

Chapter XI EMPLOYMENT IN OCCUPIED FRANCE

On Friday we got our personal belongings, our suitcases and backpacks back, we boarded a German truck that took us, accompanied by four relatively old soldiers, to Brussels. In the outskirts of the city they stopped a tram, the passengers were forced to leave, we had to enter and so we drove in a confiscated tram to the Central station where we boarded a train to Lille, Calais and Boulogne. The wagons were old fashioned with separate compartments and since each compartment had doors on both sides, one could get off at each station and escape. To prevent this we were taken to two compartments in which an armed soldier sat near each door. These soldiers were glad that they could speak German with us, they could rarely do so with the local population in Belgium. One of the four soldiers was a rather extreme Nazi, while the three others were moderate and even more or less uttered their opinion. The strangest conversations took place and the situation became painful when the Jews of Amsterdam were discussed. We were all together eight in my compartment, six of us and two Germans, including that Nazi. When he suddenly stated that he could smell a Jew from a distance of two meters we all had the greatest effort to remain serious and in our minds we agreed that that man had urgently to visit a nose, throat and ear doctor to have his organ of smell checked.

On arriving in Dannes Camiers our German escorts took us to the labor camp Scharnhorst where we were billeted in one of the barracks. We got beds and left our luggage. What struck us most was that there was hardly any sign of the so known German 'Pünktlichkeit' (punctuality). We were immediately divided into work teams and nobody checked if we really ever before had worked in this camp. It became clear that it was a come and go of workers in the Todt organisation, something we would later often benefit from. Our German attendants said goodbye and when one of the four remained alone with us, he clenched his fist in a communist salute. Apparently this older soldier served against his will in the army, and his certainly not harmless salute was a clear demonstration of solidarity and protest against the German

regime. Under German escort we were the next day taken to work which was not far from the sea in the dunes. We walked more than half an hour in the semi darkness until we arrived at the construction site, a bunker for the 'Atlantic Wall' which was considered to defend the French coast against an Allied invasion. It was arduous physical work which mainly consisted of pouring concrete. At noon we got a thick, nourishing soup, and although the cold meals were insufficient, we were absolutely not hungry.



Het station van Dannes Camiers



Een na-oorlogs bezoek aan de Duitse bunkers, een onderdeel van de 'Atlantische muur', waar wij door de Organisation Todt te werk werden gesteld.

The railwaystation of Dannes Camiers.

After the war we visited the German bunkers, a part of the Atlantic Wall where we worked for the Todt Organisation.

On Sundays we were free, and we were even allowed to leave the camp. We were in a rather luxury situation. With good weather we usually visited the villages in the vicinity. What now bothered us was that we participated in the German war effort against the Allies. This, and our goal to reach as soon as possible the south of France and from there the Spanish border was the reason that after a few days we began planning our escape.

The first who wanted to try were Willy and Jantje alias Freddy Michel. If they succeeded, they would be followed a week later by Heini, Avraham and me. The big problem was that the people in the French coastal zone could only travel with a special Ausweis (permit) and trains were often controlled by the 'Grüne Polizei' (Green Police). Another problem was that we had no money and traveling from Dannes-Camiers to Paris and from Paris to Bordeaux was not cheap. Despite these difficulties, we decided to try it anyway. We were ready to risk traveling without papers and we hoped to obtain money by selling some of our possessions.

Willy's and Jantje's escape went according to plan, and after a few days we received a message through an intermediary that both safe and sound had arrived in Bordeaux. Their address was known to us, and now was it time to start our own preparations. Heini decided to sell his leather jacket at which some Germans had already looked with envious glances, Abraham wanted to sell his leather boots which seemed to be a desired object and I decided to shave myself in the future with soap and a shaving knife so I sold my electric shaver. The gainings from these transactions would be more than sufficient to reach Bordeaux as well as for food. No sooner said than done. Within two days we found candidates for our merchandise, which enabled our escape from Dannes-Camiers. We had prepared our departure to perfection and were excited to leave camp Scharnhorst after our stay there for three weeks and a half. Two days earlier we had already deposited our luggage in the luggage room of the local station. On Tuesday morning we went as usual early in the morning with the whole group to the bunker construction in the dunes. Since it was still half dark and only a few German guards accompanied us, was it a little trick to step out of the lines at a bend in the

road and disappear among the many trees. Everything went according to plan and after picking up our luggage, we boarded the train via Amiens to the Gare du Nord in Paris. During the train journey we asked ourselves over and over whether we would be controlled by the Green Police. Upon boarding, it turned out that all the seats were occupied, so we were obliged to stand in the middle of the hallway. After fifteen minutes the door between the compartments was opened and a Grüne policeman entered, here and there asking for credentials. Apparently he had been in the compartment several times before, because not all travellers had to show their papers. The three of us stood in the aisle and thought that this was going to be our end. He looked at us for a moment, we looked back impassively, then he went on without asking anything. We breathed a sigh of relief: he apparently believed to have already checked us in an earlier round. For the umpteenth time we had crawled through the eye of the needle!

The train went undisturbed on and the moment we passed Amiens and thus left the coastal zone, a load fell off our mind. Full of expectation we arrived in Paris. It was our first visit to this metropolis and we had a whole day to see as much as possible; only at night we would take the train to Bordeaux.

I never thought that one can see so much in one day and when we arrived at night at the Gare d'Austerlitz, we were deadly tired. At noon we even ate a hot meal which was sold on the street, namely a portion of roasted chestnuts. We also had time to go to the Rue La Fayette, where a branch of the Asscher diamond factory was still in operation and where even some of my cousins worked. Our hope was that they in one way or another would and could help us financially because we were in a deplorable state.

I rang the bell and told the concierge who I was, that we just had arrived from Amsterdam and that I was asked to convey the greetings of Bram Asscher. Apparently they mistrusted my story, because a moment later the man returned with the message that no one from the family was present. Months later I learned that the whole family had been at home, but no one had believed that someone in the middle of the war, could have come from occupied Amsterdam.

Our overnight train journey to Bordeaux, which lasted eight hours, was literally a dream trip. The three of us had a compartment all to ourselves. We used one of the luggage nets to store our luggage. While Heini sprawled himself at full length in the other, Abraham and I snuggled down on our two banks. Besides a ticket check, we slept through the night.

Arriving in Bordeaux we discovered a whole new world. Everywhere we saw palm trees, peach trees and vineyards and the climate was much warmer. First of all we went to Albert, the Belgian in the Rue Paul Louis Landes, whom we knew he was on good terms with many construction companies in the South. Heini and Avraham immediately got work with the German construction company Schlotter, and they left the next day to Jonzac, a town 25 kilometres north of Bordeaux. I did not have any trouble finding work either, and after one day already I joined Willy and Jantje who worked at the Belgian company 'Van Craenenbroek', which built barracks for the German army in Gradignan near Bordeaux. Our wish not to work for the Germans had not yet come true, because it turned out that also here every job we could get was connected to the German war effort. Willy, Jantje and I were assigned a little house in Gradignan where we could cook food for ourselves. We worked long days, along with a group of French workers who bluntly showed that they were not satisfied with their work and thus planned to run away as soon as possible

During our stay in Gradignan something very important happened which would immensely change our status as foreigners in France and from which we would greatly benefit. The company 'Van Craenenbroek' supplied all the three of us with a 'récépisse', a green coloured official document issued by the French puppet government of Vichy, which allowed strangers to move freely in occupied France. Thus one could legally cross the Belgian and Dutch borders, in addition you could like every French citizen obtain ration cards for food and textiles. As a stranger you had a profound sense of security with this 'récépisse', you could even without any problems pass the many check posts.

During these few weeks in Gradignan we often went to Bordeaux after work where we visited cinemas that were only intended for the German military, and we ate in canteens of the German army which were called Institutes for Welfare. As a matter of fact we found ourselves in the lion's den, in places where mainly German soldiers and officers were. After initial hesitation it became a daily routine, the most common thing in the world. It was only two months since we had left Holland with all its limitations, raids, 'stars' and persecutions and it caused us such a very strange feeling to move among the enemy as free Dutch workers, that we sometimes could hardly believe this situation. The transition was too fast, and the change too large.

During our stay in Gradignan more 'chaweriem', including Nanno and Marietje arrived in Bordeaux, and during our visits to the canteen or 'Soldatenkino's' (cinema for soldiers) the most frightening, but also comical incidents took place.

Once, Marietje accompanied by a friend entered a German canteen. Behind them were two German soldiers, and they heard the following conversation: "Siehst du da den Juden in der Cafeteria hinein gehen?" (Do you see those Jews entering the cafeteria) to which the other soldier replied: "Na ja, die Gestapo Weiss auch wie ihre Leute auszusuchen. "(oh yes, the Gestapo knows how to choose their people). That eavesdropped conversation shows all too apparent that we had become too reckless, but it also shows that luckily the so feared German Pünktlichkeit '(punctuality) was not what it was thought to be, and that the meshes of the net were wide open in France.

Some chaweriem had succeeded in getting administrative jobs in German offices in Paris and surrounding and they succeeded to scrounge stamps, passports, military documents and marching orders. Nanno, who in the mean time operated from his temporary headquarter in the Rue Tannesse, brought a supply of forged papers and stamps from Paris. He brought us some of these documents in Bordeaux, and in the future it would facilitate our lives tremendously. In the marching orders for example was it stated that the German army had to extend all help and protection to the owner of this

marching order. With such a form, filled in by ourselves, together with the official stamps with swastikas and all, we went more than once to the German 'Ortskommandatur' (the local military authority) to get coupons for bread, butter, sausage, cheese and cigarettes, products that were scarce, and were sold on the black market for high-rise prices. But that was by far not all the benefits these marching orders offered us. Most hotels gave us on account of the German army free accommodation, and we traveled for free anywhere in France.

In late August it was over with our work in Gradignan and our ways parted. Willy wanted to join the leadership of our movement, and as Jantje sought work in the North, both decided to leave the south of France. But before we parted, Willy decided to organise a special farewell evening. With four other chaweriem he invited us to visit together a brothel in the port near Bordeaux. Willy felt it was high time to teach us, the innocent people around twenty, the facts of life, and since this city was known for its numerous institutions in this area, he believed that we should go and experience it. I was really not looking forward to this visit, but I did not let it known, I did not want to be a spoilsport, and so I went along. We arrived in a large hall with a large number of separate intimate booths where subdued red lights burned. But when Willy saw that no one wanted to enter the booths, he asked for a bigger room where we could all sit together. We were immediately surrounded by a number of women in minimal clothing. Willy ordered a large amount of alcoholic beverages that-how could it otherwise be-consisted mainly of red Bordeaux wines.



Levensmiddelenkaart voor Duitse soldaten in Frankrijk, waarmee ook wij de meest noodzakelijke levensmiddelen konden kopen.



Het 'Marschbefehl' van de firma Glaser. Dank zij dergelijke documenten konden de chaweriem en ik vrij door Frankrijk reizen.

Food carter for German soldiers in France by which even we could buy the most necessary provisions.

The march command from the Glaser firm. Thanks to such documents the chaweriem and I could travel freely in France.

Next to me was a very plump young lady, and when she started talking to me, my only answer was "Je ne comprend pas" (I don't understand). Since it seemed that this ended our conversation my neighbour thought it was time to move on to other pursuits. She put her hand on my knee, but in response I pushed her hand firmly back. I was sorry that I had gone and asked myself what I was actually doing here. Willy quickly discovered that none of the other chaweriem especially liked this evening, he therefore decided to end this not so successful evening. I had experienced an event, but decided that the visit which had just taken place was both for the first and the last time.

