

Tal, Eliezer (Klein)

Born 1925 in Tel Aviv

Joined the Palmach in 1943

Joined the Palyam in 1944

This is the Way it Was

My mother's father, Eliyahu Glaser, came to Palestine from the town of Kopisciuk (near Vilna, Lithuania) in 1891 and settled in Rehovoth, which had been established a year earlier. Since then, all of his descendants live in Israel. My father, Moshe Klein, was born in Warsaw, Poland and came to Palestine in 1912. When the First World War broke out in 1914 and there was danger that he might be drafted into the Turkish Army, he left the country and went to the USA. When he had been there for three years and as the War was drawing to an end, he enlisted in the "American" Battalion (the 39th Battalion) which came to do battle in Palestine. In 1919 these Jewish Battalions were disbanded and my father decided to remain in the country. This then was his second Aliya to the Holy Land.

The business of my grandfather (Zindel Klein) in Warsaw had been hat-making and selling and he continued in that line after making Aliya, and joined my father in Jerusalem in 1921. My grandfather, my father, and several of his sisters built up a successful business which continued for many years. The partnership with my father did not go well however and he and his family left Jerusalem for Jaffa and later Tel Aviv, where he built his own successful business of hat-making. In 1925 I had the honor of being born in Tel Aviv. My father's hat business grew and our style of life was reflected in the success of the business. Our lifestyle was typical of the middle class of Tel Aviv during the 30's. This dwindled to an end with the Arab riots of 1936 and 1939 against the Jews. Contact between people of the two nations became limited and there were also economic repercussions. That happened to my father's business as well. He had a large clientele of women from Jaffa who stopped buying from him. His business became so bad that he went bankrupt. The upshot of all this for me was that I could not go to high school and started life as a worker. I tried to make up for the lack of school chums by joining a youth movement, and this was the Tel Aviv branch of the Sea Scouts, which met at a shed on the banks of the Yarkon River.

The aim of the Sea Scouts was to familiarize youngsters with small boats and the elements of rowing and sailing, and in general to make them feel at home on the sea. On Saturdays, if the sea was calm, we would go out of the mouth of the Yarkon and sail along the shore of the country in the movement's sailboats.

The winter of 1941 was important from the point of view of my development. During this winter a group of men started training in seafaring and sea sabotage. These Hagana men were later known as the "23". The training was in cooperation with the British and was aimed at using these men in an operation

behind enemy lines. The men were based at the fairgrounds in Tel Aviv, in a building that had formerly housed an exhibit of the Orient. This area was adjacent to the Yarkon River and some of the training was done at night. There was an aura of importance and secrecy that surrounded their actions, which we young scouts were well aware of. We would whisper to each other the rumors of what these fellows were going to do. The truth was that we knew nothing of their objectives, but we did know that in the past some of them would bring a ship to Palestine and would break through the British siege and unload Ma'apilim. Our imaginations ran wild and we used them since we were young and easily influenced, even if we didn't know the truth.

During the years 1939 – 1943, WW II was at its peak, and I worked in a workshop that painted kerosene burners, and also painted mines for the British army. One day, with the assistance of Captain Lieberman, who was Captain of the Tel Aviv Port and also commander of the Sea Scouts, I was given a job on a fishing boat, the "Hatikva", that had been built in a shipyard near the port. I worked in preparing the boat to go to sea, and then as an apprentice fisherman working with experienced older men. During those war years there was a lack of protein. The price of fish was quite good and definitely enough to give the crew a decent livelihood, even if we did not catch a huge amount of fish. I worked on the boat until I joined the Palmach in August, 1943.

