

Weisser, Gideon

Born March 3rd 1926

Joined the Settlement Police in 1944

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

When I was in eighth grade I was already sworn into the Hagana. I was then a member of the Working Youth (Noar Ha'Oved) movement. When I was 15½ in 1942 I went for training at Kvutzat Mazada in the Jordan Valley and joined a group of youth from Tel Aviv who called themselves "Lehava" (flame). The training meant that we worked every morning and afterwards would receive training with weapons. A year later, my group and I went to Kibbutz Ramat Yochanan and it was there that I first heard of the Palmach. Benny Marshak came to us and asked that we give up our tent area, which was at the edge of the kibbutz, so that a platoon of the Palmach could use it. After a short argument we agreed to do so.

When that platoon arrived (which was a part of "A" Company) we developed a good relationship with them. I liked to sit around a campfire with them in the evening and listen to their stories and drink coffee. I also watched how they trained and was strongly influenced by them. After a year at Ramat Yochanan I volunteered for the Jewish Settlement Police and served as a policeman for a year. After that, I had to return to help my parents because of economic difficulties. It was about this time that we started hearing of the terrible fate of the Jews of Europe.

I was young and free and decided that I would volunteer for the Palmach. I joined the "Hermesh" (sickle) group at Kibbutz Naan at the end of 1945 and when the group finished its Palmach training, joined Kibbutz HaChotrim. 15% of the group still had to serve in the Palmach so Uri Egozi and I volunteered for the Palyam, without knowing into what we were getting involved in. I thought that that would be the field of action in the near future, and in April of 1945 I arrived at Sdot Yam for the 4th course for squad leaders. The commander of the course was Avraham Zakai and my boat commander was Meir Falik. It was a very difficult course and lasted four months. I acquired basic knowledge in seamanship and sailing, and became a small boat commander.

When the course was over I was sent with a squad of men to Ayelet HaShachar where we helped in immigration from Syria and Lebanon. This was my first encounter with olim and it was very moving for me. There were some young men among them who came to train in the Hagana and then return to their countries of origin. There were also whole families of young and old whom we brought to Rosh Pina, and were later scattered throughout the country. One month later we returned to Sdot Yam.

On the 23rd of November 1945, four sailboats sailed south and came opposite Kibbutz Shefayim. We waited there for the arrival of the Aliyah Bet immigrant

ships that were scheduled to appear. At about midnight the "Berl Katznelson" arrived with olim from Greece. When we were almost done a British destroyer appeared and put out a number of small launches, which took over the ship and started chasing us. They succeeded in catching two of our boats but the other two managed to escape. There were six men in each boat. Our boat was towed to Jaffa and after being questioned by the CID we were taken to the prison camp at Latrun. There were several hundred prisoners there, mostly from the "Etzel" and "Lechi" but also some Jewish Brigade soldiers who were suspected of smuggling arms into Palestine.

The cooperation between the various branches of the Jewish resistance movement was close when dealing with the British, and one of "respect him but beware of him" when dealing with one another. No really friendly relations developed between the Hagana and the other organizations. After five months of imprisonment we were freed under limited conditions. We, (Chanan Younis, Uri Egozi and I, and three other members of Hachotrim) had to report twice a week at the police station at Kiryat Haim jfor appearance's sake. This continued until "Black Saturday" (29th June, 1946). After then, I stopped going to the police station and was given a new ID by the Hagana and a new name. At that time I was working for a company that built houses out of pre-fabricated pieces of concrete, and went to the Galilee with the other workers. We built in most of the settlements in the area. We built from Ayelet HaShachar in the south to Dan and Dafna in the north, I spent two months in the Galilee.

At the beginning of 1947 I returned to working full time in the Palyam and participated in officers' course number 4 which was based at Kibbutz Yagur. When that was over, I volunteered to instruct in non-com course number eight which was commanded by Yossale Dror. My brother Avraham also participated in this course and was later killed in the battle for Katamon in Jerusalem, on the 1st of May 1948. By the time course number 8 had come to an end the War of Independence had basically begun. It was necessary to mobilize as many men as possible into the army and to provide them with leaders of all ranks.

I was sent to a course for non-com officers at Kibbutz Givat Zaid and when the course was over, became platoon leader in the port company under the command of Amos ben Tzvi of Kfar Yehoshua. It was our job to protect the Jewish port workers from the Arabs who worked in the port. While there, I participated in an operation to steal weapons from the British camp at Tel Hashomer. That was an operation that involved an entire company under the command of Yossefle Tabenkin. Our scout, from Kfar Azar was discovered and killed by a British guard. This jeopardized the whole operation, but we did manage to get 40 guns and some ammunition.

In February of 1948 I was sent to France to serve as a sailor. I left Palestine with a Polish passport, as part of a large group of Palyamnikim, on the last flight of an Air France plane. There were about ten of us and we reached Paris after a flight of ten hours. This was the first time in my life that I had been out of Palestine. My partner on this trip was David Stern. Two weeks later we left Paris

by train for Marseilles. We went straight to the headquarters of the Mosad for Aliya Bet which was in a villa on the eastern side of the city. We met many other seamen and Gideonim there. I was instructed to move on to Italy illegally by boat across the border between Monaco and Italy. In Italy David Stern and I took a train to Milan. We were met by Pinny Tennenbaum(Ashuach), who took care of us.

