

Michaeli, Aharon (Keller)

Born in 1927 in Poland

Made Aliya in 1947 on the Aliya Bet ship 'The Jewish State'

Joined the Palyam in Europe in 1946

Joined a course for Gideonim (radio operators)

This is the Way it Was

I was born in a town near the Eastern border of the country that was overrun by the Red Army soon after the outbreak of WW II. Until then, my life in the Jewish town of Kostopol and the education I received, was in Hebrew culture at the Tarbut School. In June 1941, when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, I was separated from my family and after wandering for a long time, ended up in Soviet Uzbekistan. I was then 14 years old. To stay alive, I found a job as an apprentice in the power station of a factory that produced cotton oil.

At the beginning of 1946 when the war was over, I managed to find my way to Poland without of documents of any kind, with the aim of getting to Eretz Israel. I then learned that my entire family had been wiped out in the ghetto by the Nazis and their helpers. With my knowledge of Hebrew I was able to join the "Bricha" organization in Poland, and after a short time I was also accepted into a course for Gideonim. The course took place in Marseilles toward the end of 1946. I made Aliya in October, 1947, as a Ma'apil and Gideoni on the vessel, "The Jewish State".

When the course was over and after a waiting period I was assigned to be the Gideoni on "The Jewish State". I boarded the vessel which had just arrived from the USA with a crew of mostly young Jewish volunteers. The ship was in Port de Bouc and from there we sailed to Bayonne on the Bay of Biscay. We worked for several weeks, preparing the ship to take on Ma'apilim. We checked our equipment, installed sleeping berths, loaded food and fuel, and went to pick up the Ma'apilim.

We took on the Ma'apilim at Burgas, Bulgaria, on the Black Sea. We sailed for Palestine and at our side sailed the "Geulah". These two ships carried 3,500 passengers; mostly young, and from Romania and Bulgaria. When we left the Dardanelles we were immediately surrounded by seven British destroyers that accompanied us all the way. "The Jewish State" took a course for Haifa and the "Geulah" headed for Tel Aviv, so the British also separated. When we were fairly close to shore, British Marines overcame both vessels. All this happened shortly after the arrival of the "Exodus" and the bloody battle that had taken place on that ship in the port of Haifa. This time our orders from the Hagana were: "passive resistance only". The resistance on "The Jewish State" lasted two hours and when it was over, the Ma'apilim, the crew, and some of those accompanying the vessel, were deported and placed in the detention camps on Cyprus. Some of those accompanying the vessel, and some of the crew, including me, stowed away in a "slick" that had been prepared earlier, and we were taken out on the following day by Hagana port workers.

I did not stay long in Palestine. After a bit of touring and visiting some distant relatives, I reported to Grisha and Moishale of the Mosad for Aliya Bet and requested to return to activity. They agreed and several weeks later I was equipped with a Dutch passport in a name that I do not recall, and I booked passage on a Greek ship sailing to Marseilles. I had to wait a few more weeks at a camp at Grand Arenas and was then assigned as Gideoni on the "Le'Kommemiyut", which was anchored out at sea because of an engine breakdown. I was smuggled out to the vessel one night by a French fishing boat. There were already several Palyamniks on the vessel; Yehuda "The Wild", Avner "Skandy" and Emanuel. The crew was Italian. This little vessel with three masts aroused the curiosity of the French authorities and of newspapermen. Before dawn a boat came along side with French gendarmes and arrested all of us, including the Italians. We spent several days in a jail in Toulon where we were questioned a few times about our identity. I for instance, had a certificate saying that I was a refugee who lived in a refugee camp. Our presence on the French coast was thought peculiar by the police but we shortly noticed that there was a marked improvement in their behavior. We were soon released and returned to the vessel whose engine was now repaired. It seemed that the Mosad for Aliya Bet had pulled strings with the upper echelons of authority in Paris.

That same night we pulled in close to the shore at Bandol and 600 Ma'apilim were brought aboard in boats. We set out for Palestine. The UN on the 29th of November had agreed to the creation of two States. The British nevertheless continued their policy of deportations to Cyprus, and we continued to try to break their blockade. We who accompanied the vessel, and the Italian crew, mingled with the Ma'apilim and went with them to Cyprus. The way out of Cyprus operated very well, and after a few days I was in Haifa.

The summer of 1948 was my period of work in procurement. There was a State but according to the UN no arms were allowed to be brought into it. Observers were stationed in the ports and they checked every vessel that came in. We found ways to get around the observers and tens of ships brought war materials and found ways to unload them, as this was vital to our survival in the battles of 1948. I was on the "Shio" with Dan ben Amotz (fuel for airplanes and Czech Messerschmidts), on the "Rex" with Gabi Weiss (hundreds of tons of T.N.T.), and on the "Borea" (10 Sherman tanks and 1000 tons of army equipment).

In 1949 I returned to Israel "for good" and went to the Signal Corps of the IDF until I was discharged after about a year. That same year I married Bracha, my girlhood sweetheart, who had made Aliya on the "Exodus" and been seriously wounded in the battle with British marines. After my discharge it seemed natural to get a job in the Merchant Marine. I took a course and passed a test to get an international license, and then joined the Zim Company as a communications officer. In 1954 I joined "NATIV" and for three and a half years worked at the Embassy in Poland. Upon my return I joined the secretariat of the Seamen's Union. In 1960 I was appointed manager of the Seamen's Desk in the

Government Employment Service. During the years 1970 - 1971 I was personnel manager of "RAPHAEL", and then returned to the Seamen's Union, from which I retired in 1993.

I now own and manage a company that supplies material for quarries.