Joining the Palmach and the Palyam

In 1943 the Sea Scout movement decided that one third of its members should join the Palmach as a special Company. I joined this group which became the "Scout" platoon of "D" Company of the Palmach. Our first base was at Ramat Hakovesh. In an effort to find illegal arms in the kibbutzim, the British police and army made a thorough search at Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh on November 16, 1943. The center of the search was the Palmach base there, but they also searched in other places that looked suspicious. During the search, members of the kibbutz and the Palmachniks resisted forcefully, one member of the kibbutz was killed, and many Palmachniks were arrested. At the end of the day's search the British had found nothing and left. A short time later those arrested were also set free. I was not among those arrested so was able to take part in rebuilding the kibbutz, which had been severely damaged.

A short time after this search our platoon was transferred to Kibbutz Maoz in the Beit Shean Valley and once again, training was renewed. While at Maoz we learned that a naval platoon of the Palmach was being formed. This was the answer to my prayers and I immediately put in for a transfer to that outfit. One rainy day in early 1944 I appeared before Zalman Perach, who was the first commander of the naval platoon. Its base was then at Kibbutz Sdot Yam that was then at Kiryat Chaim.

My Jobs in the Palyam and in Aliya Bet (1943 – 1948)

August 1943: I joined the Palmach as a Sea Scout and we were accepted into "D" Company at Ramat Hakovesh.

Early 1944: I volunteered for the Naval Platoon which had just been formed and went to Kibbutz Sdot Yam at Kiryat Chaim. I worked in the port of Haifa and in fishing at Kibbutz Ein Hayam near Atlit.

March – June 1944: I was a student in the 3rd course for small boat commanders. The course commander was Berchik (Dov Magen)

Summer of 1944: I was the commander of special short courses. Each one ran for 10 days, in which various platoons of the Palmach practiced unloading Ma'apilim from ships.

April – July 1945: I was commander of the 4th course for small boat commanders at Caesarea. At first Avraham Zakai was the commander. Later in April he was named the first commander of the Naval Company and I took over command of the course.

September 1945: Commanded the course for instructors and was an instructor in that course. The students were some of those who had completed course # 4 for small boat commanders.

August – October 1945: I participated in unloading Ma'apilim from the "Dalin", the first ship to arrive after the end of WW II. After that, there were "Nathan A", and "Gavriella" that arrived at Caesarea, and "Pietro A" and "Nathan B" that arrived at the Shefayim shore.

October 1945 – March 1946: Commander and student at the 2nd course for naval officers. The course was based at Yagur and studies were at the Technion in Haifa. The teachers at the course were: Captain Sheinman, Shmuel Tankus, and teachers from the Bosmat Technical School which was connected to the Technion.

7 March 1946: I was sent to Venice, Italy, to work in Aliya Bet. Dov (Berchik) Magen and Peter Hofman were also in this group which came with me.

March -April 1946: I was in charge of the camp for Ma'apilim at Magenta, near Milan. This camp had large stores of food, fuel, blankets, and other equipment needed for the journey to Palestine. A large amount of illegal weapons was also stored there.

May 1946: I commanded the "Dov Hoz" on its voyage to Palestine. The British allowed the Ma'apilim to enter the country. The voyage began at La Spezia. I returned to Italy on the "Eliahu Golomb" whose passengers were also given entrance.

July 1946: I participated in preparing the "Josiah Wedgwood" for its journey to Palestine and loading the Ma'apilim at the Vado pier, near Savona.

August 1946: I was commander of the Ma'apilim ship "Katriel Jaffe". The Gideonit was Aya Meir (Pinkerfeld). The ship left from Bocca di Magra, south of La Spezia.

18 August 1946: Sabotage of the deportation ship "Empire Heywood" in the port of Haifa. A description of the voyage and the resistance to the deportation is found in the first volume of the Book of the Palmach (p. 688-691). Zalman

Perach also participated in the two operations, the resistance and the sabotage. He came to the vessel in the port of Haifa disguised as a stevedore bringing food to the Ma'apilim and working for the Jewish Agency with the permission of the British. The Ma'apilim and the Palyamniks who accompanied them all ended up in Camp # 60 near Famagusta, Cyprus.

