

Aryeh Malkin

The Story of One Ordinary American Jew

Foreword

I have told my story innumerable times, usually in English to members of the Zionist Youth Movements, Hashomer Hatzair or Haborim; and often to tourists from English speaking countries and to very many young Danes. I have even told my story to Israelis in Hebrew but that has not happened very often unfortunately. It seems to me that the period of Aliya Bet and other events preceding the establishment of the State of Israel are not of prime interest to our modern techno-political society. It is also important for me to make it clear that I was not a general, nor was I a captain or an officer in any army. **I was not and am not a 'VIP'**. I was a technical sergeant 4th grade (T/4) in the Ordnance (supply) Troops of the US 1st Army that landed in Normandy and fought its way to the Oder River in Germany (where it met up with troops of the Russian Army). As regards the Israeli Army, my career started when I was sworn-in to the Hagana by Yaakov Dori when he was its commander, in NYC some time prior to the sailing of the Josiah Wedgwood in or about March, 1946. Be that as it may, I never had an inclination to be a 'military-type' man.

We must keep in mind that the Mosad LeAliya Bet and the Histadrut which established it and which also backed the Hagana and the Palmach were all in the hands of the workers party, Mapai, and David ben Gurion was its unrivalled leader. In what seems to me to be a most curious **and remarkable 'turn of faith', the right wing and supposed 'center' parties were able to convince** the masses of workers that the people and the party responsible for bringing them to Israel only did so in order to exploit them for their working power and placed them in the farthest and most dangerous parts of the country. The small Jewish community of Palestine (\pm 600 000) living under constant threat, did all that was in its power to bring the remnants of the Holocaust and North African Jewry to Palestine, later Israel, and was repaid for its efforts by being kicked out of office, and replaced by a gang that had done almost nothing to bring them here!

Now, voting for a party has become a sort of family tradition, and those Olim who supported the Likud and other right-wing parties still continue to do so in many cases. This has been more or less the way matters rest since 1976. People still live where they live (although many have gravitated to the center of the country and the big cities). On the other hand very many go to settle in the West Bank area of the country and do so willingly because the West Bank receives a disproportionately huge share of the investment of government money, and there is political motivation to prevent giving any area of land back to the Palestinians for the establishment of their own state. In other words many of the right-wing and center leaders who had supported two governments for two peoples in the West Bank and Israel have reneged on that pledge and they simply want everything. I am saying, that today people **want** to go to the far-out areas of the country because they are given or they take the land cheaper than anywhere else within the State of Israel. As of today, the West Bank is not legally a part of the State of Israel but in effect the Jews living there have more rights and benefits than the Jews living in Israel proper.

The right-wing elements named above have desires of what to do with the Palestinians, but there has not yet been a crystallization of these desires into a definite policy. Are they to remain a 'conquered minority' indefinitely? Should they be absorbed into Israeli society? This would raise the percentage of Arabs within Israel enormously? Should they be transferred, willingly or unwillingly? I admit that I do not know their answer.

I have my desires also: I would like to see an independent Arab State which would live in peace with us. I don't know what its exact boundaries should be and I don't know how we can trust 'them' or how 'they' can trust us. It is a desire, not a political program. I came to this country believing there was room for a bi-national state, both nations sharing the whole area in an autonomous fashion. That was the idea expressed by Mordecai Bentov and Hashomer Hatzair, Like many very good ideas – the baby was thrown down the drain with the bathwater. We were then offered a state by the UN that looked like a deformed octopus that had been stomped upon by a caterpillar tractor, and the people of Tel Aviv 'danced in the streets'; literally, not as a figure of speech. At the time, I was not in Tel Aviv and we had no streets at our outpost, which was somewhere out at the end of one of the octopus tendrils. We did not dance because we had to stand our watch and keep our mouths shut.

I will not be insulted if one calls me a left-leaning liberal, and I am also definitely an old style kibbutznik by choice but a bourgeois kibbutznik because I agree that the majority should rule. Even as things stand in the kibbutz today I would not want to experience any other style of living. Maybe what we had and what we did was too good to be true forever and I have few regrets. This article is meant as an introduction from which the reader may deduce what sort of person I am, or pretend to be.

Aryeh (Leon) Malkin

Chapter 1: Mama and Papa, and How it All Started

To make a long story as short as possible I am starting out with my birth. That is an impossible situation because I needed a mother and father. That is true of most babies and I was no exception. My birth was not recorded in any newspaper and it was not a world-shaking newsworthy event. It was a very happy occasion for my parents because before I came along they had had a girl, my older sister Dorothy, and she had been followed by a stillborn child. I was a healthy, alert baby **and had the usual children's sicknesses such as measles and mumps, etc. but nothing really serious.**

Before I get warmed-up to my egocentric future it would be proper to tell as much as I know about my mother and father. My mother Fannie Ostrov came from the small village of Talauchin near the city of Shklov which is in the Moghilev district of what is today northeastern Belarus. Her mother, Gitte was a widow with 3 daughters, and mama was the youngest. Gitte and her 3 daughters were brought to the United States by **Gitte's uncle Beria. Mama was 12 years old when she arrived at Ellis Island somewhere around the 1900's. Her sister Mary was two years older than she, and sister Molly was five years older.** The three sisters were in close and good relations with each other and when they married and had children; the sisters, the husbands and the children remained a close-knit family all their lives.

Many immigrants from many countries, Italians, Irish, Polacks and more came to the USA during these years and they all were ready to work at any wage and under any conditions in order to keep their children and themselves alive. This was known as the era of the sweat-shops and my mother entered the work force at the ripe age of twelve as a seamstress and never had one day of schooling in her life. She spoke and she wrote in Yiddish and she certainly had no education, but she did have a natural intelligence, an excellent taste for style and fashion and she was a marvelous seamstress (and a very good cook). Fannie was a very friendly and sociable person and one of the most unbiased and naive individuals that I ever met. I will definitely have more to say about Mama, as we called her, as this story develops.

My father was called Zalman by all of his old friends, those who knew him from his home town of Shklov. Those who made his acquaintance in the States called him Sam. Sam had come to the States a few years before my mother came (they were distant relatives but no one could ever explain to me how they were related). He had been active in the Zionist movement in Russia, in Poalei Tzion, which was illegal and dangerous, and he was probably sent from Russia to avoid doing army service. His father, Lippe had the, very unusual for a Jew, job of working as a surveyor on road building, and I was named after him – Leon. No one, not even my parents ever called me by my Jewish name.

My parents never talked about their life in Russia even when directly questioned. As a result I **don't even know my grandmother's name on my father's side or my grandfather's name on my mother's side.** My father had a brother and three sisters in Russia and he wrote to his sisters, but after he died all contact with any of them was completely lost (about 15 years ago my sister Dorothy and I did **make contact with the brother's great grandchildren and brother Vitali and sister Ludmila Malkin made Aliya with their families.** Once settled in Israel they dropped all

contact with me and that is very disappointing, and I am very sorry.) My father had gone to a “**heder**” when he was a boy but also lacked any formal education. He was one of the most intelligent uneducated individuals that I ever knew, an autodidact. He was well-versed in Jewish literature and often read to me in Yiddish from the works of Shalom Aleichem or Y L Peretz and others. He loved opera and cantorial music although he was not particularly religious. He was good at arithmetic and spoke English well and had a general good background of knowledge of history and geography. He read the Jewish Morning Journal, a popular Yiddish newspaper everyday and since an issue was always lying about in the house I also read it quite often.

