

Meitlis, Avraham (Adam) RIP
 Born in 1926 in Krakow Poland
 Joined the Bricha in Europe in 1945
 Made Aliya on the Aliya Bet ship 'Tel Chai' in 1946
 Joined the Palyam in 1946
 Died in 1992
 Written by: His son Yitzchak

This is the Way it Was

Avraham (Adam) Meitlis, the son of Israel and Rivka, was born in 1926. The family owned a manufacturing plant in the metal industry in the city of Krakow, in Poland. When WW II broke out he happened to be in France with his mother and managed to stay alive until January 1944. They lived under an alias as Christians. As a result of betrayal by local Frenchmen the Germans caught them and they were sent to Auschwitz. His mother was sent to the gas chambers. In January, 1945, when Auschwitz was evacuated he was one of those who was in the "March of Death". During the March he managed to escape and make his way back to Krakow which by now had been liberated by the Red Army. He spent some time in a hospital because of pneumonia which he developed due to the terrible conditions in Auschwitz. He managed to get to France once again and to join a training group in Marseilles. He spent several months there during which time he helped in "Bricha" (a group of Israelis and others who moved Jews from inland cities of Europe to Mediterranean ports. From there they would be brought to Palestine by the ships of the Hagana – Palyam). While doing this he would disguise himself as an American soldier and this would help him in moving people, singly or in groups, to where they needed to go.

A description of one such operation that he carried out can be found in something that he wrote: In October 1945. Chanan Yaacobi appeared and asked for a volunteer for a "special job". It was taken for granted that this would have something to do with "Bricha". I had heard that a few days ago my father had returned home. I was not sure until then if he was still alive. I had heard from people who had seen him but I hadn't been able to find him. The reason that I had come back to France was that someone said that they had heard him say that my father intended coming to France in order to find us. In this "special job" offer I saw the opportunity of getting to him, as well. Borders were now closed and it was not simple to travel from one zone of military control to another; there was an American zone, a Russian zone, a British zone and a French zone..

I was supplied with clothes from the US Army, including GI ID discs. All this was with the aid of Rabbi Abraham Hazelcorn, an American Reform Rabbi and Military Chaplain. He also gave me a letter which said: "To American soldiers – Adam Meitlis is a survivor of the Holocaust traveling to Poland to see if any members of his family are still alive. He is .. (many complimentary things here)

Please help him get to where he wants to go.” Signed by Abraham Hazelcorn, Military Chaplain US Army.

My first stop was Paris, the office of ChananYaacobi. I received instructions and some money. I was to get to Prague and contact Yitzchak Zuckerman (Antek), Mordechai Anilevitch's lieutenant in the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. My code name was 'Meiri' and I received a letter in code which I was to give to Antek. The letter said that I was a soldier in the Jewish Brigade and that he should help me.

I found out that my mission was to change off with another person working in "Bricha" and that this other person "Frumke", had been caught by the British or by the Russians and was 'burnt'. I had a travel pass from Paris to Brussels. There were many soldiers of the Jewish Brigade there and I hoped to be able to get transport from them. I could not get anything so I boarded a special train for the American Military Forces with a pass that I faked (I doctored the same pass about 6 or 7 times by the time I returned to Paris). I put the name of a small town in Germany on the pass. This town was not far from the Czech border. I received some K rations and when I arrived at my destination I went to the nearest Army camp and had something to eat. I was told to find an empty bed and there were plenty of them available.

I went to a room and took out a map to plan my next step; how to get from where I was in Germany to the city of Pilsen, in Czechoslovakia. The following day found me on a train that was hauling coal, with two other American soldiers. We were to guard the train because coal was a valuable item. The soldiers seemed to be nice guys and we had a nice talk. I told them that I was from a Polish family in Chicago and we only spoke Polish at home. That is why I had a foreign accent. Although we only had a short distance to travel, the train moved so slowly that it took us a whole day to get there. I had an opportunity to fire the M-1 Carbine for the first time (I still use this weapon in Civil Guard duty). I shot at helmets of German troops that were lying by the roadside. In the afternoon we saw two women waving at us to give them a ride. They looked Jewish to me so I went to the engine and told the German driver to stop the train. At first he refused but after a short discussion and a few threats, he did as I ordered.

I helped the two women into the car and in my halting German asked them where they wanted to go. They mentioned a city in Czechoslovakia. I told the other Americans that they were refugees returning to their homes. I opened my knapsack and fumbled around so that they would be able to see that I had a bag of tefillin with me. Their eyes opened wider and we started jabbering in Yiddish (my Yiddish was also not very good), and that is how we reached the border. The train halted and two American MPs approached the engine driver. I saw that he pointed to me and was probably complaining about me. The MPs came over and asked to see my papers. They pointed to the two women and asked who they were. I explained about them but saw that they were not convinced and asked me to get off the train. They were suspicious and if they were to make a thorough inquiry they might discover that I was only disguised as a soldier. That could have been a disaster. I thought it was high time to use

the letter of the chaplain, Major Abraham Hazelcorn. We walked a short distance from the train and I showed them the letter. They read it with interest and said, "Good luck!" It was my luck that they were good guys. That evening we arrived in Pilsen. From there I got to Prague and soon met Antek. I was told to return to his office in another 10 days. I went straight on to Poland and had no trouble entering that country and went to Krakow.

