

Leviatan, Nissan

Born in 1925 in Lithuania, made Aliya in 1936

Joined the Palmach in 1943

Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

I was born in 1925 in Lithuania and came to Palestine together with my family in 1936. After I finished studying in the Achad Ha'am Elementary School in Tel Aviv, I went on to complete my studies at the Geulah Gymnasium. I happened to join the scout movement and when my group joined the Palmach I also joined. My career in the Palmach started in "D" Company, and I was arrested in the big search that the British conducted at Ramat Hakovesh in 1943. After that, my platoon went to Maoz Chaim in the Beit Shan Valley. From there I was sent to a course for squad leaders. I then spent about a year as a squad leader in a platoon in Kibbutz Heftziba.

I was just about at the end of my service when I received an invitation to meet Yigal Alon. He did not have to work hard to convince me to join the Naval Company, and that is how I got to the 5th Course for small boat commanders at Caesarea. During this period I also took part in operations against the British police in the coastal plain region. One thing led to another and I found myself in the course for naval officers at the Technion in Haifa. I ended up in Marseilles in order to accompany Ma'apilim to Palestine.

The first vessel that I sailed on, at the beginning of 1947, was the "Ulva", which became the "Chaim Arlosoroff", under the command of Lova Eliav. Much has been written about this ship (see Lova Eliav's book). After we reached the shore of Bat Galim I hid in the hold with two other Palyamniks, and during the night swam to shore. After that I wandered about for several months, wherever Palmachniks were to be found, and spoke about this adventure. The next time I got to Marseilles was after I had been briefed by Yigal Alon and was appointed commander of those accompanying ships. I was responsible for loading the Ma'apilim on the "Exodus", and made contact with Micha Perry when the deportation ship reached Port de Bouc. After that I sailed on the "Pan York", with Gad Hilb as captain (he was also the captain the first time that I sailed).

In the fall of 1947 we arrived at Constanza in Romania and was where we prepared the ship to carry the Ma'apilim with Gideon (Gedda) Shochat in charge of the job. He was an unforgettable character. We were there when we heard by radio that the UN had decided on the partitioning of Palestine and the creation of two States. At the end of that year we sailed, together with the "Pan Crescent", from the port of Burgas, Bulgaria with the two vessels carrying a total of 15,000 Ma'apilim. Yossi Harel was overall commander; Berchik (Dov Lifshitz) was commander of one ship and I, of the other.

After we met the British fleet as we left the Dardanelles, we found out that there had been some understanding between the Jewish authorities in Palestine and

the British that we were to sail straight to Cyprus without resistance. This is precisely what happened. After spending about 1½ months in the camps, I returned to Palestine and joined the port company as second-in-command to Yochai ben Nun, who was then company commander. We were busy guarding the Jewish workers in the port and unloading illegal arms and weapons. Under the command of Amos ben Tzvi, we also took part in the capture of Haifa.

The next job was assuming responsibility for a cargo plane that brought weapons from Czechoslovakia. We flew there and back and brought all types of weapons plus some Messerschmitts that had been disassembled into various parts. After various adventures the matter came to an end and we all flew back to Israel. Under the urging of Micha Perry I joined the Negev Brigade, together with my friends, Yehuda Ben Tzur, Eliezer Shaeffer and Eitan Yacobson. I served as commander of a jeep platoon in the 9th Battalion, (together with Mota Gur). Within this framework I took part in the battles for the Negev and Sinai under the command of Chaim Bar Lev. Before my discharge I also participated in a mission of officers of the IDF (together with Yerucham Cohen, the Giny) to the USA. We met many wealthy people there as well as VIP's of the US Government. It was an emotional experience to place a wreath on the grave of the famous Colonel Mickey Marcus.

After my discharge in 1949 I turned to academic studies. It seemed that I was suited to this field more than to the army. Every few years I am invited to the schools of my children and grandchildren and tell the wonderful story of the "Ulva". It affects me emotionally every time.