

Tsiddon-Chatto Yoash
Nickname: Muttu (Mathias Bürger)
Born in Romania 26th November 1926
Came to Palestine in 1941
Joined the Palmach in 1943
Joined the Palyam in 1945

This is the Way it Was

In the Beginning:

We were a family of foreigners in Romania, one of the broken pieces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We had servants, horses, carriages and sleds. We went hunting and I had my own gun from age ten. We were assimilated, we were gentile. What was German was good, what was French was womanish, what was English was commercial and what was America or Japan was far away. What was Jewish? I had no idea! I had plenty of money to buy ammunition for my gun and film for my camera, and I had my own radio studio. I had whatever I wanted so long as I would work in my father's factory. In 1940 the Germans came. They were so orderly and clean. No doubt they would teach the locals a thing or two.

As a student in a paramilitary school, a member of the aviation club, and a fluent speaker of German, I was invited to the airstrip to see the Messerschmitts and the Stukas that sealed the fate of France. We showed them! My mother exclaimed: "But we are Jews!" The reaction was as the Nazis wanted; Jews to Palestine! So I was off to Palestine. My father paid in advance for my studies and lodging through to university, and I was added to a group of young Zionists who were going to Palestine under the aegis of Aliyat Ha'Noar. That was at the beginning of 1941 and I was 14 years old.

I was sent to the Ahava School in Kiryat Bialik. This school had transferred from Berlin to Palestine with all of its staff and pupils, just a short time earlier. As I had special qualifications, I was sent for an interview by Prof. Franz Olendorf, who decided that I should study radio in the naval training school connected with the Technion. Today, this is the Naval Officers Training School at Acre. There was trouble at the school. There were pacifists of the Judah L. Magnes type and religious, and the world was at war with Germany. I wore a uniform and was not religious, so I moved to a small leaky tent in a far corner of the campus.

I worked to support myself by fixing radios and giving lessons in math and physics, in addition to a long day of studies. I also worked at stevedoring in the port just to show that I was a real he-man. I did long for my family but there was no contact. Time flew by and the sun shined. I joined the Hagana in 1943 and demanded to be put in an adult group because of my training in radio. I was sixteen and summoned for an interview with Yona Rassin, commander of the Northern Galilee. He called for a Jewish policeman, and we went to a deserted spot in the dunes where Kiryat Chaim stands today. I was given a German gun

and an English gun, and whatever the gun, I hit the target. I was then assigned, together with my very good friend, Benny Maimon (who later went down at sea with the other crew members of the submarine Dakar), to the headquarters of the Northern Galilee command.

In 1943 I was faced with a dilemma. Prof. Olendorf had procured an exemption from service for me, and had invited me to start studies at the Technion. I would also have been able to assist others in their studies, which would have been sufficient to cover all of my expenses. Here was my childhood ambition handed to me on a silver platter! On the other hand, Yona Rassin informed me of what was going on in Europe at that time, and what a great help I could be with my knowledge of languages, radio and weapons. I could very easily pass as a gentile. If I were willing, I could be sent to Europe, to the War.

I chose to enlist without hesitation, and began a series of courses; for non-coms at Geva, for officers at Kfar Maccabi, radio operator and encoding at Juara, sabotage at Alonim etc. I was stricken with malaria and feared that I would be removed from further participation. I passed my final exams while I still had fever and was sent to Safed to recuperate. That didn't last very long. In July, 1945 I receive an important telegram from Biria, the religious command post of the Palmach.

The Operation:

"Come to Caesarea immediately". This was signed by the commander of the 4th Battalion of the Palmach, and Avraham Zakai, commander of the Naval Company which had recently been created. We contacted several ships and led the "Peter B" into Shefayim, but contact with the "Dalin" was lost. I sailed with the "Peter B" to Italy, which was under the command of Eliezer Versh (Armon). There were three candidates for being sent to Europe at that time. Eliezer and Peretz Goldstein were both older than me, but I had had more training with radio. Peretz was the one chosen, and he was killed. I will, however, continue with the story of this voyage: We ran aground on a rock in southern Italy, (Santa Maria de Leuca), were extricated and finally reached Bari. We went to the Jewish soldiers' club run by Yosef Baratz of Kibbutz Degania. Aya Pinkerfeld and I went north to Milan, to meet Yehuda Arazi. Aya was immediately assigned to the Gideoni radio station in Milan while I divided my time between Magenta, where immigrants of the "Hana Senesh" were being prepared for Aliya, and a unit of the British Army in which I served as a driver on loan from a motor pool. This gave me free use of a truck of the British Army which we used to move immigrants and supplies.