The meeting with my father was a very happy one. We had not seen each other for six years and so much had happened to each of us during that period. He was back on his feet, had reopened his old business and got his house back by chasing out the Goyim who had taken it. My father did not want to travel to France as an American soldier. He said that there was no immediate danger where he was living and that he was doing very nicely in business. When he was able to transfer some of his money to France, then he would also leave.

Several days later I headed back to the border and there was a train there that was to cross that same night. I took an empty stall but in the morning when Czech soldiers came to examine the train they found me there. They told me in a not a very polite manner (in the Czech language which I have some knowledge of) to get off the train. I told them that I am an American soldier but they did not believe me and thought that I was attempting to escape from Poland. I acted as if I did not understand one word of what they were saying and I showed them my GI ID discs. It took a long time, but they were finally convinced and put me back onto the train, which took me to Prague.

That same day I reported to Antek's office where they were now eagerly waiting for me. I was told to deliver a Russian-Jewish captain to France, who had gone AWOL from the Red Army. This was a dangerous mission in those days. The Captain was dressed in US Army clothes but his boots were Red Army boots. We traveled together from Prague and through Germany, and sat all the time opposite each other with a map spread out in front of us, as if we were searching for some place on the map. It was an American train and in the stations there were NAAFI stores where we could get free coffee and cake.

In one of the stations I saw a soldier from the Jewish Brigade and he looked a bit out-of-sorts. I walked over to him and asked him in Hebrew what was bothering him. He said he was returning from a search for relatives who might have survived the Holocaust but hadn't found anyone. He was now on his way back to Belgium. I told him to join me and had him sit next to 'my Russian'. Sometimes MPs looked into the stall and that was not pleasant. My two 'guests' couldn't go to the NAAFI, so I would go, fill a cup with cakes and bring it to them. On the French border there was another meticulous inspection but we managed that also and soon we were in Paris. We said goodbye to the Brigade soldier and took a taxi to the office of Chanan Yaacobi. The mission had been successfully accomplished. The Russian officer, whose name I do not recall, was very happy and gave me a silver cigarette case as a thank you present. Several years later I gave the case to my brother-in-law Pierre (RIP).

That was the story that Adam wrote about 35 years after it had happened.

In March 1946 he made Aliya on the Aliya Bet ship 'Tel Chai'. The vessel was caught by the British and the Ma'apilim were sent to Atlit. They were freed according to the certificate quotas and Avraham straightway joined the Palmach. In the summer of 1946 he participated in the 8th course for small boat commanders [*editorial note: Course No.8 was not in the summer of 1946. Should be written Course No. 6*] and joined the Palyam. While in the Palyam he spent time in the kibbutzim Ginosar, Yagur and Sdot Yam.

What was unusual about Avraham was that he was the only religious fellow in the whole crowd, and he was very proud of that. Because of that, the kibbutzim would arrange for him to have kosher meals. In Kibbutz Sdot Yam he worked at fishing and in the evenings he would participate in unloading Ma'apilim when necessary.

In the summer of 1946 the British Army carried out extensive searches all over the country in order to find hidden weapons that were used to attack them. Avraham resisted the search and was wounded by bayonets of British soldiers. He was arrested and brought to Rafiah. This event was reported by the newspaper "DAVAR" (13/ 9/ 46): "A new Oleh from France, a survivor of Auschwitz with a number tattooed on his arm, was wounded by a bayonet during a search, was arrested and imprisoned in Rafiah".

Towards the end of 1947 it was found that Avraham had tuberculosis. This had probably been with him since his time in the concentration camps. He received treatment here in Israel and also in Switzerland. He recovered but was recognized by the Germans as an invalid whose condition was caused by the Nazis. He was also discharged from the IDF and this caused him much sorrow. He tried for years and finally succeeded to be reinstated for reserve duty. Once recovered from his sickness, he traveled to France and spent several years there. He married Sonya (Sara Sheindal) Shilowitz and together with her, made Aliya. He found a job in the Weitzman Institute as a draftsman and worked there until his retirement.

The spirit of volunteering never left him. He did all he could to help the needy in the field of education and in the Civil Guard. He was active in "Gush Emunim" for many years and participated in attempts of settlement in the West Bank and in the Golan. He was also against the evacuation and destruction of Yamit. He died in 1992 at the age of 65. He left a wife, five children and 16 grand children. Opposite his house a little playground was constructed and is called: Gan Avraham.