

Ben Chorin David (Dudale)

Born in 1921 in Kishinev, Rumania

Aliya to Palestine in 1939

Joined the Palmach in 1942

Joined the Palyam in 1943

This is the Way it Was

I was born and grew up in Kishinev, and from an early age was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. I and my brother made Aliya to Palestine in 1939 on the immigrant ship "Rim". We had a very traumatic experience on the voyage when the ship sank, not far from a small island in the Aegean Sea. We were all saved by the Italian navy, and spent several weeks in a camp on the island of Rhodes, until picked up by another ship. We managed to get close to the shore off Netanya and I and several others managed to reach shore. Most of the others were caught and interned at Atlit.

I joined Kibbutz Shamir and then the Palmach, which was still in the early stages of organization. I was in B Company, attended a course for squad leaders in 1942 at Givat Ada, and then returned to my company as an instructor. In 1943 I volunteered for the naval training course at Caesarea. After the course we all returned to our former companies, but shortly thereafter we banded together again and formed the naval company. As in the other companies of the Palmach we worked for our living, and most of those in the naval unit worked in the port of Haifa. I went to work on a fishing boat of Kibbutz Sdot Yam. I worked there for several months and was then ordered to Tel Aviv to head the naval unit of Hapoel there. This was followed by participation in the first course for naval officers at the Haifa Technion.

The course ended at the same time as the war, and it seemed that it would be possible to open up Aliya Bet again. I tried to leave the country via Egypt but was not successful, so returned to Haifa and left on the "Petro A". This ship had managed to reach the coast and unload its passengers safely. We were a group of seamen and Gideonim that arrived in Southern Italy at a time when there was a crisis in activity there. We purchased the "Dalin" and the "Natuna," and they and the Petro were confiscated. I participated in loading the "Petro 2" before it was confiscated at Taranto. There was a lull in activities in the South after that. A number of us seamen then had little to do. We guarded a villa where Ronny Rubinstein was assembling radio sets. When action moved to the north we also went northward.

I served as telephone receptionist at the office on Via Canto in Milan for a while. This was the nerve center of all activity in the north of Italy and gave me a good overview of all that was happening throughout Europe. I was also able to see the importance of the Jewish units in the British Army, and the extent they were of aid in Aliya Bet. I then helped prepare the "Enzo Sereni" for sailing at Savona. I

worked on the "Wingate" together with Aryeh Weitzman from Bet Hashita and Avraham Reiss, the Gideoni. The captain of the "Wingate" was Mario Canda, who was later a very important player in our activities in northern Italy. The "Wingate" reached Palestine but the ship was caught and the immigrants sent to Atlit. The crew and I also went to Atlit and when the crew was released I too was released. The crew returned to Italy immediately. I returned to Italy on the "Eliyahu Golomb" which had been allowed to sail after the strike at La Spezia. A large group of Palyamniks and Gideonim were with me on the trip back to Italy.

project was to go to France and prepare the "Amiram Shochat", formerly the "Ilderos" (Ile De La Rose), for sailing. The work was done in the small fishing port of La Rochelle. The ship then proceeded to Marseilles to complete outfitting and continued to Bacoli, near Naples. In Naples I was joined by my second in command, Yonatan Kinnarti and the Gideoni, Yisrael Lustig from Dovrat. We loaded the immigrants and sailed. The "Amiram" was the first ship in long time that succeeded in breaching the blockade of Palestine. This was on the day that the evacuations to Cyprus began. After a short vacation I returned to Italy as a stowaway, with a few other seamen, on a Rumanian passenger ship.

Our next job was to free the crews that had been on the "Catriel Yaffe" and the "Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha'sira," who were interned in Cyprus with the immigrants. The "Dalin" was to be our means to this end. The "Dalin" was the first ship that took immigrants to Palestine after the war. It had been impounded but was now free to sail. We made all preparations in Bari, the 'we' being Uri Horowitz of Kfar Giladi and myself. Uri procured food and fuel for the ship with the help of Romi, an undercover agent in Italian intelligence who was a great help to us. He introduced me to a number of port directors and took care of much of the paperwork. I had to get to Cyprus and bring the two crews back home. There was to be no radio contact. What made the job a bit more difficult was that it was wintertime. Our cover story was that we were fishermen trying to make a living and the ship had all the necessary equipment for fishing. We even obtained permission from the British authorities to fish in the vicinity of the island of Rhodes, which was still under their jurisdiction.

We arrived in Cyprus in daylight with a permit to fish, and the first thing I did was to make contact with Samek. The crews were extracted from the camps, moved to the ship and we immediately headed for Italy. The trip was uneventful and we landed at the little port of Otaranto, whose director was one of the acquaintances I had made through Romi. The following day I took a train to Bari, reported on the successful conclusion of the operation, and received a pat on the back.

