

**Feldman, Bezalel** (Tzolo)

Born 17 October 1915 in Akerman, Russia

Made Aliya in 1936 when he was 21 years old

Joined the Shore Patrol in 1941

Joined the Palyam in 1944

Died 11 March 1998

Written by: Edith Feldman

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

Tzolo was born in Akerman, a town in the region of Bessarabia, near the Black Sea and on the border of Russia and Romania. Tzolo was the youngest child of his parents. He had an older sister who died before he was born, and his father died when he was only two weeks old. He was brought up by his mother, Batya, and his two older brothers, Avraham and Shmuel. The family was very poor and lived in a small cellar. His mother worked very hard to feed the family, and to educate the children in values of labor, ethics, culture and brotherly love.

Akerman was a city inhabited mostly by Russians, but it had an active Jewish community of about 5,000. There were two Jewish schools: One was the "Talmud Torah" where studies were in Yiddish, and the other was "Tarbut", where studies were in Hebrew and was where Tzolo studied. When he was in secondary school, emissaries came from Palestine and spoke to the pupils. After these talks, he joined the Gordonia youth movement. Under the influence of his brother Avraham he then joined Hashomer Hatzair. Tzolo even became the head of the movement in the city and was very active. He made his first public speech when he spoke about the implications of the death of Chaim Arlosoroff before many people of the town, and they listened with interest.

In 1936 he made Aliya and came to Bat Galim. He worked there for a time and then joined Kibbutz Shamir which was then located near Kibbutz Ramat Yochanan of today. Tzolo was then sent to work in the port of Haifa. Matters in Palestine were very tense between Jews and Arabs in those days..

1941-1942 – WW II was now in full swing and Tzolo volunteered for the Shore Patrol, which was affiliated with the Mandatory Police Force. He became the cultural officer of the force, and was constantly under the supervision of the British. He was also surreptitiously in constant contact with the Palmach. In 1943 he was sent to a special course for cultural officers in which culture and ideology were discussed. During this course he translated a Russian song to Hebrew. This song, "Not the Wind", appears today in the "Book of the Palmach Songs", pages 58 and 59, and is also found on a disc of songs of the youth movements. In 1944 he joined the Palyam and attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> course for small boat commanders. In 1945 he attended the 1<sup>st</sup> course for naval officers at the Naval School in Haifa.

This is what Tzolo had to say in December 1997 about the period when he was active in Aliya Bet: "We brought refugees in vessels and from these vessels we

brought them to the shore. Once they were on shore the Palmach men took care of them. In 1945, the vessel "Berl Katznelson" came in, we unloaded all the people, and then we returned to Caesarea. Unfortunately there was a very strong wind blowing against us, and despite the wind the 2<sup>nd</sup> mate gave the order to go against the wind. We had three boats and the British succeeded in capturing two of them; one managed to get away. We were imprisoned, at first in Jaffa, where we were questioned by British detectives and then in Latrun, where I was imprisoned for six months. The Hagana and the Jewish Agency took care of all our needs. Once we were freed from prison, we still had to report twice a week and sign that we were under surveillance. Before "Black Saturday" we were ordered not to report any more because the chances were that we would be arrested again. We were taken to Givat Hashlosha and after that to some other place where there were many mosquitoes; I caught malaria.

About six months later, I was sent to France on a large Romanian passenger ship, the "Transylvania", together with a number of other Palyamniks. There were more people on the ship than should have been, but nevertheless we were all allowed to land. 1946 – while we were in Marseilles I was appointed head of a camp of refugees, who had been gathered there prior to their leaving for Palestine. Chava Banai of Kibbutz Maayan Baruch, one of the refugees then, who was my assistant, recalls: "We were left without food and the Ma'apilim were due to arrive. We were worried but Tzolo said that everything would be all right. So it was, that we sat around a pot of tea teaching him English, while he taught us the Bible. He did not let us go to sleep that night, and even asked us to accompany him on a short walk. We thought that perhaps he had lost his marbles as it was winter and very cold outside. When we came to the railroad tracks, a train came along and stopped right there. Two trucks pulled up with American drivers and started unloading food supplies. We worked until morning to put everything away in order. Tzolo did not volunteer information but if he said that things would turn out OK, then a person could count on it."

