

Ben Yaakov Miriam (Mimi) ז"ל (Zaltzman)

Born 30th November 1911 in Antwerp, Belgium

Made Aliya to Palestine in 1932. joined the palmach -1942

Died 18th February 1962

Written by: Aryeh Ben Naftali ז"ר, Ein Hachosh

This is the Way it Was

Antwerp was a large metropolis and a very busy harbor that was the gateway to the seven seas. It had a large Jewish population, most of whom came from Eastern Europe and were refugees of the pogroms there. They brought with them their habits and their culture. For some the city was a stopover on the way to America but for others it became their home. The Jewish quarter grew and took root not far from the Central Train Station. One of the largest centers in the world of the diamond industry was established in its boundaries. This is the background in which Miriam grew up. She came from a large and well-established family that was active in public welfare and was Zionist.

Miriam was influenced by her older sisters in joining the scout movement which later became Hashomer Hatzair, and she was very active in the movement. There was a serious split in the movement; the right wing became petit-bourgeois and left active Zionism, and the left wing (that was called "Communist") was the one that continued the fight to make Aliya and did so by open or by covert means. The rightist element remained by the fleshpot of Europe. Miriam was among those who made their way to Palestine, but not before she had played an active role as an emissary of the movement to Tunis.

As the Nazis advanced throughout Europe and North Africa, the youth of Israel joined the Palmach, especially from the ranks of the Worker's movement and from the kibbutzim and moshavim. Miriam was one of the first to join up. There was at the beginning a problem of how to absorb the women into this fighting unit, but the women organized and demanded equal rights and equal obligations with the men. As a result, Miriam went through the same rigorous training as the men and ended up with colors flying.

When her basic training was over she was stationed at Headquarters of the Palmach with the responsibility for maintaining contact with its forces throughout the country. Among other of her duties was to organize the medical service within the Palmach and later, when the mass arrests of Palmachniks took place (Black Saturday), Miriam was made responsible for maintaining contact between the prisoners and Palmach Headquarters. When the Mosad for Aliya Bet was established she devoted all her strength and energy to this task and to the marine unit of the Palmach (the nascent Palyam). She took part on every possible occasion in helping move the Olim from ship to shore. Shortly afterwards she was sent by the Mosad for Aliya Bet to the Diaspora, to France. There she was active in coordinating the activity of the Palyamniks and the Mosad for Aliya Bet in the Marseilles region. When the War of Independence broke out Southern France became a center for training young Jewish youth for the Israeli Army before they even arrived in Israel.

When she returned to Israel she returned to Kibbutz Ein Hachoresch where she built her home and her family. A cruel sickness shortened the thread of her life and she passed away at the early age of 51