

Jack Pleet (RIP)

Volunteer from Canada on the "Wedgwood"

Died January 13, 1981

Written by: his brother, Pinchas

This is the Way it Was

Yaakov Pleet was born in Ottawa, Canada on January 13 1919. His father was Harry Pleet, who arrived in Canada from the Ukraine in 1910, and his mother was Krania Leah Elchis Pleet. Yaakov had a sister, Esther, born in 1916, presently living in Toronto, Canada. In 1928 Yaakov's mother passed away, and the family struggled for two years. Then, in 1930, Harry met Bertha Martha Schwartz, who had arrived in Montreal from Rumania in 1920. They married in September 1930. At the time, Yaakov was sickly, suffering from a rheumatic condition, and he was grateful for his stepmother's care and devotion. In 1931, a brother, Michael Meyer, now of London, England was born; and in 1933, another brother, Pinchas, presently living in Ottawa, Canada, joined the family.

Yaakov attended elementary school, high school and Talmud Torah in Ottawa. He was an excellent student over all, with a special love of language and Judaic studies. He was always very well-liked and had many close friends. When Yaakov graduated from High School he was apprenticed to an architect, Colonel Burt. He later went on to work as a draftsman for the National Research Council in Ottawa. Even before his Bar Mitzva Yaakov began to develop his Zionist ideals and thoughts of going to Palestine. A few years later he and a number of his friends joined the Shomer Hatzair movement in Ottawa. It was quite an active group that had a summer camp, Camp Moshava, and they were involved in many community activities.

After the outbreak of WW II, Yaakov joined the Canadian Army; he was stationed at Camp Petawawa for training, about 100 miles from Ottawa. One Sunday the family went to visit him. I can still remember the excitement of seeing my big brother in his Army uniform!! After a brief time in the army, Yaakov left that service and joined the Canadian Merchant Navy until the end of the War. His main effort and activity was then working and planning to bring Jewish refugees to Palestine. Because of the British blockade of Palestine, these activities had to be done in secret.

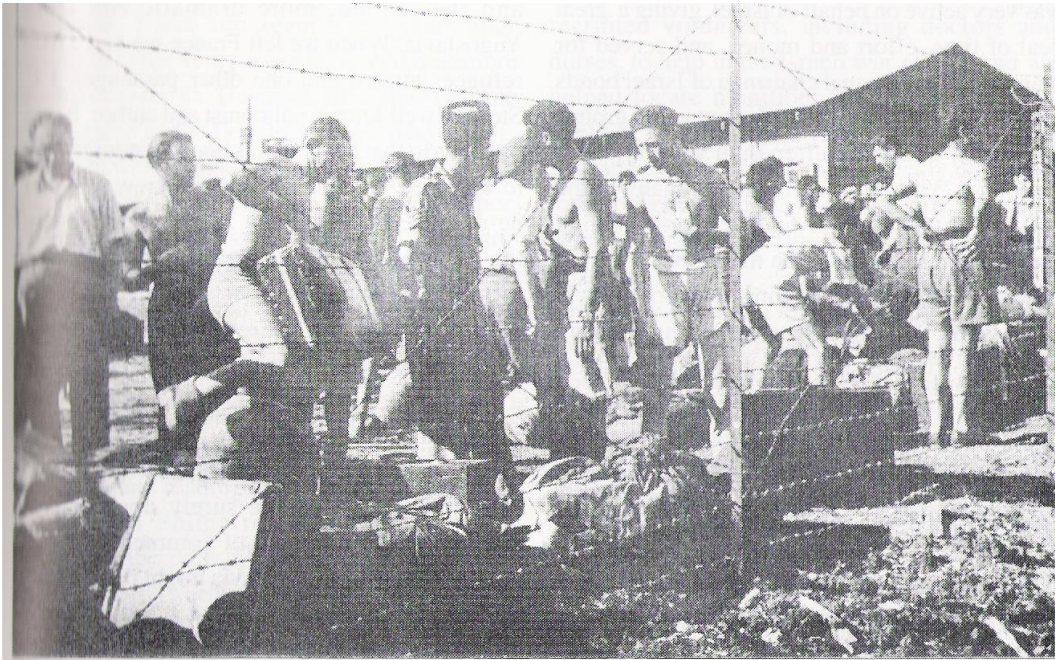
In 1946 Yaakov left Canada to join a ship that picked up refugees in Italy. After the ship had crossed the Mediterranean, it was stopped by the British. Because Yaakov was fluent in Yiddish, the plan was that he would pose as the ship's captain, which he did. He pretended to know no English, frustrating the British, and he was imprisoned in Atlit as a ship's officer. The others on the ship were treated as illegal immigrants. To protect his identity Yaakov gave away all his identification papers. As a matter of fact, when we received a letter from him at home, it was signed, "Your friend Fivelson", but we recognized Yaakov's handwriting. Once he was released from Atlit, Yaakov spent a short time in Kibbutz, (I believe it was Sasa) but the regimentation of Kibbutz life was not for

him. He moved to Tel Aviv and got a job with TAHAL where he was able to use his drafting skills working in water planning. Like others at the time, he worked and fought for the creation of the State of Israel.

Yaakov first went to the Kotel Hamaaravi during the time of the British Mandate. Back then there was just a narrow pathway, and clothes lines extended from nearby Arab houses to the Kotel. Yaakov was injured by rocks thrown at him by Arabs.

Yaakov had two great loves; the Jewish people and Israel. He was a man of great courage with a very gentle side, reaching out to people in need and writing stories for children. He was very learned, yet on Jewish festivals he volunteered to stand guard at synagogue so that others could attend.

When I visited him, former refugees who had been on his ship would come up to him and remember him, joking that they had always believed he was truly the ship's captain. I was always amazed at the scope of his friends, including Druze families and Christian Arabs, and he was proud to introduce me to them. He passed away on his birthday, January 13, 1981.



In Atlit detention camp