

Maoz, Yechezkel (Wertenberg)

Born 23 March 1923 in Germany

Made Aliya in 1938

Joined the Palyam in 1943

Was an instructor in the 3rd course for launch commanders

This is the Way it Was

I made Aliya in the framework of Youth Aliya in 1938 and arrived at Kibbutz Ein Harod. From 1941 I was a member of Kibbutz Gvar'am and that same year I joined the Palmach and was assigned to "C" Company. In the year 1942 I went over to the Naval Company of the Palmach and attended a course for small boat commanders. After that I was an instructor in short courses of the Palyam. In order to increase my knowledge of ship handling, I was sent to work on fishing boats, and on the ships "Amos" and "Atid". In 1946 I attended the 3rd course for naval officers in Haifa, after which I was sent to Greece and secretly carried a large sum of money with which to purchase vessels for Ma'apilim (details follow later).

From Greece I made my way to Italy where I was in charge of a camp, Dror Kadima, near Bari and Metaponto, for six months. Following this, I was assigned to accompany the Ma'apilim on the ship, "Chaim Arlosoroff", with which we arrived in Cyprus, after a struggle with the British. When I was freed and came back to Israel, I was mobilized into the Negev Brigade as a company commander and participated in most of the fighting in the Negev with that Brigade. After the War of Independence I stayed on in the army as commander of the Kibbutz Yad Mordechai area. I was also there during the Sinai Campaign, and during the fighting against the Fedayun.

When I was discharged from the IDF, I joined a group that was establishing the Lachish region settlements and was coordinator of the region and in charge of the advisory department. In 1970 I was sent by the Foreign Ministry to head an agricultural development team in developing countries. This included Iran, Zambia and Ciskei in South Africa. When this task ended, my final job in the service of the State was as agricultural officer in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai region, where I spent ten years.

£ 50 000 in Gold

In 1946, while I was a participant in the 3rd course for small boat commanders, I was arrested and incarcerated in Rafiah prison along with friends who were victims of "Black Saturday". I decided to better my status and made believe that I was a new Oleh who could only speak German. In that way I convinced British detectives that I was the wrong person and in the wrong place. They freed me after six weeks and I intended to celebrate my freedom at Kibbutz Gvar'am where I was a member. This would also have been a good opportunity to marry my sweetheart who was waiting for me there. Three days later a messenger arrived on a motorbike and handed me the following message: "Report immediately to David Nameri at the offices of the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Haifa". I

was given a very important assignment by David, which was to smuggle gold out of the country in order to pay for freeing vessels destined to carry Ma'apilim to Palestine. These gold coins had to be given secretly to a Greek ship merchant through a go-between who was our representative in Piraeus.

It was decided that I should carry out this mission by sailing on the vessel "Atid" whose crew I knew. I was also familiar with the vessel, as I had worked on it in the past. I applied to the CID for permission to sail. I was lucky in that the official was not the one regularly on duty, created no difficulties, and I was granted permission to sail. The arrangement was that we would sail from Haifa to Tel Aviv and then, gold coins would secretly be given to me. We sailed as planned and arrived in the evening and anchored. A small launch came out to the ship during the night, and a messenger gave me the gold coins. The coins were hidden in socks and the socks were stowed in a jerry can that was usually full of fuel. The jerry can contained £50,000 in gold. No one else on the ship knew of the gold except the chief engineer, who was a friend. He helped me hide the treasure during the night. We welded the can to pipes below the water pumps in the engine room. In the morning the vessel sailed to Alexandria and Tripoli to deliver cargo.

In Alexandria, my heart missed a beat when suspicions arose that we were smuggling hashish. The suspicions arose because on the previous night a boat had been seen approaching the vessel (this was the boat that brought me the gold), so a very thorough search was made, but nothing was found. I was to deliver the money in Piraeus while the "Atid" was anchored there. A messenger was supposed to come and get the gold from me. Hours went by, the ship had unloaded its cargo, but no one came for the gold.

The captain wanted to leave, and continue on to his next port of call but we had arranged in Tel Aviv that I would tell him as to when to leave Piraeus. I asked permission to go ashore as I wanted to clarify why no one had come to meet me. As I was leaving the ship I noticed that everyone was being searched before being permitted to leave the port. I wondered how the money could be gotten out of the port under such circumstances. When I left the port I went to the address of my contact man. I learned there that the man sent to meet me had been arrested by the authorities. I then realized that I would have to smuggle the gold out of the port area by myself.

I went back to the ship and begged the captain to allow me and a number of other seamen to go ashore. I gathered a few whom I had known and worked with previously, and who I thought could be trusted. And while explaining to them what the mission was, I showed them the gold. They were amazed. I then explained what the gold was for, and four of them agreed to help me. There was a good deal of danger in smuggling the gold out of the port area. We divided the coins between us and wrapped them in various 'strategic' places on our bodies. I ordered a launch to take us from the ship to the wharf. When we reached the exit we acted like a bunch of drunks, singing and carousing loudly and foolishly. We approached the barrier, still acting that way while officials stood looking at

us in astonishment. This looked like the best show in town which, together with a \$100 bill that I shoved into the hands of the nearest official, got us past the barrier and outside. A taxi containing our people was waiting there. We got into the cab and went to the address where the coins were delivered. We completed the mission, raised a toast, and headed back to the ship.

The captain met us with shouts and curses. He felt like he had been cheated and that we had endangered his career by smuggling explosives on the ship. This mission was accomplished, and I was then assigned to accompany the "Chaim Arlosoroff" (the "Ulua") back to Palestine. Everyone has heard that interesting story which has been told elsewhere.

Editorial note :

"In 1946 I attended the 3nd course for naval officers in Haifa".

In the original Hebrew version it says the 2nd course, but this is a mistake; It was the 3^d course.