

Eshel, Tamar (Shoham)  
 Nicknames: Osnat, Avishag, Potifera  
 Born in England, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1920  
 Came to Palestine 1923  
 Joined the communications division of the Hagana in 1939  
 Enlisted in the British Army in 1943  
 Joined the Mosad (Aliya Daled) in 1947

### **This is the Way it Was**

When Moshe Sharet found out at the Foreign Office that I was listed as having been born in the Diaspora he was very angry and demanded that I be listed as Israeli born. His argument was that my father was in England at the time as a member of the Zionist executive. My mother's family came to Palestine in 1882 and my mother was born in Palestine. In my official biography, I was not born at all. There it says that my family came to Palestine in 1882 and I grew up in Haifa. If someone asks me where I was born I usually say that I was born in Israel. However, since my British passport is and was very important to me and to the work I did there is no sense in belittling its importance.

#### My Memoirs:

I grew up in Haifa, went to the Reali School, and was a member of the Sea Scouts. My dream was to be a sailor on a Hebrew merchant vessel. I joined the Hagana when I was 14 years old. At first I worked in communications. During the riots of 1936-39, while studying at the Hebrew University, I was active in guarding several areas of Jerusalem and used Morse code or semaphore to keep contact with other parts of the city and with Maale Hachamisha. I went to England after that to continue studies in phytopathology. WW II broke out in 1939 and I was once again drafted by the Hagana to be the Gideoni in the radio communication center they planned to set up in London. My British passport put me above suspicion, which would not have been the case if I had had a Palestinian passport.

I would have had to leave London to continue studies in the same field. I was therefore instructed to pick a subject that could be studied in London because being a student was very good cover. I studied Arabic and Islam and the Middle East and a special teacher was even sent from Palestine to teach me. I knew the Morse code but had no practice in signaling by radio. The idea was that this station should be able to both send and receive, but no transmitter-receiver were available because the government had commandeered all of them for the war effort. Yisrael Dostrovski (today, Prof. Dostrovski of the Weitzman Institute) was studying in England at the time, and with his help tried to build a set. Not all of the parts were available, nor could they even be bought. In the end, we went to all of the stores available and found a very large and cumbersome radio set which had the desired wavelength and could receive, but not send. This was actually to our benefit because if we did not send messages we could not be

discovered. We served as the contact between the Jewish Agency and the headquarters of the Zionist Movement in London.

I was soon the only person left to work the station. My contact in Palestine was with Simcha Avizohar of the Directorate of the Histadrut. We worked on the system of fifths of a book previously agreed upon. The contact would begin at 11 pm every night and the reception was very poor. I described the reception as "a cock's call on a stormy night on the shore of a raging sea". One should not forget that this was also a time of the heavy bombing of London. I sat by the receiver and used a pillow to protect my head, as houses around me were being destroyed or burnt by falling bombs. I did not go down to the shelter.

Moshe Sharet (Shertok) came to London often and was active in the enlistment of volunteers for the Jewish Brigade. I asked him to try to obtain my release so that I could volunteer for the Brigade. All my requests were denied but was eventually told that if I could train someone else to do my job, I would be released. I found Shlomit Arlosoroff in London and she began working with me until she was ready to take over the job. Others joined her later.

I volunteered for the British Army in the winter of 1943. I was given a letter from Moshe Sharet to the British Ministry of War which would allow me to join the Palestinian unit of the British Army, as it was then called. The British refused to accept me into that unit because of my British citizenship. I served as a driver in the British Army in Scotland but hoped to be sent as a driver to the Middle East. I was then sent to a course for Army secretaries, which was supposed to have led to work in a secret job. I would have had to sign up for three years and promise not to leave the British Isles. I refused to sign and after a talk with my commanding officer, she decided to help me and I had an opportunity to deliver my request to a member of the royal family.

The upshot of this all was that my request for transfer was honored and I was sent to a transit camp to await shipment out of England. I ended up in Cairo in August, 1944 after sailing in a convoy in the Mediterranean. In Cairo I became an education officer and set up libraries in army camps west of the Suez Canal. The Jewish Agency had an agreement with the army which allowed some people to work for each part-time. I was in the British Army until noon and in the afternoon worked with Levi Avrahami, who was head of the Hagana in Egypt. We had a variety of jobs to do, such as smuggling Aliya Bet and Bricha workers to Europe and North Africa, moving weapons, gathering information and more. We once smuggled Yehuda Arazi through in the uniform of a Polish army airman.

At the end of 1945 I was transferred to Jerusalem, where I was once again setting up libraries for soldiers, but had complete independence of action and was working east of the Suez. There was much tension in Jerusalem at that time and very often there would be a curfew and movement in the city would come to a standstill. In such cases I would make myself out a pass, sign it and move

about freely, usually going to Moshe Sharet or to the Commander of the Hagana, and very often from one to the other passing messages between them. Telephone conversations were monitored, so I was a convenient go between for them.

I finally asked to be discharged from the army but my commanding officer was not willing to let me go. I prepared myself for discharge but went to a course for Gideonim (radio operators) at Juara. The course ended abruptly with "Black Saturday" and I was told that MPs were looking for me. I made my way back to Jerusalem and sneaked into camp. The army finally agreed to discharge me if I would return to England, where I had been sworn in. I demanded to be discharged in Palestine and it took several months to convince the army to do so and finally, I was discharged.