My next job was to be second in command to David Maimon on the ship, "Shabtai Luzinsky". We were to sail together with the "Albertina" and when close to the shore of Palestine, would transfer the immigrants to the other ship and head back to Italy. I was accompanied on this trip by my good friend the Gideoni,

Oved Sadeh, who was very experienced. We did the same thing with the ship, "Shaar Yashuv" and since we had both been gone from Palestine a long time, we joined the ship that landed the immigrants and had a short vacation in Palestine.

Meanwhile, the "Exodus" affair had taken place and conditions of work in France changed dramatically. Until then everything had been done in the open. Now we had to work the way we worked in Italy, where loading of immigrants onto ships was done in secret. I was induced to remain in France and told that my girl friend would be sent there to help me. This time, I traveled in style with a Dutch passport. I made a few trips to familiarize myself with the surroundings and ports on the French Riviera, looking for the most likely spots from which to depart when that became necessary. During this period we succeeded in sending to Israel, the ships "Aliya", "Ha'portzim", "Le'kommemiyut" twice and the "Nachshon" twice.

One day I received notice to meet Yehuda Arazi in a hotel. He said to me, "Forget the immigrants. What we need now is weapons. There is a ship here in the harbor, the "Maestrle". Take command of it and go to Naples to haul coal. You will get further instructions by radio." When I boarded the ship I met Nachum Monderer who was the Gideoni. That was the end of work in Aliya Bet. I sailed, and left my girlfriend to clean up what I had left behind. She returned to Israel several days later accompanying the immigrants on the "Providence", the first ship to arrive after the port of Haifa was under our control. My business in Europe was not over yet.

After unloading in Israel we returned to Italy and arrived at Catania, in Sicily. I was told to report to a hotel to meet Lucato, an emissary of Ada. He informed me that Ada and Yehuda Arazi wanted to see me the following day in Rome. Many Israelis connected with the Israeli Air Force were staying at the hotel. There I met Tamar Eshel, a prominent figure in the Hagana. I gathered my belongings, and flew for the first time in an airplane, to Rome where I went straight to Ada's home. There, in the presence of Yehuda and Ada I received information concerning the ship "Lino". I was told to meet Mario Canda and Rossi in Bari and to arrange that the weapons on the ammunition vessel (Argiro) should fall into our hands. I was told what Mario, Amnon Yona and Rossi had already done. and the following day I was on my way to Bari to meet old friends. I had been with Mario on the "Wingate" voyage and with Rossi when we returned with the crews from Cyprus (Mario had then been one of the prisoners).

I would like to describe these two men a bit more. Mario, who became a central figure in the work of Aliya Bet in Italy, came to us in an hour of need. He was looking for work for himself and for his ship. (The "Wingate" was originally the "Noris", his wife's name). He proved to be diligent and loyal and found creative solutions to problems that arose. He was an excellent seaman, a former captain in the Italian navy, and identified completely with Aliya Bet.

Rossi Giovanni, known as Finga, was a high officer in the Italian secret service and in charge of counter-intelligence on the Adriatic Coast. He had a great deal of authority and a great deal of self confidence. The Italians came out of the war in a weak position but nevertheless, Rossi had a great deal of influence and his authority in the police force and in the ports was very great. At first he had cut immigration from southern Italy but later, once he was given orders to help us rather than hinder, he did so with utter loyalty and became a close friend.

With these two to help us, there was no danger that these weapons would not end up in our hands. All attempts to move the weapons from Italy in a way which would prevent us from capturing them were thwarted by Rossi. In the end, Oved Sadeh and I, with the aid of the crew of the ship that Mario had picked, were able to capture the vessel and its cargo of weapons. The cargo was transferred to Israeli naval vessels which returned to Israel and absorbed it into the navy. I remained on active duty until the fall of 1949, and was honorably discharged after 8 years of continuous service in the navy.

I returned to my kibbutz, family and work. There was much to do and much that was new to me in the kibbutz. As things developed, it became obvious that we would need something more than farming in order to develop and expand. In 1969, with the aid of Kibbutz Haartzai we decided to set up an optical industry. I traveled to a factory in the USA which was prepared to supply us with the know-how and was favorably impressed. I advised the kibbutz to go for it. The kibbutz accepted the idea and this is now one of the leading industries in the kibbutz movement.

Over the years there has been a feeling of satisfaction and pride in having played a role in the realization of a dream of centuries. There is also a feeling of closeness with good friends who worked together and gave their all for the success of Aliya Bet. I hope that those who come after us might remember what was accomplished.

After his death in September, 2004, Dudale, and Oved Sadeh were each awarded a certificate of appreciation by the commander of the Israeli Navy for their roles in the "Pirate Operation." Dudale's award was given to his children at a ceremony in the Clandestine Immigration (Aliyah Bet) and Naval Museum in Haifa, Israel in November, 2005.
