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אוקופניק בן

מתנדב מקנדה באוניית ההעפלה "חיים ארלוזורוב"

ה ע ס N ה ג י ס ' 0

I served on the ULUA (Chaim Arlosoroff).

The following is my Pal Yam or Aliyah Bet career.

I was recruited in Toronto in 1946. I proceeded to New York, staying at the Breslin Hotel until receiving word to proceed to Baltimore to join the ULUA, where I met the rest of the crew. We outfitted the 1,000 ton ship and left for Marseilles through the Chesapeake Bay, Cape Hateras and across the Atlantic. What a bad trip. I was sea sick most of the time but still had to work.

Spent 5-6 weeks in Marseilles outfitting the ship with bunks, 3 high, and then left for Denmark and across to Trelleborg in Sweden where 600 single girls and a few men waited. They had been rescued from the concentration camps. What a sight as a train pulled up to our dock and these well dressed women came on board. When they went below and saw the 3 tiered bunks, they panicked thinking back to their concentration camp days.

We left after an emotional farewell with friends on the dock and the girls on board singing the Swedish National Anthem.

We proceeded to LeHavre, France to take on more fuel and provisions. The British asked the French to blockade our ship so we left in the middle of the night after cutting our lines. After a bad storm in the Bay of Biscay we finally got through Gibraltar to the Mediterranean. We passed a British Flotilla carrying the Queen of England to South Africa. They asked for our colors. We raised the Magen David since the BBC broadcasts had been tracking our progress. We went across to Tangier and hid in a cove for

2 days, and then we proceeded across the Mediterranean to Italy.

A few days later we hit Montoponto in the Gulf of Taranto in Italy where we used our long boats and pulled ourselves ashore on a wire anchored to the shore and took on another 700 Ma'apilim. What a night. We lost nobody due to a few miracles. We then set sail for Palestine, and a day out of Haifa we were spotted by a British Flying boat. By the next morning, in sight of Haifa we were surrounded by 5 or 6 British warships. They proceeded to jump us, but we took evasive action and tore the side of one of the British Frigates. Eventually they tear gassed the whole ship and managed to land many marine commandos, the infamous "Calaniot" and they took over the ship but couldn't stop us from running our ship up on the beach at Bat Galim. We were dragged off our ship onto prison ships. Empire Lifeguard was the one I was on and we were deported to Cyprus where we met the other thousands of Jews interned there. That's a story all by itself.

These people, survivors of the death camps only wanted to go to a home for Jews. They gave up chances of going elsewhere. To my dying day, I'll never forget these fellow Jews. I was so proud to be one of them. I was eventually able to escape to Palestine, spending a few months there and then back to Canada to help recruit the 1st Canadian Volunteers to fight in 1948.

I returned to Palestine in April 1948 with the Canadian Machal and went into the army to fight at Latrun (3 times) and then proceeded to the Navy after the 1st cease fire on the Wedgewood

room. I do not remember him ever visiting the Black Gang during our whole hejira).

Without question, the highpoint of our journey was the night we finally loaded the 1,500 refugees from the sealed train that had brought them to the Bulgarian port of Burgas from Romania. There were many orphans, many young people organized into youth groups according to their political or religious affiliation. It was a very moving experience to see them emerge from the railroad cars praying and singing as they boarded. I remember tears in my eyes. And I was not alone as we in the crew reached one of our goals. They were even more crowded on our ship than they had been in the concentration camps, but they knew they were going to "Eretz" (the land of Palestine) as we called it then, and there was only hope.

I did not experience the rigours of Cyprus along with my fellow crewmembers and our passengers. After our ship was boarded by the British Navy and marines and towed into Haifa harbor, as the first refugees and most of the crew were being transferred to the barges which could take them to the camps on Cyprus I was with the

group that would be the last to be taken off the ship. Next to me was the chief engineer, Pierre Baird, who told me that he had been requested by the haganah to hide in the firebox of the boiler and if I wished I could join him. The firebox was still warm, we stripped down to our skivvies, squeezed though the fire-door. There was a draft of fresh air since we directly connected the ship's main stack. We waited while the remaining passengers were taken to the British prison barges and then waited for hours more until we heard voices and then with a thick accent heard: "here they are". Among the gang brought aboard by the British to clean and fumigate the ship were a couple of Haganah operatives who had bribed their way among the Arab group that had the fumigating contract. They gave us clothes and we joined them as they left the ship.

After a week at the Carmelia court getting false identity papers I had two months in Palestine travelling, working on Kibbutzim, being shot at on the slopes of Mt. Hermon but that is all another story.