Chapter XII WORK ON Ile D ' OLERON

I found work at the Alsatian firm Entreprise General Glaser that lay underground cables at the nearby island Ile d'Oleron, near La Rochelle. I took leave of Nanno and Willy and decided while on the way to the island to visit four Gouda chaweriem: Heinie and Abraham who were in Jonzac, and Erich and Dubsy who were in La Pallice, the port of La Rochelle where they worked on a large submarine base. I found Heini and Avraham in the evening in their barracks in Jonzac. They worked as construction workers in a large camp and after not to having seen one another for five weeks, we had lots to talk about. They invited me to sleep over and I found an empty bed in their barracks. When I woke up in the morning, I watched a strange spectacle. Abraham, who slept in the top bunk, was awake but he lay with his back turned to us and remained about twenty minutes in this position. I asked Heini what that was supposed to mean and he told me that Abraham was saying the morning prayer. He knew the prayers by heart, I respected him be able to maintain his faith even in these abnormal times. I myself was not as steadfast in these circumstances, and although I also knew the prayers by heart, I had totally and forever stopped praying at the moment I was in Belgium.

When Heini and Abraham left for their work, I left Jonzac and went to La Rochelle. The meeting with Erich and Dubsy, whom I had seen last in Gouda ten months before, was even more exciting. They told me that they were working on the submarine base where, protected by great concrete walls, numerous submarines were moored. In the evening they took me to the base and I could not believe my eyes when I saw the gigantic concrete enclosure which could withstand the heaviest bombardments. It was a very strange and almost comical situation in this occupied France, in one of the most strategic strongholds of the German Navy, surrounded by warning signs against espionage, three Jews walking freely without any hindrance, viewing the top secret of the invincible 'Third Reich'

After dinner Erich and Dubsy took me to La Rochelle to have a drink. Along the way I wanted to go to the port because in the morning I had seen the Dutch boat called the North Sea whose crew had invited me on the spot to stay overnight. I told them that I gladly accepted the invitation and that I would come back after the visit to the pub. On the way to the cafe we got the feeling that someone shaded us and we did not feel at ease. We decided nevertheless to visit the bar, have a drink and were aware of everything suspicious. When after a while it appeared that the unknown to us still had not disappeared, we decided to leave the bistro separately, hoping in this way to lose our shadow. I was the last to leave and to my relief I was not followed.

The crew of the North Sea received me very kindly, but showed clearly that they did not believe at all that I was from Rotterdam. So I had no choice but to invent the story that I was only briefly in Rotterdam after having lived for years in Gouda.

The next morning I took the ferry to Ile d'Oleron. In the most northern town named St. Denis was a former children's home converted into an OT camp, and there I was billeted. The room where I would sleep the next few weeks was long and narrow with dozens of beds. I met my new room mates who nearly all turned out to be French; the only exception was a Belgian from Brussels, who spoke Flemish and who was called 'the Brusseler'. He had the reputation of being a heavy drinker and almost every evening he entered the dormitory as drunk as Lot. Sometimes it was so bad that he zigzagged from one bed to another, and finally fell down on the bed of a stranger. I had a nice relationship with him, and during the day, when he was sober again he was quite friendly and approachable.

The next morning I started my work which consisted of laying underground cables leading to heavy coastal batteries. First I had to dig pretty deep ditches in which later on the cables were laid. The first morning at breakfast I did something which was considered very strange. The French drank wine and were surprised when they saw that I drank tea surrogate. It was unbelievable how some workers without any difficulty liquidated a bottle of wine at their breakfast, and then as if nothing had happened continued their

work. They also kept themselves busy during the breakfast break with something I had never seen before. They climbed on the rocks that raised from the sea, scraped the mussels with a knife and ate them raw.

The German soldiers who served the coastal batteries and actually did not have much to do, were pretty bored and were thus happy when they had someone to chat with. They could not converse with the French workers because they did not speak their language and when they became aware that I was Dutch, they picked up on me. Every time I was working near the guns, they began to chat. They even invited me to visit the artillery park and took me once to their most secret objects. I was allowed to look through their binoculars and telescopes. On these occasions it was strange and unreal to realise that I, who had been destined for a German concentration camp, at that moment was to see something top secret German on the French coast!

As mentioned before, we did not work too hard; nor did we put more energy than necessary into the German defences. On the contrary, when the supervisors left, we hardly worked with the result that the work did not progress as expected. One of the OT supervisors became aware of that and he had been after me. When I was about a week on the island, he came to me and said suddenly: "Ich weiss genau wass du vor einer bist." (I know exactly what you are) I was really scared and thought he realised I was a Jew, because in that case I would have been lost. I was on an island, totally cut off from the outside world, and escape would have been impossible. I recovered quickly and asked, "Wass bin ich dann?" (So, what am I) and he replied: "Du bist ein grosse Faulenzer" (you are a real slacker) I was in the seventh heaven Luckily it remained at this remark, and no action was taken

Both the OT and the Glaser company had a great lack of workers, and they did not know how to get new workforce. They often let that known and one of our regular visitors, a certain Mrs. Cloude, a representative of the Directorate of Glaser, regularly mentioned it. Someone had told me that workers were entitled to a paid leave after three months, and so while talking with her, I proposed to send me to the Netherlands to my fiancé (who existed only in my imagination) and suggest to some friends and girlfriends to come and work

for Glaser. Glaser also needed women, especially for the administration and work in the kitchen. She seemed to take this proposal seriously and a week later, on her next visit to the island, she told me I could accompany her to the mainland. She gave me a letter for the OT office in La Rochelle in which it said that I had worked for the OT during the months July, August and September and proposed I should be given two weeks leave off absence. With this letter, I went to the headquarters of the OT-Bauleitung in La Rochelle, where I met a certain Mr. Smith, who handed me the required permission papers.

Instead of immediately leaving for the Netherlands, I decided to go to Bordeaux first to spend the weekend with Nanno and other chaweriem. To my surprise even Willy was there who told me the latest news from the Netherlands. My family was still in Westerbork and Manfred Litten who was arrested at his hiding place was there as well.

Chapter XIII TEN DAYS ON PAID LEAVE IN THE NETHERLANDS

After a pleasant weekend in Bordeaux, where I met Heinz Meierstein-aka Cor Hogenbirk-with whom I would go to the Pyrenees three weeks later, I started on Monday October 18 with my final preparations for the trip to Holland. After having left behind my belongings at the chaweriem in the Rue Tanesse, I headed to the 'Front Leitstelle', one of the offices of the German army to receive 'Marschverpflegung'-meaning food vouchers and coupons for train tickets, after which I left in the evening by train for Paris . I had the right to travel in the special Wehrmacht compartment which was much more comfortable than the ordinary compartments, but since I did not want to sit among all those German soldiers, I took an ordinary wagon. I was lucky because there was only one passenger, and so I could sleep the entire trip to Paris.

It was a very strange sensation to go on holiday to the Netherlands, all on behalf of the Germans, provided with amounts of food which ordinary people could only dream of. At that moment I realised actually that I was entirely out of my mind, instead of staying in the relative safety of southern France and be anonymous in the crowd, I traveled to small Holland with all its dangers. It was perhaps the urge to be closer to my family for a while or maybe that all the official papers, all possible stamps provided, gave me a false sense of security. I do not know today what the scale turned, but looking back I must admit that what I did was utterly irresponsible and likely to be attributed to my young age.

The next day I went by train to Antwerpen, where I stayed overnight at the for me so well-known hotel Derby. When I left after a night of sleeping well, I crossed the Dutch border where I heard from the inspectors that the coastal zone could only be visited with a special permit from the Germans and since I thought that Shoshanna would be in that district, I decided that the first act to do was to get off the train in Rotterdam to acquire a current permit at the local German office. Everything went according to plan until the officer while writing out the permit suddenly asked what the 'C' of the C. Beerman Street in my

identity card actually meant. As I mentioned before, I had no idea, and instead of saying Cornelis, Christiaan or something similar, the first thing that came to my mind was 'Centrum'. If that fellow had been born and raised in Rotterdam, it would have been the end, but luckily he was German who knew nothing, and so I got the requested permit without further trouble. That same evening I went to Gouda, but since I was rather well known by so many people there, I made sure to arrive in the dark. I went to Nel and Dirk van Schaik who lived opposite the youth farm in the Ridder van Catsweg. They were very surprised to see me so late and so unexpected and despite their many children, their small home and the danger that was attached to my visit, they hosted me. They told me all the latest news, and I could report something about our chaweriem in France. Dirk gave me the address and phone number of Shoshanna and Shalom, which I did not write down but had to remember by heart which was no problem at such a young age. Under no account did I want written information so that in case of arrest not to endanger anyone.

I left the van Schaik family before dawn and took the train to Amsterdam from where I continued to meet Shalom, who was in hiding in North Holland. At the Central Station I called him, and he promised to await me in Schoorl where I also arrived in the dark. We were very happy to meet again after such a long time. He came by bike and I took place on the luggage carrier. We were not long on our way when we were stopped by a police officer. That was exactly what we had not taken into account, and so we were greatly relieved when he did not ask for our papers, but drew Shalom's attention that he was riding his bike without lights. He only reprimanded us and ordered us to continue walking for the remaining part. That night we had a lot to tell each other and we arranged meeting Shoshanna and Bommel in the weekend in Hotel Jans in Driebergen, where they were temporarily in hiding.

The next day I spent in Amsterdam where I visited the family including the Olie family in the Waalstraat. In the evening I visited my cousin Sal Asscher who still lived in his house in the Northern Amstellaan. He was exempted from deportation because of his marriage to a non Jewish woman. He updated me

concerning our family, but the news was not stimulating. Even 'the boss' as Bram Asscher was called in the family, was in Westerbork, and apart from the thousands who lived in hiding, the mixed marriages and sterilised, Holland was called 'Judenrein' (clean of Jews). Sal gave me some warm clothes which I needed badly, he also gave me the address of our cousin Ben Asscher, who still lived legally in Paris also because of a mixed marriage. I promised Sal to visit Ben on my return trip and tell him about our meeting. During my stay in Amsterdam I also sent a letter to my parents in Westerbork. Later on I heard that the letter had reached them and they indeed had been very relieved to receive a life sign.

From Amsterdam I left for Driebergen to spend the weekend with Shoshanna, Bommel and Shalom. We hardly stopped talking, Shoshanna would hear all about Heini, Avraham, Erich and Dubbs, the Gouda delegation in France and she by turn told me the latest news about the other Gouda chaweriem who were hiding in Holland.

There were a number of German officers who stayed overnight in hotel Jans and I was stunned when Shoshanna after dinner sat down at the piano and accompanying herself, began to sing. In my opinion Shoshanna, who had such a Jewish appearance should have stayed in the background. Those German officers did not get enough of her appearance and kept calling bis, bis. At that point it became clear to me that Shoshanna with her bravura actually played with her life. That same evening during a serious talk with her I told her that she took too big risks and warned her to be more careful in the future, but I did not feel that my warning really impressed her. Unfortunately, I was right, at a later stage Shoshanna was arrested and deported to Westerbork, where Manfred already was.

The day before my departure from the Netherlands I went to Rotterdam where I visited the Heemraad singel where I Ru and Eef Cohen were hiding. Ru, for decades the head of the hachshara and who supported our illegal movement by word and deed, was happy to see me and wanted to hear as much as possible about the dozens of chaweriem who meanwhile were in France. Obviously I did not know everyone, so I could only tell about a few.

But Ru welcomed any information and I noticed that he drew courage from my story. I had the impression that he could very well use some bartering up because unlike his usual demeanour, he made a depressive impression.

