

Zack, Yisrael (Jaques)
Born September 1927
Joined the Palmach in 1945 from the Maoz group
Joined the Palyam in 1946

This is the Way it Was

I was born in Haifa, in September, 1927.
In 1952 I married Chana Lifshitz. Our children are Omer and Tamar.

My personal report is written as a description as if I were a small stone in a large wall of very big stones. These stones all made up that wonderful and qualitative edifice called the Palmach, and were what made the War of Independence a success. I could not possibly exaggerate the importance of the activities and the battles; therefore I have chosen a few activities and events which I recall vividly.

My elementary and high school studies were at Rehovot, Haifa, and the Haifa Bay area. After two years of high school I started work in the workshops of the Electric Company in Haifa, (there was a garage and machinist shop, and an electrical laboratory), and studied in the evenings (technical studies for working youth) at the Technion in Haifa. During this period I was a member of the Machanot Olim youth movement in the Bay area. During 1945 I went with my peer group from the Machanot Olim, to Kibbutz Maoz Chaim in the Beit Shean Valley for training, and joined the Palmach. We were assigned to "D" Company of the 1st Battalion. The company commander was Chaim Avinoam and our platoon leader was "Peachy". We would train for two weeks and then work in the kibbutz for two weeks. There were also social and cultural activities and studies in the field of agriculture.

As we were scheduled to settle on the land somewhere, our group was allowed to take part in the "Night of the Bridges" and we blew up the Sheikh Hussein Bridge over the Jordan, east of Maoz Chaim. We also took part in other operations in and around the Beit Shean Valley. I also personally took part in the KAPAP (hand-to-hand fighting with sticks) fighting with the Arabs of the Jordan Valley. This happened when we went to dig fishing reservoirs south of Maoz Chaim and to arrange the runoff of the springs in the area. Hundreds of Arabs came with their staffs and stones and we had men from Tirat Tzvi and other settlements in the area (about 100 in all). When the fighting was over we walked abreast through the fields looking for the Kipot (head covering) that the men from the religious kibbutzim wore and which had fallen during the battle. The groups which volunteered for the Palmach had to give a percentage of their members for special service. Towards the end of 1946 it was announced that the Palyam ("J" Company) started to mobilize new members. I asked to be transferred to this Company and my request was granted. The commander of the Palyam was Samek (Shmuel Yanai).

I participated in the 7th course for small boat commanders, under the command of Gideonchik Rosenberg (Rosen), and at Michmoret under the command of Avner Goldman (Gilad) – the “scandalist”. To the best of my knowledge, we started out at Neve Yam and ended up at Michmoret. I recall many days of sailing in terrific winds and fearsome waves, and sandstorms that turned our tents inside out with our beds buried under a half meter of sand. After that I participated in the 4th course for naval officers under the tutelage of Shmuel Tankus and Berchik (Dov Magen of Ramat Hashofet). We lived in tents at Kibbutz Yagur and studied at the Technion in Haifa. When the course was over, in the middle of 1947, I was sent to take part in a squad leaders course at Kibbutz Dalia which was under the command of Chaim Bar Lev, the “Bayonet”. At this course there was an incident when a tent burned down completely. By the time Bar Lev finished giving the command: “Yehuda (Yarkoni), take the platoon and run and put out the blaze” the whole tent had already gone up in flame. (Bar Lev was famous for his slow, measured way of talking, even when under intense pressure.)

Since there was still a slowdown of activity in the field after all these courses, I was assigned as an instructor for several platoons in the Naval Company. One of these was in Neve Yam and another was in Kibbutz Maabarot. After that I was instructor for small boat commanders at Course Number 10 in Caesarea. Towards the end of 1947, squad leader courses for the 4th Battalion were organized and these courses were conducted at Kibbutz Maanit. I instructed at the first course and also at the second course, which was not completed. During the first course there was an attack on Kibbutz Maanit by thousands of Arabs from the Tulkarem region. A British officer sympathetic to our cause brought up two tanks, and troops, to help us. A unit was placed under my command. We went to the roof of a house that overlooked the road and concentrated fire of a machine gun on a narrow bridge. This prevented reinforcements from reaching the Arab fighters and they retreated soon after.

