

Golomb, Yoel

Born 1919 in Germany, made Aliya in 1936
 Joined the first naval course of the "Hagana" in 1939
 Continued in the 2nd naval course in 1940
 Joined the British Navy in 1941

This is the Way it Was

As I had been in Youth Aliya in Germany, when I came to Palestine I was sent to Kibbutz Naan for two years and then to Kibbutz Ashdot Yaakov for a year. I joined Kibbutz Revivim in 1939 when the kibbutz was still in Rishon Letzion. Today I am married and have three children, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

In July 1939 I was chosen by the kibbutz to take part in the first naval course of the Hagana, on the Hagana's boats in the area of the Exhibition Grounds in Tel Aviv. The course was intended to train sailors to help in Aliya Bet (Illegal Immigration, illegal to the British but not to the Jews.). The commander of the course was Aharon Lishansky and the instructors were Catriel Yaffe, Shmuel Tankus and Yaakov Ageiev. We trained in rowing and sailing the boats in the Yarkon River and at sea. We also studied navigation, swimming, lifesaving, and other seamanship tasks.

We also had some practical training when, during the month of September, a ship with Olim came into shore and we brought the Olim to Shefayim at night, in complete secrecy. That was an unforgettable experience. We unloaded the Olim, men, women, and children who climbed down the side of the ship on rope ladders. We then brought them into shore. This seemed like a simple operation but there were two serious drawbacks: one was that we were informed that a British naval vessel had been sighted and was approaching; we managed to get all the lifeboats onto the deck, except one which we tied to the ship. The ship was named "Dora" and I think it came from Holland. The ship turned and headed back to Europe and we swam to shore. When we took count we saw that Amiram Shochat was missing; he didn't know how to swim. Tired though we were, we returned and looked for him in the water and on shore. We couldn't find him. We were quite certain that he had jumped into the water with us but that he didn't make it to shore. However, it seems that with the help of a lifebelt he did get to shore and went straight to the kibbutz.

A message was received from "Dora" some time afterwards, saying that it was neither captured nor detained. The rope that tied the boat to the ship broke and the boat was 'lost at sea'. Davidka Nameri was in charge of this operation and he chose me and another fellow to go out looking for the missing boat. Despite it having been a very tiring night, we went out and walked along the shore north of the kibbutz. When we reached Wadi Poleg, we could see the boat far out in the water. I swam out and saw that this was a rather large metal boat, and very

heavy. It did not sink because it had many air floats in it that kept it buoyant. I managed to get it back to shore and we buried it in the sand. Years later, I spotted it in the Yarkon River and who knows; maybe it is still floating there!

When the course was over I returned to Revivim. Soon after, in 1939, WW II broke out and I was called to attend a seminar for leaders of the Noar Oved movement in Kfar Vitkin. I had led various groups in the Sharon Valley but this was interrupted by another naval course which I was invited to attend. A number of the leaders of the Jewish settlement in Palestine were there (David ben Gurion, Tabenkin, Yitzchak Sadeh and Yisrael Galili,) as well as my former instructors. They explained that this course was intended to teach sabotage tactics for land and sea, in order to help the British in their fight against the Nazis.

This course took place where the previous course had been held, but this time, in addition to the "seamen," there also was a specially chosen group from the Hagana. The Intelligence Service of the British (based in Cairo) also cooperated in the course. This was a secret which was kept from the British forces in Palestine, and none of its men participated. The training during the winter of 1940-41, was very intense both on land and sea, and included all we had to know to prepare us for action. In February, three of our people were chosen: Yaakov Ageiev, Mordechai Lishchinski and Shmuel Ben Shaprut, who were sent somewhere. A month later three other men were chosen: Yitzchak Spector, Shlomo Kostika and I. We were glad to be chosen and the others envied us. Yitzchak Sadeh gave each of us a Bible and a Mauser.

An English officer arrived and took us to Sarafand and gave us army uniforms of the Artillery. We received false papers and traveled by train from Lod to Cairo, accompanied by a British officer. We were supposed to take part in a course for artillerymen there. We were quartered in one of the best hotels in the city and were given generous amounts of pocket money, but our papers were taken from us. After several days of leisure in Cairo we were driven to Alexandria by jeep. En route we stopped at a British army camp and were given a weapon with which we were not familiar. It was a German anti-tank gun with ammunition. The officer who accompanied us was a Major Camberledge and he handed us over to his cousin, Captain Camberledge. This captain put us aboard a ship, "Panland", which was already full of Australian soldiers.

We sailed north in a convoy shepherded by destroyers and ended up at Piraeus, Greece. We were surprised to meet a bunch of soldiers marching along and singing in Hebrew. They had been on other ships in the convoy and were in the Transport Corps that had been in the Western Desert. They had boarded their ship at Tobruk and joined our convoy. We were among the first to be brought ashore and were then taken to a hotel in Athens. We next boarded a small vessel, the "Barbara" which was anchored in a small bay. At about 2 am we heard a terrific explosion and in the morning, when we returned to Piraeus, we saw a terrible sight. A German bomb had hit a ship loaded with ammunition.

Several ships were sunk and houses close to the port were destroyed. The water was black with oil. We then sighted the "Dolphin 2" and on board were our three friends who had left the course before us; all of them alive and well. The "Dolphin" had been anchored close to the ship that exploded but the debris flew over their heads. It was a miracle that none of them was hurt.