That same evening I returned to Paris, where I met for the first time my still unknown cousin Ben Asscher. He was very welcoming and invited me immediately for dinner at his home in the Rue Logier. I had not eaten such an abundant meal in years, and I really imagined myself in another world. He told me that he and some of the Asscher and Duizend family indeed had been present in the Rue la Fayette when we rang the bell, but they had not believed our story. He gave me some money I could use very well at that time, and because I really could not afford a hotel, I took that same evening the train to Bordeaux. Once there I learned that Nanno had left two days before and would return later to the 'free' Vichy France. Since I desperately needed him, I decided to wait for his return. I certainly did not intend to return to Île d'Oleron and I enjoyed thinking that Mrs. Cloude in vain should wait for my fiancé and other workers. On his return Nanno brought great news: with the help of Zionist connections in the Vichy Zone he had found a way to Spain, crossing the Pyrenees. After consulting a number chaweriem who were just on the spot, it was decided to organise a regional meeting in Saintes with the chaweriem from Bordeaux, Jonzac and La Pallice. This was scheduled for Sunday, October 31, and I was requested to go straight to Jonzac and La Pallice to invite a representative from each place. Nanno did not want everyone to come, because too many chaweriem together could be dangerous. At the meeting in Saintes also participated, Nanno, Cor, Heini, Erich and Emiel Glücker, the latter was called 'forty-eight' because of the size of his shoes. Nanno told us that a French mountain guide was found, who for a considerable reward was ready to smuggle people into Spain. Each participant was obliged to serve in the Jewish army on arrival in Palestine. Whether the 'Jewish army' meant the Haganah or the Irgun was not clear : the first was the secret army of the emerging Jewish State, while the latter was an extremely right-wing dissident organisation. Especially hereabout we had an in-depth discussion, because none of us present, was prepared to serve in the Irgun. Eventually, the following was decided:

1. Cor and Jan (Heinz and Berrie) would depart the next Wednesday, November 3, for Toulouse and the rest would follow as soon as the former had safely arrived in Spain.
2. Since it was not clear what that obligation on serving in Palestine implied, Nanno was requested to investigate. In any case, nothing should hinder our escape to Spain, because our first priority was to save as many chaweriem as possible from the clutches of the Germans.

Chapter XIV A FAILED ATTEMPT TO CROSS THE PYRENEES

On my return to Bordeaux on Sunday, I went with Nanno and Cor to Rue Tanesse. Until my departure to Toulouse, I had a few days leisure time which I used to better explore Bordeaux and to enjoy in abundance the beautiful summer weather in this subtropical city. For the first time after three years I could swim again in the sea what I did in the Bay of Gironde, in the estuary between the Atlantic Ocean and the city port. With Nanno and Cor we went several times to the 'Soldatenkino'(cinema for soldiers) and 'Soldatenheim'(home for soldiers). The films at the cinema were of such quality that we usually left halfway, but in the soldiers-restaurant we ate a decent meal for very little money. On Wednesday, November 3, Cor left and I went to Toulouse. If everything would go according to plan, we could be in Spain a week later. Luckily we did not know at that moment that 'a week later' would turn out to be more than four months!

Along the way, somewhere between Bordeaux and Toulouse, the demarcation line was between occupied France and the so-called 'independent' France, governed by a pro-German government in Vichy. There was a sharper border control which was carried out both by the Green Police as well as by the French police. For various reasons I felt at ease, first of all I saw that my companion Cor Hogenbirk, although he was a Jew, looked a thoroughbred Aryan. He had blond hair and beautiful blue eyes, and he could without any trouble pass for a leader of the Hitler Youth. Secondly, we were provided with the best documents, we each had a certificate and besides we were in possession of travel orders in the name of a well known construction company, stating that Cor Hogenbirk and Jan Berend Hassink had to report without delay in Toulouse. The border control passed without any problems and on arriving in Toulouse we went to cafe Laval on the Place St. George. As agreed we had to wait there for an intermediary, a member of the Armée Juive, a Zionist organisation that wanted to bring young Jews to Palestine with the intention that they should serve in the Jewish army. It was agreed that we would read the Pariser Zeitung as recognition. I really felt I was

playing a role as a conspirator in some detective movie, so unreal and fantastic the whole situation appeared to me.

After waiting a long time while asking ourselves over and over again if we were sitting there for nothing, our patience was rewarded and the intermediary arrived. He gave us some instructions and made sure we were billeted at the Hotel Gambetta in the Rue Gambetta.

Meanwhile it became evident that the guide was prevented from coming and so we were forced to wait some more days. As the hotel became too expensive for the organisation, we searched ourselves for another hotel, this time using our travel orders on behalf of the Germans! I will never forget the large framed picture that hung on one of the walls of my new room : the image of a man with his finger in warning to his mouth, and underneath the text "Achtung! Der Feind hort mit." (Attention! The enemy listens as well). The following days were spent on excursions around the city and visiting theatre and opera. Our lunch consisted usually of hot roasted chestnuts which were very popular in Toulouse. Meanwhile, we were joined by a dozen other chaweriem, including Heini and Abraham, so that we could almost open a department of the Dutch Hechaloets in southern France. Our final departure from Toulouse was finally set on Wednesday, November, 10, 1944. The previous afternoon the entire group was called together and we were informed that everyone should take an oath on the Armée Juive. In groups we were taken to an unknown house where we one by one had to enter a dark room. By the light of a flashlight and with our hand on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, we took the oath, and we swore allegiance to the Armée Juive. It reminded me of scenes from movies of the Ku Klux Klan. We underwent this 'initiation' with ambivalent feelings, but it was a sacrifice that we had to bring before our departure to Spain.



Heini Meierstein (alias Cor Hogenbirk)



In Toulouse, herfst 1943 (v.l.n.r. Awraham, Berrie en Heini).

Heini Meierstein (also called Cor Hogenbirk)

In Toulouse, autumn 1943, from left to right, Awraham, Berrie and Heini.

On that earlier mentioned Wednesday November, 10 things finally came to a pass. The twelve of us left the Matabiau railway station in Toulouse for Boussans from where we took the bus to St.-Giron, and hence another bus to a village called Lacaze. We were very tensed during the whole trip, especially during the last stretch we did not feel at ease, because we were now in the border zone for which we had no longer good, valid papers in our possession. In this region there were hardly building sites of the Germans, and thus our travel decree was rather worthless. Each control could become fatal because in fact we could not clearly and truth worthy explain what we were doing in this area. But like so many times before we were lucky again and unscathed we reached Lacaze, where our guide Adrian stood at the bus stop waiting for us. He accompanied us in a silent procession, -talking on the way was strictly forbidden- to a desolate cabin in a meadow. Outside along a wall was a ladder

that gave access to our accommodation for the next five days. It was a lot more spacious than the Falconrui in Antwerpen, there was amply space for our twelve. The floor was covered with straw, and since we were at the foot of the Pyrenees where it was already quite cold in middle November, Adrian handed out what old blankets.

Adrian was a solid lad. He wore a beret and looked like a real farmer from the mountains. I took him to be 35 years, but may be I was possibly wrong. Immediately after our arrival he gave us detailed behaviour instructions for the coming days. During the day we were not allowed to leave the hut and only when it got dark, we could descend to stretch our legs. Early in the morning we could wash ourselves in a brooklet that flowed not far from the cabin. We had to take into account that our cabin was close to the highway, and since Germans occasionally patrolled there, we were not allowed to talk too loud. We also had to take into account that farmers might be working near the hut. Food was supplied by Adrian, the morning and evening meals consisted of bread with some cottage cheese and jam and in the afternoon it was a hearty portion of meat. Adrian expected even more participants to arrive, which explained why he could not tell us how long we should stay in the cabin. Our departure to the mountains would also depended on the weather, which was not too good at that time.

During the following days, some more chaweriem arrived and a few elderly persons over the age of forty. One of the elderly came from Czechoslovakia who soon got the nickname 'the Czech'. After five not all too easy days in the hut we finally heard that we would leave the coming Monday in the late afternoon. We were now twenty-one people and in our imagination we saw ourselves in two or three days across the border and in freedom! Before our departure Adrian warned us to take only the most necessary luggage in a backpack, since we would climb to a height of 2500 meters, it would be difficult enough to drag ourselves up. Our hands had to be free and to facilitate the walk everyone was presented with a stick. Adrian was armed with a revolver, and he distributed two sharp axes to two chaweriem-one in front and one at the rear-which they had to take as a weapon against any

bloodhounds often used by the German mountain patrols. Throughout the entire trip Adrian led the way, while we followed in a long line. From the beginning, the path led steeply upward and the elderly among us were soon struggling to keep in space. Especially the Czech endured heavily and slowly stayed more and more behind. When we reached the point from where he could return by himself, which later on would become impossible, Adrian advised him to return to the hut. We all found it horrible to see him return all alone as we were rather close to the ultimate goal, but there was no other possibility. The hardest part of the trip had yet to begin, and eventually he would have become a liability.

After the departure of the Czech our journey became increasingly more difficult and more dangerous. Sometimes we walked past hundreds of meters deep ravines, and here and there it went through massive fog banks. As we climbed more and more, the forests were thinning and the snow layer became deeper. We walked as robots and had since long lost all sense of time. Moreover, we were soaked and occasionally there became gaps in the procession, so we had to stop for the stragglers. Now and then someone slipped so we had to help him to stand up again. After several hours a mountain hut loomed in which Adrian allowed us to rest a bit but after half an hour we continued, climbing higher and higher although it happened several times that when we had with much effort reached a peak, we immediately had to descend again to begin the next climb. To make matters worse, it started snowing heavily. Adrian looked quite worried and hinted that if this snowfall would continue throughout the night, it would probably be impossible to continue. Finally,- it seemed like we had been on our way for centuries-we arrived at the next sheep hut where Adrian decided to spend the rest of the night. A fire was quickly made, the soaked coats were hung from the rafters after which everyone went to sleep a few hours, with the exception of those who took turns to be on guard. When we got up at day-break we discovered to our dismay that during the night at least half a meter of snow had fallen. Adrian tried to walk a few hundred meters, but soon came back with the sad announcement that it would be impossible to continue our journey. He showed us footprints in the snow which he claimed were from bears, which

occurred in this area. He said that from this moment on until early March the passage to Spain would be impossible and the only consolation he promised us was to try again in spring. He pointed at the top of the 2800-meter high Montvalier in Spain, and under normal circumstances one would need half a day to be there.

We felt like Moses when he saw the Promised Land in front of him and was not allowed to enter. The freedom and salvation were actually near, but a sudden snowstorm had just put an end to our dreams. Our mood fell below zero, especially now that we had to take the same trip again-but in the opposite direction-to finally return to occupied France with its dangers and uncertain future.

The journey back to the starting point was difficult, but not comparable to the way up. On our arrival in the hut we met the Czech, who amazed looked up when he saw us. Since we had already left our papers in Toulouse, we had to wait in the hut until Adrian retrieved them. In the meantime, we somewhat overcame our disappointment and some began to plot future plans. Abraham and Hans Flörsheim even considered an extremely daring escape to Spain, lying on the under the frame of the international train France-Spain. They had read that this was a possibility, and that some had succeeded already. In the beginning it also appeared to me.

When everybody had been in possession of his papers, we returned in small groups back to Toulouse, where we all happily arrived unscathed. Initially we provided billeting in Wehrmacht hotels, but since there was rarely more than three or four days place available, we had to look for something else. Dubs and I found a very simple room where we stayed for about two weeks. Meanwhile, I checked with Abraham and Hans their plan to hide under a train, but long before she gave up, I had already decided that this undertaking seemed much too risky, I found it unacceptable.

Chapter XV TWO MONTHS AT THE MAQUIS

Meanwhile Nanno and Willy had arrived in Toulouse. They were in the belief that too much unemployed chaweriem lolling about in the city caused unnecessary danger. They suggested that a large number of us should join the Maquis. The Maquis (called after an enormous Corsican scrub which was often used as shelter by insurgents) was the collective name for small French resistance groups who had withdrawn to abandoned areas where they molested the Germans with unexpected attacks.

The commander of one of the Resistance groups in the Cévennes agreed to take on some chaweriem but Nanno decided it better not to say that we were Jews. After long considerations, six of us-Cor, Heini, Dubs, Marietje Emile Windmüller (aka Willem Smeege) and I decided to accept Nanno's proposal.

On Thursday, December 9, we left for an overall different and strange world for us, first by train to Albi and then by bus to Tibarië, where we endlessly walked to Pommardelle, a hamlet of five houses and a church.