During the second course, we were called to the battles of Jerusalem and went to Maale Hachamisha and Kiryat Anavim together with the men from the course. We took part in the “Nachshon Operation” of the Harel Brigade, as part of the 4th Battalion, “Haportzim”. Our battalion commander was Yosefele Tabenkin and our “political commissar” was Benny Marshak. Our company, under the command of Poza stayed at first, at the Fefferman house, and then went to Abu Ghosh (to the house of the lawyer, Abkarius, who was in Gaza at the time). I was a squad leader in Foxy’s (from New York) platoon. We fought in Jerusalem, in the Old City, all along Shaar Hagai trying to keep the road to Jerusalem open, and in the battle for Nebi Samuel. We suffered very heavy losses and there were also losses in the reinforcements that tried to reach us via the radar outpost. Poza, the company commander, fell, and the two platoon leaders, Foxy (Harold Monash) and Feigush (Aharon Feigenblatt), as well. The third platoon leader was wounded. The second-in-command had been dropped upon us by the IDF several weeks earlier. He was always bothering us with British parade ground drill between battles. When he saw what a mess we were in, he ran away and we never saw him again. The battle ended at the time of

the Passover Seder and at the same time there was very severe fighting at Nebi Yusha in the Galilee, and many fell there. It was a sad Seder that year.

Yochai ben Nun also participated in the battle for Nebi Samuel. He came to see what fighting on land was like. He was wounded and we had to carry him and Yankale Zahavi, another wounded man. We were eight men carrying stretchers, and another fellow carried the weapons of all of us. While carrying the stretchers we were completely exposed to Arab fire. Luckily, we carriers were not hit, but Yochai received another wound while being carried. Yochai's reaction was typical of this courageous individual. He remarked, "It's lucky that I was the one who was hit and not one of you carrying the wounded. Now you are able to continue taking care of us."

When that battle was over, Shlauch, (Shlomo Shiloach) received command of our unit. We had suffered heavy losses so received reinforcements of immigrants from Eastern Europe and North Africa. Their absorption into the army was a tremendous success. We continued to fight on the outposts of Sha'ar Hagai and the road to Jerusalem. We tried to break into the Jewish Quarter of the Old City from Mt. Zion, and I was wounded at Zion Gate. Soon after came the first cease fire in fighting, during which we were all formally made 'soldiers of the IDF'. While still recovering from my wound I was made responsible for absorbing and creating new companies of soldiers from survivors of the Holocaust who came to the camp. They were candidates for the 4th Battalion. With the encouragement of Shlauch, the company commander, and of Benny Marshak, the Politruk, and with the acquiescence of the Battalion Commander, Yosefele Tabenkin, I was allowed to transfer to the Navy in order to strengthen the group of Neve Yam (stationed at Givat Olga at the time). I point out permission for my transfer, because there were many who transferred without permission. There was a strong difference of opinion about the correctness of transferring from one outfit to another without permission.

While I served in the Navy I was commander of the Navy base at the Lido, on the shores of Tiberias and of the base at Ein Gev. For a period, I was assigned as commander of the base at Kibbutz Dardara, under land siege on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Syrian outposts on the slopes of the Golan Heights.

Today, the meetings of the Palyam and the Palmach, in which happiness and sadness are intermingled, catalyze emotions evoking the past, the present and the future. The participants at these gatherings are dwindling in number and it's worthwhile that the tradition be passed on to the next generation.

