

Fried, Ze'ev

Born 4 February 1922

Made Aliya in 1935

Joined the course of the 23 who were lost at sea

Joined the Palyam when it was created

This is the Way it Was**History and Chronology**

I made Aliya after I completed elementary school in Poland. In Palestine I attended the Max Fine Technical High School in Tel Aviv. In 1939 I joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam when it was in Haifa, and worked in the port as a stevedore along with other friends from the kibbutz. On May 2 1940 I went by sea with the rest of my group to settle at Caesarea. In 1941 I joined the Naval Company of the Hagana in Tel Aviv.

It was from this group that the "23 men who were lost at sea" were chosen for sabotage of the oil refinery in Tripoli, Lebanon. Later, I was active in the Palyam and in the British army until October, 1946. In 1943 I married Tchiya and we had Miriam in 1945 and Uri in 1950. In 1948 I joined the Navy as soon as it was created, and served in it for several years and after I was discharged, I worked in the Ports and Shipping Department of the Ministry of Transportation. Then I retired.

Because of three minutes! Memories of the past

In 1941 I joined the special sea course in which 40 men participated. They were the cream of the youth. We were trained for all sorts of operations and some of them were quite far-fetched. This was because it was an early stage of WW II. It was from this course that the 23 were chosen to sabotage the oil refinery in Tripoli, Lebanon. The launch never reached its destination and disappeared forever. To the present day, its fate remains unknown. I sit here writing these lines because I remained alive. It may have been a mistake or it may have been a miracle, but I am still alive.

It happened on a Saturday in the middle of the month of May. That same week I was supposed to sail with the 23 young Jewish men and the British officer in a small motor launch which carried on its deck a large amount of explosives with which to blow up the refinery at Tripoli in Northern Lebanon. The beginning of this episode is well known but its end is shrouded in mystery forever; for "the 23 men who were lost at sea".

Every year as the date approaches in the month of May, I remember those friends of mine with whom I lived and trained, and I have not as yet assimilated their total disappearance. After all these years I still cannot forget the date, and how mad I was and how insulted by the commander of the operation, Catriel Yaffe (of blessed memory), who would not let me participate in the mission. What

was the reason? I was three minutes late for lunch on the day before we were to leave. I was late because I had been preparing my equipment for going on that mission. The anger and the insult was enough to make me cry.

In those days I was a member of Kibbutz Sdot Yam which allowed me, after a vote in the kibbutz assembly, a special, new outfit and to go to a marine course. This was in essence the first Israeli commando course and it was in collaboration with the Allied forces, but not connected with the Mandatory Government, nor did this government know about this course. Others who participated were men who had been in Wingate's group of fighters, which had fought against the Arabs who attacked the Iraq – Haifa oil pipeline.

Toward the end of the course the participants were gathered for a talk with the commander of the Palmach, Yitzchak Sadeh. He warned all of us that we had very small odds of returning alive from this mission. Nevertheless, each and every one volunteered without hesitation. I had a special reason, as my family had remained in the Diaspora and I had had no word of them. I wanted to avenge their loss and I wanted to save Jews. Can you imagine how angry and disappointed I was when, because of three minutes, I was stricken from the list. All the rest were sitting and eating so that my late entrance was noticed by all. I was stricken even before I had a chance to explain myself.

We were briefed very shortly before the start of the operation because of its secrecy, and the departure was carried out by a shore patrol boat of the British police, "The Sea Lion". The army confiscated it from the police in Haifa. I still have the feeling that perhaps the British police put a bomb on board so that they could blow up the Jewish men on the boat, as relations between the Jews and the English were at a low ebb at that time.