

**Ravid, Yehoshua (Ossie)**

Born 24 July 1922 in Cesznow, Poland

Came to Palestine in 1938

Joined the Palmach in 1942

Joined the Palyam In 1945

**This is the Way it Was**

In 1937, when the Nazis became a decisive force in Danzig, my parents sent me to Palestine via the Youth Aliya program. To facilitate my being accepted by Youth Aliya I took a short course in farming in Poland and in February of 1938 I arrived at Kibbutz Kfar Gileadi within the framework of Aliyat HaNoar. My acclimatization to life here was quite easy, and in 1942 my friend and I joined "A" Company of the Palmach. During this period I spent time in kibbutzim Dafna, Kfar Menachem, Afikim, Ashdot Yaakov and Ramat Yochanan. I also underwent a course in sabotage with Chaim Zinger as instructor, and a course for squad leaders and platoon leaders at Juara.

**Events that impressed me and have remained in my memory.**

In October of 1943 I was transferred to the Naval Company of the Palmach and completed a number of courses in Caesarea and the naval officers' course in Haifa. I was then assigned to the "Link", the naval sabotage section which was under the command of Yochai, and the headquarters of which was at the Carmelia Hotel in Haifa. In January of 1945 it was decided to sink two British patrol boats which were anchored near the police station in the port, and which were active in searching for vessels that brought new Olim. Shaul Aharonov and I were designated to do the job. The British had suffered seriously from previous acts of sabotage, and subsequently developed additional defenses. There were screens of metal that reached down to the floor of the harbor from the ships, and small police boats patrolled the waters of the port and lit up various areas, looking for divers. Destroyers anchored in the harbor also dropped depth charges into the water periodically as a defense against divers.

On the day of the operation we entered the harbor on Caesarea's fishing boat, "Aliza". Yochai had brought the explosives with him, and we waited for the cover of night. The boat was anchored in a corner of the harbor, about 800-900 meters from the police station. The water was very cold and a strong wind was blowing. Yochai's solution to the cold water was for us to cover ourselves in grease. The explosives were wrapped in canvas and strapped to one's chest. We had large pliers strapped to our legs with which to cut the metal screen so that we could reach the boats and attach the explosives to the sides of the hulls. Before we got into the water Yochai activated the detonators so that they would cause an explosion after a delay of three hours. We then swam carefully from buoy to buoy and tried not to put our heads into the water so as not to be injured by the depth charges. We advanced in this manner until we had reached the last buoy before the patrol boats. Shaul waved to me that he was going under to try to cut the screen shield. After several minutes he came up again and I could figure out that he had not been able to cut the screen. I went under

to try my hand at cutting the screen but did not succeed either, because it was too thick.

In the meantime the British sensed that something was going on and there was a sense of increased activity in the harbor. We decided to hurry back to the "Aliza". The water was terribly cold, our time was running out, and the explosives were liable to go off soon. Shaul managed to free himself and was able to swim more easily towards the vessel. I tried a number of times, but had no success. With my last bit of strength I managed to reach the vessel and climb the ladder. When I boarded the vessel and Yochai saw that the explosives were still strapped to my body, he took out a knife, cut the straps, and the explosives fell into the water. One half hour later we heard the bang when the explosions occurred.

At Palyam headquarters it was decided that after men had received theoretical training in seamanship courses, they had to receive practical training on ships. Therefore, in January of 1945, I boarded the "SS Amos" as an ordinary sailor, and worked at shoveling coal to the boilers. We worked in temperatures of 50<sup>0</sup> C. This was very difficult work and was usually done by blacks. I worked on the ship until October, and after that joined a Palmach platoon at Kibbutz Maabarot.