We were given the "Dolphin 2", a vessel with two masts but no sails. It did have a strong diesel engine and a small cannon at the bow. There were also two Lewis machine guns amidships, one on each side of the cabin. Shmuel, who was a mechanic was added to our crew, and Yaakov and Motza were given the 'Barbara'. The "Dolphin" had participated in an unsuccessful invasion of the Dodecanese Islands before we arrived. We spent about a week in the vicinity of where our vessel was anchored, during which time we walked throughout Athens. There seemed to be a high percentage of cripples in the city but the atmosphere was positive.

One evening, I wasn't for going back to the ship so looked for a hotel. I had neither documents nor a uniform and I spoke only Hebrew and German. I was careful not to speak in that language. Some people grabbed me because they thought I was a spy. (There were numerous incidents of lynching in the city.) To my luck, I was taken to a nearby police station and there I was able to speak in broken English and explain that I was a sailor on the Dolphin and a native of Palestine. They checked my information and when they saw that it was correct, were very decent to me and escorted me back to the ship. We then made a two week tour of the Greek islands as far as Crete, in order to familiarize ourselves with the area. Two British officers accompanied us. Our relations with them were not good. They were aristocratic and regarded us as 'natives'. We did all the work on the ship. There was no trouble with the 'enemy'. We were able to relax and enjoy the scenery and the clear water between the islands. That is how we spent our time until we arrived at the bay of Piraeus.

Before dawn German planes returned and heavily bombed Piraeus. The bay was protected on either side by hills and anti-tank guns located there. The planes came in very low so as not to be easy targets. Two came straight at us and we thought that that would be our end. Either they did not consider us a worthwhile target, or else had run out of ammunition. We looked innocent enough. The captain ran to the bridge, knocking me over on his way, Yitzchak (Chakko) Spector ran to the Lewis gun on the starboard side and fired at the lead plane. A trail of smoke began following it as it flew. Chakko continued firing at the second plane and managed to hit it as well. We later received confirmation that both planes had been knocked out of the sky. That alone had made all of our time and training worthwhile.

We returned to our anchorage and several changes were made in the crew. Chakko and I joined Yaakov and Motza on the 'Barbara'; Shmuel and Shlomo remained on the 'Dolphin'. The war situation had meanwhile deteriorated for the

British, so we were informed by the British Embassy. We were given sacks of documents to throw into the sea. The engine of the "Barbara" conked out and we were given another ship, the "Hiaz". All the furniture of the embassy was moved onto the ship, as well as the house caretaker and his wife. We loaded both ships with ammunition and explosives and Shlomo and Shmuel sailed out to sea with the two British officers on the 'Dolphin'. We received other officers, some of whom we already knew.

One day, the officer in charge took us to a hotel in Athens and gave us a sum of money. "I am sorry, manage as best as you can," he said. He left us there and we were quite surprised and caught off balance. We knew that if we remained in the city, we had no chance of survival. We had to find a way to get back to Palestine. While still discussing, between ourselves on a suitable course of action, the officer came back and took us to the ship again, so that we would stand watch that night on the ship. There was a danger that the Greeks would try to damage the ship. The ship was to sail for Crete the following day at 12 noon. Greek sailors were supposed to have come to sail the ship, but they did not show up. We sailed off in two ships without them, the "Barbara" being towed by the "Hiaz".

Two hours after our departure Athens fell. We arrived in Crete without being fired on, although hell was raging all around us. We stayed at Suda Bay, Crete, for three weeks. The Germans bombed the island incessantly. The anti-aircraft guns that defended the island from the hills surrounding the Bay, and from a ship that was sunk in the harbor but whose guns were above the water level, did a very good job of defense and not too much damage was done. We met a number of our Hebrew soldiers who had arrived on the island from Greece; among them BenAharon and Bankover. They were all captured later. The island was evacuated and we were on the last ship to leave. This was only hours before the Germans parachuted in and captured all those who still remained.

We sailed for Port Said and from there back to Palestine. Shlomo and Shmuel remained in Crete during the invasion and were then separated. Before Greece was evacuated, some men succeeded in bringing a boatload of dynamite into the Corinthian canal and blew it up. The walls of the canal collapsed and the canal was rendered useless. It was of no use to the Germans for the duration of the war. Shlomo and Shmuel helped move soldiers from the beach to ships that waited for them in deep water. Their work was very difficult and dangerous. Both Major and Captain Camberledge were killed on the beach there,.

On May 18th 1941 we arrived at a camp in Tel Aviv. This was the day after the "Twenty-Three" sailed on the 'Voyage of No Return'. We felt the sorrow that enveloped all of our buddies. There were several fellows in our camp who were supposed to go with the 23, but there had been no room for them. Shlomo and Shmuel arrived two weeks after us. Several weeks later, as a reward for the services that we had performed for them, the British Navy agreed to accept

seven of our men. We were in British uniforms and under British discipline but allowed to live independently in Haifa and were given living expenses. Our job was to protect the entrance to the port from penetration by small submarines. The entrance was protected by a stainless steel mesh screen which was lowered to allow a ship to enter or leave. We would then throw home-made depth charges into the water from a rowboat.

I was already married to Henia Keller, a girl from Rosh Pina. We were married in August, three months after I returned from Crete. In the spring of 1943 official enlistment for the British navy began, but I didn't volunteer because I didn't want a change in my personal life. My wife was pregnant at the time and we returned to our home in Kibbutz Revivim.

Sixty years have passed since those exciting days. Perhaps I have made some small error here or there in the story, but today there is no one left to tell it or correct it. Of the six of us, I know that Shmuel, Mordechai, Yaakov and Chakko are no longer living. We were in contact with Shlomo Kostika until several years ago, but contact was broken and I no longer know of his whereabouts. I have also not heard lately, from either Ze'ev Fried or Aryeh Morris, both of whom were also in the course with us in Haifa.