We drove through a beautiful hilly landscape during the major part of the bus ride in which neither German soldiers nor police were seen. It seemed as if we had stumbled into an autonomous region where only the signs 'Maquis country' were missing! Later we were told that this entire area was controlled by the maquisards, and that the Germans only in armoured convoys drove through. Our maquis was in an abandoned farmhouse called 'Le Req', a twenty minutes walk from Pommardelle. The building was on a slope and the creek in the valley was immediately used by us to wash ourselves. A big old barn was the dorm and straw bags which lay on the floor served as mattresses. In a relatively large enclosed space was a long row of guns with bayonets. In a small always locked storage room, food was stored in such quantities as we had not seen in years, including especially huge amounts of sardines and bitter chocolate paste which were seized in a raid on a German convoy. On the wall hung a portrait of marshal Foch and a large map of Europe on which the front lines were marked. The commander, who we soon

called 'the Lieutenant' welcomed us and gave us his first instructions. Every one of us had us had to keep watch by day as well as by night, always two men at the same time, the guard-posts were relieved every two hours. We also had kitchen and dining room duty. We received uniforms and soon we learned to disassemble, reassemble and oil the guns. The only thing which was enormous lacking was ammunition, and this was the reason that during all the exercises we were not given the opportunity to really shoot. The food was good enough and we especially liked the bitter chocolate. The only thing I had trouble with was the black sausage which I, because of my upbringing had never touched. This sausage, bought in the area by the farmers was the daily food. I also learned in my maquis period to know a for me hitherto unknown, namely coffee with a dash of brandy. Mostly we got this when we visited the always very hospitable farmers in the area. The French members of the maquis received us with open arms, and till our departure three weeks later, we did not understand why we were not allowed tell that we were Jews. It so happened that I slept next to one of the French, called Gérard who from the start made the impression to be a Jew. It was not long before he told me: "I have a feeling that you are all Jews," upon which I asked, "and you, aren't you also one?" .He confirmed my question, but from the conversations we later had, it became clear that he was a communist and he really wanted to know nothing about his Judaism. We heard a few months later that he was killed in an attack on a strategic bridge.

Two days after our arrival the Lieutenant received the news that a son of a Pommardelle resident who served in another maquis, was killed in a skirmish with the Germans. Our lieutenant decided that our whole maquis would attend the memorial service in the church of Pommardelle. On Sunday morning we left, marching in ranks to the solemn mass. We anticipated that there would be kneeling during the prayer and in advance we had decided that we would not kneel because it is strictly forbidden for Jews to kneel in a church. The only times a year that Jews kneel is on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and then only in the synagogue. When the time came and the whole church strained on their knees, we remained staying and when asked why we

did not kneel, we replied that we did not do so because we were Protestants. After ten days we got reinforcement from Toulouse, two of our chaweriem, namely Walter Dreyfus and Werner Kahn whose pseudonym was Mr. Broom. We were delighted when they told us the latest news from Toulouse and also from the Netherlands, because after all we were very isolated from the outside world in this corner of the Cevennes.

Meanwhile Christmas was celebrated with a lot of singing and a festive meal. Despite our ignorance of the French carol texts and the general repertoire, most songs were well known to us, so that we could at least hum along. But in the same period it was also Hanukkah-the fête of the Maccabees-,when Jews sing every night the famous song Maoz Tzur. One of our group intoned the melody of this song and we immediately hummed along, so we had the feeling also celebrating our belief. When the lieutenant asked what song it was, one of our group responded without hesitation "an oriental rhapsody."

Whenever news came about German troop concentrations which was quite often the case, the emergency state was declared. During such alarm not only was the maquis mobilised, but the whole area was placed in readiness.

At such moments we all went to our prearranged positions and waited. During the wait the tension increased palpable because we realised that we, with our poor weaponry would be no match for the enemy in the event of a concentrated German attack.

On Tuesday, December 28, such a serious alarm condition was announced that our commander, in consultation with the district command, decided to evacuate our maquis. Since that same night an attack was expected, was it impossible to wait until the next day so we were ordered to leave our farm that evening. The evacuation took place in two stages: first the Dutch group left, shortly thereafter followed by the French. After we had packed up our belongings and said goodbye, we started our night march, taking us through Massals and Monfranc to our second maquis at a distance of 15 km. This one turned out to be like the first, an old and neglected farm.

Here we stayed for about two weeks. We were now eight of us, and to be honest, we did not do too much. We hardly had weapons and no military exercises were held. From the beginning we felt that this stay would be temporary and this impression was quickly confirmed when we heard that the establishment of a Jewish maquis was in planning. It was the intention that our group would form the core of these new Jewish maquis and we therefore had to move for the third time in five weeks. Our last maquis, called "Le Big", was not far from Alban and a sergeant who we nicknamed the 'Rebbe'- Rabbi, was in command. From the first moment we did not hit it off with him, he had no preponderate. At this maquis we again got reinforcement from Toulouse, Robert Vin, a corporal in the Dutch army, who very soon was called 'corporal' and Paul Landauer, who immediately had to listen to the nickname 'Expo'. Paul's mother worked namely in the Expositor of the Jewish Council, and he could endless tell stories about this institution with all its intrigues. I do not remember the last part of our stay in the maquis as a positive experience, we were bored and the most important topic that kept us busy, was our long awaited trip to Spain

We were now ten people and fortunately for our whole group we received on Monday, February 7, the message that crossing to Spain was again possible, we should proceed immediately to Toulouse. The first part of the trip was by bus which on the way was detained by the French police for a check. Our papers passed the test without any problem. In the town of Castres, we had quite a long time to wait for the train to Toulouse, which suited us very badly as we did not want to attract attention. Our unease still rose when a group of German officers who were also waiting for the train, continuously looked in our direction. Perhaps they wondered what such a group of apparent strangers actually did in Castres. But fortunately the onward journey proceeded without incident and we arrived safe and sound in Toulouse.

On the platform Nanno and Willy were waiting for us, but what they told us was very bad. Ru and Eef Cohen were tired of hiding after their youngest daughter had been arrested and had surrendered themselves to the Germans. Abraham, with whom we had been so intensively together in recent

months was arrested in Perpignan while searching in the surrounding for a border crossing to Spain. And last but not least, they told us that our expedition to Spain could again not take place as in the last days vast amounts of snow had fallen.

It was now the question of what to do with us. There were more than fifteen chaweriem in Toulouse, and it was irresponsible to add another ten. After a short discussion it was decided that we, meaning the ten of us, would leave for Paris by night train to spend there a couple of holiday weeks on account of the Todt Organisation. Cor was appointed tour manager and since the train would leave already within two hours, a marching order was immediately organised for him, saying that the ten mentioned persons deserved a few days off in Paris before traveling to the coastal. This marching order enabled us to stay in hotels and receive food ration cards on behalf of the Germans. We obviously had great fun when we said to each other that our after two months maquis we surely earned quite a few days paid leave by the Germans!.

CHAPTER XVI TWO WEEKS HOLIDAY IN PARIS

The journey by night express Toulouse-Paris went well. This time we chose the Wehrmacht carriage which was almost empty and much more comfortable than the rest of the train. On arriving in Paris, we searched accommodation at the Navy, in hotel Ferry, near the Place de la Republique. After we had been there three days our so-called vacation came to an end. We decided to spend the remaining days in small groups in different unknown hotels all over the city. Dubs, Heini and I found a simple cheap hotel in a side street of the Rue de La Chapelle, near the Gare du Nord. Since we had not earned a penny during the two months, the maquis movement gave us a modest pocket money from which we had to pay both the hotel and our other expenses. Cor received from Nanno a sufficient number of blank forms to provide everyone with a furlough pass that made us feel rather safe. The three of us had a document with the hallmarks of a well known construction company that worked for the German navy, stating that Anton van Leeuwen, Arie Pons Holdermans and Jan Berend Hassink were in Paris on holiday. Obviously we used these days as well as possible and there were few sites we did not visit. The Arc de Triumph, Champs-Elysees, Place de La Concorde, the Louvre, Hotel des Invalids, the Eiffel Tower, Montmartre, the Sacré-Coeur, Notre Dame, there was hardly anything we skipped. With our official papers we had almost everywhere free access which given our poor budget, came in handy. But not only sightseeing kept us busy. Twice we took part in a Bible course taught by Menachem Pinkhof somewhere in Paris. I must say that this Bible study attended by a dozen chaweriem in occupied territory was something very special and made an indelible impression on me. It symbolised very strong the willpower and morale of our group, and it was like an undercover message to the enemy: 'You cannot subjugate us.' But despite all this, we may not overlook one thing: we certainly were not heroes, not supermen but ordinary youngsters with all their frustrations, fears and anxieties who had tremendous support one from the other and each one of us was there for the other when possible and necessary.

After thirteen days in Paris the long-expected news finally came. The snowfall in the Pyrenees was reduced and we were expected for the umpteenth time in Toulouse. We decided to split up into two groups of five in order not to arrive all together because we knew that there were too many chaweriem in Toulouse at that time, so we had to be very careful.

Cor wrote two marching orders: one for his own group who would take the Paris-Montauban-Toulouse route and the second for us, the remaining five, taking the Paris-Toulouse section. He and his men got off the train in Montauban to spend the night and we, Heini, Dubs, Emile, Expo and I continued directly to Toulouse. After two nights in that city, the wait came to an end and we heard that on Thursday the 24, February we would begin the journey to Spain.

CHAPTER XVII THE DIFFICULT ROAD TO FREEDOM

In the early morning we took the train from Boussens to St.-Giron, from where we went by bus to a village in the vicinity. On the outskirts of the village stood an abandoned barn that would serve us in the coming days as our accommodation and not far from us we saw the contours of the Pyrenees. We were now in the 40 km wide border zone where one could only stop with special permits. Such forged license we obviously had in our pocket, stating that we were on our way to repair a damaged road. Since we were now a large group, we took care not to arrive at the same time, but in small groups we dropped in. The following days many others, several Allied pilots who were shot down and a few French police officers joined our group as well as some elderly French Jews, a certain Augenlichten and Moishe Robert, and completely unexpectedly Willy arrived, accompanied by Itshe Tiefenbrünner from our Gouda group. We were now thirty-two including 23 chaweriem from the Netherlands. Unlike our first track to the Pyrenees there were now even two women.

We were all surprised when on Saturday afternoon Joop Westerweel unexpectedly came from Holland to say goodbye. This meeting and his subsequent speech made an unforgettable impression on everyone. Although I cannot remember the exact content, the lines are still imprinted in my memory. He talked about the great privilege awaiting us when we soon would be free again. He talked about the important task waiting for us in Palestine: the building of a new country meaning that we would not only serve the Jewish people, but we, through our work at a kibbutz, would contribute to the rise of socialism and a better and fairer distribution of wealth in society. He reminded us to tell everywhere how the Nazis had behaved in the occupied territories and in their own country, and how defenceless people were transported to concentration camps and killed without mercy or trial. He asked not to forget people like Schuschu and Hannemann who had sacrificed their lives to enable us to achieve freedom. He wished us luck with our track over the Pyrenees and a safe arrival in the land of our ancestors.

Attentive and moved we listened to Joop's remarkable speech, and only months later, when we were already safe in Spain, we heard the bitter news that Joop, thirteen days after this speech was arrested and executed in August 1944.

On Sunday, the day before our departure, Adrian divided the provisions for the trip which consisted of a loaf of bread, a few ounces of meat and a bit of sugar,-a calculated amount for a journey up to two days. According to Adrian this was sufficient, since according to him we were to be in Spain within this period of time. That same day Itshe Tiefenbrüner wished to return with Willy. Apparently he dreaded the difficult climb. Only much later, after arriving in Spain, we heard that in May 1944 he went nevertheless with another group, but died in the Pyrenees.

On Monday, February 27, we finally left. In a long row headed by Adrian, we walked most of the night. Against all odds, we were again attacked by a heavy snowstorm so we had the greatest difficulty to proceed. The visibility was minimal. Sometimes gaps emerged within the group and we had to wait for the stragglers, but we did not have much spare time because we had to reach the next hut where we could dry up a bit and relax while it was still dark.

Finally, on arriving, we lit a fire, we warmed ourselves and dried our wet clothes. Meanwhile, Adrian had seen that we were well behind our time schedule, meaning we also had far too little food. He decided to take us partly back the next morning to take a break in a larger and better-equipped sheep hut which was in a lonely and desolate snowy plain. To retrieve the missing supplies there was no choice for Adrian but to return to the starting point, which he did together with Moishe and Augenlicht, asking us not to leave the hut and to keep quiet. We were not at all keen on the idea being left behind by ourselves and we started worrying when Adrian after half a day had not returned yet.

