

In France and Aliya Beth.

When we arrived in Calais, we were met by a "James Bond" type, wearing a raincoat and a hat pulled deep over his eyes. He gave us tickets and soon we were put on a train to Paris. The French railway in 1947 was just recovering from the war, the journey was slow with many unscheduled stops but with considerable delay, we arrived safely in Paris, Gare du Nord where we were met by another "James" Bond, who told us in a hoarse whisper to go after him. We walked for a long time, past the church of Sacre Coeur and shortly afterwards came to a small house near Montmartre ( rue Lanarke ) a kind of hotel. "James Bond" gave a signal whereupon the door was carefully opened by a small man who welcomed us in Yiddish. He took us into a large room, not particularly distinguished by cleanliness, his wife, equally small but wider, appeared and told us to sit down to a kind of supper. This consisted of bread, pickled herring, some nasty looking and tasting margarine, a few odds and ends and then she brought a large can of what she called coffee. We were starved and ate whatever there was. Meanwhile "James Bond" bade us "Good Night" and promised to come again the following day. We were taken to large dormitories, boys and girls apart of course and as we were exhausted, we slept until late next morning.

Breakfast closely resembled supper. "Bond" came, told us we would have to stay in Paris for a few weeks and then would go on to Marseille. It would be alright for us to go out sightseeing but we must take our passports with us and put two cigarettes into them !! We all had a little money ( very little ! ) and after some advice and directions from our host we set off in small groups to see Paris. Most sightseeing was done on foot, the Metro (Underground) was expensive and strange after the London Tube and so were the buses. My first stop was at a grocer's where I asked for some cheese. He produced a piece of reasonably looking Gruyere and then asked me : "Avec ou Sans"? I wondered what he meant and the grocer added the word "Coupon", so I understood that he was referring to rationing stamps of which naturally I had none. I said: "Je n'ai pas de coupons" upon which the price doubled but I was glad to have something vegetarian to supplement my food. We saw quite a lot of Paris in the course of time, not only the Champs Elysee and the major tourist sites. For lunch we went to a small restaurant where to

my surprise I learnt that apart from the meal and tip one also had to pay for Couvert : the use of plates, cutlery, glasses etc. which of course upped what had looked a reasonable price.

One day I was stopped by a "Flic" (policeman) "Votre documents, Monsieur!" A little alarmed, I handed him my passport with the 24 hour transit visa ( long expired ). He opened it, took the two cigarettes, saluted and went his way.

Very tired, back at the hotel, we had supper ( same menu again ), did our washing, exchanged impressions, with some of us venturing out to explore Pigalle and Montmartre.

So the days passed pleasantly enough. One night after we had all gone to bed, we heard loud banging at the door and the ominous words : "Ouvrez! Police!" Our small host opened the door, there were loud voices which related to our illegal presence. We heard steps going into the salon, less shouting, the clinking of glasses, laughter and the sound of paper ( !!! ) And then it all passed over without any further troubles.

I met an old friend. We had been in the same class at school at the age of 6- 7 when her family emigrated to France. We kept in contact by occasional letters until the beginning of the war. When the war in Europe ended, I miraculously received a letter from her. She and her parents had been in hiding during the Nazi occupation and had survived. She now lived in Paris working for the US military as an interpreter and I phoned her the day after we had arrived. We met and had a sentimental reunion but no longer seven years old but 23. From then on I had a wonderful guide in Paris. We spent almost every afternoon together. She did not know, nor did she ask, what had brought me there and I was not allowed to tell. However, I believe she guessed the reason.

Then came the order to be ready to leave the following morning for Marseille. So we said good bye. She and her family live in the USA but we have kept up contact and they visited here several times. In the morning, "James Bond" took us to the railway station, a strange sight of 40 youngsters trotting behind him. We boarded a fast train ( rapide ) which much of the time travelled at snails pace. In Marseille, Gare St. Charles, "James Bond" No 3 met us. We were loaded into a number of lorries to different destinations. Ours was St. Jerome, outside the city where we got off at an old chateau with a large park, a high wall around it and there we met Baruch from the Aliyah Beth

organisation who was in charge of the place and of us. After a cursory meal, we were told by Baruch that we were to stay for some time. Our task would be to clean up the place, put up tents and get everything ready for the arrival of hundreds of DPs (Displaced Persons) who would be arriving soon and would be prepared for their sea voyage to Palestine.

