

**Lazarovsky, Yosef**

Nicknames: Yoske, Abu Zaki

Born in 1923 in Palestine

Joined the marine company of the Hagana in 1941

Joined the Palmach in 1946

Became a Gideoni (radio operator) of the Mossad for Aliya Bet

**This is the Way it Was**

I was saved from the Hebron pogroms of 1929, in which my father, my 3 year old sister, my grandfather and my uncle were murdered (may God avenge their blood).

**Childhood in Jerusalem, early studies**

I joined the Hagana in 1937 and went into communications. I attended several courses and then went to the unit for special duties in the intelligence department. In May 1941 when the Palmach was created, I was drafted into that organization and sent to courses held in the Tel Aviv Fair Grounds that dealt with sabotage. They were in the department of the British Intelligence Service in which Captain Hammond and others did the instructing. I also went to a nautical course conducted by "Berchik", and courses in spoken Arabic; Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese.

The courses were under the command of Yitzchak Sadeh, Moshe Dayan, Yigal Alon, Yisrael Ben Yehuda ("Abdo"), Josh Palmon and others and also sergeants and officers of the British Army. They were also the instructors. After this preparation I and a number of friends (Yerucham Cohen, Dan Ram, Moshe Adaki and others) were sent to Damascus, via Ein Gev and Kuneitra. The idea was to familiarize ourselves with the city, find out where the Mufti and his cortege spend their time, and carry out acts of sabotage if the German Army was to come to this region. We were also to act if the Mufti was to be allowed a free hand against the Jewish settlements in Palestine. Our unit was called 'the simulated Arab unit' and was the first of the many such units that came into existence after the end of WW II. After that I went to Beirut, Lebanon, and a few of us based ourselves there. I also signed up to study at the American University under the name of Yusuf Tawil.

I was called back to Palestine (via Sidon, Tyre and Kfar Alma) and sent to an advanced course in signaling, with the cooperation and under the tutelage of the British. When this was over, I received the ID of a soldier in the British Army named Salim Ismail Matlar, and went with Captain Hammond to Haleb in northern Syria, where I had two jobs waiting for me. One was to establish contact with British Army intelligence units in Cairo, Beirut, Tripoli and elsewhere, and the other by order of Yigal Alon, to establish contact with our people in Beirut, Haifa and elsewhere, and to help in the Aliya of Jews who took the route from Turkey through Haleb to Eretz Israel.

At the end of 1943, when the German threat to the Mid-east had waned, the British discontinued their support to this unit and I returned to Jerusalem, to continue my studies and be active in the Hagana. I happened to meet Yigal in Jerusalem in May 1946 and he asked me what I was doing. Even before I could answer he said: "Stop fooling around. There is nothing more important today than Ha'apalah (Bringing Jews to Eretz Israel)." He gave me notes for Moshe Carmil and to Yan in Tel Aviv, and the next day in his office, I was once again drafted into the Mosad for Aliya Bet. I was back in the Palmach and a member of the family of the Gideonim (radio operators). About a week later I had a note from Moshe Carmil telling me to be at the offices of Solel Boneh in the port of Haifa in a day or two, to coordinate when I would leave for Europe. I came to Haifa with a toothbrush, shaving kit, and an extra shirt in my carrying bag. I was told that I must leave immediately because the vessel "Kadio" was sailing for Piraeus. So, without documents and without clothes I was helped onto the ship by a port worker and began my career as a Gideoni. I returned home for a visit about a year later after having escaped from Cyprus and hiding on a ship of Ma'apilim.

Most of my activity in Europe was as a Gideoni on vessels carrying Ma'apilim, transferring Ma'apilim from vessel to vessel at sea, and working in transmitting stations in various cities of Europe, including Athens, Milan, Bari, and elsewhere. In the spring of 1947 the Mosad for Aliya Bet set up an intelligence unit for the discovery of leaks in the network and the prevention of information from leaking to the British. I was placed in charge of this activity in northern Italy. This included setting up independent stations. In charge of this whole operation was Mr. ben Menachem who had been a commander of the Hagana in Jerusalem and whose headquarters was in Paris. He worked directly under Shaul Avigur.

Within the framework of this job, I was witness to the activity of Neo-Nazis and religious elements in smuggling Nazis via northern Italy to South America. One day an Italian source furnished details of a smuggling operation to be carried out by a certain priest. It involved important Nazis, among them Martin Borman, Hitler's right-hand man. He also advised me of how I could, under false identity, be a witness to the act. That same evening I went to Paris and gave the information to ben Menachem and asked for instructions. The next day ben Menachem told me that the information was checked out and it was not likely that Borman was one of those involved. I was told to detach myself from that source. When I went to Prague several days later and met Shaul Avigur and mentioned this matter, he said that he had heard this information and that the source was tainted, and perhaps intended to get me into a trap.

### **"Henrietta Szold"**

As I mentioned before, I had boarded a ship in Haifa with no papers of any kind, but did have a belt around my body that contained gold coins to be delivered to Yan Avidov, the chief Mosad for Aliya Bet man in Greece. The only incident occurred on this trip when we docked in Alexandria and a doctor came aboard with the customs people to check a number of the passengers regarding their

health (more than their health, he wanted some bakshish). He happened to choose me and I ran away and looked for a place to hide. When we arrived at Piraeus, a representative of the Mosad for Aliya Bet, Benyamin Yerushalmi, came on board and promised he would get me off the ship the following day. However, when he got off the ship I did so too, as if I was with him. I followed him to the house that the Mosad used in Athens, was received with glee, and able to pass the 'golden belt' on to Yan.