When we saw a few hours before his return a suspicious figure wandering not far from the cabin, we were even more nervous since we had no idea what

the unknown was doing there, he even could be an accomplice of the Germans.

It was an enormous relief for all of us so to see Adrian again. He divided the food he had brought, it was sparsely and consisted of half a loaf, a piece of raw meat and some sugar lumps. On Wednesday at six o'clock p.m. we left for the most dangerous and most difficult stretch of our trip. Adrian issued a few participants, including two French police officers with revolvers and ammunition, while he had a machine gun and always led the way. At the end of our long procession was someone with a gun, so our group was covered at both ends.

At about eight o'clock we arrived at the most dangerous point of our track: we had to cross a small village street where Germans regularly patrolled. The entire group was hiding in a bush, not far from the road, and one by one we had to run to the other side while Adrian covered us with his machine gun. We ran through the dark streets as if our life depended on it which indeed was the case and fortunately we all arrived the other side unscathed. This spurt in the street lasted a few minutes but it seemed hours and to make matters worse one of our people fell over a heap of stones which began to roll and a couple of dogs awoke. The barking was deafening and our tension, once we had reached the other side was sky high. After this exciting episode, however, began the greatest battle: the battle against the elements, against deeper layers of snow and merge bone penetrating cold. The higher we got, the scarcer the trees and when we finally were above the tree line we saw only endless snow-and ice fields. We walked like robots, sometimes through deep ravines knowing no time nor hours. The snow was so deep that nobody could remain at the forefront for more than five to ten minutes. Those wearing high boots suffered less, but most of us were not so well equipped. We developed a sort of relay system, so that when the precursors could no longer continue because of exhaustion, they stepped aside and let the whole row pass, to join the end of the group again. The only ones who were exempt from this rotation system were the two women and older men. To this great physical effort nobody ever was exposed and our first Pyrenean trip seemed

to have been a light excursion. We became thirstier and thirstier while we had no water with us. The only way to slake our thirst was to lick some snow, which we often did.

On Thursday morning at four o'clock, this night which had required the utmost from everyone, came to a happy end. In the snow mass loomed a sheep hut where Adrian immediately made a fire. It took a quarter of an hour at least till the last participant reached the hut. We fell down as lifeless beings on the thin layer of straw that covered the soil. Luckily we got here plenty of time, Adrian decided on an eight hour break, until twelve o'clock at noon. Most people took off their shoes and hung their wet coats near the fire. We kept watch by turns since even in this harsh snowy plain where the chance that someone would come was virtually nil, we had to be ready if something unexpected should happen.

At eleven o'clock we were awakened. We 'snow washed' ourselves and we ate what was left over from our poor breakfast. The wise among us ate sparingly because no one knew how long this adventure would be. Some had wounds on their feet and had difficulty taking on their shoes again.

Going outside we saw that the weather had become somewhat better, giving us renewed courage to embark on the next stage. We had now reached a height of about 1800 meters and Adrian showed us the top of the Mont Valier, adding that we could even see Spain far away. Everyone was excited, but we, the veterans of the Pyrenees tour of last November were slightly more cautious.

At noon we left for the next stretch that would take about five hours. This time the snow was partially covered with a thin layer of ice, which made walking very difficult. It was sometimes so extremely slippery that we not only despite our indispensable canes slipped, but it often happened that we with our shoes penetrated the ice so we got stuck. After half an hour rest we continued our way at half past seven and we walked with a few brief interruptions until the

next morning at half past four when we finally reached the hut that was our baiting place.

We were at an altitude of 2500 meters, and our cortege had become longer because the number of laggards constantly increased. Some participants were beyond themselves and some, especially the elderly, started a fight. To make matters worse the cabin was so small that there was not enough room for everyone to lie down. We needed to take turn, while the others standing, leaning against each other tried to get some sleep.

There was no more food except for the raw meat which I had not eaten in my whole life, but it turned now out that under such abnormal conditions and when one is truly hungry, even that was to digest.

After a few hours rest we gathered in front of the hut. The view was breathtaking: the mountain range of the Pyrenees was spread in front of us and a little lower we saw a deep valley. Adrian took the floor and told us we were on the border. Then, quite unexpectedly he added that from here on we had to continue our way by ourselves because he had to return to France before dark.

The consternation which Adrian with his announcement caused was immense and we all agreed that his decision was irresponsible and unacceptable for the whole group. We were at an altitude of several thousand meters at a temperature of 15 degrees below the freezing point, and without food and under such circumstances Adrian would leave us? And what would be our fate if we lost the way in this harsh environment?

These and other sad thoughts made us terrible nervous. We knew Adrian had received eight thousand francs for each participant, and the least we could expect from him was that he might bring us safely to the inhabited world. Maurice, one of the French police officers tried to persuade him but he remained adamant. Adrian ended the debate by announcing that he had now to go back. He explained that we had to continue walking until we reached the Spanish mountain village Montgarri. After a few hours we would again find a hut, and what farther we should see a pole that indicated where the descent

began to civilisation. Herewith he took leave, and with sorrow and fear in our hearts, we saw him disappear in the direction of France.



Itshe Tiefenbrünnner, die tijdens zijn poging de Pyreneeën over te steken om het leven kwam.

Itshe Tiefenbrünnner broke both legs while crossing the Pyrenees, and had to be abandoned.

Chapter XVIII A 'LIVING MASS GRAVE' at 2600 METERS

To our luck Maurice took leadership. He was a determined man with a lot of experience and we had the feeling we could trust him. We walked the whole Friday, but the hut Adrian had talked about remained untraceable. We were totally run out of our food, we had eaten the last day and a half was some raw meat and snow.

At about five o'clock, at night fall, we suddenly faced a steep wall of snow and ice. We had to choose between two options: either continue straight on with on one side an abyss and on the other side the ice wall, or descend into a deep basin. A violent discussion followed because a wrong decision could become fatal. Part of the group was in favour of descending but the majority agreed with Maurice, who chose the first option, and so we decided to continue straight on. This decision turned out to have been the right one and undoubtedly saved our lives but our morale was at its lowest point. Some people started crying and others yelled at each other.

Except the falling darkness, it also started snowing. When we finally climbed to the top along the ravine, we reached a vast plateau. There was no choice but to spend the night there because we all were at the end of our forces and it was now too dark to continue. But what could we do in the extreme cold of 15 degrees below zero, while as far as we could see was no sign of a cabin? Without shelter, we would surely freeze to death.

Again it was Maurice who took the initiative and told us to dig a large pit in the soft snow with our hands. Anyone who still had some power participated, and then Maurice asked us to take off our shoes and boots, because otherwise the risk existed that our toes would freeze. Some refused to do so, with the result that the next morning they actually got up with frozen toes.

Next, we put our coats on the bottom of the pit and we lay down. But the hole was not big enough, and so we lay in two layers, one on top of the other. Obviously, nobody slept that night and there was nothing else to hear than the endlessly moans and groans. We had to remain constantly in a certain

position and turning over, or even moving our limbs was impossible. Especially those who lay at the bottom, to which I belonged, literally suffered most.

When this nightmare was finally over, there were few who had no muscle pain. For some people in our group all this was too much, so they left the large hole in order to dig a private smaller one. Our wet clothes which we had put on top of us serving as blankets quickly froze and changed into hard boards. Those who left the pit first in the morning, described it as a large snow-covered living mass grave. But despite this seemingly endless night and the fact that most were physically and psychologically broken, we had been able to keep one another warm by lying one on the other and it was thanks to this that we had survived.

The next day, Saturday 3, March was our sixth day in this desolate wasteland. We remembered embittered how Adrian, who had let us down in such an irresponsible way, had promised us a track of two days. After the sleepless night and barely having eaten in those two days, we were shaky and there was only one question that kept us busy, would we today arrive safely, or would we be doomed, so close to our goal, to perish in this snowy plain?

After a few hours, during which we made our way rather stumbling than walking, we finally perceived the boundary as promised by Adrian and the mood immediately turned one hundred eighty degrees. The renewed sense of hope was working as a shot of adrenaline in our blood, which also increased our pace considerably. Arriving at the end of the plateau, we began on a difficult descent of more than thousand meters, but in the meantime the sun started shining and our wet clothes dried. When we not long afterwards discovered the first trees above a thin snow layer, we realised that we were saved.

What we felt at that moment cannot be expressed in words. Suddenly we felt that the suffering of those six days as well as the hardships had not been in vain.

As we descended more and more, the snow layer became increasingly thinner and we even found a stream with ice cold water and for the first time since three days we quenched our thirst. We were now indeed in Spain, the actual dangers were gone, but we still had to walk for hours before we reached the first village, Montgarri. Therefore, we decided that everyone at his own pace would continue, we split up into small groups for the rest of the journey.

The first of us reached Montgarri in the early afternoon where the poor peasants received us with open arms. None of the locals understand how such a large group had succeeded to defy the elements and to restrain the Mont Valier in early March.

Most chaweriem who had tried in vain the crossing in November, were now increasingly convinced that the first time when Adrian decided to return, had been unnecessary because this time the terrain was infinitely more difficult. We much later heard that he was shot by the Germans at another attempt crossing the Pyrenees in the summer of 1944. We all agreed that the way he had left us on our own had been more than irresponsible and in this view we were a few months later strengthened when another large group was abandoned in the same way, but with a tragic accident.

Chapter XIX EIGHT MONTHS IN FASCIST SPAIN

My group belonged to the rear, and when we finally reached Montgarri we were so exhausted that nearly everyone stayed another day in the village. Some chaweriem said they had seen a wolf, a big grey dog had followed them at a certain distance and according to the farmers in the village it must have been a wolf.

I have already mentioned that the reception was heartwarming, one of the farmers took me and two others home. By turn we washed ourselves in a large tub with warm water followed by a hearty hot meal which was set on the table. We felt like a king, and immediately after the indulgences we went to bed and slept a whole day. I slept uninterrupted fourteen hours, a record that I have not broken in my entire life.

After a warm goodbye to our hospitable and generous hosts, we left for the village of Alos. It again was a walk of a few hours, but after this blessed rest, all went well. We knew we would be arrested in the main street of the village, but we were not worried at all because we knew that the Spanish never extradited refugees to the Germans. One fact we knew for certain, every male refugee between eighteen and forty years old would be arrested and interned in the camp Miranda del Ebro. Therefore we had previously decided who would be under eighteen and who over forty. We had left our passports and other identity documents in France, and anyone who looked young took an extra rejuvenation and became seventeen, while those with an older look turned into forty-one.

In Alos we met the chaweriem who were all arrested in the meantime. The routine was in our case the same as well. In the only street in that village we were met by the Spanish police and taken into custody. We were registered and after spending two days in jail, we walked under supervision and escorted by police officers to the larger village Esterri. In the afternoon we continued by bus to the small town Sort, where we stayed overnight in a hotel. This time I shared the room with Paul Siegel, who had escaped

Westerbork a few months before. After dinner we went into town, where we ate our first typical Spanish delicacy, whose name I forgot. It were long, narrow strands of dough fried in oil and sprinkled plentiful with powdered sugar. It tasted fine and I assume that I exceeded after all these fasting days in the Pyrenees, within a few hours I was deadly sick. Paul was apparently wiser; in any case, he did not spoil his stomach. The next day we went by bus to Lerida, the capital of the province with the same name located on the Segre River which flows into the Ebro. Here we were taken to police headquarters, where we were registered again and our fingerprints taken. We were also told under no circumstances to leave the city without police authorisation.

Immediately upon arrival we contacted the Joint, the influential Jewish-American aid organisation also called The American Joint Distribution Committee, whose main task was helping Jewish refugees. His representative in Spain was Dr. Samuel Sequerra, whose office was in hotel Bristol in Barcelona. The representatives of Sequerra provided us with hotel rooms, clothing allowance and pocket money.

Dubsky and I were in hotel Fonda de Agramunt on the Plaza d'España. Dubsky was badly ill, he was one of those who had kept his shoes on in the snow pit and his toes were in a deplorable state, he could barely walk and after a doctor had seen him was prescribed a ten days bedrest.