My father, known to the children as Papa, came to the States several years before my mother. He entered the rat race when he was about 17 years old and started work as a stevedore. My father was a strict and honest man and a very hard worker but simply was not the type who knew how to make money. His dream was to save up enough to buy a little store or some other little business but he could not make it happen. Both he and my mother lived on the lower east side of Manhattan when they arrived in the country. After they met and married they moved to the Bronx and that is where we children were born (Fordham Hospital).

Dorothy was born in October of 1918 and that is what kept my father from going to World War I. I was born on May 31, 1921 and sister Pearl was born in January of 1923. Baby Gilbert came along in February of 1926 and that made up the Malkin family. Papa gravitated to the leather trade and worked in his cousin’s factory. He worked hard and earned little, Mama had to work also in order to make ends meet during the very difficult years of the Great Depression (1929-1932). Mama worked at home or in a factory and sometimes both. We children always had to look neat and well-kept and my mother made beautiful dresses for my sisters out of leftovers. We lived in an Italian neighborhood of the Bronx for the first ten years of my life and all our friends were Italian, or Sicilian. **Mama’s sister Molly lived with her husband and four daughters on the first floor and we lived on the second.** Sister Mary lived one block away from us with her husband and two sons. We ate the Pesach Seder meal and the Thanksgiving meal together always, until the outbreak of WW II. If one child in any of our bunch got the measles, then there were ten cases of measles the next day.

Molly’s youngest daughter Sally was my age and she married a friend of mine whose uncle owned a Tire Repair and Retread factory. **This little fact later becomes crucially important.** Aunt Mary’s youngest son was 2 years older than me but we were close friends and spent time together building wireless sets, studying flies’ legs and onion skin with a microscope or photographing them. **Mary and her husband Willy had made a bit more money than we or Molly’s family and they moved to a ‘classier’ neighborhood but nothing else changed.** Mary’s two sons and I would sing in a men’s choir that appeared I synagogues for the high holidays (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur). They were much better than me but somehow I made the grade and earned about \$20.00 for a few weeks of practice and then the performances. It was not easy being up front all day and standing in a suit and tie. Sometimes we also performed at weddings and that gave us \$5.00 for one night. That was considered the icing on the cake.

When I was a boy of six years my father asked me if I would like to go to Hebrew school and I agreed. A nearby synagogue had afternoon classes where four of the five books of the Bible were

taught (the fourth book, Leviticus, was considered to complicated for young children). There were about 12 children in the class which included two or three girls, and one boy and one girl remained good friends of mine for many years. When I was about 11, a madrich (leader) of the Hashomer Hatzair came to speak to our class and invited us to a meeting at the synagogue that evening. I went to that meeting with some of my friends and the leader and a girl with him spoke about building a homeland for the Jews in Palestine and of building a kibbutz, a collective agricultural society, of working in agriculture, etc.

This was like being hit with a ton of bricks. Everything he said found its way to the core of my **being**; I don't know why but that was exactly what I thought that I wanted to do with my life. At the ripe age of 11 I had decided that I want to go to Palestine, to be a farmer and build a kibbutz. The idea of staying in the USA and studying and living in a city was not nearly as attractive. I became a member of the movement and if a good friend of mine left I would conduct a debate with myself. Is he doing the right thing? Should I leave the movement also? I invariably decided that my friend was doing the wrong thing and I was being true to my ideas, or ideals. Even when I look back today, I can honestly say that I made a better life for myself than most of them. Although some of them did make more money, they did not have more happiness or a feeling of fulfillment as I have, from having created a new society and a new country and a good family. I am well aware of the imperfections that come with them, but I still believe I came out on top. The way I have put it makes it sound as if I was competing against others; that is not what my intention is; how can I say in a modest way that I think I made a wise choice?

The task of bringing up four children during the period of the Great Depression (1929-1932) was very difficult. My father was too proud to get welfare from the government or to borrow money and he put in as many hours of work as he could, as did my mother. We children had no toys that cost more than a few cents; we played with marbles or checkers and the girls played hopscotch or jumped rope. My father enjoyed playing checkers (draughts to the British) and pinochle, a favorite with Jewish men, and the women played casino. Papa taught me to play checkers and I taught him to play chess. He beat me consistently in checkers until I developed a system with which I can beat almost anybody even today. He was happy about that and did his best to beat me at chess. I read a few books about chess openings and famous games and played on our high school team. Even today I love to play chess but have no illusions about my skill.

Other amusements as children were: going to the zoo which was near our home and to the botanical gardens there and rowing on the Bronx River which is a small stream. We also went to the Museum of Natural History, and I often went with my parents to see Yiddish plays at a downtown theater. I had quite a good understanding of Yiddish. I was a poor student of English literature but I was very good at spelling. Actually I was a poor student in that I never studied or prepared lessons, but I must have had a retentive memory because until the end of high school my marks were generally high. That did not work so well for me in college but by then I had lost interest in studying and all my effort was put into the Shomer movement. I became the leader of a group of boys and two of them are close friends of mine to this very day (Chaim and Nachum Meyers).

The area of 182nd Street to Fordham Road (190th) and 3rd Ave. to Southern Boulevard was about 90% Italian and there was a large open air market in the middle. We lived on 181st St. and all our friends and schoolmates were Italian. The Italians were in many ways similar to the Jews. They had come to the States for the same reasons, and parents worked very hard to give their children an education. Their family ties were very strong and they were Roman Catholics but not violent anti-Semites. We felt very comfortable in their midst and years later when there were six-seven Italians in my platoon I got along with them very well.

My sister Dorothy went to work as a secretary the day after she completed high school. This was real help for my parents. I completed my high school education when I was sixteen and continued on to CCNY (City College of New York) which was a free tuition institute. I studied for one year subjects which I felt would do me no good in my future as a farmer in Palestine so I **quit and looked for a job. This is where Sally's husband comes in because he and I both went to work in his uncle's tire repair and retread factory.** This was very difficult, heavy, dirty and hot labor and good preparation for being a Chalutz (pioneer) on a kibbutz. I received the minimum wage, \$11.00 / week. When I came home from my first day of work with my black, grimy hands and dirty clothes – Mama broke out in tears. I asked her **what was wrong and she said, "You will never be a doctor or a lawyer."** My answer was, **"No Mama, I will be a farmer in Palestine"**.

In the Shomer movement kids in the same peer-group established very close personal relations with each other. Our standards were so different from other kids our age and we defended them vehemently against others we wanted to be different and do something that was out of the ordinary. We were only young kids but we were already aiming to change our lives and live a very special life in far-away Palestine. **We had to be a bit crazy perhaps and if we were not so 'extreme' in our ways maybe we would not be here today. The girls didn't wear dresses and they didn't wear high heels or use make-up, not even lipstick.** We went around most of the time in our Shomer uniforms with our scout ties. As the saying went, you could leave the Shomer movement but the Shomer never left you.

I am today, more than 70 years later, still in contact with two brothers who were in the group I led, Chaim and Nachum Meyers, and with two who were in my peer group, Norman Fallick and Sid Katz (and his wife Mim and sister-in-law Arlene). Others who had been in our enlarged NYC **peer group have also remained close friends even if we don't see each other for 10 or 20 years.** When we meet time vanishes and we feel immediately at ease with each other. It is really a very beautiful and unique relationship. Unfortunately, here in the kibbutz my peers are dying out and in the Diaspora that is also occurring, so the circle gets smaller as Nature takes its course.

