

**Avi (Lifshitz) Livney**

Volunteer from the USA on the "Exodus 1947"

**This is the Way it Was**

Born April 26 1927 in New York City, USA. Served in the Hospital Corps, US Navy, 1945-46. Served in the Mosad for Aliya Bet from January 1947 to 1948. Joined the President Warfield ("Exodus 1947") in Baltimore in January as ship's purser/ pharmacist. Two weeks later, in a ceremony on the ship's deck, the entire crew was sworn in to the Hagana by Yaakov Dori (Dostrovsky). Six months later we were in a night-time naval engagement against six British destroyers and a light cruiser. I was stunned by the sight of British marines actually gassing and clubbing unarmed men, women and children, the remnant of our people, whose only crime was that they were trying to go home. I could only think that the people doing the gassing and clubbing (and killing) were the same people that I had so greatly admired during England's dark days of the early 1940's. What had happened to the fair play learned on the playing fields of Eton?

After our return to Port de Bouc from Palestine, I was instructed to get off the "Ocean Vigour" (one of the three British prison ships), and joined the "Pan York" (Kibbutz Galuyot) in Marseilles. Sailed to Safi, Morocco and up to Brest, where we were told of the sabotage bombing of the "Pan Crescent" (Atzmaut) in Venice. Three of us were sent there by way of Paris, Marseilles and crossed into Italy by rowboat in the middle of the night, from Monte Carlo to Ventimiglia, and traveled on to Milan. Under Berchik Magen (Lifshitz) and with several others, we continued to Venice and the "Pan Crescent", which was in drydock. We remained with the ship and once repairs were completed, sailed down the Adriatic and on to Rumania, arriving in Constanza October 1<sup>st</sup>. The "Pan York" arrived from France one month later and both ships remained in Constanza until the end of December, when both of them sailed to together to Burgas, Bulgaria and began loading Ma'apilim.

As on the "Exodus" most of my duties were again in the medical area. We sailed south, cleared Turkish waters, were caught by a flotilla of British warships and convoyed straight to Cyprus, arriving New Year's Day, 1948. Getting off the Pan York in Cyprus, Gedda Shochat and Dave Lowenthal were immediately caught by the British, and getting off the "Pan Crescent", Teddy Vardi (Rosenfeld) and I were also caught. Dave and Teddy had been part of the "Exodus" crew. When we saw Gedda and Dave several days later, both of them showed signs of beatings. Teddy and I spent a night in a jail cell of the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry. The next day we were interrogated several times individually (no beatings) and ultimately sent to the winter camps at Xyloimbou. We found Dave and Gedda , and under Gedda's lead, cut through the fences

and escaped in the middle of the night, made our way – forty km – to the camps at Kraolos, and cut our way in. twenty four hours later the four of us plus Berchik, Grisha Sheinkman and several others, escaped through a tunnel under the camp fences, and were picked up by a fishing boat and arrived in Caesarea the following night (January 13, 1948).