After some time, I was sent to France. I set up a radio station on the French Riviera and then another one near Paris, on the Dreyfus estate near the village of St. Nom La Breteche. I then helped prepare the ship "Asia", later renamed "Tel Hai," for loading immigrants. I liked the people I worked with; Shaul Meirov (Avigur) and Ehud Avriel (of whom Yehuda Arazi was not very fond), Shmarya Tzameret and Willie from Kibbutz Usha. There were also three radio operators from the French Jewish underground, Yisrael and Jacques – who are now in

Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi, and Alex, who suffered from TB. Our housekeeper in Bondolle was Lotte, who had a number from Auschwitz tattooed on her arm.

We had a very good and long relationship with Phillip and Collette Dreyfus. He had been a member of an elite British commando unit and had parachuted eight times into occupied France. She had been secretary to the fabled French Maquis commander, Jean Moulin. In Marseilles I used the identity of a US naval officer as well as the identity of Aryeh Friedman (Par) of Caesarea. In Paris I was a British paratrooper.

The "Tel Hai" sailed in March of 1946 and I was the Gideoni on that voyage. We had an engineer on board who did not seem trustworthy, so I kept an eye on him continuously to insure that he did not sabotage the engine. We were three Palmachnikim on the ship; Yisrael Rosenblum was commander, Chaim Miller from the German Company, who was returning from another operation, and myself. We were joined by two of the immigrants, Aviva, a pretty nurse, and Shlomo Zelinger, a graduate of Auschwitz who later joined Bet Ha'arava, and subsequently became one of the best known Israeli sculptors.

We were caught by the British and brought to Haifa where they tried to identify the Palmachnikim on board with the help of the traitorous engineer. I disguised myself and succeeded in avoiding detection on the ship, but when I was in the harbor area I was arrested on suspicion of sabotage. I escaped two hours later and Davidka Nameri put me on one of the buses that went to Atlit. As he put it: "For the English, it's better for you to be an immigrant than a Palmachnik". As we were standing in line in Atlit waiting to receive blankets, I noticed that a truck was unloading vegetables and the empty Tnuva crates were being thrown back onto it. Once a volunteer, always a volunteer, so off I went to help unload the vegetables and then arranged the empty crates around me. When the Jewish driver reached Haifa, he was surprised to hear me knock on his rear window and ask to be dropped off at the Egged bus station. Two escapes in one day!

A few days later I was off to see Yigal, the Old Man(Yitzchak Sadeh) and Moshe Sneh, concerning things about which they had to make a decision. An aviation unit had been created and I had wanted to be an aviator ever since I knew my uncle, who had been a fighter pilot in the Austrian Army during World War I. I asked Yigal if I could join that unit and at first he agreed, but later he told me that aviators would be needed when we'll be fighting for statehood but for now, he had something else in mind for his British soldier. He had a job for me to do in Egypt.

Four of us left for this mission; two "real" British soldiers and two others. Yisrael Gefen from Nahalal and Gad Lifshitz from the Tel Mond area(he fell during the War of Independence) were the soldiers, and I and another from my squad. I was now in the 405th Water Carrier's Company which was stationed at Fayid, on the Canal. I spent my spare time driving a stolen truck until caught by a British officer. He had been watching me and when he stopped me and asked what I was doing, I told him that I worked at the garage and was testing the truck. He

asked me why I didn't have a sign on the truck saying that it was on a test run, so I put such a sign on the truck and no one bothered me after that. When our job in Egypt was over we made our getaway from Egypt on an Italian ship that assured safe passage as it had been carrying prisoners, and we ended up in Italy.

We left the ship at Taranto, and the first thing we did was to get into a fight with British MP's. We then commandeered a passenger compartment on a train to Bari in the name of His Royal Majesty. At Bari I had a surprise waiting for me. My mother had arrived in Milan and demanded to see me. Yehuda Arazi ordered me to come to Milan and meet her and he also gave me a few days off. I invited my mother to a restaurant but she refused to eat pork. I was dumfounded. At home we had slaughtered and eaten pork, ham, etc several times a week and now she would not touch any of it. She said that she had sworn that if she lasted through the war, she wouldn't eat pork any more nor ride on the Sabbath. (She kept that vow until her dying day at age 94.)

She asked me if I had any time to spare and I told her that I had a few days. She then suggested that we go to Rome and meet the Pope. I could not understand her idea and asked, "Is it Sabbath or is it the Pope?" Her answer was: "My little fool. If I survived the war, and also found my son, then I believe in all religions."