When I was about 18, I became seriously involved with a girlfriend. Sex was taboo in the Shomer movement, the rationale being that if people marry and settle down and start having children then they never make it to Palestine. There was a great deal of truth in that and it was a good policy if we could have gone on to Palestine at the age of 19-20. When WW II came along and Aliya ceased completely that prohibition became impossibility.

In 1941 I was sent by our movement to work in the city of Rochester and my girlfriend went to our training farm at Hightstown, NJ. I received my call-up to the army almost immediately after

the USA declared war against Japan and Germany, but was given leave to go back to NYC to see my parents and be drafted from there. This transfer delayed my going to the army for a few months, but nevertheless I was the first one from our peer-group to go to the army. I was able to spend a few weeks and took leave of family and friends and reported for basic training to Camp Lee near Petersburg VA. It was there that I received my “Dear John” letter that put an end to our relationship.

Although we separated as a couple we remained very close friends nevertheless for all our lives. She married and I married in the course of time and we lived in the same kibbutz and respected each other and she and my wife were also close friends and for many years we were neighbors. Our children grew up together and were also good friends. I think that there is not very much to **dwell upon when considering my sex life; no wild escapades on my side and none on my wife’s side either.** We are married for more than 60 years and still in love with one another.

The army was an important experience for me in several ways. Until my induction I had lived within a circle of friends who all had the same goal in life. Here in the army I was one in a company of 100 men, each of them from a different city and state, from various religions and 15 different nationalities. It was a matter of learning to live and let live and no man is better than the **next so don’t preach and don’t teach; don’t crowd the other guy and stand your own ground.** That was an important lesson for life, not only for the army.

Chapter 2: My US Army Career

I had happened to work at tire recapping and retreading for several years and as it turned out that is what the army also wanted me to do. The army wanted a Tire Repair Co. and we became that and I was the only one in the outfit who knew the trade. The company was sent to a school in Camp Holabird Baltimore, We were given the equipment needed to set up a shop and I taught everyone how to build a patch and to repair tires. At the time I thought it was a crazy idea having a tire company in the army but it turned out to be very worth while and when we went into action with the First Army we saved them from having to haul new tires to the front (which would have had to come from the States and involve lots of shipping).

After Baltimore we went to Camp Pickett in VA but did not stay there long. From VA we shipped to CA by train and ended up at the Pomona fairgrounds where there were barracks that had been used to house the Japanese when they were detained in camps. Conditions there were awful as this was **called the ‘Desert Training Center’.** We slept on folding cots without mattresses and sheets and we only ate C or K rations, we carried our carbines and gas masks and wore our helmets at all times. The Captain of our company took a special dislike to me when I refused to work as his supply sergeant and he promised that he would never promote me; he kept that

promise faithfully. His name was Stubblebine, but when he was not present our nickname for him was Stumblebum.

When we arrived at Pomona there had been an outbreak of a few cases of spinal meningitis, the camp was quarantined for two weeks and it rained continually for those two weeks. This made a lake of the fairgrounds and the month of February which was the first month we were there was really bad. Finally, the weather and the grounds cleared up in March and April and we built a tire repair shop where we worked during the week. Weekends we hiked about five miles out past Claremont where there were orchards or desert and we built an obstacle course, the likes of which would have made the Green Berets proud. Friday, Saturday and Sunday we were soldiers and we ran that obstacle course and had rifle practice. The rest of the week we were tire repair men and worked in our shop. So it went for six months.

I have to tell more about my company, the 158th Tire Repair Co. which had as usual about 100 men divided into four platoons. One platoon was a headquarters platoon which the captain controlled with a staff sergeant under him doing all the work. This platoon included the clerks and supply sergeant and vehicle pool sergeant and no one in that platoon touched tires. The other three platoons each had a 1st Lt. and a sergeant and several corporals. I was a corporal from the formation of the company until Stumblebum left us in June of 1945, because he heard we were earmarked for the Pacific. My platoon Lt. became the commanding officer and made me a sergeant that same day. He was a very decent and quiet guy and did not demand too much formality.

In the USA each platoon would work one shift and when we went overseas to Great Britain it became clear to us that the platoons would separate and work alone. However, I would like to say more about the men; I had my 23rd birthday in May, a week before D Day. Others in my platoon were my age but a good number of them were as much as five years older. Our sergeant was from New Haven, CT and his name was Hymie Shwartz. He was Jewish by birth, by name and by looks, but he did not know anything at all about Judaism or Zionism, and did not care to know. He was a very good sergeant and everyone in the platoon liked him. I never heard a word of discredit from anyone in the platoon re Hymie; he was fair and treated all of us impartially and he was even-tempered and a wise individual. There was another Jew in my platoon and I forgot his name. I thought him to be a disgusting person. His IQ must have been something like 180-190 and he was a shrewd card shark. He sold cigarettes to the men in the platoon at a profit, and he sold whatever he could lay his hands on, on the black market. He must have made a small fortune when we were back in Paris after the war was over. I rarely exchanged a word with him.

My best friend was a young Greek Adonis who was about 6 feet tall. We sort of clicked from the moment we met although we had almost nothing in common. He was big and strong but very mild-mannered and very kind. He was always ready to help anyone who needed anything. He was a superb gambler, which is not quite the correct word because if it was dice or poker, he came away winning nine times out of ten.

He had a mother and sister back home in Patterson, NJ and his sister was his contact because his mother only spoke Greek. One day, after he won several hundred bucks when we were still in

Tidworth, I told him to give me his winnings and I'd send them to his sister, He did that and I made out several one hundred dollar money orders and mailed them to his sister, Mary. That became a habit and about a week before we were to return to the States, he comes to me and says, "Malcom (that's what they all called me) if you ever need a few bucks just ask me and you have it. Thanks to you I have a bank account of to \$5000.00 waiting for me when I get back home."

We also had a nice gang of Italian descent and they were all just about my height. I think three of them were called Pat, and we also had several Irishmen called Pat. That was a bit confusing. There was also a smattering of Polacks and Swedes and Texans and Kentuckians – in short, it was a very typical American company. When we slept in pup-tents or roomed, two to a room as I Andennes, my partner was invariably a guy from Brownsville Texas. This platoon was milieu for more than three years (August 1942 – October 1945)!

The men saw that I disliked the black-marketeer Jew as much as they disliked him. I never sold them anything and although I did not smoke, I received my ration of cigarettes and if they ran out they would ask me for a pack, no charge. I worked with them and held up my end, never criticized their ideas or tried to measure them by my standards. They were adults and they spoke their mind and I spoke mine and that was that. They all knew I intended to go to Palestine after the war and they couldn't quite figure that out, but that was my problem and not theirs. At most they would say, "Okay, Malcom; if that's what you want to do then do it."

Besides running a tire shop at Tidworth we had a few other jobs. We worked with big axes and broke up railroad boxcars which carried half-tracks or ambulances and sometimes tanks. When the vehicle was sufficiently exposed a crane came along and set it on the ground. We checked the batteries and the water and put air in the tires and when about 50 had been serviced we drove them out to their units along the southern coast of Britain. This was a good job.

While we were in England I became acquainted with the Habonim's David Eder Farm And with the Hashomer Farm at Wiggie House in Wiggie Lane (how could I ever forget a name like that?). I was also a frequent visitor at the Habonim Hachshara that was near my camp. That same group later founded Kfar Hanassi and Varda's best friends joined that kibbutz. Her friend Janet, with whom she had toured Europe, married one of those Habonim people whom I had known in England. At this date they have both passed away.

