

Aharon Shapiro

Volunteer from Canada on the "Hagana"

**This is the Way it Was**

When I got out of the navy after WW II, I enrolled at NYU. After only a few months in school I had a call from a shaliach of Kibbutz Artzi, Moshe Furmansky. He asked to meet with me to talk about something important. He suggested that we get together in a park to provide privacy for what he was going to tell me. Moshe informed me about Aliya Bet. Ships needed to be equipped to smuggle Jews from displaced persons' camps from which they were prevented from leaving. He asked me to join the crew that would be sailing for Europe. Moshe knew that I had been in the navy and had been trained to work with radar equipment. I decided to quit school. I was asked to get in touch with somebody in City Island, NY. Two corvettes had been bought from the Canadians. They had stripped the ships and I helped them get radio and other communication equipment and installed them. I wasn't involved in the engine work. The whole thing took no more than a month.

When the ships were capable of sailing across the Atlantic we went to Marseilles. In Marseilles there were Jews from the Hagana. They had everything organized. They took over and installed wooden bunk beds. They were very tight; you couldn't sleep on your side. The height between the beds was less than your shoulder width. My job was to change the radio system so that it was compatible with the Hagana. We organized a radio system all over Europe; some of the countries were: Austria, Poland and Hungary. They would bring Jews in trucks over night so they wouldn't be caught by the British. They sent me all over Europe. One of the places was Paris. The French police patrolled the streets for radio equipment that might be used by the Communists. They were afraid of the Communists. They picked up the signals of my radio. They came running up the stairs of the apartment we were using. The French police arrested me and took me to jail. Luckily, someone was able to make a phone call to the Israeli underground. As there was no love lost between the British and the French an arrangement was made with the French. When the call was made to the Minister of the Interior they said I was alright and let me go. This must have been in the Fall because the opera season was on in Marseilles.

Another place they sent me was to Saint Jerome, formerly Napoleon's estate. They had gotten permission to use the place as a waiting station for the displaced persons. This was near Marseilles. My job was to keep the children busy. The way I did that was to teach them radio. The first ship I took to Palestine was to sail from a small cove east of Marseilles, called Bee de l'Aigle. Our ship was small enough so that we could go in close to shore and use a gangplank. We saw French officers and they had a bridge table that they opened. They had pads of paper and a stamp. As people got off the truck they

were handed a paper that was stamped by the officers. This was an official act giving people permission to board the ship. The ship was called "Hagana". We set sail with over 1000 (not an exact number). It was fairly uneventful. The people were very happy to be on board. At the last moment a famous journalist got on, called I.F.Stone. He wrote a book called "Underground to Palestine". He mentions me in the book. At this time these events were secret. He referred to a guy from Jersey City who had been in the Navy and was a radio operator.

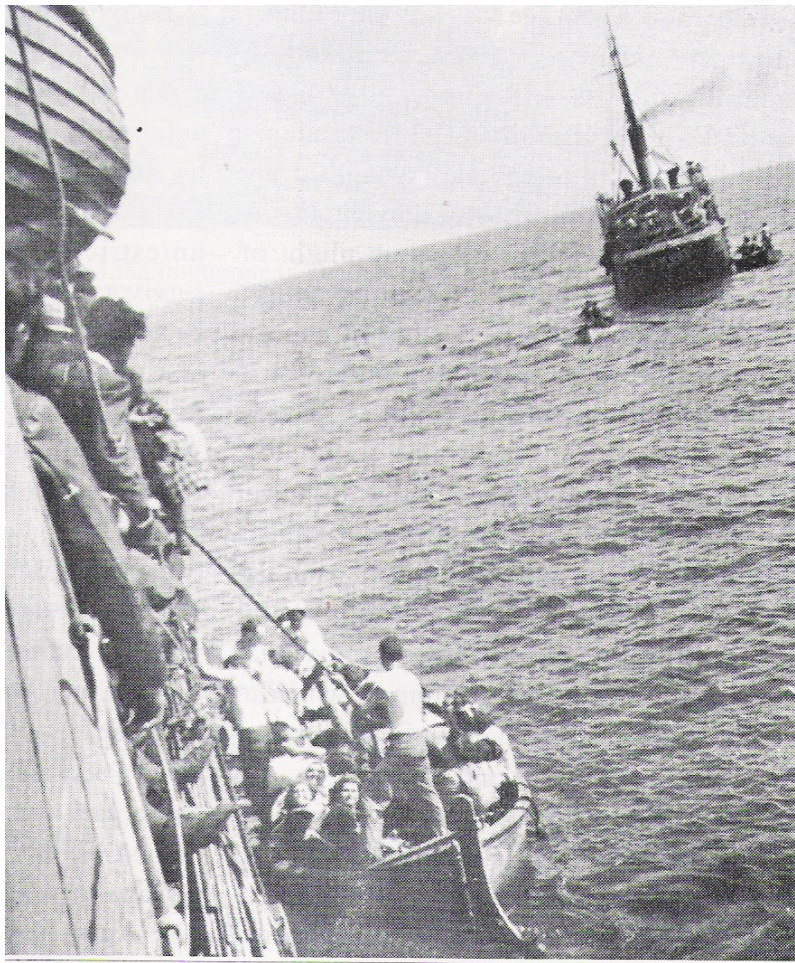
After we sailed out to sea we spotted the British who were looking for us. They had failed to stop us from leaving port but wanted to stop us from unloading our passengers in Palestine. Someone in the Hagana was smart enough to predict that this would happen, and they had made arrangements with a Turkish transport vessel to meet us at sea. We moved everyone on our ship by boats onto the Turkish vessel and this ship arrived in Palestine. We sailed to Milos and hid there for a while. We had run out of fuel so we got hundreds of barrels and filled them up. This took us quite a few days. It was early fall of 1946 when we set sail again.