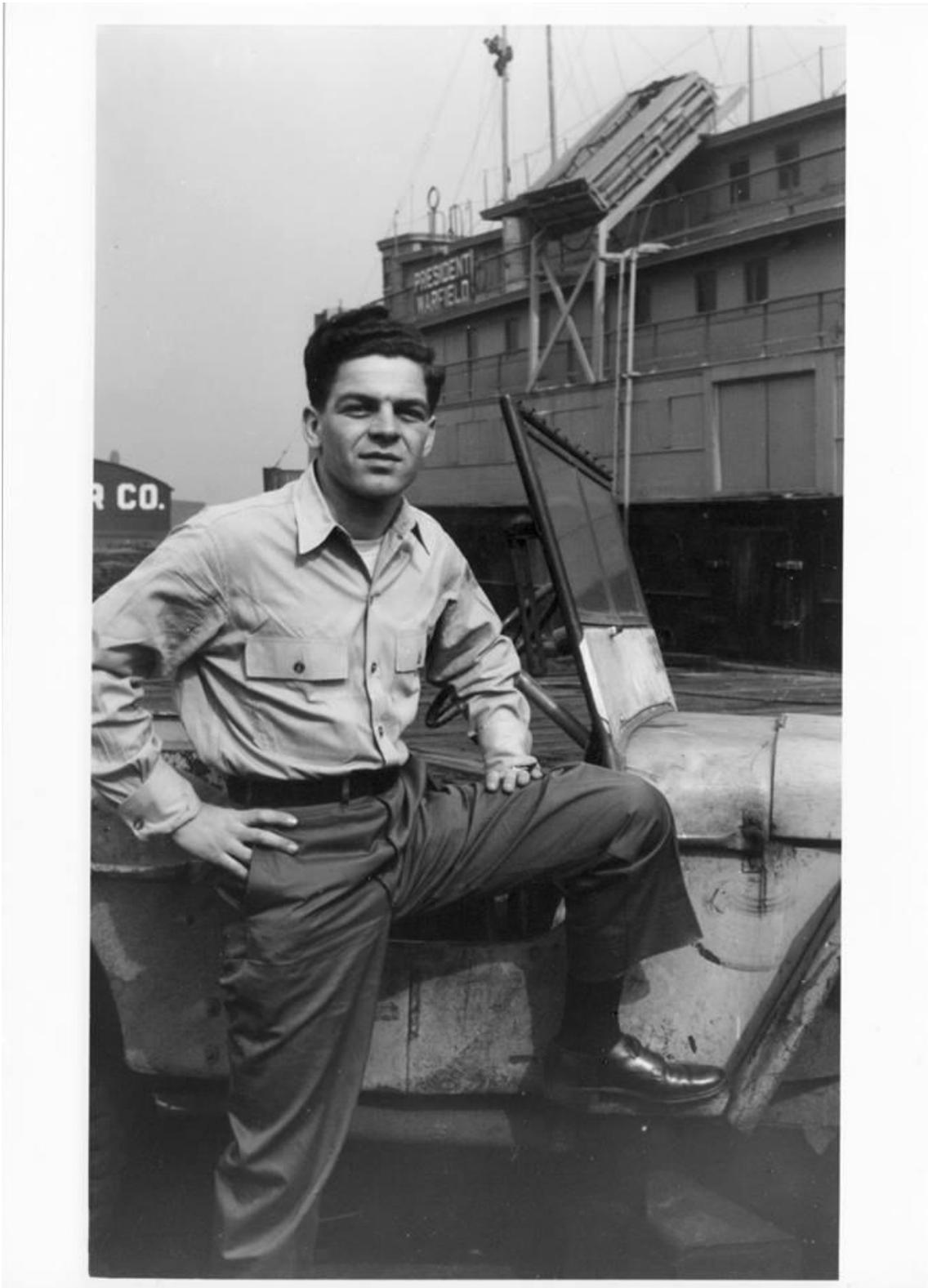
Two weeks later I joined the American garin at Kibbutz Ein Hashofet, and during the summer, many of us were sent to Kibbutz Shaar Hagolan in the Jordan Valley, where we trained until January 1949, when we went up to the Lebanese border and founded Kibbutz Sasa.

I left the kibbutz early in 1952, did public relations work for the Palestine Economic Corporation in Haifa, moved to Jerusalem and spent a year at the Hebrew University, majoring in economics. Married by this time to a girl from Philadelphia, we returned to the US in the fall of 1953, finished a BS degree at New York University, and did graduate work at Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. Twenty years later, received a BA in Art from Trenton State College. For many years was an executive with a company of builder-owners of office buildings and hotels in New York. The last three years, before returning to Israel in 1977, worked at the State House in Trenton, New Jersey. Was responsible for the insurance matters of State government.