In 1946 several of us Palyamniks boarded a merchant vessel in the port of Haifa with the consent of the captain, who had been bribed, and were able to sail to Marseilles. Once there, we met Yoske Almog, who had been waiting for us, and he brought us to the camp at St Jerome. I remained there for about three months and then traveled to Italy and reported to Yehuda Arazi at the Magenta camp. While conversing with him I mentioned that I had had to leave my parents in Danzig, and when the World War began they fled eastward with other Jews, toward Russia and China. I received a few letters from them when I was at Kfar Gileadi but after a while the contact was broken. At the same time the rumors of the destruction of European Jewry spread and I did not know where my parents were, or if they were alive or dead. After the War and after the Holocaust, Jews that remained started to congregate in camps that the Mosad for Aliya Bet organized in Europe. I asked Arazi to allow me to look for them in camps that had been set up in Germany and Austria before I went on a trip with Olim to Palestine.

Arazi told me that first I should report to Metaponto, and there he would notify me of his decision. I reported there and was put in charge of supplying water and food for the camp. A short time later I was told to report to Arazi in Rome. He had prepared false papers for me in the name of a U.S. Army lieutenant named Stock Peterson, born in Alaska. I received an American army uniform and a jeep and was presumably in the U.S. military intelligence, whose job it was to question German prisoners-of-war, as I was fluent in German.

I received a three week vacation to search for my family. I was also given a list of camps in Germany and Austria and the address of one of our people in Austria, in the event that I needed to contact someone. I wandered among all

the camps and first approached the camp director, who was an Israeli. I would explain who I was and ask permission to see the list of inmates and to ask questions about people. In this manner I was able to cover a great many camps, the names of which I don't recall. Time was running out and I still had no information concerning of my family. I had promised to return to a camp near Metaponto by a certain date, so decided that the last place I would try was a camp near Salzburg, Austria. By this time I was almost certain that none of the family was alive, and I did not have much hope of finding anyone.

I arrived at the Salzburg camp in the evening and found a bunch of destroyed buildings and tents put up near them. People wandered about listlessly in ragged clothes. I approached one building near which three children were playing soccer with a ball made of rags. They ran from me when I stopped the jeep nearby, but I ran after them. They entered a building and went up to the second floor and I followed after them. I yelled for them to stop and while doing so I asked if they knew anyone from the Shmuckler family. They kept running however and ran into one of the rooms. I stopped at the door and knocked. An old, blond-haired woman opened the door and stood before me shivering. I told her that I am a Jew from Eretz Israel and she has nothing to fear. I then asked her if she knows anyone from the Shmuckler family. The woman answered: "Ossie, Ossie!", and only then did I realize that this old woman was my mother. I had not seen her for ten years. My father was also there, and the three children who had run from me in fear were my three brothers. It is impossible to describe our emotions at that moment. We talked the whole night.

Before I had left Italy, Arazi had told me that if I find them I should take my brothers with me and they would go to Palestine on one of the Hagana ships. He would get certificates for my parents, so that they could go legally. I made the necessary arrangements with the camp director, and on the following day I took my brothers with me in the jeep and we headed back to Italy. I crossed the border at the Brenner Pass and there I ran into a checkpoint of the British Army. They asked to see my papers and when they saw that I was from Alaska they were very interested and asked me many questions about life in Alaska. They asked me who the fellows in the jeep were and I told them that they were refugees that I picked up along the way. I told them everything I ever learned in school about Alaska. Finally I arrived at Metaponto with my brothers and reported to Arazi about the success of my mission. Yehuda told me that I would sail on the "Shabtai Luzinski" the following month and that my brothers would sail on the "Chaim Arlosoroff" which would sail on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1947. This ship was caught by the British and my brothers were sent to the camps in Cyprus.