We made ourselves at home, some of the girls did the cooking and the laundry, most of the rest of us gave the large house a good cleaning ( a major operation ), unloaded lorries with supplies- blankets, camp beds, clothing and prepacked complete meals. Everything was stored in a large shed with L. being responsible for order, cleanliness and keeping book of what came in. One day, the first transport of people arrived from a DP camp in Germany. Most of them were in their twenties, former partisans from the East and not from the German Death Camps. All were registered, ( my job ), no one gave his right name and then they were settled in tents and given a meal. All were divided in their respective movements: Dror, Habonim, Beitar, and others with their respective Madrichim who kept order and discipline. Each morning there was a roll call by Baruch, followed by breakfast, cleaning and tidying up work. Classes were held, mainly Ivrit, history, self defence and practice for the day when they would be leaving for their ship.

More people kept arriving, filling ours and the other camps. The first ship was ready for departure from Marseille port. Very early in the morning, those detailed for the trip, silently packed their belongings, were given a canteen of coffee and a large sandwich. The lorries arrived, all climbed into them and with muted greetings were sent on their way. Much later we learnt that their ship, a very small one using sails and an auxiliary engine had managed to get through the British blockade and had safely got into Palestine.

And so it went on, transport followed transport, more ships were readied and left for their adventurous and often dangerous journey. For us life had become a little easier. We somehow received French Identity Cards and occasionally were permitted to go into Marseille, then a not very impressive port city. We could buy a little fresh fruit on the market. Cigarettes we had : Camel, Phillip Morris, Lucky strike and other American brands. Chocolate we were also allotted : Hershey bars. We could visit other camps in the

vicinity. The most beautifully situated was on a hill near La Ciota overlooking the sea.

And then, after about half a year of often hard work, it was decided that we had earned our Aliya. Our ship was not in Marseille as that port had come under British scrutiny. We were taken to the small fishing port of La Ciota. When we left our lorries and saw our ship, we were relieved and pleased. It was actually a real steamer with a large funnel, formerly a Swedish coastal passenger boat of rather ancient vintage. Now all the amenities had been removed, wooden boards, serving as berths and three layers high had taken their place. Our ship had about 1000 tons and was to carry approx. 1200 Olim. Normally, a 10 000 ton liner will carry a few hundred passengers. Note the difference !

Before boarding, two French colonial soldiers stood on either side of the gangway, officially to see that all went off in an orderly manner. I had the impression that they were fast asleep. Remarkable.

We were told where our places were and settled down as well as we could. Below me was C. who immediately took out a folding chess game and started playing against himself. I began reading a book. All waited impatiently for the ship to start but only after several hours we felt we were moving. Why the delay, I only learnt much later. The French pilot who was to have taken us out of the harbour, had been bribed by a British agent to stay at home in spite of the good pay he received from the Mossad. The captain, a Spanish republican (as were most of his crew) absolutely refused to move without a pilot. After lengthy arguments with the Mossad commander, (and with the inducement of a pistol at his back) he reluctantly telegraphed the order "Dead Slow Ahead" to the engine room. It soon turned out that the captain had good reasons for insisting on a pilot because just outside the port our ship struck an underwater rock which made a hole in the bottom of the ship and through which water entered the lower holds. The captain pleaded in vain to return but to no avail and on we went. Soon the ship developed a list, so dozens of Olim were given buckets (which really were meant for a different purpose!) and in two or three long lines, water filled buckets were passed from hand to hand and ultimately emptied into the sea. That went on day and night with a carpenter trying his best, if not to block the hole, at least to reduce the size of it. His labours and the bucket brigades kept the ship afloat but the list became increasingly pronounced. Then

came the order : All on the right move over to the left ! This maneuver helped to straighten the ship. After a while of course, the list appeared on that side, and so everybody had to move to the right. That was repeated throughout our journey.

After two days on the way, a storm began shaking the small and unstable boat from side to side with the resulting seasickness of most of us. ( remember the buckets ? ) In the beginning, the lower berth was considered " First Class " but now no longer. ( A little thought will explain why, so spare me the details ! ) Because of the sickness, no warm meals had to be prepared and the few people who were immune , were given packaged ones ( and very good ones too ). At least, mugs of water were distributed.