David Shaltiel, who was the Head of "SHAI", the intelligence branch of the Hagana, asked me to go to work for him after my discharge. At the same time, Ben Gurion and Moshe Sneh were in Paris and the head of communications wanted me to go there as communication officer. I preferred to stay in Israel, which is why I did not want to be discharged from the British Army in England. I was afraid that the Hagana would want to keep me in Europe. I was brought before a tribunal that would decide my fate and to my great relief it was decided that I stay in Israel at least one year to work for SHAI.

I began my work with SHAI in July 1946, even before I had been officially discharged from the army. My work was very difficult but very interesting. One of the highlights was the Committee of the UN which visited Israel and decided on the partition of Israel (UNSCOP). I set up a network of intelligence gathering from telephone conversations and other sources, and passed the information on to the political aficionados.

The morning following the 29<sup>th</sup> November I traveled to Tel Aviv early in the morning while things were still quiet. I was not able to return to Jerusalem after that, so while I was in Tel Aviv I was given the job of tending to the needs and supplying info to foreign correspondents who came to Palestine in droves. I was also the unofficial censor of the material they sent to their papers overseas (the British were still in Palestine!).

About a month later I was called to Ben Gurion's house and was told that it was important to make use of my passport. I had to go to Europe, meet Eliezer Kaplan and give him information about the arms and weapons we would need. This information was given to me by Yisrael Galili. Eliezer's exact whereabouts were not known nor could he be contacted by telephone. I was flown from Sde Dov in Tel Aviv to Lod airport and was soon in Geneva where I met Eliezer. Shaul Avigur waylaid me in Geneva and told me that I could not return to Palestine immediately but had to go with him to Paris. We walked through the streets talking so that we would not be overheard, and he convinced me of the

importance of going to Marseilles and working with Shulamit Arlosoroff. She was to give me responsibility for Aliya Daled, which was another form of illegal Aliya.

I returned to Palestine for one week and then returned to Marseilles to begin working. Shulamit was scheduled to return to Palestine and I took over her work immediately. Even today, very little is known about Aliya Daled because it was a sensitive subject

Aliya Daled came into existence for two main reasons: the first was to bring soldiers back to Palestine who were in the Jewish Brigade or other British army units so that they could start working for Aliya Bet or the Bricha. Their papers and identities were given to olim, their "doubles," so that they could make Aliya. When they themselves had to or wanted to return to Palestine, new papers had to be made out for them. A laboratory with very good equipment was set up near Marseilles to forge papers. The second reason was that the olim of the "Exodus" who were returned to Germany, were promised that they would not be sent to Cyprus but would be sent directly to Palestine. Also, members of the Palyam who had to travel to various countries were given what was needed to travel between countries.

The whole system was based on the fact that many people from Palestine had left the country before the war and were stuck in the Diaspora without being able to get back because of the outbreak of war. These people were entitled to passports as 'returning citizens'. When a transport of people would come to the Marseilles area each person would be interviewed, physical details noted, languages spoken, etc. They would then be sent to camps in the vicinity that were run by the Hagana.

We would create 'families' out of several compatible people and give them children also from among the many orphans that we had there. We would create a passport for a family, sometimes the whole passport was fabricated, and sometimes we only had need to remove and change the photo. In every passport we put in a visa from a British consulate somewhere in the world. We had a list of consulates and the names of the various consuls then serving. We had copies of signatures, copies of stamps. special seals, significant numbers, etc.

Every day the camp commanders would appear at our office in order to receive the list of olim whose turn it was to go to Palestine. Every night the ones chosen for Aliya would assemble at the camp in St. Jerome. Occasional fights and arguments would ensue because of those chosen over others. The ones that were chosen were brought to a special hall where they were given their new identities. They would also be searched to make certain that they did not have any incriminating evidence of their former identity. Each one was given an address in Palestine, which was supposed to be his home address and had to be committed to memory. He was also told which buses stopped near his house and

answers to other questions that the British might likely ask. We usually had people at the other end of the line in Haifa so there was never any trouble.

They would be driven by truck to ports near Marseilles, usually La Ciotat. In this kind of work we were not talking of hundreds of individuals but when the British left on 14<sup>th</sup> May we did have to prepare passports for 1,000 olim. We worked one week without sleep and lived on pills in order to get the job done. When the War of Independence broke out, an embargo was declared that forbade entry of young people of army age into the country. We had to find a method of circumventing this embargo. We needed young volunteers and specialists such as pilots. A bunch of young MACHAL (non-Israeli volunteers) had collected in our camp and we managed to contact a small South African airline that agreed to fly them from a small airfield near Marseilles to an airfield near Haifa.

In the summer of 1948, after a pogrom in the city of Oujda, Morocco I was asked by Ephraim ben Chaim to go to Algeria and see if I could open up a route for Moroccan Jews to get there. I spent two weeks in Algeria and arranged for the Moroccans to get to the port of Oran, from which they would get passage by sea to Marseilles.

At this point I asked to be relieved of all my duties and returned to Israel. I was offered many jobs, in Marseilles as consul, or in Iraq or India. I was not discharged but given a short furlough in Israel so most of my belongings were left in Marseilles. From Marseilles I traveled to Rome and in Rome I got a hitch on a transport plane that carried Messerschmitt fighters to Israel and was dropped off in Haifa. I managed to remain in Israel and when I retired, served for 12 years as director representing the public on the National Company for Coal Supply, and was also Chairperson of the Committee on Shipping.