

Klein Moshe (Moishale)

Born 1927 in Poland, made Aliya in 1930

Joined the Palmach in 1944

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

I joined the Palmach in 1944 and was attached to "E" Company in Kibbutz Beit HaArava. In 1945 I volunteered to go into the Palyam. I attended Course No. 5 at Sdot Yam. I served as an instructor in a platoon under the command of Poza (of blessed memory) at Givat Zaid. One day, a pickup truck from Palmach headquarters came by and its driver, Chatuli, asked me to come with him. Poza told me to take all of my belongings because I would not be coming back to the course. I had no idea of where I was going or what awaited me.

We arrived in Tel Aviv and went to Palmach headquarters on Rothschild Blvd. I had no idea, by the way, of where Palmach headquarters was located. I met a few other fellows there whom I knew; Biba Nafcha, Moshe Erling, Asher – I don't recall his family name – and others. Altogether, there were six of us, and we got into the vehicle and continued to travel without knowing where we were headed. Finally we arrived at the camp of the Palyam in Sdot Yam, with which I was very familiar. Samek, the company commander, was waiting for us, as well as Yosefele Tabenkin, commander of the 4th Battalion, to which the Palyam was attached. We were then told that we were going to Cyprus to take command of, and to instruct, the people there.

We joined a fishing vessel named "Shark" which was to take us to the Island, and commander of the vessel was an old friend from the 5th Course, Yosef Romanovsky (Rom). We loaded explosives and weapons onto the vessel and packed them into big rubber balloons that were hermetically sealed. We attached a heavy rope around the hull of the vessel and tied the balloons to the rope. In that manner we were ready to ditch all of the equipment if we were surprised by the British. We received a minimum of information of what we were expected to do with the Olim in Cyprus once we got there. Time was short and we didn't even have time to say goodbye to our dear ones. My parents, for instance, had no idea of where I was for several months.

Our vessel carried a little dinghy, and after about twenty hours of sailing we arrived at our destination on a very dark night. Yoske ordered those who knew how to swim well, to swim to the shore. The girls and the weapons and explosives were delivered to shore in the dinghy. I didn't have a bathing suit so I took off all my clothes, threw them into the boat, and swam to shore naked. We had a small signal light to guide ourselves to shore while we swam. To our luck the sea was calm and although the swim did not appear to be a problem, I swam and swam and it took me ages to get to shore, although Yoske didn't think that the distance was more than 100 – 200 meters.

Finally I reached shore while I still had some wind left, and then got a real shock when I discovered that I was the only one on the shore. No one was waiting for me. Yesterday I was in Givat Zaid. Today I was outside of Palestine for the first time, in a strange, and foreign land, standing alone on a beach naked as the day I was born. I was probably not far from tears but I had no time for them. I had to see if there were any others who had made it to the beach or if there was anything else, friendly or hostile in the vicinity. I tore out some bushes and put them close to shore to give me a bearing. I then ran 100 meters to the left and 100 meters to the right and saw nothing. So I ran 200 in one direction and 200 in the other until I noticed that someone had taken cover in a way that we had practiced in our field training. Upon closer investigation I found Motke Dagan (of blessed memory) was the one who had hidden, not being certain of who I was. Although I had not known him previously, I hugged and kissed him as I would an old friend, as I was so relieved to meet a buddy. We soon met all the others who had reached shore before me. They had all been worried and looking for me, and I had been the last to reach shore.

I was able to retrieve my clothes, and then we all got to work and buried our boat, the explosives and the weapons, in the sand by the shore. We mapped the area so that we would be able to find the stuff at a later date. We then entered Caraolos Camp through the tunnel *[editorial note: a tunnel had been dug at some time previously, kept hidden from the British, and used by Palmach and Palyam people who went in and out of the camp almost at will]* and inside we met Idel, who was the camp commander and whom I knew as he had once been my company commander. This whole episode of sailing, swimming, landing, hiding, finding, crawling through a tunnel and meeting friends inside a prison camp in a foreign land, was a terrific adventure for a twenty-year-old kid and it left me with a high. I was ready to climb mountains or do anything that might be demanded of me.

