

Almog, Yosef (Pinchuk) “Yoske”

Born in 1923 in Proszciovce, Poland

Made Aliya in 1936

Joined the Palmach in 1942, the Palyam in 1943

Underground alias: “Oranov”

This is the Way it Was**History and Chronology:**

I was born in a small town near Krakow, Poland, to a Zionist-oriented family, and was active in the Hashomer Hatzair Youth Org. from a very young age. My parents, who were from the petit bourgeois class, were members of the Oved movement and among the founders of our town's Tarbut School, in which I studied. It was at this school that I gained my knowledge of Zionism, modern Jewish history and the Land of Israel. That was in addition to studies in the official Polish school. In 1936, all six members of my family made Aliya to Palestine and settled in Tel Aviv.

I completed my studies in the school for children of workers, and my secondary and technical education at the Montefiore School. In 1938, while I was in the Noar Oved movement, I joined the Hagana in the framework of the Gadna and the following year entered the sea branch of Hapoel Tel Aviv. In 1939 I was accepted into the course for nautical instructors (in the company of others such as Avraham Meron, Miloh Meir, and David Geva (all of blessed memory) and Tzvi Shor, Yehuda Shinitsky, and Moka Limon. Shmuel Tankus (a future commander of the Israeli Navy) was the instructor.

From the Palmach to the Navy:

In 1942, I joined the Palmach and was accepted into the second course for small boat commanders. This was at Caesarea in April 1943 and was under the command of Yankale Salomon. In January 1945 I entered into the first course for officers which was at the naval school in Haifa and under the aegis of the Technion. This course was led by Shmulik Tankus and Berchik (Dov Magen). When the course was over I began my work in Aliya Bet.

In April 1948, after arrival with “Nachshon”, I joined the new Israeli Navy.

From “Tiger Hill” to “The Jewish State”, Memoirs:

It was the First of September 1939, a Friday, and the Tel Aviv shoreline was packed with people. A group of us kids from the Noar Oved were having an activity of some sort near the “Red House,” not far from the shore in the northern part of the city. At about 2100 hours a ship appears just a short distance from the shore with all its lights blazing. The ship came into shore and started to unload its passengers. Hundreds of people formed a crowd to watch this absorbing spectacle. The bow of the ship was dug into the sand and some people disembarked by themselves and made their way to shore while others were assisted. Then along came the British Police and took the situation in hand. It was only on the following day, during an activity on the Yarkon River, that we

were told about the incident of the previous day and the role of our instructors Shmulik Tankus, Berchik, Yaakov Agiov, Catriel Yaffe, Mordechai Lischinski, Menashe Baruch and others. Davidka Nameri wrote about them and called them “the Yarkon Boys”.

That ship had been the “Tiger Hill” and it carried 1,417 immigrants. This whole event stuck in my mind and influenced me to join the Palmach and take part in Aliya Bet activities. When the course for naval officers was over I sailed for a while on the “Amos” and later, took part in unloading immigrants at Caesarea.

22nd November 1945 – the Night of the “Berl Katznelson”:

When the immigrants had been helped off the ship at Shefayim, a British destroyer caught the last two small boat loads of immigrants while still in the water. I was in charge of one of these boats. All of us were arrested and incarcerated at the Latrun prison camp. For me and for most of the other Palyamniks, this was our first meeting with the remnant of the Holocaust. This was what was left of the Jews of Greece who survived the death camps. As Alterman wrote: “They carried the nation on their shoulders” . That is exactly how it was and how we felt.

In 1946 I was sent to the Diaspora with false papers. I arrived at the St. Jerome camp near Marseilles. This was the center of the Mosad for Aliya Bet work in France. I was added to the group that prepared ships for carrying the immigrants and was led by Gideon Shochat. Between preparing one ship and another, I was also in charge of several camps in the south of France. One was a camp of young people who had survived the death camps, and another had 300 people, mostly young families from Russia and Poland, also remnants of the Holocaust. They were scheduled to leave on the “Theodore Herzl”.

My meeting with these young people and with these families was traumatic and difficult. These Olim regarded us as their saviors. The slightest word we uttered was obeyed immediately. The job of managing a camp added to my self-confidence and was good preparation for commanding a ship afterwards. In Marseilles I met some friends from boyhood days who were also active in jobs similar to what I was doing and that was a pleasant surprise.