To get back to my company, we were moved out of our barracks and into tents in the middle of the month of May, 1944 and the company framework broke down in everything but the name. My platoon was my home and we lived out of our three 6x6 trucks and their trailers. Each day we would grease the wiring in the morning, pack everything we had into the trucks and trailers and head out to a country road for a drive of 5 or 10 miles. The Lt. in the lead truck would turn back and we followed back to the camp and unpacked.

The very same thing occurred on D Day, June 6th, and we read about the invasion in the newspapers and heard about it on the radio. We stayed back at camp for another three or four days and when we next took off it was to drive to Portsmouth and board an LST of some type. We boarded it at night and we crossed the Channel at night, arriving at the French coast some

time after daylight. On this, the fourth or fifth day after D Day the Americans had established a beach head and gained some depth into the Normandy countryside.

The LST came very close to the shore and lowered its ramp, the sea was calm and the LST came in where metal tracks had been laid down and marked so that the trucks rolled down one behind the other into the water which covered the lower parts of the truck engines. The grease protected them enough for us to make our way to shore. I happened to be driving one of the trucks (almost every one of us was a truck driver) and we came ashore in low gear and halted not far from the water line. The whole beach was crowded with piles of supplies and with pup tents of all sort of support troops who, as we were doing, were bringing ashore everything the infantry and armored units needed to keep on fighting. There were piles of food supplies and barrels of fuel, at some distance was ammunition depot. In between the supplies were pup tents of the units that were bringing in and sorting the supplies out and the whole area looked like one big mess.

Always, like background music the sound of shelling could be heard, but rarely did a shell reach this part of the beach. Not far from us there was a not very high cliff wall and a dirt road climbed it at an incline which was not very steep. Our Lt. took off somewhere to meet his superiors and get his orders. Only then did we learn that our platoon was a part of the First Army and the other platoons had gone to other armies. I would like the reader to understand that, contrary to the general misperception, **there was no sign anywhere in the vicinity that said “Omaha Beach” or “Utah” or any of the others. Maybe these names appeared on the maps of the generals, but we did not see them. We were not in or near any town and we did not know exactly where we were and it didn’t matter. We had arrived in Normandy.**

The Lt. was told to get us away from the beach ASAP and to get to work. He had a little map on a scrap of paper and he followed the arrows until we came to a huge pile of “injured” tires. They were waiting for us. We set up our trucks in a T formation which we had practiced about a million times, and put down the floorboards between them. We threw a camouflage net over everything, unpacked our belongings, started the generator so that we could heat the molds imbedded in the truck floors – and we started fixing tires.

One shift of men worked and the others went to sleep. The generator ran steadily for 23 hours and would be shut down for an hour of servicing. This was our routine from the beach to Kassel, somewhere in the middle of Germany. We repaired thousands of tires; they had shrapnel stuck in them, live and spent bullets and more. It suddenly struck me that the guy stuck away somewhere in Washington in planning or logistics was a genius. We were fixing tires in the battle zone and the infantry and armored divisions were only minutes away from us. They came from the 1st Div. and 29th Div. and from the armored divisions and loaded up whatever they needed and back they went to the front.

One of the most awesome days of the war was the day of the breakout from the beach head. This was the 23rd of July, I believe. Early that morning the rumbling of bombers was heard coming from England and headed for the town of St. Lo. Since the town of St. Lo was over to my right when I was facing inland, I know that I was at Omaha. Had St. Lo been to my left, I would have been at Utah. The first plane dropped smoke bombs and the smoke drifted back in the direction

of the sea. As a result, the first bomb landed in the observation dugout of the commander of all ground forces who had come all the way from Washington to see how the breakthrough progressed. He (General Leslie McNair) was killed instantly and the bombers were ordered to adjust their targets. They then proceeded to drop their bombs on the town and did that for about four hours, swooping in, turning to the right and heading back as the next squadron came in. The noise, the smoke, the destruction and the intensity of the concentration on that one town was overpowering. As the last plane departed the American troops moved forward and kept going.

The US Army began its in depth advance to the other side of the Cotentin Peninsula and into Brittany and towards Cherbourg at the same time that the British completed their bridge from Mulberry to the shore. I am not a qualified critic of military tactics but I have the feeling that the British and Canadian soldiers who had landed on D Day must have suffered from a lack of sufficient supplies to support them and to support their swifter advance inland. I think the British troops were as good as any we had, but in my own unimportant opinion I think General Montgomery was a flop.

Several people have asked me if I was not afraid at any time. I said “definitely, jumping off a flagpole scared the shit out of me. I could never have willed myself to do it. However, going up the flagpole in single file meant just following the guy in front of you, so without thinking I walked forward and walked up and walked off and it was over. **But weren't I scared at the beachhead?** No, maybe I didn't have enough brains to be scared and maybe I was just philosophic about what would happen – if nothing happens, nothing happens and if I get hit with something I'll have plenty of time to worry about it, so since I have never been a big worrier, I just delayed the worry to the unknown future and took matters in their stride. I do not consider myself particularly brave or fearless.

I have also been asked, “What about anti-Semitism?” Well, what can one say. In the USA you have a mixed bag some hate you more and some hate you less so you find your compatible circle and usually live within it. In Great Britain the mass of people are invariably anti-Semitic but often in a genteel fashion. The French, particularly the rural population dislike all strangers and particularly Jews. The Germans, prior to the Nazis were no better and no worse than other nations. Once the Nazis were in power they had no choice. In short, every Jew knows that nobody likes Jews as a group which only proves that we have to do whatever is in our best interests and to try to step upon as few toes as possible of others.

The 158th company/ platoon with the 1st Army also left the bridgehead and moved inland and southeast to a field near the village of Manou, not far from La Loupe. This region of south Normandy is known as Perche. We set up our trucks in a field and stayed there for the month of August. The 1st Army had a good deal of ground to cover and to clean up behind us at the same time that it headed east towards Paris. There were fairly large pockets of the German Army behind us at Mortain and Falaise. This was our first big jump forward. When we arrived there we were close to the action but by the end of the month the 1st Army reached Paris and the rear had been mopped up.

After the fall of Paris I think the German Army retreated to its own border as fast as it could go because the next time that we moved we went through Paris on September 3rd or 4th and continued north via Soissons and Laon as far as the Belgian border at Hirson. That is a long distance and the front-line troops had to give the supply troops time to catch up with them, refuel etc. the following day, my platoon moved into Belgium and set up our trucks again in a field near the village of Micheroux, not far from Liege. This was early in September and the weather was rainy and cold. We had been sleeping under the sky since we landed in June and we had been working our asses off. The troops at the front lines fight for a few weeks and then fresh troops are called up to give the fighters a break. We were 25 men working non-stop to keep the wheels of the army moving.

At close to the end of the month a special order came from headquarters ordering me to take a vehicle and report ASAP to army headquarters in Paris. That was a 400 km drive and when I arrived I was very, very tired. I turned the command car I had driven over to a vehicle depot and reported as designated. The ordnance officer was not from my company but he ordered me to report to a tire repair factory at the Quai de Jemappe the following morning and I was to show them the army way of repairing tires (I was quite fluent in French by this time). I was also given a billet in a nice hotel on Ave. Marechal Foch.

I checked in at the hotel and had a beautiful bath and meal and was more than prepared for a **good night's sleep. I lay in that bed and tossed and rolled for a half hour until I was convinced** there was no choice. I threw the blanket onto the carpeted floor and myself on top of it and within five minutes I was dead asleep. Morning came all too soon and after a coffee and croissant I was off to the Quai de Jemappe.

