

**Malkin Aryeh** (Leon)  
 Born 1921 in New York City  
 Made Aliya in 1946  
 Volunteer aboard the Hagana ship, Wedgewood



### **This is the Way it Was**

I joined the Hashomer Hatzair Youth movement when I was 11 years old and was strongly attracted to the idea of making Aliya to Palestine and living in a kibbutz. In June of 1942 I was inducted into the US Army. In October of 1943 I was shipped over to England in a unit that was created especially to repair tires (my civilian trade). On June 11 of 1944 my unit landed on Omaha Beach and started to repair tires within one hour after landing. My unit was attached to a mechanized corps of the First Army and went with that Corps from Normandy through Paris to the border of Belgium and on through the Walloon region of Belgium to Aachen and Bonn, and V Day found us at Kassel, in the middle of Germany. I was returned to the USA in November of 1945, and only then could I start laying my plans for Aliya to Palestine.

While checking the various options that I had at that time, a Shaliach of the movement came to our communal apartment that I and my friends were living at in The Bronx, and told us that the Hagana had purchased two Canadian corvettes and wanted members of the Zionist Youth movements to man them because absolutely trustworthy people were needed for this first venture from the shores of America. (As a matter of record, I want to give credit where credit is due and let the public know that these ships were purchased through the noble generosity of Mr Rudolph Sonnenborn, an oil magnate from Baltimore.)

Five members of my kibbutz (Kibbutz Daled – later Kibbutz Ein Dor) volunteered: Menachem Peretz (Moskowitz) ל"ר, Zeev Rauff ל"ר, Dov Smilansky (Seligman) ל"ר, Mordecai Barkan (Blockman) יבדל"א and the writer of this article. There were many other volunteers from an older group of members of the Hashomer movement (Kibbutz Gimmel – later Kibbutz Hatzor), and from a younger group (Kibbutz Heh – later Kibbutz Sasa) and from the Habonim movement also. Two complete crews, consisting of 100 % Jewish sailors were ready to man and sail these ships for the first time in 2000 years!

The crew was divided between the two ships, the Beauharnois and the Norsyd, on the day we were to leave port. I and three others from my kibbutz sailed on the Beauharnois, and Menachem sailed on the Norsyd. The day after the Passover Seder we left the Port of New York for destination unknown. The only experienced seamen on our ship were the Captain, Gerry Lichtman and the First Mate, Hans Flagler, two Jewish sailors who were veterans of the American merchant fleet. We also had a young Israeli radio operator and a Russian-Israeli Chief-Engineer named Kalametzov.

We were divided into deck hands and machinist crews and it turned out that Zeev and I were deckhands on the 12 – 4 shift, Blocky and Dov had the 4 – 8 shift and the rest of our seamen were from Habonim and they worked the 8 – 12 deck shift and all the machinist shifts. Jack Pleat of Kibbutz Gimmel was the kitchen staff and that was

it; 9 men on the machines, 6 on deck and 1 in the kitchen. That was the crew and the four officers completed the picture. The Captain and First Mate were old buddies and both were enlisted by their good friend Yoel Rohr, a member of Kfar Menachem and an artist. They had had no connection with the Zionist movement, but were ready to do anything that was 'against the British Empire'. Kalametzov was looking for good pay and a bottle of vodka, and he was given both on the ship. We from the youth movements were volunteers and received no pay at all. I think the radio operator was a Palyam man but that was only a guess then.

Out at sea we had trouble continuously with the ship's engines and sometimes we stopped and just floated along while some temporary repair was made. Finally, we put in to the port of Ponta Delgada in the Azores Islands so that some serious repair work could be done and we stayed there for ten days. While there, a Rabbi from Lithuania who was the only Jew on the island found our ship and begged the captain to take him along; he promised to earn his keep at kitchen work and the captain thought he might be needed once we took on our passengers.

From Ponta Delgada we sailed into a storm which reminded us how frail our sea-legs were, but somehow managed to reach Gibraltar (we were sailing under the flag of Panama as a bona-fide merchant ship). There we loaded up on fuel and crossed the strait into the Mediterranean. It was only then that the captain was informed of our destination; Genoa Italy. Our sister ship, the Norsyd, made for the port of Marseille. At this stage we deckhands were given more specific duties for the purpose of moving into port. I was given the job of helmsman; Blocky was in charge of the winches and Dov of the launches.