On 20th May 1947 I was told by Shmarya Tzameret, who was in charge of all activities in France, that on the 22 of May a ship was to arrive at Port de Bouc. This ship was called the “Northland” and had a crew of Jewish American volunteers. The ship was to sail to the Baltic and take on immigrants from Poland. I was appointed to command that ship. Shmulik Haram was to be my second in command together with Avraham Meron who was also an engineer. Aharon Michaeli and Ptachya Faig were the Gideonim (they were Olim who had volunteered and taken a radio course in Marseilles). The “Northland” had been an ice-breaker in the US Coast Guard. The ship arrived in port as scheduled and

the following day we went aboard and were introduced to the captain and the crew.

We received orders to leave port as soon as all preparatory work was done, and to sail to Bayonne on the west coast of France, in the Bay of Biscay. Our aim was to prepare the ship to take passengers in a small port that would not attract the attention of British intelligence. Our agent in Bayonne would make contact between us and the shipyard that was to do the work on the ship. The contact between us and the crew of American volunteers was very good. One of them I had met previously on the "Chaim Arlosoroff" when he was navigational officer on that ship in Marseilles.

On June 2nd 1947 we were on our way and arrived at Bayonne on June 12th. We met the engineer and the shipyard workers and they went about their job immediately. About a week later, another American ship arrived at Bayonne and this was the "Paducah" code named "Angel". The preparatory work on the "Angel" was also to be done by the same shipyard. The commander of "Angel" was to be Moka Limon and he arrived shortly after the ship's arrival. The crews of the two ships, the American volunteers and the Palyamnikim all worked together and got along very well. The chapter of "The Exodus" caused a change in plans for the "Northland".

When "The Exodus" was returned to Europe, the British government declared that from then on any illegal immigrant ship caught would be sent back to the country from which the ship had come. Following that announcement, the Mosad for Aliya Bet reached an agreement with the Romanian government (with the agreement of the Soviet Union as well), to allow 4000 Romanian Jews to leave Rumania and to sail to Palestine from Bulgaria. The "Northland" and the "Angel" were sent to the Black Sea, to the port of Burgas, Bulgaria in order to load passengers.

"The Angel" left on the 4th of August and the "Northland" on the 28th of that month and they both sailed from Bayonne to Burgas. We passed through the Straits of Gibraltar on the 3rd of September and as soon as we entered the Mediterranean we were met by a British destroyer that accompanied us for 2,000 miles, from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles. The British studied us and the ship all during the voyage, which was a very pleasant one during that season of the year. The voyage in the Bay of Biscay and along the Portuguese coast had been a very stormy one. Due to the nature and composition of the crew the spoken language on the ship was English.

When we entered the Dardanelles the British left us and we continued through the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus to the Black Sea. On September 14th we anchored near the port of Burgas until we received permission to enter the port. A pilot had to direct us into the port because it was surrounded by a minefield.

On the night of September 22 we started loading immigrants onto our ship. They got off the train that brought them from Romania and moved directly onto the ship. Romanian and Bulgarian guards kept the area of the pier sealed. This was a very moving scene for all of us Israelis and for the American crewmen. We left port the following morning and anchored some distance offshore where we waited for three days until the "Angel" also finished loading, left port and joined us. Together, we started on our journey to Palestine.

At this juncture we had two surprises: 1. – As we were loading the passengers onto the Northland it turned out that there were 150 babies that were carried by their mothers in little wicker baskets onto the ship. We housed them all in what we had designated as the hospital ward, and their mothers slept not far from them so that they could take care of them during the voyage. 2.- it seems that about 80 young children of about 14 years of age had been left on the shore because there had not been room for them on the "Angel". These were brought out to us and loaded onto the "Northland". We now carried 2,664 Olim.

We sailed past the minefield and through the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles together with the Angel, and as we entered into the Aegean Sea we found two British destroyers waiting to join us. The pilots left our ships and we were on our own, except for the company of the two destroyers. The fact that we were carrying the remnants of the Holocaust to the land of Israel was an emotional experience for the whole crew, and we felt that way up to the very end of the voyage.