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1947 I sailed with the Olim of the "Shabtai Luzinski" and we reached Palestine opposite the shore of Nitzanim. The British discovered us and we received orders to sail into the shore, beach the ship, and get the Olim off and away. I jumped into the water and was thrown a line which I brought to the shore, and tied it to something solid. The Olim either swam or used small boats which could be tugged along the line so that they could get to shore

quickly. The British brought soldiers to the shore and there was a mix-up of soldiers, Olim and Israelis. The Olim and the Israelis were sent to Cyprus. I managed to avoid the British and got to Beer Tuvia and to the Zoller family there. They gladly hosted me for several days, until the British moved out. I left them, and spent a short time in Palestine before leaving again for Italy, where I was given command of the Formia camp. We started to prepare the ship, "Af Al Pi Chen". I made contact with the authorities in the area and we spread a rumor that there was sickness in the camp and ordinary citizens should not enter. Every so often we would get a shipment of new Olim, and would take care of them, feed them, put them up in tents, and prepare them for the voyage to Palestine.

Yehuda Arazi came to Formia and told me to prepare for loading the Olim on the night of 15 September 1947, and that I was also to accompany them on the voyage to Palestine. I was also told that we would not need small boats to load the Olim because this vessel was an L.S.T. that ordinarily carried tanks. It could come in to the shore and the Olim would be able to walk on board. When the time came, the door would not open, and we did have to use boats to take the Olim aboard. A rather dangerous storm was raging while we loaded the Olim, and it took almost 4 hours before they were all on board. Dawn was breaking by the time that we left the shore at Formia with 434 Olim. I knew that this flat vessel was to be used only over short distances and was not suited to weather storms or to traverse open seas. To our good luck we had calm seas all the way. En route we organized groups of young people to aid the other Olim, and to give out the food and water.

In the course of the voyage it turned out that we had an olah with us named Betty Fiedler. She betrayed us and identified all the Israeli crew members, except me, to the British. I managed to go as one of the deported Olim and not as a crew member. I spent about a month in Cyprus and was then sneaked out on a boat that sailed back to Palestine. I reported back to Yigal Alon soon after I arrived, told him about Betty, and gave him a photo of her. Yigal said that he would have the matter looked into by Intelligence, and would find out her background. A long time afterwards, when I was in Italy, I found out that her step-sister came to Kfar Gileadi and spent about 1½ years there. She went to Jerusalem and there contact was lost. Betty was also never heard of again.

In March 1948, Arabs blew up a vehicle filled with explosives in the street leading to the port of Haifa. Six Jews were killed in the explosion. In retaliation it was decided to blow up a vehicle in the midst of the Arab neighborhood and near the headquarters of the "Najda," on Iraq Street. This operation was to be carried out by the local company of Hagana in Haifa under the command of Olek Cooperstock (Nachshon, of blessed memory). Yaakov Ritov and I were also included in the mission. As our "Link" had now become the Port Company, under the command of Yochai ben Nun (of blessed memory). I reported at the Fire House on the slopes of Haifa where we were given the uniforms of British paratroopers, with wings on the tunics and red berets. Our equipment included 3 vehicles; a jeep, a command car and a truck, and we were 11 men. I loaded

the explosives, which weighed 750 kg. onto the truck. As I was the sapper, I would have to set off the explosives when the truck was where it was supposed to be. The jeep was to lead and the truck was to follow. I was hidden on the truck by a canvas and held the detonator which would be activated after a three-minute delay. Yankale was behind us in the command car and he was to pick us up after the detonator had been activated. We went through that area of Haifa and were stopped at checkpoints of the Hagana, the British, and the Arabs, and no one recognized us. We reached the street and the truck halted where it was supposed to halt and I lit the detonator. I jumped off the truck and saw that the jeep had started to move and the truck was moving after it. I yelled in Hebrew to Yankale to halt and that I had lit the fuse. Meanwhile, the Arabs started shooting at us and we fired back. The truck driver and I ran towards the jeep, which had to break through a barricade in order to leave that street. No sooner were we out, then there was a huge explosion, which caused many deaths.