I returned to Romania where I met the rest of my family. They had not been harmed by the Germans but had been impoverished by the Russians because they were the bourgeoisie (My family made aliyah to Israel in 1951).

I continued to work as a driver for a time and as a smuggler and scout, going across the Alps. I repaired a radio station, and was given a trainload of 2,700 immigrants by Shaike Dan, who told me to take them from Bucharest to Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

In Zagreb we were given the use of a university campus that was being built. The building had no windows and no doors and it was winter. My assistant was Sherry, a wonderful person and an immigrant herself. She later married Reuven Hirsh (Yatir). We did some training while we were there and the morale of the group was good. From the university we moved by train to the small port of Bakkar on the Adriatic. The ship that waited for us there was "Knesset Yisrael". Benyamin Yerushalmi and I prepared it to take on the immigrants, and we had 300 German prisoners to help us with the work.

While checking the rust on the hull of the ship which was 54 years old, I hit a bit too hard and created a hole. Should I tell someone? 3,400 immigrants were waiting to sail and the ship had just crossed the sea. What if...? I decided to say nothing for the time being. We sailed towards the end of November and also had the "Agia Anastasia" sailing with us. She carried 600 young immigrants. We ran into heavy winds and the engine of the "Agia Anastasia" died. The ship was dragged by the wind and current into a magnetic minefield that the Germans had sown along the Adriatic coast, and had not yet been cleared. Chaim

Fradkin of Kibbutz Bet Alfa who was the Gideoni on that ship, radioed that they needed help. We answered that with 3,400 people on board we cannot do anything and that our engine was not powerful enough to maneuver in the strong wind. Luckily, their ship ran aground on a small rock near a small island and they were all able to get to land without any casualties. We later took those immigrants onto our ship.

During this storm a baby was born and I was asked to be the godfather. The parents wanted to call him Mordechai but I suggested the name Saar, because he was born during a storm. He was therefore named Saar-Mordechai and was the first of 11 babies born on this voyage. On his identity card, his place of birth is listed as Knesset Israel so people think that he was born in the Knesset building. I met this young man many years later. He was then a company commander in the paratroop reserves and a father of four children.

We had a battle with the British because we had been lied to. We were told that we would be sent to Atlit but then saw that we were being transferred to a deportation ship to be sent to Cyprus. I was wounded in this fight but did not dare to ask the British for help, as they had seen me 'work over' one of their soldiers. This was my 20th birthday, by the way. The girls of Kibbutz "The First of May" took very good care of me, and that, and my young age led to a quick recovery. When we reached Cyprus, Kippy, the commander there, gave me the job of seeing that all the foreign crewmen were smuggled off the island.

We came to the end of December and the holiday of Christmas, when most of the British soldiers were pretty drunk. That night we managed to smuggle all 20 foreign crewmen from the island and sent them home. We also smuggled a radio transmitter onto the island, but it fell and broke. Besides, we did not have any electricity in our camp to operate it. But Kippy wanted a radio, and told me to see what I could do. We opened a path through the barbed wire fences and were soon able to come and go as we pleased. I took the broken radio to the hills outside the camp where I was able to work quietly, and brought it back inside when I had finished, together with a battery from an army truck.

Just about then, a stunning nurse arrived from Palestine who was sent by Davidka with instructions for me. Our relationship started when I sent her to buy just about all of the A size batteries on the island. That relationship has continued to the present day. With the large battery of the truck and the small ones that we bought, we had power to use the radio and low current to heat up the cathodes of the radio. When our truck battery went dead we arranged to switch to the battery on the Bedford truck that hauled water. This battery sat outside the hood, and was easy to switch with our dead one. We would push the truck to help the driver to get it started, and told him not to switch off the motor at his next few stops.

Yossale Hoover (Dror) stretched the antenna between two tents, but well concealed and voila! We had contact with Palestine, loud and clear. When

Kippy was sent back to Palestine I was put in charge of the camps and I started to organize the "Defence Forces" This was preparatory training for the immigrants who would later be serving in the Israeli army. I invented a torchlight ceremony we had in the camp one night because I did not want to use the word "Hagana" which the British might have found offensive. During the War of Independence a whole brigade of new immigrants served in the army.

I was brought back to Palestine and charged with the sabotage of British ships in Cyprus. The sabotage itself was carried out by Yossale Hoover, Yoske Romanovsky and Moshe Lipson. Raissa and I were also in on the act and since I was in overall charge of operations, I was considered directly responsible.