In Italy I had the identity of a Polish refugee named Gedalia Friedman. This included a photo and a letter that I was a member of the Jewish community of Milan. This allowed me freedom of movement anywhere in Italy for a year. After two weeks, David and I received a message to go to the center of Aliya Bet activity, in Formia Latina. The commander of that base at the time was Nachum Shamir. I helped load olim on several ships. On one occasion we tied a cable from ship to shore and then pulled rubber boats back and forth along the cable; In that way the olim were loaded onto the ship. On another occasion, the olim arrived on trucks covered with tarpaulins, and only at the port were the tarps removed and the olim transferred to the waiting ship.

At the beginning of May 1948 I boarded the ship "LaNitzachon" which, together with its partner, "The Orchid", left from the port of Naples. Each ship carried about 200 olim. Benny Kravitz was the ship's commander and Oved Sadeh was the Gideoni. I was responsible for training the olim in the use of weapons. We arrived at the port of Tel Aviv on the 17th of May and the olim disembarked in broad daylight. I was given a day's leave and went home to see my parents. They told me the sad news that my brother Avraham had been killed in the fighting in and around Jerusalem.

I presented myself the following day to Avraham Zakai at Naval headquarters and was told to take the same ship back to Italy. Twelve days later I was back at Formia Latina. At this time, Yosef Dror and Amnon Yona started to set up the unit that sabotaged enemy weapons found in Italy. This occurred following the success in sinking the "Lino" with all its weapons. This unit was made up of the following members of the Palmach: Bentz Stopler, Gideon Rosen, Yosef Dror, Gideon Weisser, Yehuda Venetzia, David Frummer and Amnon Yona. We also had a skilled driver and a secretary. There were also several olim from Libya who were added to the outfit, as well as several Italian Jews.

At first we used Italian diving equipment which was from the Second World War. We practiced diving to a depth of four meters. We had trouble making our own reliable fuses. I worked with a test tube and sulfuric acid a whole day and was unsuccessful. After this, I was sent to Venice which was the center of the Egyptian weapons export effort. It was my task to prepare all information possible about the harbor. I also made contact with Shimshon who was in command of the immigrant camp at Genoa. This camp was in an isolated setting. It was at this time that we made two attempts to destroy Egyptian planes in Venice and both operations failed because of unreliable delayed fuses.

In August of 1948 I and Gideon Rosen (Gideonchik) were sent to Genoa for several purposes. We were to survey the port. Also, we now had English passports and as our English was very poor, wanted to see how we could manage in that language, so went to different hotels. Thirdly, we had to take care of a "slick", (a place where we hid illegal weapons). We had a quick look at the port and then went to take care of the "slick". Here we suffered a very unfortunate accident: There were magnetic mines in the "slick" that had been activated and we were to de-activate them so that they would be safe to handle.

Everything went wrong with the first mine that Gideonchik handled. The detonator exploded but luckily, the mine did not blow up, The detonator was enough for Gideonchik to lose three fingers, but he remained conscious. He was able to instruct me on how to put everything back into place. I received fragments in my face and body. The camp commander appeared and I asked that he call Rome, let them know what had happened and send help. Since my wounds were comparatively light I decided to disappear so that I would not be questioned by the Italian police. I left the house before they came, and returned later. It was decided to take Gideon to the Jewish Hospital in Milan, so we went there by taxi and he was given excellent care.

I went back to Genoa to clean up and remove our tracks, and also brought back Gideon's English passport. I was then sent to scout a small airport near Milan that the Egyptians used. In the aftermath of that survey, five Egyptian planes were blown up. There was a change in the command of the small group within which I worked. Yosef Dror was relieved and Izzie Rahav took his place. Toward the end of 1948 I went with Izzie to Genoa and we examined the possibility of sabotaging Egyptian vessels leaving from that port. By the end of 1948 I felt that there would be no more action in Italy and requested to return to Israel. In February of 1949 I returned on the recently purchased vessel "Scio". Once on land I took some time off just to tour the country a bit and then returned to my kibbutz, HaChotrim.

By the end of 1949 I married Miriam Gertner. She was born in Hungary and was a survivor of the Holocaust. She made Aliya on the ship, "Mordei HaGetaot". We had two sons: Avi, who died of sickness in 1977 at the age of 27, and Yochai, who is married to Rachel. We have three grandchildren in the kibbutz, Maor, Achihu and Ro'i. Our son still does reserve duty in the Navy. In the kibbutz I worked as a fisherman and a farmer and then for many years, was the kibbutz buyer. I am a pensioner, now, but work part time fixing flat tires. As a reserve soldier I participated in the Sinai Campaign, the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War. In retrospect, I was in agreement with the aims of the Palmach but think that the leadership of the Yishuv placed too much of the burden of the fight against the British on the shoulders of the immigrants.