I walked in and said **“BonjOur a tout le monde”** and they all came over to greet me. I handed about cigarettes, soap and chewing gum and told them I know that they knew there job but I had to show them the Army way once. I went through the ritual of skiving and plugging and **patching, ending up with “Compris?”** They answered as one – **compris.** I said **“bien, a demain”** and took off with the manager to the nearest bistro. I told the manager that I would check the turnout and if it was okay I would not be breathing down their necks. He said they are experienced workers interested in their jobs and there would be no trouble. We drank a Pernaud to that and I took off to see what Paris was like and he went back to the shop. Paris had recently been liberated but nothing was working yet. There was very little transport, no theaters or movies or concerts. I just walked **all over town, Montmartre and Montparnasse, checked out ‘Sacre Coeur’ and climbed the Eiffel Tower. I became very familiar with Paris.**

My two weeks were up (I had even become comfortable with the bed) and back I went to Belgium. The end of September and beginning of October were cold and snowy that year. We moved to another town, Oreye not far away but there we slept in a real house. Our winter quarters belonged to two women whose husbands were prisoners of war. Living with them were several little girls from Liege. Liege was a dangerous town because almost all the V-1rockets fired from Germany flew over the town and quite a few that were sabotaged would blow up over or near the town. Children were sent away to rural areas for their safety.

One such V bomb happened to come in our direction one night and landed about 30-50 meters from the house. This was sufficiently close to blow off all the slate from the rooftop and to deposit all the plasterwork onto the floor and to break all the windows. We awoke with a start and surmised that we were under attack. We all soon realized what had transpired and started laughing when we looked at the other fellows and saw them covered in white. We were lucky the thing did not land closer. That was a short night because we cleaned out the whole house and then we showered. We put some pieces of canvas over the windows to keep the house a bit warm.

We spent some time in the town of Verviers which is close to the Eupen and Malmedy regions of Belgium. The inhabitants were mostly German and supported the Nazi war effort. When the Battle of the Bulge began we were ordered to retreat to the town of Andennes. We lived in that town with Belgian families and that was one of our very best stops. This was now the middle of the winter months and we had not progressed much because the Battle of the Bulge and the fighting in the Ardennes Forest held up our progress. There were also some rivers for the armies to cross. Finally there was a lucky breakthrough at Remagen and the 1st Army was once again moving eastward.

We made a short stop at Aachen and it was there that I heard about the death of my brother Gilbert, who had been an infantryman in the 3rd Army. My brother, 5 years younger than me and was drafted when he was 18. I was already overseas. He did his basic training and assigned to the infantry. He must have been sent to France/ Germany as a replacement in some infantry division. Somewhere in the Ardennes Forest He was hit in the shoulder by mortar shrapnel. He was listed as missing in action for about a week, when his body was found and identified by his clothes and dog tags. His commanding officer notified my parents and it was my mother who wrote to me. He died on or about the 10th of February, one week before his 19th birthday.

His death saddened me especially because I knew what his loss meant for Mama and Papa. They never succeeded to fully digest it and make their peace with the fact. Regretfully, I felt that I had not known him sufficiently. When I left home for Rochester he was only a kid of 15. His passing allowed me to empathize more closely with those Israeli parents who lost their children at such a tender age. It is also another reason why I am so ready to give the Arabs land for peace.

I asked my commanding officer for leave to visit his grave as he had been buried in southern Belgium. I could not find the village near where the American graveyard had been established so I hitched back to Andennes as the father of the family I had stayed with was a railroad man and knew Belgium very well. He explained to me how to find the place and I did, took some photos and hitched back to my outfit which was now at Bonn. (The following year my Belgian family visited the grave and placed flowers there.) My brother had also been in the Shomer movement and I was quite certain that he would also come to Palestine after the war. Death puts a definite end to all plans.

We were not at Bonn very long and our next hop forward was at Kassel where we set up our trucks in an abandoned airplane factory. It was now April and spring was in the air and the end of the war was in sight. We were not far from where the Americans and the Russians met and our little platoon of 25 men had gone all the way and did its job so well that we received a ‘**merit**

badge'. The official history of the Ordnance Corps mentions specifically that the 158th Tire Repair Co. made ... "one of the most spectacular records of achievement in Ordnance Service". ("The Ordnance Department" On Beachhead and Battlefront" author: Lida Mayo, Chapter 15, "The Race Across France" page 283). I am very proud that this has been mentioned.

On May 8th 1945, the war against Germany was over. I and the whole platoon had so many points by which it was decided who goes back home first, that I was positive I would be back in the States in July. I was very mistaken; we remained for some time in Kassel but we did not have to work. I took a vehicle that same day and toured the surrounding countryside. Just by chance, I rode by a forced labor camp that the Americans had liberated a few days earlier. I stopped and approached the double barbed-wire fence. American soldiers guarded the camp so that the inmates could not leave nor could anyone enter. The camp was quarantined because there was disease and lice, etc. inside and because the inmates, the remnants of the Holocaust had to be protected from food.

This was my first encounter with the survivors of the Holocaust and it was definitely a shocking occurrence. I was looking at skeletons that looked more like robots than like human beings. They moved like robots, their expressions did not change; their eyes looked unfocused and inhuman. I could not attempt to imagine what they had gone through that caused them to look the way they looked. This was the moment of truth; we had heard rumors but did not really know what had happened to the Jews in the camps; now I knew and could never forget. There was nothing I could do for them then but perhaps that is why I was ready to volunteer for the Hagana ships later that year. I went back to the vehicle I was driving and returned to my platoon, but I never forgot what I saw then.

We soon left Kassel and returned as far as Aschaffenburg, on the Main River south of Frankfurt. We had absolutely nothing to do there and I spent most of my time in a canoe that I 'borrowed' from one of the houseboats. I have the feeling that the army did not know what to do with us. After one wasted week we were finally sent back to western France to a camp near Rheims. This was a sort of holding area and outfits were sent from this camp to the debarkation camps near Marseille or near Le Havre. Outfits came and left all through the months of June and July but we remained there. It dawned upon our Captain Stumblebum that we were to be shipped out to the Pacific somewhere so he hurriedly transferred himself out of our unit and our Lt. took command. The first thing he did was to make me a sergeant.

Then the USA dropped the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan gave up the fight. It is my firm opinion that the atom bomb killed less people than the continuation of the war would have killed and it definitely saved many American lives. The Japanese government had a committee that arrived in Washington, DC to discuss peace when they attacked Pearl Harbor. "They sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind." For my little platoon that event meant that the Pacific was out and Paris was in. We left that ugly camp and took up residence in a stadium on the outskirts of Paris. German POWs were in the soccer field and we were in the dressing rooms. It was our job to guard them. Luckily, having been made a sgt. I did not have to do guard duty and I was free to go into Paris and meet other soldier friends of mine who were in town, I also met the leader of the Hashomer movement in Paris, Leah Weintraub, and her little daughter

Monica. Her husband was in the French underground, the Maquis during the war, he had been caught and killed by the infamous Nazi, Klaus Barbi.

