

Vaknin, Yosef (of blessed memory)
 Born in 1924 in the Old City of Jerusalem
 Joined the British Army in 1943
 Joined Ha'Chavura ("The Gang") in 1945
 Written by his daughter, Shlomit Biran

This is the Way it Was

In 1939 -1940 when things were very difficult at home, Yosef left and settled at Sheikh Abreik (later called Givat Zaid). He worked at farming and became particularly attached to the sheep-raising branch of work. In 1943, during World War II, after the ship "Arinfora" was sunk, he was called to service and joined the British Army together with his buddies, Yochanan Zaid (of blessed memory), Yosef Koren and Yaakov Kotev (May they live a long life). They served in the 462nd Transport unit in Italy, until June 1946. He was discharged after the "La Spezia affair"

He returned to his home in the old city of Jerusalem where he remained for several months. When he learned that the British were searching for him because of his involvement in the "La Spezia affair", he and his friend Yoske Koren (Koronel) settled at Kfar Yael (later known as Irgun Yael). This was a village adjacent to Menachemia, established for discharged veterans of the British Army transport units.

In the Moshav he did any work necessary, particularly in agriculture and security. In 1948, during the War of Independence, when attacks on Jerusalem intensified, he left the moshav and went to help defend the city. He took part in accompanying convoys and in the fighting at the Kastel, and fell in the battle for the High Commissioner's residence on 17 August 1948. He died at 24 years of age. His memory is with us forever.

A group of men was chosen by Yehuda Arazi, Meir Davidson, and others from the 462nd Transport unit whose task it was to save survivors of the Holocaust and bring them to Palestine. They also gathered arms and explosives and saw that these also reached Palestine in order to aid the Jewish security forces. This special group was known as "The Gang" and worked under conditions of great danger, and did everything with the aid of false documents. They ransacked British storehouses for equipment, clothing, blankets, and anything else that Ma'apilim would need while waiting to go to Palestine, or for the journey there on Hagana ships.

"The Gang" was the first to arrange houses or camps where the Ma'apilim could stay, and as the flood of Ma'apilim increased when WW II was over, these camps were able to absorb them and care for their daily needs. The Ma'apilim received training in work and in learning Hebrew. This job was very demanding for those helping the Ma'apilim and required devotion and dedication without bounds. Needless to say it was also dangerous, clandestine, and illegal

On one of those road trips, when they were carrying an engine part to be fixed, the drivers stopped to rest somewhere in a town in the northern part of the country. My father stepped too close to a tram, was hit, and had his hand broken. The pain was very great but he refused the help of those around him because he did not want his truck to be caught with the load that he was carrying. Only when the mission was over and the part delivered, did he go to the hospital in Milan to have his hand treated.