

Ashuach, Pinchas –Pinny

Born 1927 in Israel

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

When I finished my studies at the Naval School near the Technion in 1945, I joined the Palyam. I joined the platoon at Ein Hayam, close to Atlit. I then went to Kibbutz Givat Hashlosha and from there, joined the 6th course for small boat commanders. After the course I gained experience as a seaman by working on an American ship which sailed to Aden, Iraq and Kuwait, Bahrein and Egypt. For three months I sailed about the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and then returned to the platoon base at Maabarot and Sdot Yam.

On “Black Saturday”, 29 June 1946, I was sent to the detention camp at Atlit but was freed after several weeks because I was still considered a boy and not a man. The others with me who were caught, were sent to the detention camp at Rafiah. I went back to work at Sdot Yam and to train at Maabarot. During this period of working and training we were supposed to help move immigrants from several ships but that did not materialize. The sole exception was the ship “Amiram Shochat”, which did manage to break through the siege of the British Navy. I also participated in “Wingate Night”, when Bracha Fuld was killed.

Toward the end of 1946, I sailed on the former Hagana ship “Enzo Sereni” to Alexandria with a crew that consisted entirely of Palyamnikim, and from there to Genoa, Italy. We then went to work preparing ships for Olim according to directions of Yehuda Arazi and Ada Sereni. I stayed at Magenta, near Milan, for about five or six months. This was not only the center that supplied food and other necessities for the ships of the Olim, but also served as center for packing and shipping arms and weapons of all sorts for our forces in Palestine.

After my sojourn at Magenta I commanded a transit camp for immigrants not far from the town of Mula, in the vicinity of Bari, for three months. In the latter half of 1947 I and three other Palyamnikim went to Venice, where we boarded the “Pan Crescent”. This ship became the “Atzmaut” and its commander was Dov Magen (Berchik). The plan was to leave under cover of night and sail to Romania where we would load 8,000 Olim and bring them to Palestine. When the preparations were nearly finished there was an explosion below deck and the ship almost sank. This was likely to have been the work of the famous British diver, Commander Crabb.

I moved on to Formia, in the Bay of Gaeta, where we worked on preparing four ships for sailing. These were to be the last of the “illegal ships” prior to the Declaration of the State. While we were at Formia, we missed out on action in connection with the ship “Lino” which sailed from from Yugoslavia and destined for Syria with a load of 7000 rifles and a great deal of ammunition. We were told to sail immediately, cut across the Straits of Messina, catch up with the “Lino”,

overpower her crew, and bring her cargo to Israel. Before we left port we heard that the "Lino" had been delayed in Bari, so our departure was also delayed.

On the 8th of May I was called to a meeting with Yehuda Arazi at the Excelsior Hotel in Naples. The Gideoni Avraham Lichovski arrived shortly afterwards. We were told to have pictures taken for our passports and give them to his secretary. The following morning we were issued fresh passports and I became a young South African named Lionel Harris Hoads, born in Johannesburg. We were given the details of the "Atlas" operation and on the following day we boarded the small ship "Apoania" in the capacity of young men traveling and out for a good time. Avraham was to be the communications man and I the commander. No one on the ship but the captain knew the purpose of our voyage or who we were.

We arrived at the port of Algiers and after a few days of nervously waiting, a tall Pole appeared. He was a smuggler and responsible for loading weapons on board. We loaded Hotchkiss anti-aircraft machine guns, hundreds of Chateau machine guns, plus a huge supply of ammunition. All this was WW II surplus of the French Army, and the load was consigned fictitiously to Tangiers. Shortly before we had finished loading, the captain appeared in our room and was very pale and upset. He admitted that he had given the details of the voyage to the chief engineer. The chief engineer was insulted by not having been told at the outset of the voyage and he told others of the crew. All this was taking place in an Arab port while fighting was going on in Israel. This was the 15th May 1948.

The crew was at that moment in the fo'c'sle debating what to do, Avraham and I hurried over and while he blocked the exit, I spoke to the men and told them that we were Jews and we were to sail to Tel Aviv. Obviously we could not tell them that beforehand, but could depend on our rewarding them for their service. One of the crew was an Italian (who later married a Gideonit and lives in Israel today) and he rose and said that he had worked with Jews before and the crew could depend on their being treated fairly and generously. I ordered the leader who seemed to be acting as spokesman for the others, to stay in his cabin until we left port. I brandished a revolver I was carrying, without directly threatening him. A few hours later we were fully loaded and left port.

We arrived in Tel Aviv on the 5th of June 1948 and on the last few days of the voyage, enjoyed the protection of a Dakota aircraft of our fledgling air force. When we entered the harbor, Shaul Avigur and Munia Mardor were there to greet us and even had a good word to say upon the successful completion of the mission. While these weapons were being unloaded, the port of Tel Aviv was being bombed by Egyptian Spitfires, and a bomb landed not far from the ship wounding Avraham and one of the crew members.

In September 1948 we sailed from Italy to La Ciotat in southern France. The ship was the "San Michele", which had formerly carried immigrants to Israel as the "Mishmar Ha'emek". A few Palyamnikim remained on the ship and used it to

carry Mustang aircrafts from Cyprus to Israel, and weapons and ammunition from various ports of the Mediterranean to Israel.

After the war I studied geodesics and cost accounting, and worked for Solel Boneh in construction in Israel and in foreign countries. In 1951 while I was busy with civilian work and had just married Shaula, I was asked to travel with Benny Kravitz, Avraham Miretsky and others – to Egypt on the ship, “Krav Emek Ayalon” (formerly the “Fabio”). This was a political gesture to insure our right to use the Suez Canal. The UN intervened, the trip was cancelled, and we returned home. This trip was done later by the “Bat Galim”.

After I finished working with Solel Boneh and Ashtrom as project manager in Turkey, Ghana, Nigeria, Nicaragua and elsewhere, I worked independently in Chile and the United States. That is my story, - finished but I hope not yet over.