

Meyers, Chaim (Weiss)

Born 11 July 1924. New Jersey, U S A

Arrived in Palestine in 1946 on the "Tel Chai"

Became active in the Mosad in 1945 as a volunteer from the U S A

This is the Way it Was

From the age of 6 I lived in The Bronx, New York in a mixed neighborhood of Italians, Blacks and Jews. Every day after school was out I would be busy with my activity in Hashomer Hatzair. That is how my life went by until I joined the US Army. From D Day + 4 of the invasion of Normandy I participated in a unit of field engineers in the battles of WW II on the European front.

At the end of the war my unit found itself stationed at Hirschfeld, Germany and two months before I was to be discharged from the army I went AWOL in order to participate in Aliya Bet. During the fighting and until the end of the war I did not have a clear idea of what had happened to the Jews of Europe and there wasn't a word on that subject in the army newspapers.

I received a ten day pass from the army and was able to fly to London and in the office of Hashomer Hatzair there I was shown a great deal of material, both in writing and in photos, which only then made it clear to me how great the tragedy of the Jewish people really was. I was given the address of the nearest concentration of Jewish refugees to the area where my unit was stationed in Germany, and this led me to the training farm of Kibbutz Buchenwald in the village of Gehringshof.

I would visit this training farm from time to time and would usually bring with me several jerry cans of fuel. I had many discussions with the people there and also with members of the Jewish Brigade whom I met. I tried to get a discharge from the army and although I only had about two more months to serve, no one, not even my army rabbi chaplain could do anything to get me released then and there. When the turn of the Buchenwald inmates came to go on Aliya I decided to go AWOL and leave with them for Palestine.

The plan was to reach Palestine via the Mediterranean after a twelve day sea voyage. Actually, the whole trip took much longer as we hid in Antwerp, Belgium for four months. We spent our time there learning Hebrew and in other cultural activities. Our teachers were emissaries from Palestine who were also in the Jewish Brigade. Our daily needs were supplied by the Mosad for Aliya Bet and the JDC. All our activities took place inside buildings, and only once a week we went out to the public baths. At all other times we used cold water and washed inside our rooms. Once a month we went to the theater.

Antwerp was then under American jurisdiction. Frequently, soldiers would stop passersby and check their names and their identification. Every refugee received a card from the Aliya Bet people with his name and his intended country of emigration – Argentina. The secretary of the Buchenwald group,

Aharon Batzia gave me the name of Weiss, which I could pronounce without giving away my American accent. From then on, and for many years in Israel, my name remained Chaim Weiss.

When the day came for our immigration to Palestine, we were loaded onto British trucks as if we were British troops and went through several different military districts until we reached Marseilles. In Marseilles we boarded the Hagana ship "Tel Chai". On the ship I joined the rest of the Jewish crew, members of the Palyam, and my position was mechanic in charge of the diesel generator that supplied electricity to run the radio and permitted us continuous contact with Palyam headquarters in Tel Aviv.

Twelve days after the start of our voyage the ship was caught by the British. The three Greek seamen were stationed where the immigrants disembarked from the ship in Haifa, so that they could identify the rest of the crew, but we were able to disguise ourselves and the Greeks couldn't identify anyone.

In 1978 I went to an Israeli court and legally changed my name back to Meyers. The judge asked Aryeh Malkin (a member of Kibbutz Ein Dor today) who had been my leader in the Hashomer Hatzair in New York, to certify my identity and he did so. When the judge asked Aharon Batzia if he knew me as Chaim Weiss, he said that he knew me before I knew myself, as he was the one who gave me the name. The judge allowed me to change my name back to what it had been originally.

In 1979 I went back to the USA and was escorted from Kennedy Airport to Fort Dix, NJ. After a stay of one month and a half at the camp I was legally discharged from the army of the USA.