The Mediterranean was calm, the weather was beautiful and the week's voyage to Genoa was a most pleasant one. Once there, we were given a few hours of free time to see the sites of the city, with the admonition: "Do not tell anyone the ultimate destination of the ship!" As we walked along the main street we saw a large group of people marching along with flags. They were waving the Magen David and when we questioned some of them we learned that these were the remnants of the Holocaust whom we were to bring to Israel! We went along with them to the large house in which they were living, saying that we were Jewish merchant sailors on a ship sailing to Cairo. We had no knowledge whatsoever of Palestine.

We took our departure from this group of fellow-Jews without letting them know our real purpose with mixed feelings, and headed back to our ship. The following day we left Genoa, which was too busy a port and had too many British eyes looking for us, and we headed for the port of Savona, farther north. Savona was a smaller and 'quieter' port and seemed more suitable for our purposes. Once we were alongside a pier our Palyam men came aboard and took charge of affairs from that moment on. The following day Italian workers came aboard and added to the deck and put in the stanchions and fixed the ship for carrying hundreds of passengers.

When the ship was readied we left port in the evening heading south, but once out at sea we turned and headed back north to a very small fishing pier, Vado. The sea was shallow and the current and wind made the task of tying up to the pier very difficult and took longer than expected. Once done, we hurried to lower rope ladders and move our passengers into the ship's hold. With dawn, several policemen appeared

before we had completed loading all the passengers. They wanted to quarantine the ship but the Palyam boys convinced them to allow us to finish loading the passengers instead of leaving them sitting in the sun on the shore. The policemen agreed and once all were aboard we cut the lines and ran. The police were angry but helpless, and the Hagana people left behind placated them and did all the explaining. (I may also add that we left behind the American journalist, I. F. Stone who had contracted with the Hagana to write the story of the illegal aliya. The Hagana people promised Stone that he could make aliya with our sister ship which was soon to leave for Palestine from southern France. He did make aliya on that ship and wrote an interesting account of the voyage, "Underground to Palestine").

We sailed south along the coast of Italy and through the Strait of Messina. We were on our way to Palestine with a cargo of about 1230 Jews. Half the passengers were Polish and most of the remainder was Greek, with a few Italians and a handful of Russian partisans. The latter were very helpful in caring for the needs of the rest of the passengers and for maintaining a high morale. Conditions were extremely crowded, sanitary facilities were minimal and the logistics of supplying water and food to all were complicated and difficult. These passengers who had gone through so much difficulties and dangers in the past years still had this voyage under these harsh conditions before them, before they would be able, hopefully, to settle down and rebuild their life anew in Palestine.

There was no room anywhere below deck for the sailors, so we all slept in the open air on the bridge. It was June and the weather was perfect. We had sailed for about a week towards the coast of Palestine and when we were about 100 miles from Haifa we sighted a plane circling overhead. More to the point, the plane had sighted us and we knew that His Majesty's fleet would soon appear. The following morning we were awakened by a shot that was fired across our bow, and we were informed that we were in the territorial waters of Palestine and we would be taken in tow to Haifa with the aid of the British fleet. We were surrounded by three British destroyers.

We had been informed by the Hagana radio that the ship's passengers were to be taken to the Atlit Detention Camp and therefore we should not resist capture. One destroyer attached our ship to its side and the British marines prepared to board and commandeer the vessel. We had taken down the Panama flag that had been flown until then and the Magen David now flew in its place. At the same time, a banner was strung across the length of the ship declaring us to be the "Hagana Ship, Josiah Wedgewood" in honor of the British Statesman who strongly supported what we called "Aliya Beth", and what the British called "Illegal Immigration".

As the British Marines prepared to board our ship and stood in ranks on the deck of the destroyer, all the passengers came out on deck and stood there in a solid wall. All, without a command or a word being uttered broke into the singing of Hatikvah. This was one of the most emotional and unforgettable moments in my life! We stood there in full view of Haifa and the Carmel range together with the mass of Holocaust survivors and a few young Palyamnicks and about 15 young Americans singing Hatikvah while the British marines waited patiently. As the song died away they boarded the ship and towed us into port.

We sailors were instructed to become Polish immigrants with Polish names of our own choosing. This was not difficult and none of us had identification with us anyway. The Palyamniks also made themselves unrecognizable. We were taken off the ship and transferred immediately to Egged busses that stood in a long line waiting to receive us. In a short time we were all on our way to the Atlit Detention Camp. We had arrived on what became known as 'Black Saturday'. On this day the British arrested all the leaders of the Jewish Agency and several thousand kibbutznikim in a desperate effort to capture the Hagana leadership. The barracks at Atlit were full of kibbutznikim so the British erected a temporary camp of tents next to the barracks and that was where we were to be held.

