

Dror, Yosef (Yossale) RIP
 Born in Poland in 1925
 Made Aliya from Mexico with his brother and mother in 1930
 Joined the Palmach in 1942
 Joined the Palyam in 1944
 Written by Samek Yanai as directed by Tzipora Dror

This is the Way it Was

Aliya to Palestine

"In 1930 a ship from Vera Cruz, Mexico, reached the port of Jaffa. The passengers were taken off the ship and onto boats by sturdy Arab port workers, and among the passengers was a skinny little boy of 5, and that was me". That is how Yosef (Yossale) Dror recalls his landing in Palestine. His first five years were spent in Mexico City, but it was his mother who was the driving force in their making Aliya to Palestine. His early youth was spent in the poor neighborhood of Mahloul in Tel Aviv, which is located by the sea. Yosef spent much of his time in the water, swimming, sailing, rowing etc. He may not have felt a particular affinity for the sea, but in any case, the sea was close to him. That must definitely have had some influence.

From sea games to the Palyam

By the end of 1942 Yosef completed his studies and joined "C" Company of the Palmach. He worked and trained in Kibbutz Ashdot Yaakov. In the beginning of 1944 he transferred to the Naval Company, which later became the core of the Palyam. He participated in a course for small boat commanders of which Berchik was the commander. There were about 40 trainees in the course and the instructors were Menachem Cohen and Shmuel Tankus. This course lasted 3½ months and after that they had some practical training, and went to work on the fishing vessels of the kibbutzim.

Early in 1945 the first course for naval officers began, which was intended to prepare Palyamniks to accompany the Ma'apilim. There were 15 trainees. The chief instructor was Shmuel Tankus, and also a Captain Sheinman who had been an officer in the Italian Navy. Other instructors were connected with the Naval School in Haifa. In this course the trainees learned the basics of navigation, astronomy, boat construction and other subjects.

Unloading Operations

In 1945, when WW II was over, the vessels with Ma'apilim started to arrive. The first of these was the "Dalin". We did not have radio contact with the vessel and the problem was where to find her and meet her. We went out to sea in two sailboats to try to make contact with the ship, and on one of the boats was a transmitter. We also made up sign language between the two boats to facilitate a minimum of communication. We searched for two days but found nothing and returned to Caesarea. The following day I went out again with Berchik in a small fishing boat, "The Guard of the Sea", and found the "Dalin" that evening not far from Caesarea. She brought 35 *[editorial note: The Dalin actually brought 37*

Ma'apilim; the mistake is in the Hebrew version] Ma'apilim and we helped them off the vessel. The first one to reach land, hugged and kissed me. After this first unloading, we did six more but perfected our methods and unloading went faster. We unloaded at Caesarea three times and the other three times dropped the Ma'apilim off at Shefayim. We sent sailboats out to meet the ship at sea not far from the dropoff location. These boats then accompanied the ship into the dropoff zone. Davidka was in charge of all the landings and there were security guards around the area, armed with light weapons to keep the British away. All the landings were completed without disturbance or interference and the Ma'apilim were scattered among the nearby kibbutzim and moshavim. Each voyage brought more Ma'apilim than the previous one.

When the "Berl Katznelson" approached shore with 212 Ma'apilim we went out to meet her with four boats and started to unload. When we had almost finished, a British destroyer appeared and started to hunt the Ma'apilim who were still in the water. The vessel was taken captive but there were only a few Ma'apilim still on its deck. Kippy jumped into the water and swam ashore. Meanwhile, a north wind had sprung up and it was difficult for our little boats to make progress. The British managed to catch two of them. I was in command of these boats and had 12 men with me. The British towed the boats to Jaffa and from there took us to Latrun. We were imprisoned for about a half year. Among the prisoners were Nimrod Eshel, Yoske Almog, and others.

"HaMa'apil Ha'almoni"

In February, 1947 we left for Palestine carrying about 850 Ma'apilim, most of them were from Poland, Romania and Hungary, and a few from other East European countries. There were also a few Ma'apilim from North Africa. The sea was quite rough and many people vomited. Water was coming in from cracks that appeared in all parts of the ship. I went through the holds and closed all the portholes. There was vomit everywhere and when I came back on deck I vomited as well..

Several days before we were to reach Palestine a British plane spotted us and circled overhead. When we were 4 miles from the coast two more planes appeared and three British destroyers encircled us. They blocked our path and ordered us to halt. We continued to sail and ignored their instructions. Two destroyers approached us on each side and squeezed us, none too gently. One of the destroyers made a large hole in one side of our ship. To our great luck, this was about 1.5 meters above the water line. Until then the Ma'apilim had all been below deck but they now came up and fought with the British marines. The British used water hoses and threw teargas grenades at us. This broke the resistance and the vessel was in their hands. We stopped transmitting and smashed the apparatus with an ax. Our vessel was then towed to Haifa. The British pulled down our flag but I decided to haul it up again and climbed the mast to do so. A soldier climbed up after me and we had a tussle, but I succeeded in flying the flag and this encouraged the Ma'apilim.

In Haifa we were taken from the ship to the pier and were not handled very gently either. That same night we were loaded into a deportation ship and sailed to Cyprus. The plans to blow up the deportation ships started.

Planning sabotage

Yoash (Chatto) Tzidon tied 160 flashlight batteries together; we had no other batteries. I prepared an antenna and we wove the antenna inside a rope. We tied the rope between two masts, and managed to establish contact with Palestine. We had explosives but didn't have delaying fuses. A nurse who worked for the Joint (Distribution Committee) on her way to Palestine, brought some back with her but had to get rid of them and threw them away before she reached us. In Palestine they were also planning to blow up the deportation ships. The team consisted of Yochai ben Nun, Samek Yanai and Yoske Rom. One night these fellows arrived in Cyprus in a small fishing vessel. They brought with them a small boat, an outboard motor, and explosives. They buried the boat and the equipment in the sand, and marked the spot. Yochai was caught and shipped back to Palestine while Samek spent several months in a Cypriot jail. Yoske was not caught and came into the camp and worked with us to sabotage the "Ocean Vigour" which was anchored in Cyprus. He found the explosives that had been hidden but the boat had disappeared. Nevertheless we did succeed in damaging the "Ocean Vigour".

I was caught after the operation and sat in jail for 23 days. I sawed through the bars of the windows and escaped back into the camp. We were informed after a time that the fishing vessel of Michmoret would be coming to pick us up. At the appointed time we broke through the fence, and made our way to the beach and onto the vessel. *[editorial note: Yossale was the only one to return; after Yossale's escape from the prison, Yoske Rom was sent back to Israel in order to sail to Cyprus with a fishing vessel to take Yossale back home].*

Yosef Dror (Yossale) accompanied the "Hama'apil HaAlmoni" to Palestine and was commander of a diving unit in the Palyam. In 1948 he transferred to the Navy with his unit and all of the Palyam. In the Navy, his unit was combined with the explosive speedboats unit and this became the 13th Flotilla, the "Marine Commandos". Yossale initiated the addition of submarines into the Navy and was the first commander of the submarine flotilla.

He was discharged from the Navy in 1963 and returned to his kibbutz, Maagan Michael. He completed his education, attained the rank of Captain, and continued working at sea. On June 29, 1976, while touring the Stromboli volcano, he was involved in a terrible accident in which he was seriously injured, and died. He was buried at Maagan Michael.