September 1946: Escaped from the camp in Cyprus and sailed to Greece from Limassol on a ship leased by the Mosad for Aliya Bet. There were eight Palyamniks in this group and a Greek seaman. Our vessel was challenged by a Greek coast patrol vessel near Cape Sounion and we were all jailed by the police. The Mosad for Aliya Bet made efforts to have us released but the process took about a month.

November 1946: All eight Palyamniks escaped to Italy in a hired vessel. We landed at Santa Maria de Leuca.

January – July 1947: Was in command of all seamen and all those accompanying the Ma'apilim in Italy, and responsible for getting them onto their vessels when they left. This position was given to me by Yigal Alon, commander of the Palmach, and Yehuda Arazi, director of all Aliya Bet activities in Italy. During this period I was responsible for loading the "Chaim Arlosoroff"; about half the passengers for this vessel were loaded at Meta Monto in Taranto Bay, Italy; the "Shabtai Luzinski", which left from Meta Ponto, the "Moledet", which also left from Meta Ponto, the "Shaar Yashuv", which sailed from Boliasco, near Genoa, the "Hatikvah", also near Genoa, and the "Mered Haghetaot" which left not far from Bari, in Southern Italy.

July 1947: Commanded the Ma'apilim ship, "The 14 Victims of Geshet A-ziv". The Ma'apilim boarded at Milliarenno, south of Livorno. The Gideoni was Yitzchak Breuer, and other Palyamniks who accompanied us were Shalom Dolitzki, Uri Horwitz and Zeev Paz. This ship was caught by a British destroyer not far from the shore of Palestine. There was no resistance to deportation because of the poor condition of the structure of the ship. The Ma'apilim were taken to Cyprus and the Palyamniks hid as instructed and later disappeared from the port area.

March 1948: I joined the Navy when it was created.

My Jobs in the Navy in the War of Independence 1948/ 1949.

March 1948: From the Palyam I went to the Navy.

March – April 1948: Helped organize the Headquarters of the Navy, moved units of the Palyam to the Navy, and mobilizing personnel.

May – June 1948: Was appointed commander of the force that was to land north of Tyre and blow up bridges over the Litani River. This operation was cancelled at the last moment.

July 1948: Was appointed commander of the landing forces of the Navy. In this capacity, also participated in the breakthrough to the Negev in the "10 Days" operation, and in the battle for Beit Afa, east of Kibbutz Negba.

September 1948: Chief of the Department of Planning Operations of the Navy. This entailed planning the Navy's participation in the "Zeev" Operation (15 –

23 October, 1948). Planning and preparation for the “Horev” Operation (22 December 1948 – 8 January 1949).

November 1949: Discharged from the IDF with the rank of Lieut. Commander, 1955: One year of (voluntary) service in the Navy as Operations Officer on the Navy ship, “Mivtach”

October 1956: Participated in the “Sinai Campaign”. Part of my reserve duty was as second-in-command of the “Mivtach” when it sailed from Haifa to Eilat by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

The Passage to Civilian and Academic Activity:

When my service in the Navy ended I turned to studies and received 3 degrees from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the field of Life Sciences, (B.Sc., M. Sc., and Ph. D.) In 1967 I was appointed by the government as director general of the National Council for Research and Development and remained in this position for 13 years. I served at the same time as Chairman of the committee of the chief scientists of the various government ministries. I was also chairman of the Interdepartmental Center of Technological Analysis and Prognosis, and also chairman of the Directorate of The Company for Research of Seas and Lakes.

During the years 1980 – 1984 I was a research fellow for one year in the Institute for Analysis of New Systems of Research, in Germany and spent 3 years as technical and scientific consultant for the Inter American Development Bank in Washington, DC.

Aside from the book “The Campaigns of the Navy in the War of Independence” which I wrote to earn money when I was a student, I also published many articles in many countries, and I am the editor of the book(in English), “Science, Policy and Development”.