After the decontamination ceremony and showers in the permanent camp area, we were moved to the tent area and assigned 25 to a tent. Men and women were separated and we were given mess kits with which to eat our meals. We slept on mats on the ground. None of the Palyam boys reached Atlit; they had all disappeared en-route! That remained a mystery to us for many years.

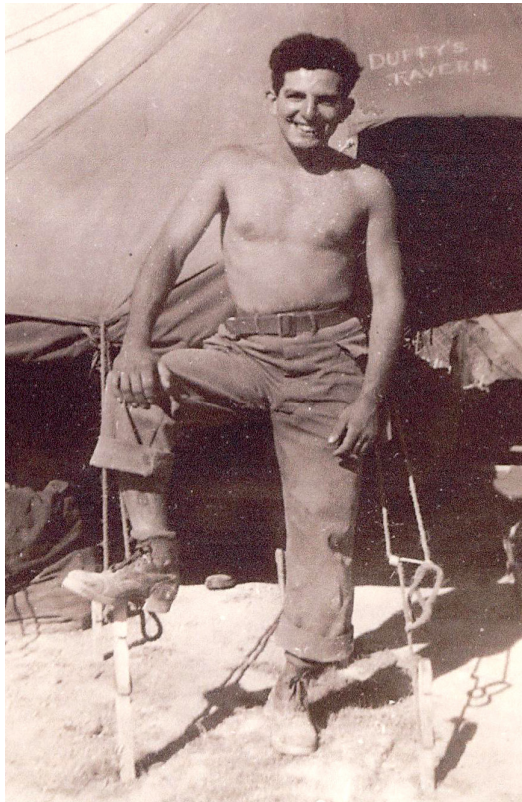
Shortly after our arrival in camp the Hagana proceeded to get us out. First, the captain and first mate were 'removed', and then in twos, threes and fours, the rest of the crew. Our turn came 16 days after our arrival, and after we had all been transferred back to the permanent barracks. (The thousands of kibbutznikim had been interrogated and freed.) We were smuggled out of the camp and sent to the Hagana Hotel in Haifa. The following day we took the bus to Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek and were reunited with our friends who had already made Aliya by devious means.

Since then, I reside in Kibbutz Ein Dor, as do all the others who came on the ship with me. Those who have passed away are buried there including my friend Menachem who arrived some time later on the Hagana ship "Hagana". Sadly, Dov Seligman who had come with us did not have the opportunity to live a normal span of life. When we settled in the Lower Galilee and began to build our new kibbutz he was shot from ambush and mortally wounded while driving a tractor and cultivating the land. This was on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1948 only one and one half years after arriving in Israel, and several months after his marriage. I married and raised my family in Kibbutz Ein Dor, and worked at farming the land, which had been my childhood dream. I was a cotton grower and ginner and classer for about 45 years. I am now retired but still try to maintain an active and productive life style.

***Editorial note: the following is an article that Aryeh wrote in 2009, related to his duties in the U.S. Army during WW-II, few years before he got involved in Aliya Bet.***

It all began in July 1944 when my outfit was camped in a field on the edge of the village of Manou which was located just about one km from the border of Normandy [*editorial note: Aryeh arrived at the invasion beaches of Normandy on D-Day + 5, as a truck driver of auxiliary forces*]. The First Army had recently broken out of the beachhead and advanced across to Brittany and up to

Calais and North towards Paris, leaving behind small pockets of resistance at Falaise and Mortain. We set up our trucks and went to work (we repaired tires for the First Army). As the day progressed, three children of the village came by to see what we were doing and I asked them (I spoke French) who they were. The oldest boy told me they were brothers and sister and they were 8, 9 and 11 years old. They were cute kids so I took a photo of the three and made myself a note, Daniel, Michel and Mireille Goulet, Manou, E.&L., July 1944.



*Aryeh waiting for his call to the Normandy beachhead in southern England*

The Americans continued to advance and so did we, so after about a two or three weeks stay at that village we were off again and this time we did not stop until we reached the border of Belgium at Hirson. We camped and set up shop again at Micheroux, near Liege. I shall not continue with the details of our advance as this little story has to deal primarily with these three little children.