The previous evening, however, when he still stumbled around a bit, we went for the first time since months to dine in a nice hotel room. We had not yet received clothing allowance and in our worn and ragged clothes we looked like vagabonds. Thus, the gérant asked us politely to leave the dining room and sit in another room where people like us, dressed in rags would not stand out. We, however, now since years in freedom after having lived prescribed by the law for years, had a different opinion. We therefore answered that we just had crossed the Pyrenees and we wanted to be served just like everyone else.

After this rather painful incident they decided to serve us, but it happened that this evening paella was on the menu. Since we at home ate only certain

kosher types of fish, I was therefore horrified by my upbringing to see shrimps and oysters on my plate. I carefully took out one by one all the seafood, legs and other parts of the crabs and put them on the edge my plate. The looks of the waiters and the other people expressed what they did not say: "Not only does he sit at a table in ragged clothes, he's crazy enough not to eat the tastiest part of the paella!"

We stayed two months in Lerida, a really boring city. The first days were used to purchase a new wardrobe, because no one had decent clothes. I will never forget the faces of Caspar Llunes, the owner of our hotel and the hotel staff as well, when I entered the hotel in my new outfit. She barely recognised me, and from that moment on, their attitude towards me completely changed, proving that there is much truth in the saying: 'clothes make the man.'

Most chaweriem lived in hotel Cuatro Naciones. All of us had a lot of leisure time so we often met, we regularly went to the cinema and strolled together. I still remember a movie in three episodes called 'Drums of Fu Manchu'.

The climate in Lerida was not very pleasant, and on some days it was so stuffy that we had trouble falling asleep. We knew that the Joint made every possible efforts to transfer us to Barcelona and of course our departure to this great city was the talk of the day.

In the meantime we became busy with more cultural issues, Hebrew and English classes were also organised. Besides our contacts with the Joint, we were already negotiating with the Jewish Agency, and we met their representative, Frits Lichtenstein who especially had come from London. He promised that the Jewish Agency would make every effort to accelerate our departure to Palestine. A few months earlier the Nyassa had already sailed from Spain to Palestine with refugees and at the moment when there would be enough chaweriem in Spain, our turn was due. We did not have to worry about certificates issued by the British Mandate. The 75,000 certificates promised for the next five years, according to the British White Paper of 1939, were by far not used.

We also used the opportunity to get in touch with the outside world. I wrote a letter to my family in Palestine in which I told quite extensively what had happened during the last few years in the Netherlands. I wrote Shalom and Shoshanna as well and because all the letters were censored I had to be very careful how and what to write. When I succeeded in renewing the contact with my cousin in Lisbon he informed me that he had found a way to send sardines and other foodstuff to the family in Bergen-Belsen. He had also written to my parents to tell them 'John' was now in Spain. Later I learned that when this information had reached them, they were very relieved that at least I was safe.

The first week in Lerida we experienced the totally different Spanish rhythm of life compared to our well known Western European style. Night life started very late, in a restaurant you were not served before nine or nine-thirty p.m. For the movies you had to wait until ten o'clock and it was very common to return to your hotel after midnight. Between one and four o'clock in the afternoon you could not do anything, shops were closed and the streets were deserted. Very quickly we adapted ourselves to the use of our hosts and we also crawled into our beds for a siesta. We soon realised that the nap was one of the most important parts of the day. You should not disturb anyone, and if you dared to call, you would often hear on the other side of the line some rude expressions. When you ordered or wanted to fix something and asked when it could be done, the most common answer was 'mañana' meaning 'tomorrow' but that time expressions seemed timeless, because occasionally it could also take a 'semana' meaning a week.



Lerida, maart 1944. V.l.n.r. Heini, Erich, Dubski en ikzelf.



'De trommels van Fu Manchu'

Lerida, March 1944. For left to right. Heini, Erich, Dubski and I. From the movie: 'The Barrels of Fu Manchu'.

What especially struck me was the strange headgear of the Spanish police, black, triangular caps with raised edges which appeared very familiar for me because the dignitaries in the Portuguese snoge (synagogue) in Amsterdam, wore just the same hats. This garment has therefore to be very ancient, the Portuguese Jews brought it all to Amsterdam in the seventeenth century already.

The warm climate played a key role on the street, in the cooler evening hours all of Lerida strolled on the boulevards, especially on the Plaza de España where our hotel was situated. It was obvious that young boys and girls did not walk together, but always in groups. There was a lot of remote flirtation, often the boys and girls called each other and although we obviously did not grasp much, the first Spanish sentence we got the hang of was, "Siñorita, usted es

muy amable," translated: "Young lady, you're very sweet." These parades took especially place during the weekends and of course the terraces of restaurants and cafes were fully packed.

We soon experienced that hardly a week went by in Spain without any festivity. These parties often had to do with saints of the Catholic Church. We regularly saw processions passing by with many crosses and the priests wearing the finest garments. But besides religious ceremonies, all kinds of festivals were celebrated. Costumed people appeared on stilts and group dances were accompanied by flamenco-guitar players. The Plaza de España was the centre of these celebrations, so we often enjoyed ourselves there. When the dancers noticed that we were foreigners, we were often invited to participate and we amused ourselves extremely well though our performances left much to be desired.

The time Dubsky lay in bed, his toes were daily bandaged by a nurse and from her we heard that despite the numerous parties, life was not at all honey in Spain. The nurse was the daughter of a Republican who had fought against Franco in the Civil War and had lost both his legs. Despite the fact that he was one hundred percent disabled, he received no financial or medical support from the Spanish government. He and his comrades were considered outcasts, and instead that he provided for his children, his children supported him. This was also the reason that in Lerida and later in Barcelona we saw everywhere invalids on the street displaying their defectiveness, thus earning their poor living.

The weeks in Lerida slowly passed and when finally after two months we heard that we were allowed to leave the city to go to Barcelona, we really celebrated. On arriving there it turned out that we ourselves were supposed to look for our own billeting and since our budget was very modest, most lived in small groups of two or three in simple guesthouses.

During the months in Barcelona the steadily growing number chaweriem from the Netherlands increased, we were nearly sixty. During that time, a large group of French chaweriem who had also crossed the Pyrenees with the help of the Armée Juive, arrived as well.

The transition from the small country town Lerida to the metropolis Barcelona was enormous and we no longer suffered boredom. The cultural and entertainment possibilities were endless, and instead of strolling through the narrow streets in Lerida, we walked now on the wide Ramblas, Paseo de Gracia and Plaza de Cataluña. Besides adult refugees, Jewish children from France also arrived, almost all without their parents. They had entered the country through relative easy routes on the coastal plain, thus avoiding the border crossing over the Pyrenees. Immediately after arriving in Barcelona they were taken in by the Joint and by a number of local Jewish families but their number increased, making it necessary to find a central place to stay for the entire group. A boarding house was found at the end of the Ramblas, not far from the coast, while the couple Sasha and Fanny Rabinowitch, themselves refugees from Paris, took the care of these children upon themselves. Heini and I started helping the family Rabinowitch, in the beginning we walked with the children, and later we kept them busy with Hebrew lessons, songs and other cultural activities. The age of the children ranged from six to sixteen years; some were born in France, but the majority had German parents who had fled to France before the war. That explained why they all spoke French, but some of them also very decent German. In late May, we were surprised by the arrival of Uri Durlacher, less than four years old and thus the youngest of the group. His parents, Ruth and Zwi Durlacher, originally from Germany, were members of the Dutch hachshara. They were currently in Toulouse, but it was intended that Uri would join them immediately after their arrival in Spain. Uri looked surprised when he, after all that French, German and Spanish that he had heard around him, could suddenly speak Dutch with Heini and me. Several weeks later, Uri's parents arrived safe and sound and this was the only time in Spain that we could return a child to his legitimate parents.

One of the problems that burdened our conscience to some extent was that we on the one hand now lived in a fascist country, while, on the other hand, that same country had been very hospitable. We knew the stories about the tragedies that had taken place at the borders of democratic Switzerland; we had heard how entry was refused to Jewish refugees, how they usually were

mercilessly driven in the arms of their German tormentors. I remember that years later, when Franco was still in power, my wife and I wanted to spend a holiday in Spain and one of our friends asked, "What are you really looking for in such a fascist country?" We answered him that we know that he went year by year on vacation to Switzerland, the same country that had delivered his own co-religionists to the Germans during the war, while fascist Spain had admitted thousands Jews and thus had saved their lives. He, of course had no reasonable answer.

Nevertheless this problem kept us often busy in our daily life. It happened that there were collections on the streets of the Spanish 'Winter Help'. The collectors were members of parties and they wore black uniforms so you could recognise them from afar. The moment we saw them arrive, we turned round because in no way we wanted to have anything to do with these people. On Holidays on which often parades were held, we had another problem. In the parades the Spanish flag was almost always carried and then all arms of the onlookers went up in the fascist salute. Obviously we did not participate, the moment we saw the flag coming closer, we took to our heels. Another manifestation of Catholicism in Spain that we tried to avoid at any cost were the many processions watched by crowds of spectators along the route. When one of the many crucifixes passed, everyone just knelt on the street. Since no one stood upright, we immediately stood out very unfavourably.

But Spain was not only a fascist country, it was thoroughly Catholic. The law of Ferdinand and Isabella was still in force, so that no other official religions were allowed. A synagogue did not exist actually. Instead, some local Jews had fitted up a makeshift synagogue in a small street near the Ramblas.

There was a Torah scroll and some prayer books but on the outside nothing showed that it was a place of prayer. When we on Shabbat morning wanted to go, it had to be done most secretly and through all kinds of detours.

The first time when we did not yet knew where the synagogue exactly was, we were brought there secretly as if we were a group of conspirators or

revolutionaries. It was incomprehensible and unimaginable for us to learn that even the Inquisition was not officially abolished in 1944!

Today the situation has totally changed and there is complete religious freedom in Spain. Yet it is hard to imagine that there existed medieval states only fifty years ago.

Early July we received a letter from Shalom in which he wrote among other things that unfortunately Johanna had fallen ill two and half weeks before, in the beginning it had seemed quite serious. Luckily the fever fell after three days and she overcame the crisis and was back home again with her husband Fred. The free translation of this coded text was: Shoshanna was arrested two and a half week earlier and everyone was afraid that she would immediately be deported to the East. Fortunately that did not happen, she was allowed to stay with her husband Manfred in Westerbork. It was a message that caused us deep sorrow because we owed our freedom especially to Shoshanna and thanks to her we survived.

Meanwhile, more and more children arrived, so the Joint finally decided to set up their own orphanage and leave the temporary pension. They moved to Calle Marmella where a spacious and a much more comfortable villa was hired for all involved. Heini and I terminated our pension and received a spacious basement assigned as a bedroom. We shared this with Carmi, a chaweer from the French "hachshara" who became the third youth leader. Now having more space, we set up a real timetable and the children were assigned to both age and abilities, in different classes.

In addition to learning we were busy with sports, swimming and hiking, we taught the children Hebrew songs and dances and in every way prepared them for their departure to Palestine. It was already obvious that the majority would immigrate when a boat would be available and a safe passage assured on the Mediterranean.

The preparations for our emigration were in full swing as well, and in the course of July and August most of our chaweriem received certificates from the British consulate in Barcelona which allowed us to enter Palestine

officially. I remember August 28, 1944, when I was asked to come to the consulate to collect my certificate. I realised very well in what kind of privileged position I found myself: Millions had died, and I was one of the elected 75,000 who were legally allowed to go to Palestine.

That same summer, daily news was that the Jews were gassed in the East. It was broadcasted in the press as well as on the radio. The only thing we did not know yet was the unimaginable scale of this mass murder, and the names of concentration camps like Sobibor and Treblinka were at that time still unknown. In September, Eliyahoe Dobkin, one of the leaders of the Jewish Agency who was responsible for Jewish immigration to Palestine, came to visit us. He told us that a Portuguese boat was chartered which in another month would leave for Palestine with around four hundred emigrants from Spain, Portugal and Tangier. Naturally this invigorated our morale, because none of us was interested in staying longer in Spain.