Meanwhile, the stench had become almost unbearable in spite of the huge fans which were supposed to blow fresh air into the holds. It became my job to alter the direction of the air flow every quarter of an hour, a job which fortunately kept me out of the holds. After a while, a few of us who were working, were given permission to become " Deck Passengers ". We slept on sacks of potatoes which were stored in a kind of tent on the upper deck. This really afforded " First Class Accomodation " for about ten people who were happy to have that privilege. For the hundreds of less lucky ones, there was a night promenade on deck for 20 minutes for each group, which made everybody appreciate fresh air.

One of the American chaverim, who said he knew all about lists, told me the exact number of degrees a list could have before the ship would overturn. He cheerfully took approximate measurements and to our luck, there always were a few degrees to spare though we often were very near the limit. I had no reason to doubt Hillels expertise, as we did not capsize.

After some days, the storm abated, orderlies from each group brought warm food ( soup ) and dry rations to their people. We on deck saw the captain's steward bring his meals on a tray, very different from ours and a bottle of wine.

One difficulty was the daily morning wash, for which we lowered buckets into the sea. No shortage of that kind of water ! We had soap especially made for use in salt water which was less than effective. I also tried to shave, almost a complete failure, but I religiously used my razor each morning . Our radio operator from the

Mossad, who had a very good transmitter was called Moshe ( not his real name ). He was always cheerful, no matter how dangerous the journey , He had brought with him a trumpet and each morning he played encouraging tunes, some of which I remember to this day. He did much to keep up our spirits.

Then came a disturbing incident ; One of the Mossad escorts mixed up the salt with the fresh water tanks by mistake and from that moment two thirds of our potable water supply became undrinkable, so water rations were strictly limited. We tried to augment the litre (?) we were allocated by opening tomatoe tins and drinking the juice and when none were left, we tried to squeeze raw potatoes but little moisture could be extracted. Once or twice the ships engines stopped because of some breakdown which after some hours, the engineer managed to repair. It was an eerie feeling to stand still and we all were greatly relieved when the engines started again. The engine room was very noisy, the engineer treated us to some of the distilled water for the steam. It had a horrid taste but at least it was wet !

Two weeks passed with ups and downs. The ship still had to be continuously levelled.

Then one day, there appeared planes , repeatedly circling over us. Everyone was immediately ordered below deck but the Mossad people glumly said that we had been discovered and that there was trouble ahead. And sure enough, that night, suddenly darkness was transformed into light by half a dozen powerful searchlights. We could not see what was behind those lights but when dawn broke, we saw 3 British destroyers with their large guns, one of each side of us and one in front.

A brief conversation with the commander of the British fleet followed. He asked us why the list and kindly offered to send a repair crew over, an offer that was declined. He then asked a number of questions and I was given a megaphone and told what to reply in English. "Yes, we were the San Demitrio, flying the flag of Panama. Yes , we were on our way to Beiruth with a mixed cargo. And no, we had no passengers on board. No, we needed no assistance, thank you very much, so kindly take your great ship away from our bow and allow us to continue our journey." There was some more cat and mouse small talk for a while, the suddenly the British captain or whatever his rank was, said in a different voice : "We know you have illegal Jews ( ! ) on board on their way to Palestine. HM Government

in London have decided to send you to internment camps in Cyprus until ??? Please, follow peacefully, we shall take you there."

Our answer was as follows :First the name San Dimitrio was removed and replaced by Latrun . The flag of Panama was lowered and the blue and white one was hoisted. Then I was told to asked the British Capt. : "Arn't you ashamed to hunt poor Jews who have barely escaped Nazi extermination camps and all they want is a safe refuge ?" Perhaps he was ashamed as he did not reply.