Tzolo continued: "After that, I accompanied the Ma'apilim on a vessel called "Theodor Herzl", which arrived in Palestine in April, 1947. The commander of this vessel was Moka Limon. The British seized the vessel but the Hagana had given us orders to resist, so we fought them as best we could. We threw several of their seamen into the sea. The Spanish crew was so frightened that they hid. I looked up at the bridge and saw that no one was at the helm. I went up, grabbed the helm and steered. The destroyers rammed us a number of times but we kept going. It was over when three British officers with revolvers shot and killed three Ma'apilim who had tried to protect me. The British took over the ship but it was difficult for them to navigate with us in tow, as we had destroyed all the equipment on the ship. All the Ma'apilim were taken to Cyprus but Moka, Yosh Halevi and I hid in the hold. We stayed hidden for four days until the Solel Boneh cleaning gang came to the ship and got us off. In an article written by Yosh Halevi in the newspaper "Bamachane," there is a good description of what happened. It is called: "Three Men in a Hideaway".

I was next sent to Italy, to the refugee camp at Magenta, near Milan. There, we wrapped explosives and hid them in washing machines that were shipped to Palestine. In 1947 I was appointed commander of the vessel, "Tirat Tzvi". It carried 900 Ma'apilim and we left the port of Gaeta with a crew of Spaniards and Basques. We headed for one of the Greek islands since the sea was very rough, and stayed there for 3-4 days until the sea became calm. We sailed in the direction of Cyprus and from there to Palestine but lost our way. With the help of the stars and some astronomy, I managed to find our route and we arrived at the coast of Palestine but were caught by British destroyers. They put the Ma'apilim onto their ships and took them to Cyprus. I and two other Palyamniks hid in the hold again until the Solel Boneh gang came to get us out.

Some time later I was again asked to go to Italy. The name of the vessel was the "Atzmaut" and it was in the last stage of repairs. When they were finished she sailed to Romania and take refugees from there to Israel, this time legally. The captain of the vessel was Yitzchak Aharonovitch who had also been the captain of the "Exodus". We took many Ma'apilim and managed to get them to Israel. When we arrived it was after Ben Gurion had declared the existence of the State of Israel. Since Ben Gurion thought that we were now superfluous I returned to Kibbutz Shamir. There I did field work and fish farming."

After the Establishment of the State:

1948 – He met his wife-to-be, Edith, and she joined the kibbutz.

1951 - Their eldest son, Avraham was born and named after his brother who was killed in WW II.

1953 – Their daughter, Batya was born. She was named after his mother whom he never saw after he made Aliya in 1936.

1965 – Twins were born, Yochai and Dikla.

1966 – Traveled to Russia to see his brother Shmuel and his family.

1969 – Fell off a ladder in the orchard and landed on his neck and back. From then on his health was poor.

1972-1975 – Went to study and teach Hebrew at Oranim College

15 April 1974 – His son Avraham died on the Hermon during the War of Attrition that followed the Yom Kippur War.

1982 – He recovered from a very difficult operation on the vertebrae of his neck.

11 March 1998 – He died at the age of 83.

Tzolo did not have an easy life. He knew much suffering but at the same time knew how to make the most of what he had. He was physically a very strong person and also had wide knowledge. Conversation with him was always fascinating and dipped in humor. He had the ability to merge mind and matter, strength and compassion. He was alive and full of vitality until his last day, and interested in everything happening around him. He would speak his mind and continue to read and learn. Within him he carried the heavy sadness of the loss of his son, from which he never recovered.

Tzolo believed in man, and in the equality of opportunity, cooperation, and in helping one's neighbor. He fought all his life for a better society and for his ideals. May he rest in Peace.