



Kaplansky, Eddy

קפלנסקי אדי

מתנדב מקנדה באוניית ההעפלה "מדינת היהודים"

ה ע ס נ ה ג י ד ' 0

I was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1925, the first of three children. My father was born in the Old City of Jerusalem, and emigrated to Canada after WWI had uprooted his family. My mother emigrated from Latvia to Canada in 1922. It was there that she met and married my father. My upbringing was in a traditional Jewish home/ there were frequent family gatherings at my paternal grandfather's house, where I'd hear my father and uncles talk their childhood days in Jerusalem while my grandfather told of the carpentry jobs he had all over Palestine, Their tales instilled in me a sense of identity with Eretz Israel.

It was in the Montreal of author Mordecai Richler that I grew up and had my schooling. It was then Canada's most important city, and had its largest Jewish population. Quebec province was under the strong influence of the Catholic church, which ran most French-language schools. In the 1930s we lived in a mixed area with few Jewish families. A Catholic school stood between our house and the school I attended. Going to school alone was an invitation to a beating by its students, so to feel safe we went in small groups. There was no avoiding the anti-Semitic insults they'd hurl at us as we passed their school, and we'd often have to defend ourselves against students spoiling for a fight. Their teacher priests would stand by in silence, tacitly approving of their actions.

In 1943, when I was old enough, I joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). As a Jew, I felt duty-bound to join the fight against Hitler. After graduating as a pilot a year later I was assigned to various courses. One was to prepare

pilots for convoy escort and anti-submarine patrols, which also qualified me as an air navigator. I was still in Canada when the war in Europe ended. I volunteered to serve as a fighter pilot against Japan, and was sent to a special preparatory course. The course ended the day after VJ-Day.

In late 1946 I learned of the Hagana's Aliya-Bet activities. Fully aware by then of the Holocaust and the plight of the survivors in Europe, I felt that only a Jewish state could offer them a safe haven and guarantee the future safety of Jews. So although never a formal Zionist, I readily agreed when invited to be crew on an Aliya-Bet ship.

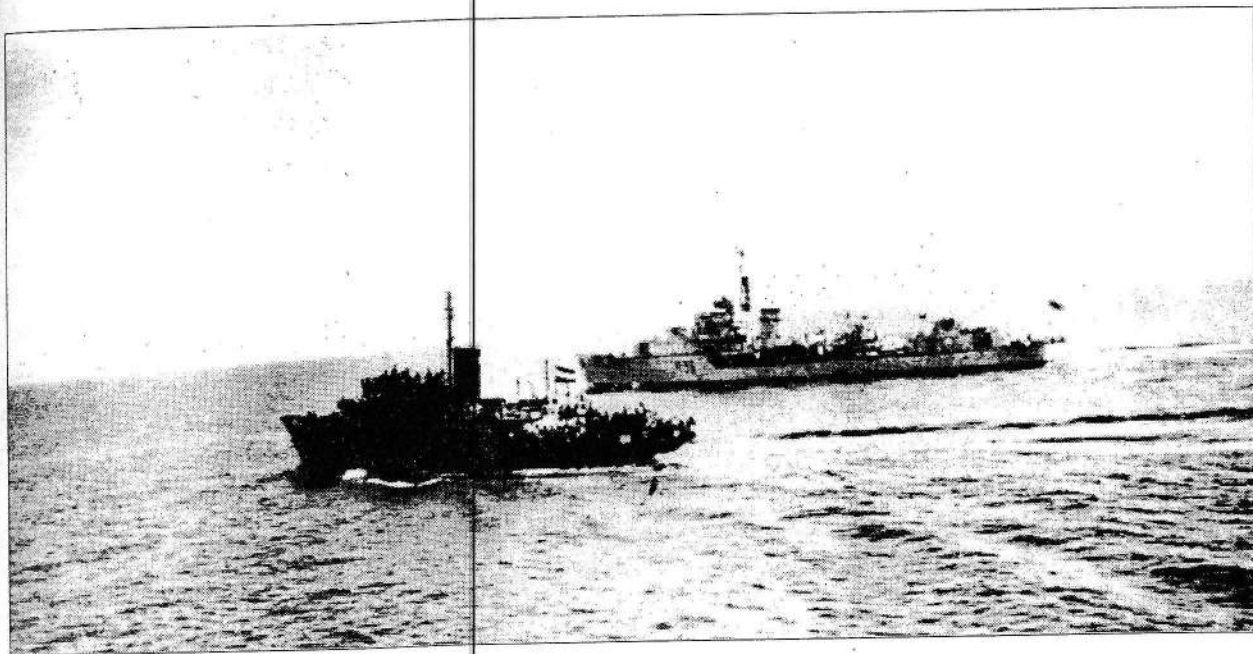
It was in April 1947 after Pesach that my friend, Laz Kahansky, and I boarded a train to New York. We continued to Baltimore a few days later. On arrival we took a taxi to Brown's Wharf, at the foot of Front Street near the Sailors' Institute. Our first sight of the Northland gave us a jolt, so disheveled did she look.

Our crew were mostly volunteers like us, landlubbers who never sailed before. Of the officers, only the radio officer wasn't a hired professional. The Northland was a former US Coast Guard icebreaker, which in WW2 patrolled off Greenland and sank a few German submarines and surface craft. She had been acquired as war-surplus for the Hagana's Mosad le Aliya-Bet for fifty thousand dollars. She was in the last stages of overhaul and outfitting; paid for by a local Jewish philanthropist.

For the next week or two we cleaned the ship, and took on supplies and foodstuffs for our voyage and future passengers. The ship's donkey

passengers and this couple came to our hotel before Esther Miron. When she walked in and saw Mr. & Mrs. Tayar (he was an MK from Tel Aviv at that time) they all became hysterical. The Tayars had met on the Ben Hecht, were friends of Esther Miron who baked their wedding cake

and hosted the party after they all reached Israel and lived near each other for several years, then moved a distance from each other and this was the first time they had met in many years! These memories last forever.



The ship "Ben Hecht" with 626 illegal immigrants and Jewish American volunteers detained by British destroyer at sea

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השערים פתוחים

אסופת זכרונות
העפלה 1945-1948

מהדורה שניה - מתוקנת ומעודכנת

לחיי
הספינות
שבדרך



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