We heard orders being given on the destroyers.They gave way to us but followed closely behind and at the sides.When Haifa was still quite a distance away,more orders were given and soldiers in full battle outfit with sub machine guns, truncheons and gasmasks assembled on deck. The with a terrific crash, two destroyers rammed us on either side,almost breaking us in two and lifting us out of the water.When everything was topsy turvy on the Latrun,the soldiers started throwing tear gas and when that took effect,boarded our ship,all the while wielding their truncheons.There was little we could do to fight back except throwing tins and whatever was handy at them.Soon the fight was over,the soldiers took up position on the bridge,herded everyone into the hold,stood above on the sides with their guns at the ready but vainly looking for the captain, his crew and the Mossad people,who has all mingled with the Olim.We were dragged into Haifa Port and often forcibly transferred to two large troop carriers,fittingly called "Liberty Ships" and built in the USA by Kaiser Shipyards, a Jewish firm if I am not mistaken and handed over to the British Navy.Before boarding,we were searched for weapons and documents. Nothing relevant was found but the military personel was not beyond taking watches,jewellery and US \$s,some of the few belongings the Olim had managed to bring along.When they tried to take my watch,I let off a volley of curses in my best English,whereupon they go alarmed and let me go.

In the troop carrier,we were put into large holds,securely closed with armed guards at the doors..The moment,we left port,soldiers appeared with a huge supply of sandwiches and vast amounts of hot,sweet tea with milk and mugs. That was not only a humane touch but also a clever one as with filled stomachs after a long and arduous journey noone thought of rebelling.We were then given soap and towels and showers were opened with unlimited amounts of hot

water. Remember, we were on a troop carrier with amenities for hundreds and more soldiers.

After about 8 hours, we arrived in Cyprus, were loaded into lorries and taken to one of the summer camps which had been put up for the internment of the Ma'apilim, with an imposing high barbed wire fence and watch towers around it. Ours was camp 63, there were some more, waiting for further transports of Olim.

Again, all was arranged according to movements, food was prepared in military dove oil cookers, products distributed from a store and in no time, the entire organisation of the camp was in our hands. Lessons were given, a clinic was opened

, staffed by immigrant doctors and Hadassa nurses from Palestine.

The British camp commandant, a Major Fox and his staff were in a large tent just outside our compound. Soon a delegation was formed from the various movements and I was entrusted with the task of interpreting. We were led into Fox's tent. After a rather cold exchange of greetings, our people read out a list of requests and demands which I had to interpret : Better food, clothing,

, lamps, and other equipment. Fox had it all written down and promised to do what he could. We parted with an other meeting scheduled for the next day. These meetings became an almost daily part of our routine and I soon found my way around the military

establishment. The army people were at a loss to understand how an illigal Jew could speak English without an accent, sometimes better English than the staff. That was a secret I kept to the last. After a while, the meetings took place with the commandant of all summer camps, a Colonel W. who of course had more authority and apart from drinking an entire bottle of whisky each day ( so he told me ) he was a good man who did whaever he could to ease our lot. As all staff called me by my first name, I saw no reason to do differently and so we were on a first name basis but still a certain distance was kept. \*

More and more Ma'apilim arrived, the summer camps were full and winter camps consisting of Nissim Huts were opened. The fairly good times came to an abrupt end when there was an organised protest which resulted in the camp offices being burnt down, the soldiers opening fire with resulting casualties. Colonel W. was transferred, a new one took his place who regarded us as the enemy and treated us accordingly. My job was superfluous as no more conferences took place. Fortunately soon afterwards, I and 750 ( the monthly quota ) -were released in April 1947. We were returned legally to Palestine

\* After some time, I was made a full member of the delegation and often had to negotiate on my own.



many more than 750 because of induced miscounts by the army personnel. I still had to spent 4 weeks in Atlith until a lorry from Maayan Zvi came and we were allowed to leave into freedom. That was in May 1947

So ended my second internment: 7 months altogether. I was more that one year on the way. Before settling in Maayan Zvi, I visited my parents in Tel Aviv and stayed with them for 3 months.