I did not sleep very much that night. The following morning we were given clothing similar to what the camp inmates wore, and I went out to see what the camp looked like. A vendor came toward me and wanted to sell me a piece of cake. The very sight of a vendor inside the camp surprised me, as it was something I might have expected of Jews in the Diaspora. I could not understand why he was doing that in this camp. The scene was so incongruous that it deflated my motivation completely. I returned dejectedly to the tent and met Idel there.

I told him that I wanted to return to Palestine as soon as possible because I didn't come to Cyprus to take a bunch of peddlers and merchants to our new country and I didn't see how I could help there. He looked at me in a peculiar manner and said, "Come with me Moshe, and we'll take a little walk around the camp. After that, if you want to go back, we will send you back." We left the tent and bumped into the cake vendor again, and walked on further, and saw someone else

working as a barber, and near him was a small carpentry shop and a tailor's shop. The tents had been made of three layers of cloth. The tailors had removed the whole middle layer and used the material to sew clothing. In another corner there was a regular bourse in money from all corners of the world, and I cannot figure out how these people were familiar with the exchange rates here inside the camp! It was a mystery to me. Then, this wise person Idel said to me, "Look, Moshe, even usurers can be productive under certain circumstances. These people were in extermination camps two years ago and today they are active, not broken-spirited. Can you imagine another people sitting in a detention camp after years in an extermination camp, that would not be broken-spirited and hopelessly dejected? They would be sitting here apathetically and just waiting out the rest of their lives, from one meal to the next. The will of our people is not broken and we will be able to bring them forward from here on."

This little walk with Idel affected me and has guided me in life up to this very day. My pride in the Jewish nation has guided my thoughts and actions ever since. I remained for almost a year as commander of the camp by authority of the Palyam. My other adventures there will have to be told at some other time.

Sometimes a person is busy with one thing and cannot imagine what other interesting things may develop from that, things which seemingly have no apparent connection. In 1962 I was sent by the Zim Company to manage a shipping company in Lagos, Nigeria. Two years later civil war broke out between Biafra and Nigeria. The Nigerian Government mobilized me to organize the movement of supplies by sea to the region of the fighting, and that was with the blessing of the Foreign Ministry of Israel. At that time the Nigerian army captured or liberated (depending which side of the struggle you were with) Port Harcourt and the only way to bring supplies to the Nigerian Army was by sea. I organized the logistics of the shipping and also handled all the documentation. Because of the work I was doing I was often absent from my residence which was in Lagos.

I was probably the only white man within a radius of 2,000 km and spent a good deal of my time with the officers of the army. At one meeting with them, there was another white fellow there who seemed to be English and I was curious to know what he was doing there. Soon after our first encounter the opportunity presented itself. When he heard that I was an Israeli, his face lit up and he said to me: "Listen Moses (as I was called in Nigeria), I owe your country so much that it is difficult for me to know where to start. My whole life changed because of you fellows." I was all the more curious to know how and why that was, and I asked him to tell me. His answer was, "Because of you, I have a son." That really amazed me so I begged him to explain further.

The Englishman explained that he had been commander of the detention camp at Caraolos (I had to interrupt him and say that so was I, but from the side of the inmates. That had been my job in Cyprus), and he had to receive the Olim who came on the Pan Crescent and the Pan York. When he saw how warmly these

poor souls were received by the inmates who were already there, he was amazed and perturbed by the resilience of the Jewish people. When he went home that night and told his wife about it, he was so excited and in such an emotional turmoil, that he succeeded in making his wife pregnant, something which he had not ever been able to do because of a low sperm count. By the time he finished his tale, he was in tears. This was twenty years after the camps of Cyprus were emptied, and we were on the other side of the world. Then we were each on the other side of the fence, and now we were sitting as friends and drinking to each other's health. We exchanged addresses but lost contact with each other. Never the less, a circle had been closed.