It seems that what had been done at Cyprus did not have the formal approval of the Hagana but had been done by command of the Palmach, which had supplied the mines and other equipment, The Hagana was somewhat in a state of turmoil after the events of "Black Saturday". I, the small pawn in the game, did not know that Sneh had been removed. Yosefele Tabenkin, in his deposition at Efal before he died, declared that Carmi, the Jewish Agency representative in Cyprus, and Laub, the head of the JDC there, had both complained that I had set up my own underground movement in Cyprus and had known what my intentions were. They wanted "peace and quiet" in their territory and I wanted to prepare soldiers for a war.

Afterwards:

Yahel told me that I must add what a Palyamnik did after the Palyam was over. I was sent by Golda to cool off at the radio station at Givat Brenner. I was thinking of joining Lechi (the extreme right wing resistance movement) but my fiancée, Raissa, whom I was soon to marry, was from the Worker's movement and would not hear of it.

In October of 1947 I was sent to Hanita where I was to survey the Lebanese border and monitor the movements of Kaukaji (the Leader of Palestinian Arab forces). I returned with a cast on my foot and was married on the 6th of November 1947. Yigal Alon sent us flowers and asked how it was to be married 'on one foot'. At this stage I intended to resign and go back to the university to study. At the same time I planned to work with General Amos Chorev's father in what was the forerunner of Rafael, the company that develops weaponry for the Israeli army. While I was there I built a mine detector according to a sketch found in "Popular Mechanics". It could detect a plate that was buried several meters underground – if anyone would be able to lift and carry it.

All of this came to an end with the vote in the UN on the 29th of November, 1947. I cut the plaster cast off my foot and was put in charge of a convoy on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road. I had been drafted by Jacques Tzvia, the commander of the Arab Company. Yan Yanovsky, who was in command of the Communications network of the budding Israeli Army, found me in one of these convoys and wanted to know why I was wandering around the roads when there was so much work to be done in developing the communications network.

I was transferred immediately and put in charge of the radio station of Jerusalem. I felt I was too far away from the action, and once again put in a request to join the air force. At first I was transferred to the Harel Brigade as coordinator with the air force and by the end of the War of Independence. was a crew member of a C-46 that had been converted to a bomber.

By the end of 1950 we were the three first graduates of the air force training program, - Yankale Solomon, Benny Peled and I. We formed the first fighter squadron, the 101 Squadron, and had Mustangs, taken over from the Spitfires. Since I had had to give up my rank at the start of the course, I was now a second lieutenant but had an additional role as communications and Intelligence officer for the Air force and the Navy. I had a large office in Stella Maris in Haifa and a little cubicle at my home in Ramat David.

When our English test pilot was killed, I took his place in 1952 and tested planes that we built from parts of broken-down airplanes and 'alte zachen'. I went back to a fighter squadron and became commander of a fighter squadron that specialized in night flying. We first went into action during the Sinai Campaign and I shot down a plane in a night battle. When the Six Day War came I was in charge of planning in the air force, plus a few other tasks. Mine was the second plane to take off from Ramat David and my objective was to neutralize a rocket launcher at Port Said. I was unscathed until my next to last lift-off, when I had some trouble in getting back to base, but made it. Although I was quite happy in the Air Force, I quit over a difference of opinion with Ezer Weitzman. He favored procuring a Dassault fighter plane for the Air Force although a committee of his choosing, had recommended an American plane. In any case, I continued to fly in the reserves until 1984. Altogether, between the underground, the regular army and the active reserves, I had spent 41 years of my life, from age 18 to age 58, in military service and finished with the rank of Colonel.

I went over to industry and established a company in Carmiel, "Cyclone Aeronautic Equipment". This company operates to this day and as CEO I earned the award for outstanding exporter. We exported equipment worth very substantial sums. In 1988 I became a member of the Knesset and was particularly active in the field of legislation, especially law for the "respect, honor. and freedom of the individual," in changing the law for the election of the prime minister, and in promoting a constitution.

I was a member of the Peace Mission to Madrid (1991) and today fight to establish large industry in the Negev. I also do research in the field of political science and write. I have written two books; "Principles of Electronic Navigation" and "By Day, By Night, and in Fog". I have written more than 250 articles on a subject that led to an invitation to appear before a joint committee of the Senate and House of Representatives of the USA, and the Barcelona Conference in Germany. Until the middle of 1995 I was a member of the Consulting Board of "Rafael" and sat on a number of directorates. I also lecture frequently.

Our three children are active in the private and academic fields. I uphold the old Spanish saying: "Meanwhile ,with steak and with wine we shall continue on our way."