There is one thing that I must mention and that I think is very important; I do not hold the sons or the grandsons, etc. responsible for the sins of their fathers and at the same time I do not want others to blame me or the Jews for the sins of our fathers. I see no reason to blame some German kid that runs across my path for everything that the Nazis did. Life goes forward, not backward, and not in circles. Even during the war when I was in various German cities and saw ordinary middle aged people or children or whoever, **I could not and cannot bring myself to hate others in general.** The English had their Mosley and the Americans their McCarthy and matters could have taken a bad turn anywhere. Of course there were the SS and Gestapo and their like for whom I would have no mercy. **But the “ordinary man in the street” was caught up in something that was too difficult to handle once the oiled machine was set in motion.**

September came and went and towards the end of October we were finally shipped to the debarkation camp in Arles, north of Marseille. We shipped out on a large Italian passenger ship and I volunteered to be in charge of the cold storage room on the trip back to the States. I had all the ice cream and fruit and anything else I wanted at my fingertips, so it was a very pleasant voyage. I was officially discharged on the 10th of November, which also happened to be the **birthday of my former girlfriend, Aliza. I met her that day in NYC and said “Happy Birthday”.** I had been in the US Army for 3 years and 4 months. I had spent two years overseas and prior to that six months in California, so it was good to be home.

I think that I had matured quite a bit due to my army experience. I learned how to live with other people of different religions and of different opinions. I was less opinionated and less dogmatic than I had been. Maybe we can even say that I was a wiser individual, and I was tougher in the physical sense of the word. I had carried my share of the load and I could walk or run for miles. I had done all that was demanded of me in the army and I feel that I earned my five battle stars even if I was not the one who shot back at the enemy. More than once it was I that had been shot at, or strafed or bombed or shelled. Now it was all over and the problem was: How to get to Palestine?

Chapter 3: The Voyage, Aliya Bet

I have written about my voyage with the Hagana Ship Wedgwood in the Palyam site (palyam.org) but this is neither a copy or similar, although it was the very same voyage. At a different stage in time one may regard events in an altogether different manner. I had returned to the USA on the 10th November 1945 and spent the next few weeks reacquainting myself with my family and with my friends in the Shomer movement. About 20-25 of them were living in a commune in a house on Creston Ave. not far from my own home. It was just a short walk or bus ride. We were not youngsters any more and we were all anxious to continue with our lives in Palestine. The problem was: How do we overcome the British blockade?

The British had established a **small monthly quota for Jewish immigration in a “White Paper”** issued in 1939. The object of the foreign office was not to disturb the balance between the Arab

and Jewish population. This was a matter that the Jewish institutions and the Jews in Palestine could not accept, in the face of the hundreds of thousands of survivors of the Holocaust who had nowhere else to go in the whole wide world. All countries had shut their gates (and some were more eager to absorb Germans and Hungarians than Jews). Europe itself was a mass graveyard that had buried their loved ones and stolen their homes and properties. The Jews of Palestine (known as: The Yishuv) was the only group that wanted them and decided that our Allies of yesterday were today's enemies. The Histadrut and the Hagana, formed the "Mosad for Aliya Bet" which coordinated the work of the volunteers and those mobilized from the Jewish Brigade and the Palmach and Palyam. David Ben Gurion, the Director of the Histadrut (The Jewish Labor Federation) put Shaul Avigur in charge of the operation and Shaul left for Europe and worked from Paris most of the time.

Aliya Bet (illegal immigration) was a complicated affair. Men from Palestine went to the large cities of Eastern Europe (Vienna, Warsaw, Kiev, etc) where the Joint Distribution Comm. had set up camps where they housed, clothed and fed the survivors. Many of these were very willing to follow the young Israelis who said they would lead them to various port cities of the Mediterranean and from there to Palestine. For very many this was the only road to a future of any sort. With that in mind, and after all the suffering that they had gone through at the hands of the Nazis, they were ready and willing to make this long and difficult journey. They had no passports and no IDs of any kind, but they put their trust in these young Israelis who had left their homes and their jobs or their studies in order to help their fellow Jews. The survivors left for the Mediterranean in small or large contingents and crossed many borders, enduring untold hardships, but tens of thousands succeeded in reaching Bari, Taranto, Marseille, Constanza and more. In these coastal towns there were other members of the Mosad, men and women, who set up camps in which to house and feed, educate and care for the orphans and others. The survivors had to be re-educated to becoming as normal human beings as was possible in order to prepare them for their future. This was a tremendous job. The Palyam men refit the ships that were to carry them to the Promised Land. These ships were at first purchased or leased from European countries but later on the Hagana came to the USA and with the help of some wealthy Jews larger and better ships were purchased that carried thousands of survivors, instead of hundreds. The ships that came from the USA were manned by Palyamniks and volunteers, many of them had been former soldiers in the Allied armies.

I pause in my narration to say a few words of unabashed admiration about these young Israeli men and women. They received no salary, they received living expenses. They received no glory, they worked under aliases. They had left homes and families behind for an indefinite period. With their experience and leadership abilities they became the future high officers and commanders of the Israeli Navy and the IDF. They were, are and will be always our true and unknown heroes. The immensity of their contribution to Israeli independence has never been fully recognized. I feel very proud to have been associated with their effort for even a short time, but I feel like a midget when standing alongside them.

We in our commune in The Bronx had obtained passports and visas, seaman's cards so that we could work on merchant ships and certificates to attend the Haifa Technion as students. Some of the girls even managed to receive bona-fide certificates. There was no doubt that all of us had

taken action to leave somehow. It was now December 1945 and the shlichah (emissary) of our movement in NYC, Yona Golan came to visit our commune. She had something very urgent and secret to tell us. The Hagana in the USA was at that time looking for sailors to man two Canadian corvettes it had bought which were surplus navy equipment now that the WW II had ended. She asked for volunteers and she explained that we would be departing the USA illegally and without our ID or any identification. It was important that the Police, FBI and the British do not know that these ships sailed from the USA. They were to be the first and more were to follow.

Five of us volunteered; Mordecai Blockman (later Barkan), Menachem Moskowitz (later Peretz), Zeev Rauff, Dov Seligman (later Smilanski) and I, Aryeh (Leon) Malkin. Blocky and Menachem were leaving their wives behind. They both had medical discharges and Menachem did not serve in the army for reasons of health and Blocky was discharged not long after he was drafted. Dov served in the air force on the island of Kwajalein, Zeev was in the paymaster's corps and I had served with the First Army in England and France.

This was the beginning of the next important chapter in my life, the voyage to Palestine. Each day we left our commune in The Bronx at about 05:30 and subways to the southern tip of Manhattan. We boarded the ferry to Staten Island and from the ferry we took a bus to the shipyard. This was about a 2 hour trip; we worked till about five in the evening and were back in the commune between 19:30 – 20:00. We did not talk about what we were doing in the commune. One day in March we were called down to the Zionist Org. offices in Manhattan and sworn in as members of the Hagana by none other than Yaakov Dori (The commander of the Hagana and later the first Chief of Staff of the IDF). Obviously, we were almost ready to leave and at this point I requested special permission to tell my parents (my father was recovering from a severe heart attack and one son had already been taken from them).

It was with great trepidation that I faced my parents one night before they had gone to bed and I told them that I had something extremely important to discuss with them. They sat up in bed and I sat down next to them and spilled everything right out directly. I said that I had been working on a Hagana ship for months which was soon to leave for Europe, pick up survivors of the Holocaust, and try to get them to Palestine despite the British blockade. I did not know when they would hear again from me but I would write and they would know it was me as soon as I could do so.

We sat silently regarding one another and it was my father who broke the silence: "My son", he said, "if I was your age and in your position, that is exactly what I would want to do. You have my blessing and my full support." My mother cried silently and added, "I have known all my life that the day would come and you would leave for Palestine. Take good care of yourself, son, and write often." We continued to sit in silence, but we felt as close as parents and child could possibly feel. I think they were the most marvelous people in the world. I kissed them goodnight and that was actually the moment we parted although we did not leave NYC until several days later.

