

Bar Lev, Yehoshua

Nickname: Shu'ik

Born 1928 in Kfar Azar

Joined the Palmach in 1946

Joined the Palyam in 1947

This is the Way it Was

He joined the Palmach in 1946 after finishing studies at Mikveh Yisrael. He joined the Palyam after helping immigrants of the "Shabtai Luzinski" to land on the shore of Nitzanim, and saw Palyamniks and immigrants sent to Cyprus. He participated in the eighth naval course and in the fifth course for naval officers, which was the last such course of the Palyam. When the course was over he was assigned to the port company, and was in command of the sea route between Haifa and Nahariya, until Acre fell and the Western Galilee was freed from siege.

He went to Italy in 1948 and was one of the settlers on the hill between Formia and Gaeta. He commanded the ship "Enzo Sereni" on her second voyage, the ship "Dromit" (Kafalos) on her second and last trip from Yugoslavia, and the ship Caserte (on four trips). He returned to Israel and helped to set up Nachal, and served as adjutant at Nachal headquarters when it was still a battalion within the framework of the Gadna. He was released from service in 1949 with the rank of lieutenant. After his release he became national coordinator of the institute for nautical leadership.

In 1952 he married and joined Kibbutz Afikim and in 1959 he returned to the village of his birth. He spent one year in the Israel management center and the next 33 years at Bank Hapoalim, as assistant to the director of the Bank and as secretary of the Bank. He was founder and first director of the department for business development, president of the Isco Company in New York, and an active director in a trust company of Bank Hapoalim. Like all other Palyamniks he is a candidate for the repopulation of a geriatric institute at the earliest opportunity, after the chrysanthemums have flowered or sclerosis has set in.

When I completed the naval officers' training course I joined the port company. When the Western Galilee was besieged I became commander of the Haifa – Nahariya sea coast and had two Yossis to help me, Yossi Shochat and Yossi Barash. We rode around in a Tag 13 with two Aharons whose last names I could never remember (but liked them very much) They were veteran seamen with wide shoulders and big hearts. They were the best there are and we were the best of friends.

I went to Europe on the deck of one of the Pans when it was sent for refitting in Venice. Ike was the captain and Venice was both magical and stank. From the City of Canals we took a night train to Rome, and in Rome we went directly to the

home of Signora Bacchi on Via Nazionale 66 [*editorial note: Signora Bacchi owned a cheap boarding-house, used extensively by the Mossad Le'Aliya's operatives; Yehuda Ben-tzur remembers 56 as the house's number*]. I returned to Israel from Naples via France on a wooden boat that was named for Enzo Sereni. I am not certain if that was the original "Enzo Sereni", but it was nothing but a nut shell that left Naples without ballast and made for La Ciotat. We hit a storm and had to seek protection in a small bay until it blew over. Yumbo was the Gideoni and my heart went out to him, as he sat at the radio with a bucket by his side, tapping away in Morse code while vomiting his kishkes into the bucket. It was a dark, dreary, and stormy world!

By the time we got to France we were surrounded by another storm that encompassed the whole region between Rome and Paris. We left La Ciotat with a group of olim from England, who were going to join Kibbutz Bet HaEmek. They had with them a baby no more than between one and three months old. The day before we were to reach Israel the parents noticed that he was very ill. There was nothing that we could do and he died before we reached port. I do not know what his name was but may his memory be blessed.

My next voyage was the most interesting. The "Kefalos" ("Dromit") had made its first voyage to South America and it had brought cannon. This ship belonged to a captain who was a professional smuggler, which in itself is not so terrible, but someone who smuggles cannon also needs a crew of professionals. The trouble was that this captain was not a very nice person. He was a bundle of nerves and a bit crazy. In comparison to Italian captains, he was an 'angel of death'. He had all of South America in an uproar when it became known what his cargo was, but he completed his mission and the cannon reached their destination. That was what recommended him when he was offered another trip. When he was offered this second trip, he wanted Flick to go with him as he had on the first trip. But Flick had had enough of him, and didn't want to go again. David Stern had also gone with Flick and didn't want to go a second time, if Flick was not going. He said he would agree to go if I would also come along.