Olim - Immigrants  
Ma'apilin - Illegal Immigrants

*W. B. Brown*

29 / 11 / 04

In Maayan Zvi and Tel Aviv 1947 -

In May 1947 I arrived in Maayan Zvi after having been released from Athlit and legalized as an immigrant. Two days later, I left for Tel Aviv to reunite with my parents who had settled down quite well. That really was a happy and joyful occasion. We had been separated for nine years, I was barely 15 years old when I left Germany and now I was 24 ! Mother had luckily been able to get a visa for Palestine and had managed to leave shortly before the outbreak of the war. ( August 1939 ). In spite of the rather crowded conditions in their flat, one room and the use of the facilities-a folding bed was put up for me at night in the hall. The flat was owned by a Mrs. Stern, an elderly lady, who occupied the other room and had kindly agreed to let me stay. The following day, my parents took me to town to buy me some clothes-khaki shirts and shorts, khaki stockings and a sun hat, all after the fashion of the day. Father earned his living by giving Hebrew lessons privately and also evening classes for the Tel Aviv municipality as well as conducting tours into old Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Mother worked as a help to women who had a new baby and together they were able to make a fair living though of course far below their former standard. I tried to give English lessons with very limited success.

I stayed in Tel Aviv for 3 months and then it was time to return to Maayan Zvi where in spite of promises, most of our group were put into tents. It was very hot in June-July and I suffered from the heat. Even now, after so many years here, I have not been able to get used to the warm climate. However, I was sent down to work in the Pencillaria fields ( a fodder plant which was grown for seeds ) These plants were very high and did not allow any air to come in to ease the stifeling heat and I returned home after work completely exhausted. We began at 5.00 in the morning and finished at 1.00 because of the heat ) and that went on for days until all seedpods had been cut. For a long time, most of us were detailed each day to different jobs, mostly very hard and unpleasant ones and I suffered increasingly from the heat. We were welcome to the work organisers but most chaverim took no interest in us and we had difficulties to get used to our new and often harsh surrounding.

29<sup>th</sup>

On November 29<sup>th</sup> 1947, we all crowded around the only radio in Maayan Zvi in the Chadar Ochel (Dining Hall) and listened to the voting in the U.N.O regarding the creation of two states in Palestine a Jewish and an Arab one. The required 2/3 majority was exceeded and all those who were asleep were unceremoniously roused from the slumber and told the news. There was dancing and the kitchen manager was induced to bring some bisquits and even two bottles of wine !!

In the course of time, I was "promoted" to work in our Tnuva in Sichron Yaakov where 4-5 Chaverim were busy selling fruit, vegetables, fish, chickens and eggs. That kept me out of the heat but it was a most unpleasant job and I was glad to get out of it after one and a half years.

Then came 6 months of dishwashing (by hand) together with Akiba Brantwein. We were a good team, in the kitchen there was always a little extra to eat and again, I was inside, out of the sun. That was followed (or preceded, I don't remember) by a stint as Chazran responsible for minor repairs, the hot water supply and carting laundry to and from the childrens houses. For this and other transport I had a donkey and a cart and at times I could give a treat to some children by letting them ride along.

Then more "promotion": I was to be a tractor driver (tractorist) which was considered a good job, and was taught by Alfredo and Franzek on the old and venerable Caterpillar 22. In the course of time, I graduated to other tractors including the Oliver which had to be started by hand and had a vicious backfire which one day broke Franzek's hand and almost mine too. Apart from ploughing, disk harrowing, spreading fertilizers and other jobs, I sometimes had to take the Oliver and a cart to Haifa to fetch provisions. That was more than a 3 hours trip either way but there was of course far less traffic on the roads. The favourite job was

"Hovalot" going up and down and transporting greenfodder for the cows and anything else as needed including taking chaverim to and from work.

In 1952 I was sent to serve the usual time in the army, then 2 years, After an initial week or so in Zrifin (Sarafand-induction and selection camp) I was ordered to Beith Cholim 10 (military hospital in Haifa) apparently because I had completed a course as a medic in the reserves. When the administration officer to whom I had to report

asked me where I was from-Kibbutz,England and of course Germany-a Yekke,he smiled happily and said: Afsanauth (quartermasters store ) The NCO in charge there had long been waiting for someone to relieve him and was more than glad to introduce me to the job.After several weeks,I had to sign for every single item in the stores,my mentor had himself promoted out and the responsibility was to be mine for my entire service.I had of course helpers and the supply officer was officially in charge but we got on very well from the beginning and became good friends. There were quite a few privileges that went with the job: a permanent pass to leave the hospital camp, I could go home whenever I had the time ( which was not very often ) I had a room to myself-much better than at home and more.I also got promotion in rank . . . earlier than the regulations allowed,had many good friends and in some way enjoyed the respect of most,no matter what their rank. However,it was certainly not all an easy life.I had to work for many hours,long after most were free,but I did not mind.As long as things were running smoothly,nobody interfered in my work and I soon learnt what I could and what I could not do.