On 1st April 1946 the Beauharnois sailed from the port of NY, destination unknown. The Beauharnois was in the 900 – 1000 ton class of small destroyers, as was her sister ship, the Norsyd. Both had been sold minus their armament and as we carried very little ballast they sat high in the water and rocked and rolled and were a bit difficult to handle. The Norsyd sat in port for a few more days and then took off in our wake. While we had been in the shipyard both crews had not been chosen and everyone worked on both vessels. Only on the day that the Beauharnois left was its crew chosen.

Blocky, Dov, Zeev and I sailed and Menachem was left behind for the Norsyd. We were chosen to be the deck gang and two members of Habonim joined us on deck. The rest worked as the engine gang. Each gang worked a four hour shift; Zeev and I worked from 12 M - 04:00 AM and from 12:00 noon – 16:00 PM. Dov and Blocky worked the 04:00 - 08:00 and the 16:00 – 20:00 shift. The third shift belonged to the fellows from Habonim. During our 4 hour shift, when we were out in the open sea, one person stood watch for two hours and the other was at the helm. After two hours we switched, the helmsman went on watch and the watchman took the helm. An officer was present on the bridge with each watch and our officer was invariably the First Mate, Hans Flagler.

Hans and our captain, Jerry Lichtman were close friends and were veteran sailors on the banana run to South America and the Caribbean. They were both wobblies (anarchists) and friends of Yoel Rohr, an artist who had been a founder of Kfar Menachem. All he had to tell them was that we were out to screw the British and that was sufficient reason for them to help us out. Flagler was an excellent navigator and intelligent and mild-mannered as an individual. Jerry was more the rough, tough sailor who had **been a boxer at one point in his career and had also been Trotsky's bodyguard**. He has been described as a drunk by Yehuda Arazi and others and I think that is a gross mistake and an unwarranted smear. Arazi never boarded our ship anywhere and never met Jerry personally. I, who in due time became the helmsman, never saw Jerry drunk on the bridge. The worse that could be said of him is that he liked chewing tobacco, and was never seen without his mouth working away at a plug. (I had made it a point of honor to learn how to chew tobacco in the army, so when he offered a plug to the deck crew Blocky and Dov and I took a bite. I chewed and spit like a veteran but Blocky and Dov turned green and threw up.)

I had very little to do with the other officers, Shalom Shwartz an Israeli Palyamnik was on another shift and the radio operator was unknown to me at the time. The Chief Engineer was a very experienced Russian Jew, Kolomeitzov, and he definitely enjoyed his vodka. He worked better with it than without it. When I recall these officers and crew, I have the feeling that we were the first all-Jewish crew in 2000 years. I did not get to know too many of the Habonim boys in the engine gang both because we worked and slept when we were off duty and the time went by rather quickly. I know that some of them joined Maayan Baruch and Kfar Blum, but most returned to the States when the War of Independence was over. I do wish to point out however, that we were a very unusual gang of sailors and we have been much demeaned in other publications (i.e. a publication by Arik Kelman and others). We were not ordinary sailors and we had no sailing experience. We were first and foremost members of Zionist Youth Movements. Although many of us had been in the army very few men smoked and all drank very little alcohol. None of us did any business or monkey-business by selling anything on the black market

anywhere. None frequented bars and pubs and absolutely no one went to a whorehouse. I cannot vouch for any of the crews but the Beauharnois and Norsyd and I know nothing and say nothing about other crews.

As I look back now at that voyage across the Atlantic I find it strange that we rarely talked about the job that lay ahead of us. I think that perhaps we did not have sufficient information about how and what we were to do. We were busy with the ship which gave us a good deal of trouble. One day we rolled about in the ocean with absolutely no control over the ship and several days later we pulled in to the port of Ponta Delgada in the Azores and spent 10 days repairing what had to be repaired. While there we met the only Jew who lived on the island; he was a rabbi from Lithuania and he begged us to take him along. He promised to do any work we demanded of him and he kept his promise. He worked in the galley cooking or washing from that moment until we arrived in Haifa.

Our stop in the Azores left me with a peculiar feeling of unease. The islands are beautiful on the one hand, and the climate and soil excellent. Everything grew well and bountifully and every square cm. was owned by men in Lisbon. The islands inhabitants were no more than poor serfs who handed over all their produce to the owners and were left with barely enough to keep them alive. I was glad to leave it all behind.

We were flying a Panamanian flag and had Panamanian papers. Officially, we were going to Alexandria to take aboard a load of wheat, or some such story. At any rate, when we arrived at the Rock of Gibraltar we asked for and were given fuel and we crossed over into the Mediterranean Sea. We had had a rough and stormy passage in the Atlantic whereas the Med was in this season as smooth as glass. I think it had taken almost a month to get to Gibraltar. Now the sun shone, the sea was calm and we felt like veteran sailors approaching the end of a long voyage.

Only now was the captain informed that we were bound for Genoa, on the west coast of Italy. Hans, our navigator plotted the course and we sailed eastwards at about 15 knots. We arrived at that port after 6-7 days of smooth sailing and once again we were in troubled post-war Europe, having completed the first leg of our journey. We had not been in port for an hour when we received further orders from Tel Aviv to leave immediately and to head for Savona. It seems there were too many British eyes on the outlook for us in Genoa, so we left the port before we had tried to dock the vessel and steamed about 30 km north to the small port of Savona. Here we docked at what seemed to be the center of the town, and it was here that our Palyam commander, Berchik came aboard with a large gang of Italian workmen.

We were warned not tell anyone what our true goal was and the less we said in general, so much the better. We were Jews but we knew nothing of Palestine and we were headed for Egypt. As I had mentioned previously, others have written about us selling cigarettes on the black market, drinking in bars and who knows what. Nothing can be further from the truth; we were the model of good behavior. We received no salary and we had no credit cards and we had no possessions to sell even if we had wanted to do so. **We were not 'sailors in a foreign port', we were Shomrim and Habonim** working for the Hagana and Palyam, and we had a mission to accomplish.

Actually, at this point we were in remission and not mission because the Italian carpenters and workmen took over the remodeling of the ship so that we would be able to pack in as many survivors as possible. They enclosed the whole stern of the ship and added a few hundred bunks there. All the holds had several tiers of bunks. Toilets had to be added and the air conditioning had to be improved. The galley had to be able to prepare food for more than one thousand people. The whole job required organization and planning. The most important part was that played by the survivors! These poor people had gone through hell for years; yet they were ready to endure a voyage under conditions which were not fit for animals in order to rebuild their lives, their futures.

I thought also of the Palyamniks, Berchik and Miri (not their true names) and the others backing them up who I never met and never knew, but they were all part of the Mosad for Aliya Bet. They had left their families somewhere in Palestine and were working incognito for the good of their fellow Jews. What a responsibility they had taken upon themselves! They were about my age or younger. There was no money to be made in this job, and no glory; **and no one said: "Thank you" when the job was completed. No one has put the matter more succinctly than one of the Palyamniks himself, Yochai ben Nun (future Commander of the Israeli Navy and founder of the famous 13th Fleet {Israeli Seals}): "We did what had to be done at that time."**

I feel very humble when I take it upon myself to talk about these men. Most of them are gone and all but forgotten. Some remain – old, sometimes embittered, all with the human failings of ordinary people. They were there when it counted and they did their job. Those with the benefit of hindsight who are eager to criticize and find fault would do well to think twice and ask themselves: What have they done for their fellow Jews? ...