In December of 1948 we were on our way to Bakar (today, Croatia) in Yugoslavia. This was a nice little port and there were hundreds of German workers there. They had been prisoners of war and Tito had left them behind so that he could give them a long course in Titoist Socialism. As we were on our way we received a telegram from Barpal asking if we have sufficient food supplies and fuel to pick up some passengers. We answered that we had enough food for 1500 people for ten days or more.

Barpal was a secretive person. He did not tell us that we might have to take a few more than 1,500 olim but he did ask us if we had checked our figures well. He also suggested that we stop in Bari if we need more food or fuel. The captain was angry; "Doesn't he think I know how to refuel my ship? If we have to go into Bari again, you'll have to walk to Haifa", he said. We told Barpal not to worry. Our

figures were correct. We knew nothing of what was to transpire, nor in what a "catch 22" Barpal himself was entangled.

We reached Bakar and 'the old man' came to visit the ship. Two days later Shaik Dan also showed up and Shaik had two important things to tell us: First, this was to be the last vessel to leave from Yugoslavia with olim from the Balkans. "Whoever comes we take, and whoever does not, we do not take". Secondly, if this episode is to be told as a typical fairy tale, then what happened on the day of the celebration exactly at twelve o'clock midnight? Cinderella must leave! These two edicts fit together like Siamese twins.

This time God was on the side of the bad guys. We shoved in men, women and children as if the "Dromit" was the size of Australia. We left exactly on time like an Italian train and our radio equipment promised us a storm. But we did not need the radio to tell us what weather we would have. The Adriatic Sea shot mountainous waves in our direction and here we were, with twice the number of olim than had been expected. This torture continued for about three days in which we had made no headway. When the sea became tranquil, life on deck went back to normal; normal, but not good. The food was pretty bad and sleeping in the crowded holds on shelves was not pleasant. We were supposed to be en route for 8 days, but the storm added three more.

Complaints started when we had been at sea six days. It was like the Hebrews complaining when they left Egypt. The complaints about the food were justified, but there was nothing that we could do about it. Legumes and stale bread was all we had, so a rebellion was forming slowly but surely. A hunger strike was then declared. This was the first and last time that I did not like people who had a healthy appetite. This was bad. You know that food on a ship can be terrible. There were dry, stale biscuits, soup made of legumes, and tinned beef that had been collected from battlefields. Had God helped the good guys, we would have had several days to get used to the food, and then could have thrown the remainder at the British marines. In the end we would arrive in Israel. Now, however, we not only had not yet arrived in Israel, but had three additional days of torture because of the storm. And the English were no longer here. The olim formed an actions committee, we had a heart to heart talk with them, and the strike ended.

During this uproar, three olim approached the captain and complained. He promised them access to the food supplies. This was a parallel to what Joseph had done in Egypt, remember? Seven good years that subsidized seven bad years. Expectations were far too high and all I could see on the horizon was another storm brewing, a human storm. I approached the captain and asked him if he had lost his mind. He told me that sometimes a good lie can solve a bad problem. He himself had seen that work when he had smuggled weapons from China years ago. I said that that may be so in the case of a good lie but a bad lie could only make matters worse.

When I left the captain and returned to the deck I met Nat Holman, the Chief Engineer. He told me that he would handle the captain and he did! I don't know what would have happened if he had not interceded. We were at sea for 11 days and arrived in Israel weak and battered. Of course, the olim were even weaker and more battered than we were. Sometime later I heard that among our passengers there was a young fellow aged about 17. He settled in Israel and Hebraicized his name to Tommy Lapid.

So, what else do you expect? A calm sea, a soothing wind ... forgiveness for bad food – come on!