It was a good thing for us that the English had lots of enemies. Tito, the dictator of Yugoslavia, figured if France could let the Jews go through so could he. Quite a few Jews had come into the Adriatic area and Tito figured he'd let them. We were given instructions to use Seth, a day's sailing from Milos. When we arrived in Seth we received a tremendous welcome – that is one of the good things about dictators, when they say do it, it happens. They brought girls on board and we had a big party. Everything was organized; we got more fuel and more food, and they brought the people to the ship in trucks. There were 1500 displaced persons. We were really unbalanced but we couldn't say no. We set sail early next morning and encountered heavy weather. We had too many people on the ship and she started rolling. Aryeh Paar, (Friedman) the captain, (at a get together of the crew some 50 years later, even though he was ill at the time, he couldn't say no to me when I called his home. When he saw me at the gathering he called out, "There's the kid!". I was the youngest of the crew. It turned out that Aryeh was only 25 years old on that voyage) said that I was the best one to steer the ship and he ordered me to steer and to stay with a bucket next to me when I needed to throw up. The British destroyers spotted us and squeezed us. They sent a boarding party and we had a little bit of a fight. One guy from our crew got killed. They towed us a mile from Haifa. I. F. Stone has more details, I don't remember. The British decided to send people to displaced persons camps in Cyprus. They tied us up in the port of Haifa. They were trying to find some Americans in the crew to try and put pressure on Truman to stop us. They wanted to make a big stink about it.

What happened to me? I mixed with the DPs. The Hagana wanted me to do some work in electronics. They brought a boat alongside the ship. One of the Hagana people sneaked on board and was told to give me "papers". They never got the papers to me. I was arrested and put in jail. Every morning the British police came with an Arab to interrogate me. I told them I was a Polish refugee, but I didn't want to speak Polish because of what they did to the Jews. So I

spoke in broken Hebrew which I said I was learning. The British police told the Arab in English what to ask me. Every morning it was the same thing. They finally took me back to the ship with the other refugees. This time the Hagana did a better job. They said I was an engineer and needed to fix the ship. That is how I got away.

The Hagana took me to the Palmach; The Palmach was part of the Hagana. One of their camps was near Ein Hashofet and they had some problems with electronics there. I did a number of things. Then they sent me back to Europe. I did some more work in Europe. I ended up in Marseilles where I worked on another ship, and got that ship ready. Then I went back to the US to a training camp of Hashomer Hatzair in New Jersey to get ready to migrate to Palestine. I was asked to go on a mission to Holland before I arrived in Israel (by then the Jewish State of Israel had been declared). They had an arrangement with a diamond cutter in Holland. The Hagana thought I could get away with it because I looked like an American. When I finally arrived in Israel I joined the nucleus of Kibbutz Hei (Sasa) at Ein Hashofet.



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