We spent a number of weeks in Savona while the vessel was being prepared and somewhere in the middle of June we were ready to sail. It was dusk and all the workers departed. Berchik was on the bridge, I was at the helm and an Italian pilot came on board. We headed out and south but within a half hour we were back north headed for Ponta del Vado. This was a very small fishing boat pier several km north of Savona. Since it took a very long time to tie up to the pier much has been written about this and almost everything is completely wrong, the aim being to show how good Arazi was and how bad Berchik and Jerry were. In fact, the Italian pilot was giving the orders about 90 % of that night. Finally it was Berchik who took over and tied up. Jerry was not drunk and not in the picture.

Having tied the vessel firmly the survivors climbed aboard in the dark of night and we directed them with a minimum of talking to fill up the holds one after the other. This part went very smoothly and by dawn almost everyone was aboard the ship. When there were still about 50 survivors, Arazi and Sereni, and the American journalist I F Stone (invited to come along for the ride by the Hagana) and several Palyamniks on shore, a jeep with carabinieri came along and wanted to quarantine the vessel.

IF Stone thought he could convince them to leave us alone but 2 of the policemen took him off to the nearest jail and 2 remained to deal with us. At the jail IF Stone showed his passport and journalist papers to the judge and the judge had him returned to the beach. In the meantime the

Hagana people convinced the policemen to allow the rest of the survivors to board the ship so that they could get some food and drink. When all were on board Berchik acted immediately (he and Arazi disliked each other immensely) and he cut the lines and we were soon out at sea. **The Hagana people and the carabinieri were taken by surprise and poor IF Stone stood at the water's edge shouting, "Wait for me."** Of course there was no turning back and the journalist was told that he would be taken to Marseille and would board the sister ship, the Norsyd. (That is exactly what happened several weeks later and he wrote about that voyage in the book, "Underground to Palestine".)

We made for the open sea and headed south. I had been at the helm for more than twelve hours. I repeat and am ready to swear in court that only the Italian pilot and Berchik gave the orders for berthing the vessel at the pier, the pilot then left the ship and Berchik ordered the departure. Jerry was not on the bridge. Berchik cut our lines with a hatchet and I heard that this upset Arazi very much, but as I never left the ship that is only hearsay.

Our voyage from Italy to the coast of Palestine was smooth and pleasant. The survivors on board were cooperative and not too many were seasick. Most of the survivors came from Poland but there was a large minority from Saloniki. The Greeks were in better condition health wise and the voyage was easier for them. The dislike between the Poles and the Greeks was mutual but there was no trouble. We were also lucky in that we had a group of about 25 Russian partisans and they volunteered to help give out the food and to maintain order and most important – they kept the morale high with their singing and good humor.

I had one especially difficult day when Berchik ordered me (we all chipped and painted the vessel **but I was considered the 'master painter'**) to wipe out the name Beauharnois and to put in some other name. **A boatswain's chair was thrown over the side of the ship, I had a rope tied across my chest which Dov wrapped around the railing several times and held tight, I sat on that little piece of wood with a can of paint in one hand and a small brush in the other.** The chair swung towards and away from the prow of the ship and each time it swung in I would dab. This was a slow and tedious, not very pleasant job. When the port side was finished I went to starboard and repeated the whole operation. That finished, I still had the stern to take care of. That was a long, tough day, believe me.

I must say that there was very little contact between the crew and the survivors and that is what Berchik wanted. On all the other voyages the crew had been a foreign crew that had been leased with the vessel and the captain. We were not foreigners; we were Jewish volunteers doing everything willingly (and without pay). Somehow, I think he failed to appreciate that, and we never brought that to his attention. There was some chemistry missing somewhere.

The evening before we planned to reach Haifa or somewhere in its vicinity, we heard a plane circling overhead. The British radar had picked us up and was ready and waiting. We were in international waters but approached shore towards dawn. At dawn a shot was fired across our **bow and we were informed via megaphone that we were now prisoners of His (or Her) Majesty's Royal Navy.** We were also informed by the Hagana not to offer any resistance because we were to be brought to the Atlit Detention Camp near Haifa and sooner or later we would be given

certificates for legal entry. Berchik ordered the crew not to speak English, only Yiddish or silence, and to mingle with the survivors. The helm was made fast, the Palyamniks disappeared and we were to choose new names and say only that we were Polish Jews coming to our Homeland.

A British destroyer, (one of three that surrounded us) tied up alongside and Marines prepared to board us. Someone had taken down the Panama flag and the Star of David took its place. That acted as a signal and everyone on our ship, now renamed the “Hagana Ship Josiah Wedgwood” burst out singing Hatikvah. This was spontaneous and it was from the heart. The Marines stood at attention and waited until the song was over. We were towed into Haifa harbor and transferred immediately to buses. I looked around and there was not a Palyamnik in sight. We were driven to Atlit and housed in tents, 25 men or women to each tent.

To the best of my knowledge, none of the American crew was discovered and none of the Palyamniks. (It was only many years later that I discovered what happened to them and how Berchik slipped through their fingers and went to his home in Kibbutz Ramat Hashofet for a short visit before leaving Palestine again. There was another ship and more survivors waiting for him in Europe. The Palyamniks had built a stowaway in which they remained for a day or two. A Jewish clean-up crew came aboard and did its job; they then freed the men, gave them a change of clothes and mops and the Palyamniks left the ship as members of the clean-up squad. Berchik found a bus driver he knew from Kibbutz Ein Hashofet. The driver gave him the wheel and walked to the exit gate. When the bus was full Berchik drove to the gate, gave the bus back to its driver and he took a bus to his kibbutz.)

Atlit was a very interesting chapter in itself because when the survivors were placed in their previous condition of living behind wires they reverted to some degree to old habits which we thought they had left behind and forgotten. Firstly, we were put into tents because we had come I on Black Saturday. On that day all the leaders of the Yishuv were arrested and about 3000 kibbutznikim as well. Several kibbutzim were literally torn apart and roads and paths and houses were torn apart in a search for slicks (places where illegal weapons were hidden). The leaders of the Yishuv were held in camps, as were the kibbutznikim and that is why we were in tents. These tropical tents were double lined but in about five minutes the survivors had ripped the inner lining completely apart and it disappeared. It seems that the material was necessary for the coming winter's shoes.

It took about one week to check on the kibbutznikim and send them back home. We were then able to transfer to the barracks. First there was a generous dose of DDT and then a shower which left one feels degraded but not clean. The dining hall barracks were off to one side and surrounded by barbed wire. At mealtimes the gates were thrown open and the survivors piled in. They entered via the front and rear doors and climbed through the windows; it was a stampede. A small basket of bread or rolls had been placed on the tables. These had been emptied and the food hidden somewhere; all waited patiently until the baskets were refilled and we proceeded with the meal. As the say, it seems that old habits die hard.

We, the four from the Bronx spent almost a month at Atlit. We were then told that it was our turn to unload the bread. We met near the kitchen and when the little panel truck showed up we

unloaded the big baskets of bread onto a table and carried the baskets back into the truck. Someone closed the doors behind us and we were moving – out of the camp. Our next stop was the Carmeliya Hotel on the slopes of Mt. Carmel in Haifa. We were given lovely rooms and had a good shower and an excellent meal, but we discovered that sleeping on a good bed with a good mattress was all but impossible. We threw our blankets on the floor and slept like babies.

On the following day we were given bus tickets to Kibbutz Mishmar Haemek where the other members of our group were gathering and which was to be our gala introduction to kibbutz life. **The voyage and the Great War and our period of ‘growing up’** were the distant past and we were now to embark on our long-awaited **future of building a kibbutz...**