The sea was calm with a slight gentle breeze. The skies were partly covered with feathery and wooly clouds through which the sun peeked from time to time, This warmed the immigrants sitting on deck. The time we had spent outside the port waiting for our sister ship had been spent in organizing our daily life and in preparation for confrontation, if necessary, with the British. As we approached Haifa we changed the names of the ships to their Hagana names, as instructed by headquarters in Tel Aviv. The "Angel" became Hagana ship "Geula" and the "Northland" became "The Jewish State" These names were painted in large letters on the bridges of the ships, in English and in Hebrew.

On the morning of the 2nd of October, while approaching the shores of Palestine we split. The "Geula" made off in the direction of Haifa, and we on the "Northland" made for Tel Aviv. Soon, the two destroyers that accompanied us were joined by two more, so that we had an entourage of four destroyers, two on each side accompanying us. The "Geula" was not neglected either and also noted an increase in the number of destroyers that gathered. A process of trying to convince us now took place, in Yiddish, Romanian and Hebrew.

When talking did not help, they sprayed streams of water on the decks as well as tear gas. They then tried to tie up alongside us but we managed to maneuver to prevent them from so doing. Finally toward evening they tried again to come

alongside but we turned the bow of the ship toward them and crashed into them. The destroyer on our port side was damaged by this collision but the destroyer on the starboard side managed to secure a hold and a squad of armed marines boarded the ship and captured the bridge. We had previously disconnected control of the helm from the bridge, and controlled the ship's movements from the helm in the hold below deck. The "Jewish State" had been an ice-breaker so it had not been damaged by the collision. None of the immigrants were hurt because we were able to warn them of the collision in advance and they were prepared for it. We continued to move to the coast with the British destroyer alongside us and the lights of Tel Aviv were seen in the distance as evening descended. A strong force of British sailors boarded the ship and forced its way to the engine room and managed to put the engines out of commission. We now had no electricity and no air in the holds so we told everyone to go up on deck. The destroyer towed us into Haifa, and we arrived there the following morning. We were moored once more alongside the "Geula" at what the poet Alterman called the "Pier of Tears".

This is where all the ships captured by the British fleet were kept in a corner of the port. We stayed on board for three days. The conditions on the ship were very difficult and we were kept there because the British were debating if they should do another "Exodus" and send us back to Europe, or to find another alternative. In the end, we were sent to Cyprus and not sent back to Europe, despite British declared intentions to do so.

We received orders that my friend and companion Shmulik Haram (Hochman) should go with the immigrants to Cyprus. I and about 20 of the American volunteers went down to a secret hiding place that had been prepared beforehand, and we hid there for a time and then left the ship together with a group of workmen, after the immigrants had been removed. After about a two week stay in Palestine I once again took off for Europe, this time to France. I arrived at Marseilles and once again met up with my friends at St. Jerome. I and my old pal Dudale (ben Chorin) surveyed the coast in the area of Bandol-St.Tropez, to the east of Marseille. We had to find a port for three ships, the "Aliya", the "Ha'portzim" and the "Lekommemiyut".

Nachshon Ha'Kastel – The last to be sent to Cyprus:

In the middle of January, 1948 Shaul Avigur called me and gave me command of the "Tadorne," which had been purchased in the fishing port of La Rochelle in western France, north of the Bay of Biscay. The objective was to prepare the ship technically, take on food and other provisions, enter the Mediterranean and bring the ship to the Straits of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia, there to prepare her as immigrant ship. Before we sailed I was given the Gideoni, Shalom Bornstein, and as second in command, Yisrael Shenkman (he had been an American volunteer on "The Jewish State"), and Shaul ben Zeev (Poli Farkash, a Mosad man) who

was expert at preparing the bunks in the holds. We left the Bandol area on the 8th April 1948 and had 560 Olim on board. We had so much trouble with the ship's boiler that we had to transfer the immigrants to the "Yechiam," near the island of Monte Christo. The "Yechiam" had set out from Gaeta Italy with only 238 immigrants. We headed for serious repairs in the port of Bastia in Corsica. When the repairs were completed we once again went to the bay near Bandol where 550 immigrants, half of whom from North Africa, were waiting for us. Here we were given the name "Nachshon Ha'kastel" (in honor of the operation whose aim was to break the siege of Jerusalem). On the 26th April the ship was caught by a British destroyer near the shore of Palestine. It was towed to Haifa and the immigrants were transferred to Cyprus. The fight against the British sailors was very fierce. Many sailors were thrown into the water by the immigrant defenders and many on both sides were wounded. This was the last ship to be captured and the last time that immigrants were moved to Cyprus.