When after two years,my service in the army was about to end,I was asked to sign on for more time. I explained that I could not decide on my own but that the Kibbutz had to agree. A very flattering letter was sent to Maayan Zvi requesting to allow me to stay on.The answer was n o and that I was needed at home. So after one more month during which I handed over my job,I returned home.

Meanwhile my parents had moved to Maayan Zvi,as did a number of elderly parents of our members.They had a standard size room with the addition of a shared bathroom , then an almost unheard facility.They were happy here and were with us all their lives. Mother worked in the clothing department and father began teaching the first two Ulpanim.After this he developed his latent journalistic talent and ability.He had always liked to write.In Germany,apart from his job as a schoolmaster, he was the editor of two Jewish journals and now he began to write articles about historical personalities and places of this country.His articles were published in the Israeli German language papers but also in Jewish journals in the USA,Argentina,Germany and other countries.

I returned to my job on tractors but also began teaching English in the two upper classes of our school, part time.

One day, on my way to the dining room, I was stopped by the Kibbutz Secretary, Meir. He said: "I almost forgot to tell you. As from next month, you will begin teaching our new Ulpan!" and went on his way before I had a chance to reply. The matter came to the Assefa, (General Meeting) where in spite of my protestations that I had no idea how to teach Ivrit, a show of hands settled it. I was allowed to visit several Ulpanim to see how experienced teachers did their work in class. (Ulpan: A school for teaching Ivrit to young adults from abroad, mainly from western countries and potential immigrants) My father sat with me every evening to explain Hebrew grammar, how to teach adults and gave me constant encouragement.

Meir, the Secretary was right when he told me afterwards that the first few courses would be difficult but after ten or so, it would be much easier. I lasted for about 35 years, teaching 70 Ulpanim, a record I think. The Jewish Agency, with support from the Ministry of Education, Ulpan Dept. sent me on a 4 weeks study tour to England very interesting though I did not really learn what I had wanted to. At a later time, Yaakov, the Ulpan director and I were invited by a kind of Ulpan for the German language, a large institution with more than 800 students. We were to see them at work but it turned out that they more wanted our advice. Towards the end of our stay there, I gave a demonstration lesson in Ivrit (!) to about 25 teachers and had most of them able to understand and repeat the approx 35 words (in sentences) I had used without of course a word of German. I think it was an interesting experience to them and also to me.

In 1989, when I had turned 65, I was called to the Department and told that after finishing the present course, I would have to retire according to the law as a government employee. Of course, if I wanted to, they would be glad to let me go working without pay but to this neither the Kibbutz nor I agreed. So I prepared myself to become a pensioner when suddenly a letter arrived from the Dept. asking me to continue on full pay! This I was willing to do but when I turned 68, I thought I had done enough and handed in my resignation.

The many years were on the whole, good ones and I enjoyed my work. It was only interrupted during the wars when I was called to the reserves, a term at a seminary and 1 year at the Yad Tabenkin archives. Whenever I had a free day or hours to spare I helped in our factory and also relieved Neomi in the Secretariat when she needed time off. This I did for a number of years when early one

morning I had a phone call saying that Neomi and her husband Akiva had been in a car accident and badly injured. Would I please come and take over her work in the office. That I did and I have been there for many years, working 5 hours a day in spite of being long beyond retirement age.

In 1958 I married Karin who had been an Ulpan student from Sweden. No, I was not yet working in the Ulpan although my father was her teacher for some time.

Meanwhile our family has grown. We have three sons, two of them married with a number of children, our grandchildren. We meet often in our enlarged home and are happy to have them with us in spite of the kids managing to turn our place upside down within minutes.

All we want is to have reasonable health and peace and to be able to enjoy the time which we still have, together with our friends and family. Karin and I love to work in our small garden although we have had to limit the work we can do. We are also able to travel abroad occasionally to visit relatives and acquaintances.

So, looking back, it was not a bad life and it still is quite a good one.



29/3/04