baltimore, tried to prevent this from behind the scenes and it was the same wherever we went – Marseilles, Porto Venera, back to Marseilles and finally Sete. Evidently our skullduggery was stronger than their skullduggery because we always managed to slip our moorings and break for sea. (Were a few palms greased?) I can say that none of the other vessels had a harder time with the British than the Warfield.

From early morning until late in the afternoon on July 10th 1947 we loaded 4550 passengers on Warfield, a vessel certified to carry 350 people. On Friday July 11th 1947 we departed Sete, France at mid-morning. We had to leave without benefit of tug or pilot because the French pilot welched on his word to con us out of the harbor. As we cleared port heading east, there was the frigate HMS Mermaid, standing three miles out in international waters waiting to tail us. She followed us until we reached a position somewhere off the island of Malta whence she retired. But she was relieved by three destroyers which took positions port, starboard and astern of our vessel.

We continued easterly, on a heading which brought us just north of the Egyptian coast. Our plan was to put her hard aport, heading in a northerly direction keeping six or seven miles into international water until we would have come abreast of Tel Aviv. We would then put the helm over hard right and race for the beach. The whole town was to turn out and flood the beach with people and before the British could mobilize a force large enough to arrest us, the passengers would be spread out among the Israelis and filtered to all sections of Palestine. On the day we appeared off Egypt, (July 17 1947) four more naval vessels rose above the horizon to join the armada we were already facing. (This task force was composed of HMS Ajax (cruiser), HMS Checkers, Chieftain,

Charity, and Childers (destroyers) and HMS Providence and Rowena (minesweepers). We were obviously to be stopped at all cost. The Star of David would not be flown until the next day because we were still under the "protection" of the Honduran flag. (I guess it had been 2000 years since a Jewish ship had flown a Jewish flag). But it was at this time that we proudly displayed our new name, "Exodus 1947" for the first time.

Between 01:00 and 02:00 on July 18th, out of this very black night, two huge blinding spotlights hit us port and starboard as two destroyers squeezed us to put boarding parties aboard. At the same time they notified us over the hailer that we were in Palestinian waters (Actually we were 30 miles out in international waters). We were told to heave-to because we were under arrest. In the initial surprise, they managed to get most of the men they would be able to put aboard during the four hour battle. Actually they were never able to take the ship with the number of men that they were able to put on board.

The moment the British began the assault our 2nd mate, Bill Bernstein, blew the ship's whistle to alert all on board that the battle had begun. That attacked us with steel tipped truncheons, tear gas and side arms; we repelled them with ballast rocks, food tins and potatoes. The first British boarders headed directly for the wheelhouse and Bill, who, as 2nd mate had the 12 am to 4 am "dog watch". Bill attempted to bar their entry with a fire extinguisher, but was clubbed into a coma with a fractured skull. He died about 17 hours later on an operating table in Haifa.

The British attempted to steer this ship from the newly captured pilot house. But Cy Weinstein, our 3rd mate uncoupled the helm from the after steering station and began to take evasive action, controlling the ship from the steering engine. From whichever side any destroyer would attack us, he would turn the vessel in that direction – thus forming the classical "tee" and preventing many more British from boarding "Exodus". The battle continued for four hours (until approximately 06:00) until our wooden super structure was ripped open, port and starboard respectively between 150 to 200 feet. It was dangerously weakened and swaying with each roll of the ship. It was past time to think of our passenger's safety and give up. With every vessel in the opposing armada at least 10 knots faster than us, our prospect of breaking through to Palestine was nil.

When we arrived in Haifa the crew mingled with the refugees, the Israelis went into hiding in various parts of the ship, and Cy Weinstein (3rd officer), Bill Millman (Bosun, who was shot in the jaw), Stanley Ritzer (cook), and myself were arrested and charged with aiding and abetting illegal immigration and put in a lock-up. About a month later charges were dropped and we were deported. The people were taken back to Port de Bouc, France in three prison ships – Empire Rival, Ocean Vigour and Runnemedede Park. And in one of the worse examples of public relations in history, the British displayed to the world the miserable treatment they accorded our Jewish refugees. (It is one of the few times in history that the world sided with Jews). The British ordered the people

to debark, but they refused and the French would not allow the British to force them off in French territorial waters. This was the work of Ernest Bevin (British Foreign Minister) who was intent on breaking the Jewish resistance to British colonial rule. He finally wised up, and after the damage was done to British prestige, and ordered the ships to British occupied Germany at Hamburg, where the people were forced off by British troops. A few months later as a result of this blunder, the British announced that they were giving up the Mandate. Anyway, that is how we interpret this incident.

The cost:

1. 2nd officer Bill Bernstein clubbed to death.
2. Hersh Yakubovitch, 15 year old orphan, shot to death.
3. Mordechai Baumstein shot to death.
4. Bill Millman, Bosun, shot at close range, jaw shattered.
5. 146 people with injuries – club and gunshot wounds, 27 required hospitalization.



After the struggle on the "Exodus", on the high seas