

Bailey Nieder

Born in 1922 in Seattle, USA

Volunteer on the "Geula"

**This is the Way it Was**

College: 1939 – 1943 (MIT) BS in Electrical Engineering (Power Option)

Military Service: 1943 – 1946 US Army Signal Corps OCS, Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Development of proximity fuse, Enlisted as Private, Discharged as 1st Lt.

Aliya Bet volunteer: March 1947 – December 1947. Fireman aboard the SS Paducah (Geula).

After British takeover, escaped in Haifa and missed Cyprus detention by hiding in boiler firebox with chief engineer.

Family: 1948 married Erika Dessauer (Holocaust survivor, immigrated to USA from France in 1947). Married 49.5 years, untimely death in 1998. Three sons.

Employment: Worked as engineer for General Electric Co. and Seattle City Light; executive vice-president and eventually president of Champale Inc. a small specialty brewer. After 5 years in New York I returned to Tacoma as General Manager of Tacoma Steel Supply Co. Retired from that position in 1988. Since then enjoying life with travel, volunteer committee work, some consulting.

Recruitment background: Came from a family with a strong Zionist feeling, my father was born in Illinois on a small farm in 1890 (his parents had immigrated from Galicia in mid-1880's and were settled on a farm by the Baron de Hirsh organization). Grandpa left his family in 1898 to seek gold in Alaska. They were reunited in Seattle in 1900. Dad was an early Zionist with Socialist leanings and there are records of him debating the issue with the rabbi of the dominant German Jewish community before the local Bnei Brith chapter in 1924.

My maternal grandfather immigrated to Canada in 1900. He moved to Seattle in 1916 and was very involved in bringing relatives from Poland, Germany and Austria from the 1920's to 1941. From his reading of the Jewish press and his correspondence he had early knowledge of the massacres in Eastern Europe and of the concentration camps. Both sides of my family believed that if there had been a Jewish State, millions of lives would have been saved.

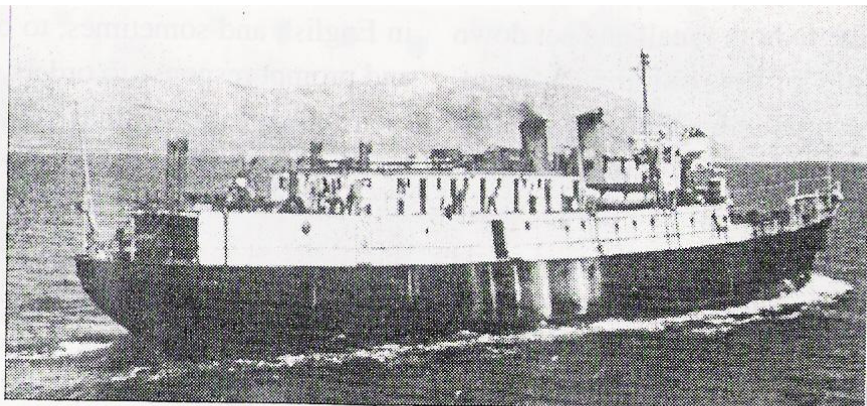
I was discharged from the army in August 1946. I returned to Seattle for the first time, since I had lived there in 1939. With a few other veterans and some University of Washington students we formed an unaffiliated Zionist youth group. Syd Abrams, Elihu Bergman and I made attempts to get to Palestine and when representatives of Hashomer Hatzair and Habonim arrived in town to woo our group we learned for the first time about recruitment for Aliya Bet, but nothing concrete. I was transferred to Schenectady, New York by my employer, GE, and Syd phoned me with the name and address in New York City of Kieve

Skiddell. I went down at the first opportunity and after a short interview I signed up, contacted my Seattle associates who joined me, and a few weeks later we were flying to Miami to become enthusiastic members of the crew of the Paducah.

The story of our eight months journey from the US to Portugal to France, Turkey, Bulgaria and finally Palestine has been well recounted by our captain, the righteous Gentile Rudy Patzert (though he did neglect what went on in the engine room. I do not remember him ever visiting the black gang during our whole hegira). Without question the highlight of our journey was the night we finally loaded the 1500 refugees from the sealed train that had brought them to the Bulgarian port of Burgas from Rumania. There were many orphans; many young people organized into youth groups according to their political or religious affiliation. It was a very moving experience to see them emerge from the railroad cars praying and singing as they boarded. I remember tears in my eyes. And I was not alone as we in the crew reached one of our goals. They were even more crowded on our ship than they had been in the concentration camps, but they knew they were going to "Eretz" (the Land of Palestine) as we called it then, and there was only one hope.

I did not experience the rigors of Cyprus along with my fellow crew members and our passengers. After our ship was boarded by the British navy and marines and towed into Haifa harbor, as the first refugees and most of the crew were being transferred to the barges which could take them to the camps on Cyprus I was with the group that would be the last to be taken off the ship. Next to me was the chief engineer, Pierre Baird, who told me that he had been requested by the Hagana to hide in the firebox of the boiler and if I wished I could join him. The firebox was still warm, we stripped down to our skivvies, squeezed through the fire door . There was a draft of fresh air since we directly connected the ship's main stack. We waited while the remaining passengers were taken to the British prison barges and then waited for hours more until we heard voices and then with a thick accent we heard: "here they are". Among the gang brought aboard by the British to clean and fumigate the ship were a couple of Hagana operatives who had bribed their way among the Arab group that had the fumigating contract. They gave us clothes and we joined them as they left the ship.

After a week at the Carmelia Court getting false identity papers I had two months in Palestine, traveling, working in kibbutzim, being shot at on the slopes of Mount Hermon, but that is all another story.



The ship "GEULA" (Paduca) in Gibraltar strait