With regard to the conquest of Haifa, Nissan Leviatan and I took part in capturing Staunton Street, as far as the Post Office. Nissan took one side of the street with one squad, and I the other side with a second squad.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948, during the Ben Ami campaign, the Palyam was designated to blow up two bridges in Lebanon: one of a railroad and the other over a road. We sailed on the "Aliza" at night, to where the operation was to take place, and anchored 300 meters from the shore. We put rubber boats into the water, took the explosives on our shoulders, and landed a few minutes later on a rocky shore, which hindered our getting to solid ground. As we moved forward we were fired upon and given the command to retreat. We relieved ourselves of the explosives and headed for the rubber boat. One side of the boat was damaged and full of men. I decided to jump into the water and swim out to the vessel. During this operation, Pinchas Sobol, a Palyamnik, was killed.

After Haifa was taken, I was again sent to Formia, Italy, to bring the ship "Avionia" to Israel with 1,000 Olim. After that I was given command of a procurement ship and in that year made six trips carrying arms and ammunition, machine parts and Spitfire planes from Italy and Yugoslavia. All of this was done with a foreign crew but with one of our Gideonim (radio operators), Yehuda Limoni. On every trip we would be given a sum of money in foreign currency for emergency use; to buy fuel or to bribe port officials, etc.

I recall one voyage when we were to bring Spitfire planes to Israel for the Air Force. It was July 1948 and the Czechs suggested to our procurement representative in Czechoslovakia that we purchase 50 Spitfire planes. They could only fly a distance of 600 miles and therefore could not reach Israel by air directly. Our representative looked for some country that would allow us to load the ships in their port so that we could bring these planes to Israel by sea. Yugoslavia agreed that we could load the planes in the port of Sibenik. This was a small port with which we were not familiar. The name of this operation in the Air Force was "Velveta". I left Haifa on the ship "Arsia" for Yugoslavia with the

intention of first going to the harbor of Split. We were told that there would be Israelis waiting for us there.

Gedda Shochat, a pilot and son of Kfar Gileadi, was there to meet us. It was great to meet him there and we exchanged news of home. He told me that we would not be able to load at Split and we would have to continue to Shibenik. On the following day we went to meet the port director and the foreman of the dockworkers and arranged that they start work immediately.

Forty planes and spare parts were all loaded into large crates on a train that stood at the port. Gedda told me that it was very important to get everything over to Israel as quickly as possible. At the end of the first day of work the dockworkers went on strike. Gedda bribed the foreman and the workers and they went back to the job. We loaded about twenty of the crates and sailed for Israel. Gedda asked that when I return to take the rest of the crates, I should bring boxes of oranges and assorted canned stuff, and most importantly, a Parker 51 pen and pencil set. At that time it was a rarity in Europe, and would be a very nice present for the port director. We had a calm sea and were in Haifa one week after leaving Shibenik. The unloading and the trip back to Europe went quickly and upon arrival I gave Gedda the oranges for the workers and the present to the port director of a Parker 51 set from the State of Israel. This time the loading went more rapidly and soon all the holds were full and there were still several crates on the wharf. Gedda wanted me to also take these on the deck but I explained to him that that was very dangerous, and if we would run into a rough sea or a storm we would be in serious trouble. We loaded them as well and set sail.

At first the sea was calm, but when we reached the Aegean Sea a storm arose and it rained heavily. The crates on deck got wet and started to move about. It was too dangerous to continue sailing and we decided to head for the nearest island and seek shelter. We approached an island whose name I don't remember and we cast anchor about 300 meters from the shore. We then started to work on making the lines fast that held the crates on deck, and pumped water out of the holds. The next morning we put two sailors into a boat and sent them to buy some fresh food for the crew. I saw with my binoculars that there were people with guns on shore and they were shooting at the boat. I ordered the boat back and got out my tommy gun and returned a volley towards the shore. Yehuda Limoni contacted our headquarters and we were told that there was an Israeli warship in the vicinity that would accompany us the rest of the way. When this trip was over I returned to Kfar Gileadi.

In conclusion, my wish is that we continue to meet every year at Caesarea for many more years.

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