In Athens I helped the Gideoni, Avraham Lichovsky to complete construction of a transmitter meant for my use, and also for use by Samek (Shmuel Yanai) and Kippy (Arieh Kaplan) who were to sail on the next vessel. The story of that voyage has been told elsewhere, and I will only add that my conditions as Gideoni were very difficult. The little cabin where I worked was crowded and I had to work by the light of a candle. When we arrived and were towed into the port of Haifa by the British, and it was decided that we be sent to Cyprus, Yaakov Dostrovsky (afterwards Yaakov Dori, the first Chief of General Staff) told us to resist and if worse comes to worse, to blow up the deportation ship, "Empire Rival" before it sails. He gave me cans of milk for the children who were on board and one of these cans was filled with explosives. We planned to blow up the ship by going onto it first, but the children were brought on to it first so we decided to cancel the operation.

When we arrived at the Keraolos camp in Cyprus, the knapsack containing explosives was discovered, but the transmitter arrived in fairly good condition and was later used by our people there. After us, other seamen and Gideonim arrived and were instructed by Dr Shiba who arrived at the camp with orders from the Mosad for Aliya Bet. Three weeks later we were told to organize an escape from the camp for eight Palyamniks and Gideonim and a Greek sailor from the "Henrietta Szold". This was done in pairs, each pair getting to Famagusta and from there to Larnaca, where a fishing vessel owned by an Israeli Jew waited and sailed to Greece. At the time, there was a small civil war going on in Greece. Therefore, when we tried to come ashore in a small bay near Piraeus, we were caught and held as possible Albanian Communists. We spent a few weeks in jail until a ransom/bribe was arranged, and we were freed on bail. We ran away again and managed to get onto a small vessel that deposited us in southern Italy. From there we found our way to friends in Bari.

#### **"Shabtai Luzinski"**

I set up a station that was in contact with Milan ("Miriam") and then went with Yigal Alon, Yehuda Arazi and several other Palyamniks to La Spezia so that we could start preparing the "Shabtai Luzinski", on which I was to be the Gideoni. Yigal also ordered us to resist, by force, being moved to Cyprus. He also told us that all Gideonim had been incorporated into the Palyam. The voyage of this vessel involved one mishap after another. Yehuda Arazi joined us on that trip but when we were stuck in Reggio Calabria for a few weeks, he left the ship together with Ada Sereni, moved us out and on our way again. We continued south, took the Ma'apilim on board and continued toward Palestine. One day later, the motor conked out and we had to return to port, unload the Ma'apilim,

and move the ship into a dry dock in Taranto. When the repairs were made, and Yehuda and Ada had straightened matters out with the authorities, we reloaded the Ma'apilim and took off again. I caught a high fever and Arieh Chaikind relieved me.

### **Af Al Pi Chen**

I was supposed to sail as Gideoni and second-in-command on the "Af Al Pi Chen", and participated in the preparations. When a plane discovered us as we neared the shore of Palestine, a destroyer appeared very soon after and cut us off from the shore and we could not make a rush for it. Another destroyer appeared soon after and in conversation with them we were told to proceed to Haifa peacefully. When we refused and prepared our weapons (cans of preserves) the British came onto the vessel shooting. One Ma'apil was killed and several were wounded, and the British took over the vessel. The big surprise was that one Ma'apilah, whose mother was married to an officer of the British Detective force in Palestine, had acted as a mole even before we left Italy. She informed on us and the Palyamniks, and we were questioned, beaten, and a heavy guard placed on us, so that we would be arrested when we landed. We managed to escape, mingle with the Ma'apilim, change our appearances as much as possible, and were transferred to Cyprus together with the other Ma'apilim.

Several days later I made an escape and managed to get onto one of our vessels headed for Haifa. I was soon back in Europe and this time I was responsible for building an intelligence network in northern Italy. However, when a Gideoni was needed I sailed with ma'apilim who were added to the vessel, "The 29<sup>th</sup> of November", which sailed from Corsica.

### **Tirat Tzvi**

Considering the situation in Palestine I asked to be relieved of my obligations in the intelligence service, and was assigned to be Gideoni on the vessel, "Tirat Tzvi". This voyage went without undue complications, and when we were being towed to Haifa I hid in a "slick" and on the following day, when the Ma'apilim were taken to Cyprus, I was taken off the ship by Solel Boneh workers, and was soon out of the port area. I went from there to the new Navy which was just being created and became chief communications officer.

### **After my discharge**

At the end of 1949 I asked for a discharge, was married, and went to live in Tel Aviv. I immediately applied to Reuven Shiloach of the Foreign Ministry, whom I knew from the years 1941 – 1943 when I was active in Syria and Lebanon. I was accepted for work in the research department of the Foreign Ministry (and which later was integrated into the Mosad) and I went to a number of courses which were to prepare me for work in enemy countries. In 1950 I was sent to Egypt where I set up and operated a transmitting station. After several months I was recalled to Israel. I was called to the office of Shlomo Cohen, one of the leading figures in the Mosad, and informed that Yudke Tager had been caught in Baghdad. (He was a friend from my youth and we had been trained together.

He had gone to Iraq when I was sent to Egypt.) I was asked if I was prepared to go to Iraq to get Yudke out, and when I agreed I was let in on a plan and given a new identity. The operation was later cancelled by Ben Gurion.

I was then transferred to the General Security Service and was Chief of Operations in the Tel Aviv area. For a time I was active in the preparations for the establishment of the Israel Quarries Company, but returned to work in security after the Six Day War. I was active in investigations in Judah and Samaria, and in the Gaza Strip. I completed my civil service in an Israeli insurance company.

Note: I am very, very sorry for the insolence, superiority, and lack of patience which I at times displayed towards the Ma'apilim, and beg their forgiveness.