

Alexander, Eugene D.

אלכסנדר יוג'ין

מתנדב מארה"ב בצוות אוניית ההעפלה "חיים ארלוזורוב"

ה ע ד N ה ג י ד ' 0

My name is **Eugene D. Alexander (Gene)**.

My Aliyah Bet name was Mickey, sometimes Mickey Mouse.

The Ma'apilim said that I looked like a movie star. I said jokingly "Yeah, Mickey Mouse". It stuck. I guess I was one of the least likely to end up in the Pal Yam. Both of my parents came from orthodox households and reacted very negatively to the religion, any religion. They both ended up atheists. We never celebrated Jewish holidays and I wasn't Bar Mitzvahed. In fact I'm still not quite sure what the Jewish holidays are, and I never lived in a Jewish community. Strangely, I have always felt Jewish. Probably because I've always had a sense of Jewish culture and as my cousin of a similar persuasion says "I'll be a Jew until the last anti-Semite dies." It looks like this will take a long time because there are still some anti-Neanderthals around.

I was born in Orange N.J. 8/29/24. Spent my early years in New Jersey. My Mother became very ill and I spent two years in childrens homes before my father and I came to New York City. The Depression years were very difficult and I remember that at times we were very limited in the kind of food we ate, but there was always enough. I went to high school in New York and had a semester in college before, as a somewhat naive and bewildered 17 year old, I found myself at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in May 1942. They moved things very fast in those days. Three months preliminary training and I was on a ship as a Cadet for sea training. Before I knew it we went through the Panama Canal, around Cape Horn to Durban South Africa and finally

to Port Tufik in Egypt. The round-about way was to avoid submarines. It took better than a week to unload cargo.

It was during this time that I met my first Israeli's, except they were called Palestinians at that time. They, we and some Aussies partied together. To me, at that time, they were all Brits, and I thought the Jewish guys were a lot like the Aussies and I liked them both.

Back around South Africa, up the coast of South America, with a few stops at ports to pick up Cargo, and back to New York. To our surprise we found that we had been reported missing. Seems that the ships going through the Mozambique Channel a half day before us and a half day after us both had been sunk, and they must have mistakenly thought that we were sunk too.

Ten more months at the Academy and I am a 19 year old ensign in the U.S. Navy, assigned to an attack transport in the Pacific. I was at the invasions at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. A Kama Kazi missed us by twelve feet in Okinawa and the Japanese fleet chased us during a storm.

Sometimes in late 1946 I was discharged from the service as a Lt.jg. At the time I didn't have much direction and my sense of meaning was very disturbed when I discovered that some American corporations had plants in Germany and were involved in both sides during the War. I guess they were hedging their bets but this seemed to me to be a bit too much hedging, to say the least.

Anyway, I'm sitting on the beach in Long Island telling this gal that I have a 1st engineers license

the little icebreaker and Eddie found himself at the wheel maneuvering to hard left and to hard right, until he managed to collide into one of the ships, which crinkled like tin by the heavily plated former icebreaker. The British ship was so seriously disabled that she went through repairs during half a year. The battle turned into a race to the shore. Finally marines from one of the war ships succeeded boarding "The Jewish State" with tear gas. They killed one person. All deck hands changed clothing and mingled with the refugees. The British were handing down 10-year sentences for refugee smuggling at the time. The British began evacuating the 2,700 refugees back to Cyprus. A "Shoo-Shoo" (slang for Hagana member), who could hardly speak any English asked Eddie if he wanted to help him escape. After agreeing, he was asked to wait for him in the subdeck. While waiting with some other men in the dark, the door was suddenly locked. There were about 10 men stuck in a dark, stinky water tank, together with Eddie, who suffered from claustrophobia! After being locked up in the dark for 25 hours, they were freed by stumbling into the sunlight, facing a British naval officer. Eddie said he almost got a heart attack! But when the officer asked him if it was awfully bad down there, it was understood he was on their side. They exchanged clothes with cleaning workers and with brooms in their hands, they passed the British guards to get on shore.

After Eddie's escape from the British, he received a false identity card with an Israeli name and was warned not to speak a word of English. The only thing he learned to say in Hebrew was: "Ani lo medaber anglit", hoping the conversation would stop at that point. Together with his fighter pilot brother Mike, they managed to bluff their way past the blockade of Jerusalem to hide out from the British with friends of the family. Later on he married one of the

daughters, Adina, from his safe-house family. Eventually, Eddie returned to Panama where I, his only daughter was born. Later my family moved to the U.S. and then back to Israel. My father volunteered during the "Six-Day War" and the "Yom Kippur War" driving an ambulance. In 1976 he started the first health food shop in Jerusalem, "Ha'adama" on Rehov Bezalel. When he retired, he moved to live together with me and his four grandchildren in Moshav Bar-Giora, a peaceful area in the Judean hills.

My father always felt bad that the role the Americans took during Aliya Beth had largely been overlooked. In the late 80's there was a reunion which I also took part in. I was so surprised to see so many American volunteers who participated in Aliya Beth. When my father came home from the president's house wearing a tag, his upstairs neighbor argued with him that there were no Americans helping during Aliya Beth and she added that she made the interviews for the official Hagana account. He explained to her that the very wheel he steered, taken from the "Jewish State" is on display at the navel museum in Haifa.

And although my father was always very modest, and clearly unaware of the exceptional nature of his actions, he found it very important to let the Israelis know how the Americans helped during the War of Independence.



"The Jewish State" (with 2664 immigrants) at the "Peer of Tears" dock at Haifa

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