It was not until 1989, 45 years after the invasion that I came across this little 4x6 cm photo of the three little kids. On some sort of spur of the moment I decided to send them this photo, thinking that they probably had no other of themselves as children, as who would take photos like that during the war years. As I did not have a street address for them, I decided to mail the photo to the mayor of this little town, figuring that – as French villagers, they still lived where they

were born. I should point out somewhere that these children did not know English so I wrote to them and to the mayor in French.

My guess was proved correct when I received a reply from the mayor (a woman, Denise Moreau) who informed me that she had delivered the photo as the parents lived in the village and some of the children lived there or in the nearby village of La Loupe. She invited me to visit and informed me that they would answer shortly. Indeed their reply arrived and they sent me a photo of themselves as grown adults in the company of their spouses and their younger sister who had been born after the war. From this point on there has been a sporadic but continuous interchange of postcards and letters, most of them dealing with holiday greetings. I would also like to point out that on the whole it was not Daniel or Michel who wrote to me, but their wives, Nicole and Denise. (Unfortunately, Michel Goulet passed away several years ago).

Recently, 65 years after the initial contact with three little French children, there was a dramatic development. I informed the Normandy Tourist Board of my pending visit to the beaches and was notified that I could receive a commemorative medal (65 year anniversary of the invasion) at any town hall of my choosing. I selected La Loupe, where Daniel now resides and which is several km outside the border of Normandy, and was informed that the matter would be arranged.

On September 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, I arrived at the house of Daniel Goulet in the company of my grandsons, Nir and Ron Graham. We were received very warmly by Daniel and his gracious wife, Nicole, and introduced to their daughter and friends and to Denise Goulet and Mireille and her husband. We spent the afternoon in their company and were hosted to a wonderful meal prepared by Nicole. This was followed by a tour of the vicinity of Manou and climaxed by the reception at the town hall of La Loupe where the Honorable Mayor, M George, presented me with the commemorative medal and said some very complementary words to which I made a short reply (in French). The 40 – 50 guests at the reception were offered delicious snacks and there was a toast to continued French – American friendship. This was how a very unusual day came to a “Happy End”.

This was followed by an unplanned aftermath, when while visiting the Museum of the Invasion at Arromanches, where the British troops landed, I had a short conversation with the receptionist there and she announced to all those in the Museum at the time (probably one to two hundred Frenchmen) that there was a visitor with them who had been at Omaha Beach with the U S Army. I was given a hearty round of applause and then she also presented me with a commemorative medal. This was followed by very many requests for a photo

and much cheek kissing “à la française”. In summary, this was all a manifestation of great honor for me personally and of the general feeling of gratitude and friendship of the ordinary Frenchman for the USA.

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## Manou / Il était dans le Perche pendant la seconde guerre mondiale Le militaire américain de retour 65 ans après

**V**ENDREDI en fin d'après-midi, une réunion a été organisée par la commune en l'honneur de Léon Malkin. Ancien combattant de l'armée américaine. L'ancien militaire était accompagné de sa famille et d'amis de la commune de Manou, notamment de Daniel Goulet et de Guy Dréano.

Visiblement ému, Léon Malkin, a reçu des mains du maire de La Loupe, Eric Gérard, en présence des représentants des associations d'anciens combattants, les barrettes de la commémoration de la libération. Tous les présents ont ensuite été invités à lever le verre en reconnaissance à Léon Malkin.

Qui est Léon Malkin ? Léon Malkin, était un soldat de l'armée Américaine dans une unité de soutien des divisions mécanisées. D'une ampleur sans équivalent, cette division était chargée d'approvisionner les divisions mécanisées en combustible, munitions, nourriture, pièces détachées et pneus pour les jeeps et les camions des divisions qu'ils devançaient ou suivaient.

Après la percée de Saint-Lo, ils sont arrivés à Manou et s'y sont installés. Il a connu



■ Le maire Eric Gérard, épingle la barrette de la libération sur la poitrine de Léon Malkin.

des enfants de 11 ans, Daniel, Michelle et Mireille Goulet.

Il a pris des photos et sont devenus amis... En 1989, Léon

Malkin a fait des recherches et a retrouvé ses amis d'antan.

Pas tout à fait dans la mesure où Michel est maintenant décédé et ils ont entretenu

de nouvelles relations. À l'époque, Léon Malkin avait 23 ans à l'époque, il en a 88 actuellement et semble en pleine forme.

Leon (Aryeh) Malkin, 2009