We started our preparations, which mainly consisted of buying some clothes which we considered suitable for Palestine. Why I also thought that I would need a leather jacket remains a mystery till today. The climate in Israel is in fact such that a leather jacket hangs in the closet for at least eight months a year. Perhaps this kind of information was from other immigrants to Palestine, for example, thousands of German Jews who had arrived in the years 1933-1939. They had the reputation being very properly dressed, they always wore jackets, thus their nickname in Palestine soon became 'Jekkiem' (from the word "Jacke"). Except for ourselves were also purchased the most necessary clothes for the children in the orphanage.

The next few weeks we waited impatiently for news about our departure. It was decided to let the children travel as a closed group under our supervision. About twenty kids were already a few weeks in Lissabon, Portuguese visa were requested for Carmi and me which unfortunately arrived too late, so our journey to Lissabon was canceled. In the end of September we heard that the Portuguese boat, Guine, would leave Lissabon to sail via Cadiz, Tangier and Gibraltar to Haifa.



Zo'n twee-derde van onze groep, gefotografeerd in de zomer van 1944 in Barcelona.

About two-third of our group in the summer of 1944 in Barcelona.

Chapter XX A DREAM BECOMES REALITY

In the beginning of October we heard the exciting news that the Joint had hired a special train with hundreds of certificate holders on board from Barcelona to Cadiz. The journey went via Madrid and would totally take twenty-four hours which was a far from easy task with dozens of children entrusted in our care.

In Cadiz a special hotel near the Atlantic Ocean was hired for the whole group, from our rooms we were within two minutes in the sea. The children were in the same hotel, although in a separate department. Initially our stay in Cadiz was supposed to take several days, but every time there was another problem, so we stayed at last three and a half week. During this waiting there was no alternative but to re-establish a more or less normal daily routine, with classes, walking, gymnastics and swimming, mainly to prevent the children to become too restless. The stay in Cadiz was a kind of forced vacation but really unneeded by everyone, especially not after lounging seven months in Lerida and Barcelona. We all wanted just one thing: reaching our destination as soon as possible and the only subject of the talks was therefore when the boat would arrive and what the reasons for the delay could be. There was almost nothing to do, Cadiz was an ancient harbour town where we occasionally walked and had an ice cream, but we were mainly on the beach and in the sea, most were so sunburned that they looked like purebred Spaniards.

The Guine finally wharfed on October, 25 and after inspection by the Spanish authorities, boarding began, for the vast majority this was the first sea voyage. Part of the kids who had been temporarily in Lissabon were already on board, and it was a happy meeting. It was a very nice feeling for us to see all the children reunited again.



*De jeugdgroep in Cadiz, vóór
het vertrek naar Palestina*



De 'Guine'

The youth group in Cadiz before the departure to Palestine.

Not long ago it would have been dangerous to make such a voyage on the Mediterranean, even by a passenger boat which like ours, sailed under the flag of a neutral country. Sicily was conquered by the Allies, but Crete, where we had to pass, was still in German hands and it was known that the area was unsafe because of German submarines.

The first port where we moored was Tangiers in North Africa where some Sephardic (Oriental) Jews came aboard. While we knew Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, who are Sephardic as well, the families who were now on board

had nothing in common with them. They were dressed as Arabs, sat mostly on the floors and hummed continuously monotonous Oriental melodies. We never had hitherto known that such types were Jews and only in Palestine and especially after the founding of the State of Israel, when the great wave of immigration came from North African countries - we would get to know them better.

From Tangier we sailed to Gibraltar, where the boat had to wait a few hours and we were deeply impressed by the massive allied fleet that lay at anchor. From there we sailed to the Mediterranean, where the sea so haunted the first days that most of the passengers were seasick and constantly hung with bent heads over the railing. Fortunately I did not suffer from seasickness, so that I could deal with the children, most of whom were rather sick. Only when we arrived in the eastern part of the Mediterranean the weather improved and hence also the mood on the boat.

After a journey of eleven days in the Shabbat afternoon of November 4, we saw in the distance the coast of Palestine looming and an indescribable joy and excitement overcame us. Everyone stood at the railing, we sang Hebrew songs and some danced the 'horrah' the traditional Israeli dance. Who imagined our disappointment when we heard that we had to stay overnight on the boat because the disembarkation could not take place on Sabbath. Once it started to get dark, we admired the thousands of lights from Haifa and the Carmel Mountain, it was as if they welcomed us. After an emotional rather sleepless night, the ship sailed the next morning finally into the harbour, where it was moored on the main quay.

The arrival of the Guine in Haifa was far from the most common events in the world. During the years of war it was extremely exceptional that a boat full of Jewish immigrants from occupied Europe arrived, the crowds in the harbour and the many people waiting for us, made that obvious. The press was well represented and the next day articles appeared in every newspaper telling in detail our adventures.

The idea that we immediately after the disembarkation could move as free people in Palestine, unfortunately turned out to be a big disappointment. It

soon became clear that we would first be taken to a transit camp for immigrants. Under the supervision of the British police we were transported in buses to the Atlith camp located about 15 kilometres south of Haifa.

One of the first things we noticed there was the rich diversity of delegates of all political parties that awaited us, religious directions and ideological currents in the kibbutz movement, the one more interested than others to win as many people as possible. This forced stay in Atlith put frankly said a huge damper on our enthusiasm, especially when exactly on the day of our arrival it started raining so hard that the entire camp at no time was flooded. I was now happy that I had brought my leather jacket, but what we needed much more at that time were waterproof boots, as there were hardly any paths in the camp and we constantly slipped in the sludge. A few days earlier a number of immigrants from Bulgaria had arrived which was probably the main reason for the visit of David Ben Gurion and Moshe Shertok (Sharett). Ben-Gurion was at that time chairman of the Jewish Agency. Four years later he became Israel's first Prime Minister, while Shertok, the head of the political department of the same organisation, was Israel's first foreign minister. Both were mainly concerned with the Bulgarian immigrants and barely exchanged a word with us, which was very disappointing. The only reason I can think about is that there was much greater interest in the fate of millions of Jews in Eastern Europe compared to that of the several hundred thousand from the West.

The days in Atlith passed by very slowly and were mainly used for registration, verification of passports and certificates and the allocation of a first accommodation in our new country. For most chaweriem the last was no problem because many had already made arrangements with a certain kibbutz where whether Dutch relatives or friends lived, such as Gal-Ed, Hazorea and Sede-Nehemiah.

This question was entirely different for me. On the one hand I preferred to go with Heini to Gal-Ed, but on the other hand, I had an inner struggle and considered trying a religious kibbutz. Kibbutz Jawne, where a cousin of mine lived, was my first preference, but my doubts in the religious sphere were

such that I decided to go first to Jerusalem and postpone the decision in the mean time.

The tumultuous events of recent years had undeniably brought such inner turmoil that I did not know exactly what to decide. What undoubtedly played a role were the rumours we heard in the recent months in Spain and the first week in Palestine, the systematic mass extermination of hundreds of thousands of deported Jews in Eastern Europe indeed were found based on truth.

I was brought up in the belief that we Jews all belong to a people chosen by God, and I began to wonder how it was possible that the reward of such membership could be the gas chamber. I wondered how the God to whom my family and I our whole life three times a day had prayed, prayers which also presented the phrase 'The supreme God, who proves beneficial favours, who remembers the good deeds of the ancestors and who shall bring the redeemer for their children's children', had allowed that hundreds of thousands of His people in the most gruesome and violent way were killed in concentration camps. For me there was no doubt that it was of no importance how the murdered in the past had related to the faith. For the Germans it had made obviously no difference, and every Jew was comparable or even inferior to vermin, like cockroaches and rats which had to be destroyed.

I remember that in the winter of 1944-45, a refugee from East Europe managed to reach Palestine and that he told the following heartbreaking story: Jews entered the gas chambers in Auschwitz, sang the twelfth article of faith of the "Rambam", the medieval philosopher and rabbi Moshe Ben-Maimon, which reads: "I believe fully in the coming of the Messiah, and even if he lingers, he will surely come." What a deep belief these people must have possessed to speak these words when death was facing them. I had to admit that I had not such faith anymore. All these events and especially the eight months in Belgium and France, where I had lived as an adventurer, did not make my decision easier.

After a week in Atlith we were allowed to leave the camp as free citizens. The children were divided among six general and religious institutions, Ahawa and Deganya in the North, Petach-Tikvah and Ayanoth in the South.

I took the bus to Jerusalem and for the first time in my life I absorbed the landscapes I had so much heard and read about. After Sharon, the coastal plain, we drove from the valley of Ayalon, and through Bab-el-Wad, the narrow entrance to the mountainous Judea, to Jerusalem. I stayed with relatives in the orthodox district Geola, and of course I had to tell endless stories about the recent events in the Netherlands.



De jeugdgroep aan boord van de 'Guine', op weg naar Palestina.

Companhia Colonial de Navegação
S. A. R. L.
Tais que o passageiro deve conservar
N.º 8 Viagem N.º
Paquete "A Classe" Camarote N.º 10
Baliche N.º 11
Soja
De CADIZ para HAIFA
fez passagem no paquete, classe e destino acima indicados
o Sr. A. Scher Forward
Adultos... 1150
Menores...
Gratias...
Os serviços clinicos, medicamentos e dietas serão pagos pelo passageiro em conformidade com o tabule de bordo. Exceção-se a assistência medica a passageiros indigenas e militares sem gratificação.
CADIZ de 21 de Julho de 1948
Instruções do passageiro Pela Companhia Colonial de Navegação

Mijn passagebiljet: het ticket naar de vrijheid.

*The youth group on the 'Guine on their way to Palestine.
My passage ticket, the ticket to freedom.*

One evening I was invited by the Dutch community in Jerusalem to give a comprehensive overview of everything that had taken place in the Netherlands since the German occupation.

Meanwhile I received an invitation from Hans Beith to meet him at his office in Jerusalem. Hans Beith was the director of the Youth Aliya of the Jewish Agency department which dealt with the taking in of young immigrants, in which capacity he was also involved in their further education. Thus I decided to postpone my plans for the future till after the meeting with Hans Beith and meetings with other relatives and friends.

The meeting took place a few days later at the headquarters of the Youth Aliya. Beith expressed his appreciation of the work Heini, Carmi and I had voluntarily done with the children and he invited me to visit all the institutions in which the children were now living. For this purpose, he handed me a sum of 15 Palestinian pounds, the equivalent of 15 Pounds Sterling. In those days, when a monthly salary was about three pounds, this was a huge amount, more than enough even to travel around in the country and visit all the children's homes. But the biggest surprise was Beith's announcement that a scholarship had been put at my disposal so that I could follow the seminary for teachers and youth leaders of the Youth Aliya in Jerusalem in the summer of 1945 when the second year of this seminar should start. Many prominent figures, including Martin Buber, Nathan Rotenstreich, Ze'ew Wilna'i and Ernst Simon would become my lecturers.

But first I made a two-week round trip through the country. I found that most children had adapted well in a short time and that all had gone better than originally expected. Moreover, this was the first time I used public transportation, and I must say that there were a few things to criticise. The buses were small and there was no time table. There were long waiting passengers lines and when you could finally get on the bus there were often no more seats.

In the North I visited Gal-Ed, and saw how the chaweriem were busy disintegrating and removing large pieces of stone from the fields earmarked for agriculture. Today this is done with tractors, but fifty years ago it was

heavy and ungrateful handicraft. During this visit, Heini invited me to go with him to Jerusalem, where one of the kibbutz members, George (Giora) Josephtal would show us the city. George was one of the leading chaweriem of the kibbutz, and in later years he would become Minister of Absorption of Immigrants. That tour through the old city of Jerusalem, the bazaars, not to mention the visit to the Western Wall or as called in Hebrew 'Kotel', impressed us unforgettably.