I was discharged from the army in 1950. Several months later I passed my matriculation examinations and went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to study geology. For my masters degree I studied the geology of the Ramon Crater in the Negev. For my doctorate I studied Mt. Sodom and the Dead Sea fracture (part of the Syria-African Rift). After working for many years in the Geological Institute of the State of Israel, I moved on to the Hebrew University

in 1968, where I participated in research and teaching as Professor of Geology. During this period I did further research and sabbaticals in France, the United States, Japan and Mexico. I spent from half a year to two years in each of the aforesaid countries. I also did research in commercial and economic fields: A survey of raw material for the manufacture of caustic soda in Iran for the Iran-Israel Company, surveys and consultation regarding the storage of gasoline and other fuels in the underground salt rock of Mt Sodom and in the Plain of Amiaz. I did surveys connected with raw materials for cement in the coastal plain and the Negev. My particular field of interest and activity in geology is the sedimentary basins at the verge of the continents and of inland fissures and sedimentary basins, geochemistry and tectonics, problems of salinity, and geologic economics of sedimentary mineral deposits.

I retired in 1996 but continue to do geological research in addition to research and study in fields that are newer to me, such as the development of language and of writing, as a means of communication in the early stages of the development of mankind; and the history of our people in ancient times and during the period of the dispersion in the Diaspora.

One final word: In connection with putting my memories on paper, I tried to make clear to myself how I got to the Machanot Olim Movement, and from there to the Palmach and the Palyam. How did I come to choose research in geology as my profession, and to choose a university as my place of work and study? Why did I go to foreign countries to do research in language and cultures other than ours? From where did my interest stem in the development of natural panorama and hills and rocks and bodies of water? At the same time, there is my interest in various cultures that have developed and died even prior to the effects of globalization. It seems to me that the answer or background to these developments, was the nature of our way of life in the period prior to the founding of the State (of Israel); a period of being close to nature, dreams and pioneering.

When I was young I lived in the Carmel area when it was still far from being the center of a large urban population. Our huts were spread between rocks, olive and carob trees, and the natural vegetation of the Carmel forest. Our population was mixed with the population of our Arab neighbors, and they also lived in tents and huts. The rocks of the Carmel and the presence of minerals such as calcites and quartz, and alongside them the presence of fossilized creatures, froze an ancient world in their midst. In the midst of this scenery were the playing fields which were shared by us and Arab children. This close relationship allowed us to peek into their world and their way of life. We were invited to their holidays that were so different from ours, so colorful and picturesque.

It was under such conditions that my curiosity regarding rocks and fossils and the differences between cultures, grew and was nurtured. It was not as a passing phase, but something I experienced every day and in all seasons of the year, for many years.

I will skip a few years and come to my youth. I passed through a number of youth movements and landed in the Machanot Olim where I found the mixture of the social group, the national ideals, and the hikes and closeness to nature, to my liking. This was during the early years of the World War. We hiked in the Galilee and Samaria, and Judea and the Dead Sea Rift as far as Hatzeva and Massada. We visited the monasteries of Wadi Kelt, southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights as far as Kuneitra. Once more there was this combination of a way of life, natural wilderness, and nature as altered by man. The continuation was in my training in the kibbutz and in the Palmach. My life was working in the fields, on the tractor and irrigation in open furrows. In the Palmach we trained in the Hawara of the Dead Sea area and in the meandering of the Jordan River.

In my courses with the Palmach we studied subjects that were of interest to me. At the course for squad leaders, during the intermission between activities I studied English by translating books, with the aid of a dictionary. In this manner I translated "The History of the Earth" and the "Birth and Death of the Sun" by Gamow. These books greatly aroused my interest in the sciences. The first one brought me to geology and the second one to cosmology. To my sorrow, the science of cosmology was still in its infancy.

Editorial notes:

7th course for launch commanders : Gideonchik Rosenberg (Rosen) was one of the instructors in Neve Yam , and at Michmoret one of the instructors was Avner Goldman (Gilad) – the "scandalist..
The commanders were Micha Peri and Shlomo Schlauch.

Lull : "in the middle of 1947, we entered a period of self-control when there was a lull in Aliya Bet activity". There was no lull.

Feigenblatt : In Palmach site - Feigenbelt