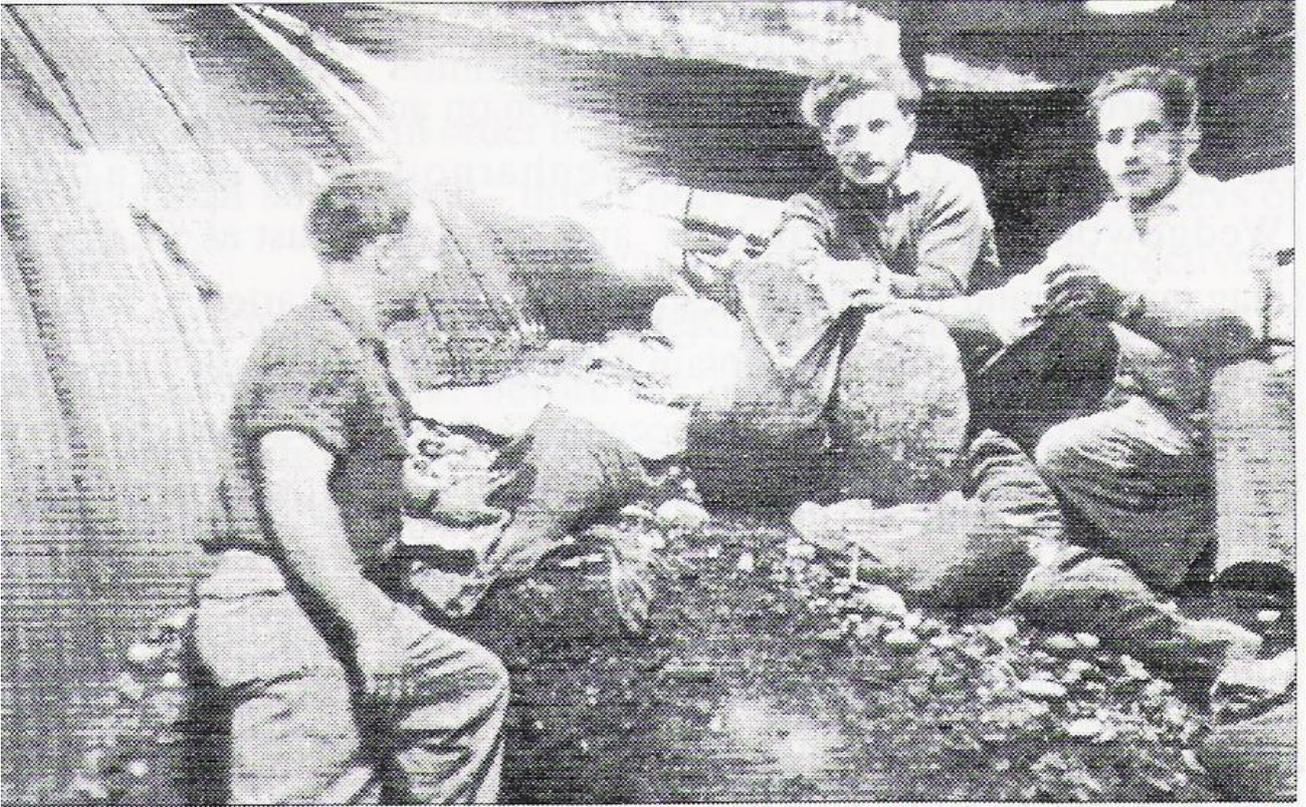
Back in Israel, I am a member of a kibbutz, a volunteer guide at the Diaspora Museum (Beit Hatfutzot), and audit course in art history and archaeology at Tel Aviv University. We also have a busy family life with three of our four children living in Israel. I am also able to point to grandchildren and say that for the first time in 2000 years we have members of our family who have been born in Jerusalem. Although I was of the first generation of our family born in America, both of my parents came to the U.S. as small children at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. My father's family came from Minsk and Bobruisk in Byelorussia, and my mother's family came from Truchenbrod in the Ukraine. My mother's family came led by my great-grandmother and settled in a small town in Connecticut called Collinsville. They were the only Jewish family in town and ran a general store. Later the family separated and some members moved to Boston and the rest to New York.

I was born in the Jewish Maternity Hospital in Manhattan (an institution which no longer exists). Childhood memories in Brooklyn are of Jewish neighborhoods (my great-grandmother lived across the street). Jewish friends, and schools where most of the pupils were Jewish, even if most of the teachers were not. Although school was open during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, most of the classrooms were empty on those days. At 7 years of age I was snatched into Hashomer Hadati, at twelve I was a boy scout and at 15 I discovered Hashomer Hatzair. I have truly had a most fortunate life, and my first meeting with Ma'apilim was not a meeting with strangers, but rather with family. I have said on more than one occasion that I thank all those who gave me the opportunity to serve in the Aliya Bet. We could have done no less. As a postscript, about 15 years ago my youngest child, then a brand new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. in the IDF came to me

and said, "Dad, I was born 40 years too late!" Today, she is a mother and kibbutznik in the Jordan Valley.



Avi Livney in front of "President Warfield" – the Exodus 1947



Excavation of tunnels for smuggling the detained from the camps in  
Cyprus