I was once again ordered to hide aboard ship with a number of others who had served in the crew, and the immigrants were accompanied to Cyprus by a representative of South African Jewry who had come on the voyage specifically for that purpose.

From "The Jewish State" to the naval vessel – "Eilat" (the first one)

On the 22nd of April 1948 the Hagana captured Haifa. The port remained in British hands for purposes of evacuation of their forces until all of the British left Israel on June 30, 1948. When we were towed into Haifa by a British destroyer it was a pleasant surprise to learn that the city had been captured and was in the hands of the Hagana. A department of the Seafaring Services which was the predecessor of the Israeli Navy was established, and the ships of the phantom fleet were now being repaired so that they could return to active service as naval vessels. I was given orders to report to the head of that service in Tel Aviv.

The following day I met my old buddies from the Palyam; Avraham Zakai, Moshe Rabinowitch and Shmuel Yanai (Samek) and they inform me that I am now responsible for preparing "The Jewish State" for naval service and I am to be its commander. A whole group was to work with me in the preparations and as the crew, and among them was my old friend Avraham Meron who had sailed with me on "The Jewish State". Avraham was an excellent engineer and served with me throughout the War of Independence.

On the 21 May 1948 "The Jewish State" left the port of Haifa flying a Turkish flag and headed for the port of Tel Aviv which was the port of the new State. Once we were in open waters the ship was renamed the "Eilat", and was the first warship of the new State of Israel. The duties of the ship were to provide protection against aerial attacks on the city of Tel Aviv, and to accompany all other immigrant ships that were still to arrive. Two other vessels of the phantom fleet were also being prepared to assist in these duties; the "Shomer" formerly the "Wedgwood", which entered service on the 9th of June and the "Hagana", which

joined us on July 18th. These were very difficult times for the new State, which was under pressure of Egyptian forces from the South, other forces attacking Nahariya and the north of Israel, and the siege of Jerusalem and other regional battles.

The Battle of the Ayalon Valley – The last of the immigrant ships.

On the 29th of May 1948, the vessel “The Battle of the Ayalon Valley” entered the waters of the State of Israel carrying 706 Olim and was accompanied by the “Eilat” into the Caesarea region of the coast because Tel Aviv was being bombed at the time by the Egyptians. The new Olim were brought to shore safely and peacefully under the protection of the “Eilat”.

The Battle for Tel Aviv

.On the 4th of June the “Eilat” was on duty patrolling the waters north of Tel Aviv when we received a telegram from Navy Headquarters. There were unidentified ships coming up along the south coast and we are to identify them. We identified the ships (when they were opposite the site of Palmachim of today) as three Egyptian warships: One was a corvette of the Sloop class, another was an LST with many soldiers aboard and landing launches as well, and the third was a troop carrier, “The Emira Fauzia”, which also carried many soldiers. They were advancing northward in single file. They were about ten miles distant. The Egyptian corvette sped toward us and when it was 3 miles away it fired with 3 inch canon. It found our range and we suffered two hits which did not impair our maneuverability. We replied with our two 20 m”m air anti-aircraft guns but the shells fell far short of the corvette. We moved in to close the gap between us and at the same time a plane attacked the corvette but did not do it any damage.

In another attack at 17:00 hours two of our planes attacked and caused damage to the “Emira Fauzia” which turned south and fled, but one of our planes was damaged and sank in the water. The Egyptian vessels did not return and we continued on other assignments.

In September 1948, special small vessels were purchased for the commando forces of the navy and the “Ben Hecht” was chosen to be their mother ship. The name was changed to the “Maoz” (the fort) and I served with her until the end of the War of Independence in 1949.

I continued to serve in the navy until the end of August 1968 in a number of capacities. In the last year of my service I was transferred at my request to the Ministry of Defense in order to establish the “Clandestine Immigration and Naval Museum” which I directed until my retirement from Tzahal in 1995.

The ice-breaker “Northland” had the honor of sinking 2 German spy ships in the North Atlantic during WW II and it had been my privilege to have brought 2,664 Jews, remnants of the Holocaust, to the Land of Israel during our struggle against the British. I also commanded her as the “NS Eilat” during our War of Independence.

I married my wife in 1955 and she has been at my side ever since. We raised three wonderful children together and we have been blessed with wonderful grandchildren as well.