Life in Palestine was very simple. Most men wore short khaki pants during the week which were exchanged on Shabbat for long khaki pants and white shirts. The women were dressed simply, and using makeup was out of the question and if someone still applied some colour she immediately stood out and was denounced as 'bourgeois' The food was simple but adequate: white cheese, olives, halva,- a hard, sweet substance made from ground sesame seeds - anchovies, lakerda - a sort of mackerel and brown bread were the most common components for breakfast and lunch, while the main meals often lacked meat. Blocks of ice, brought to the houses by cars or carts were used for cooling food. Electric refrigerators were virtually unknown and just once I saw somewhere such device, usually the brand 'Frigidaire', and their owners were generally seen as capitalists.

People did not have much money. A good monthly salary was between three and four Palestinian pounds. A pound was divided into one hundred piasters or one thousand mils and for fifty mils (also called a shilling) you could eat a full meal at a restaurant. The terms mil and piaster stem from the Turkish time, and until today the phrase 'When there was a hole in the piaster,' exists in Israel, meaning: When the money was worth much. But the coins of ten and twenty-five mils had holes as well. With the establishment of the state of Israel was the mil replaced by the pruta.

The year 1945 was also characterised by rising tensions between the Jewish community and the British Mandate Government. The 'Stern group' and the 'Etsel', the two dissident Jewish resistance movements who did not collaborate with the 'Haganah', the unofficial underground army of the Jewish population, were working together, they began to stir and raided from time to

time English soldiers, policemen and strategic points. The consequences were particularly noticeable in major cities and expressed themselves in sudden police or army units check posts. I was a few times hold up in Jerusalem and searched on weapons. Usually the British were out for young men of my age.

Chapter XXI MY FIRST EXPERIENCES IN THE KIBBUTZ

After considering the diverse possibilities for my future and after I had explored the country from north to south, I finally decided first to try a few months in the kibbutz Yavne. In case this trial period should not turn out as I expected it to be, there was always the possibility to start the seminary in Jerusalem in the summer..

I must admit that the kibbutz took my doubts into account and did not exert any pressure. I visited the synagogue service most irregularly, and I often skipped the morning prayer with the ritual phylacteries, The highlight for me were the festive Friday evenings as the crowd in the dining room of the kibbutz celebrated the Sabbath. The chaweriem appeared in long, ironed khaki pants with crisp white shirts, and the women wore their best dresses. The long tables were covered with white tablecloths, and the traditional Shabbat songs, which were sung with devotion by hundreds of people sitting at the table, gave the beginning of the Shabbat a very special character.

As far as work in the kibbutz for me was concerned, I was entrusted with the care for the horses and mules, which in those days were used as 'heavy machinery' in the kibbutz, mainly in agriculture and for the transport of heavy freight. Years later they would be replaced by tractors, but in those days these were still scarce. My new boss was a certain Rosenthal, who unfortunately was three years later killed in the Israeli war of Independence. He taught me how to harness horses and mules, and he warned me not to stay behind a horse, and certainly not behind a mule, because they could not be trusted and they could give you a kick you might not survive.

The noble mule couple entrusted in my care were named Haman and Washti, both names known from the Purim story in the book of Esther. These animals had a reputation for being extremely lazy and indeed, they did everything possible to prevent being harnessed. So I had to be very cautious to get them unscathed connected to the plow or car. Luckily I mostly managed, but then arose the problem leading them to the fields.

It is often claimed that donkeys are stupid and stubborn, but this applied only partly for these mules. Haman and Vashti were far from stupid, but as stubborn as stubborn can be. The road to the field was always a Via Dolorosa. No whip or shouting could help, it was as if the animals wanted harassing me and deliberately walked slowly. The reverse was the case, as soon as the work was done, they ran like arrows from the bow at the kibbutz and returned to the stable where food was waiting for them!

Sometimes I left the kibbutz for assignments that took all day. At a certain moment my niece had to give birth to her first child, but the abundant rains had caused such a great muddy mess in the winter of 1945 that no bus nor ambulance could reach the kibbutz. So I had to take her with a mule to Hadera from where the new mother could reach the hospital by bus.

One of the tasks that the kibbutz had taken on itself was mowing the English military airfield of Quastina. Every once in a while I drove there early in the morning with the mules and the mower, returning to the kibbutz towards evening.

Since it was early in the summer, the eastern wind often brought the 'barchash' on very hot days. Barchash are thousands or even tens of thousands of small flies that sit at your nostrils, mouth, eyes and ears and even penetrate your neck and leave no spot on your body undisturbed. You could become as mad as hatter and even eating and drinking was difficult since the barchash also wanted to have their share of it.

Since Yavne was a religious kibbutz, nobody worked on Sabbath and the atmosphere reminded me of my parental home and the Zichron Ja'acov movement. On these days I was often invited by one of the families, and so I lingered regularly in the hospitable house of Mirjam and Menachem Bolle.

Using the word 'house' here, is a bit exaggerated. It was to some extent something between a wooden container and a barrack, but very nicely decorated, and there was a homey atmosphere. Life was in fact so simple that families tried in as many ways as possible to bring a cozy and snug

atmosphere in their homes. I remember a discussion on the question whether or not it was 'bourgeois' to hang curtains!

I did not regret the six months I spent in Yavne, but eventually I came to the conclusion that my future was not there. So I decided to take up the invitation of Hans Beith, and in June 1945 I started my studies at the teachers seminary in Jerusalem. Now, after 50 years, looking back on the past period, I can say that this decision proofed to be correct. I have spent most of my life teaching, especially adults.



Haman en Wasjtie, de muilezels in kibboets Jawne, druk bezig zich een weg door de modder te banen.

Haman and Washtie, the mules in kibbutz Yavne, trying to pave a way through the mud.

EPILOGUE

I wrote this story in 1995, fifty-one years after my arrival in Palestine. Part of the story is based on a diary which I began immediately after my arrival in Spain, as my alter illegal ego, Jan Berend Hassink, could obviously not keep a journal.

The story is about my journey from Amsterdam the Jewish 'Mokum' to Jerusalem, and of course both cities have in the past fifty years undergone tremendous changes.

Mokum, sometimes called the 'Jerusalem of the West', the city of Spinoza and Uriel da Costa, but also of Rembrandt, who made the local Jewish population immortal with the painting of the Jewish bride, and well-known people like Dr Ephraim Bueno, rabbi Manasseh Ben Israel, and many others- that Mokum does not longer exists today. The Jewish Quarter with its Weesperstraat, Rapenburg, Joden Houttuinen, Waterlooplein and Jonas Daniel Meijerplein are history. Most of it is demolished and today the subway runs underneath the once so famous places.

The Ashkenazi synagogues still exist, but are transformed into the Jewish Historical Museum. The Portuguese Synagogue appears on the monument list. It is beautifully restored and is of great tourist interest, but it is much too large for the small group of Portuguese Jews who survived the war. The Anne Frank House and the former Dutch Theatre attract enormous interest as well but they mainly relate to the hiding and the extinction of the Jewish community, and are therefore not typical of the Jewish past of the city.

My wife and I have often been in Amsterdam in the postwar era; we even lived there again for one year in the sixties, but we avoided the Jewish Quarter and the Plantage (Plantation) as much as possible because we could hardly endure the reversal and altered atmosphere in these neighbourhoods.

Since the war Amsterdam had almost always a Jewish mayor, but the Jewish proletariat with its vendors and Jewish humour is gone. The few who returned from the camps or from hiding places went to live in other areas, such as the

Rivierenbuurt (River Quarter) and the 'Goudkust' (Gold Coast). The Jerusalem of the West ceased to exist, and many of those who could no longer feel at home there, moved to the real, ancient Jerusalem, the 'Jerusalem of Gold.'

World War II, and especially Hitler's Germany, were the main causes of the decline of Jewish Amsterdam, but without being aware, they promoted also the growth and prosperity of Jerusalem. When I was for the first time in Jerusalem in 1944, there were more than one hundred thousand Jews. Today, in 1996, their number has exceeded 420,000.

In Yad Vashem, the Central Jewish Institute in Jerusalem commemorating the Shoah, are two impressive bronze wall reliefs by sculptor Nathan Rapoport. One is called 'the last way' and the other 'The Resistance'. In the middle are a few words from Ezekiel 16: 6, which express everything in their brevity: "Through Your blood Shall You Live".

It was the opinion of Rapoport and with him many Israelis-that without the Holocaust and the extermination of forty percent of the Jewish people, the State of Israel would not have been founded in 1948. The terrifying photographs and films taken in Bergen Belsen by the English and by the Russians in Auschwitz, helped to awaken the conscience of the world in the postwar years. This contributed to a large extent that in November 1947 more than the required 70 percent of the UN voted for the establishment of the State of Israel.

Yad Vashem makes something else quite clear, to which unfortunately is given far too little attention, namely a number of aerial photographs taken by Allied pilots during the years of war. These pictures are so clear and show even the smallest details of the death camps Auschwitz and Birkenau. They show the crematoria, the rows of barracks and the railway yard where the selections took place and one wonders why the Allies have not bombed the crematoria and the railways leading to the camp.

And not only Auschwitz: the same could have been done to the many other concentration camps scattered throughout Central and Eastern Europe. With relatively little effort, the Allies had been able to thwart the destruction process, but instead tens of thousands of tons of explosives were dropped over German cities. And the first question calls for a second: Where was the world conscience in the last years of the war? Since 1943, the Western governments themselves can no longer say: "We did not know it." Today it is known that both the Allied governments and the International Red Cross and the Vatican already knew during the war what happened in the German concentration camps.

Unfortunately part of the people mentioned in my book, did not survive the war.

Shoshanna was arrested in June when she was on the way. She was deported to Westerbork and from there to Auschwitz where she was killed in spring 1945 .

Kurt Reilinger-Nanno was arrested in Paris in April 1944, along with other chaweriem and taken to Buchenwald. He survived the concentration camp and returned to the Netherlands, but was killed in a car accident in Harderwijk in September 1945. In the darkness he saw a vehicle with one headlight coming towards him. Apparently thinking it was a motorcycle, he did not step enough aside and was ridden over. What a tragic fate after all he had been through and all he had done for his fellows.

Ernst Hirsch-Willy-was arrested together with Kurt in Paris in April 1944, and died in Bergen-Belsen in April 1945.

Thanks to its attitude, sacrifice and organisational skills, the Westerweel group managed to save an unprecedented high percentage of Dutch chaloetsiem: out of a total of 716 members who were on hachshara, 393 people or 55%, survived the war. Unfortunately, 323 members, or 45% perished.

Due to the initiatives of Shoshanna and the work of Dirk van Schaik 67% of the Gouda group survived the war, while when 19 persons went into hiding, 15 members returned.

These figures compared to the total Jewish population of the Netherlands, show us how great the differences. Assuming that there lived about 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands in 1940, 75%-more than 105,000 people-were killed, the highest percentage of any country in Western Europe, and 30% more than the losses within the chaloets movement.

Obviously a number of factors that facilitated the chaloets movement to outwit the Germans must be taken into account.

First, most chaloetsiem were unmarried and single young men and women who had come on their own from Central and Eastern Europe without direct responsibilities for parents or children. They formed a community, and mutual aid among them also contributed significantly which influenced that a large part survived the camps. They formed a separate group in Westerbork and were assigned to work mainly in the field and no heavy physical work was shunned which caused 'even' respect from the German camp commandant Gemmeker. The productive work of the hachshara group in Westerbork also enabled members to stay longer in the camp, which offered many of them the opportunity to be placed on veterans lists. This was also the reason that many ended up in Bergen-Belsen, where survival rates were much higher than in the other camps. Most of the chaweriem of the Elden hachshara survived, 36 were deported and 27 survived the war!

Because the chaloetsiem were young and used to hard physical work, they could much easier cross the border disguised as Dutch workers. There were even some who ended up in Germany, where there were deployed in the labor service. However, this effort was less successful, and after a short time they were forced to return; some of the group crossed the Pyrenees to Spain with us.

In May 1991, an impressive ceremony took place in Yad Vashem during which last respects were paid to all the perished chaweriem. A special room has been appointed in their memory. On the walls are four attached glass plates with the 323 names. In addition a book named

'They Were Our Friends,' by J. Benjamin was published in which he briefly describes the Dutch hachshara in time of the war.

Although these chaweriem did not have the privilege to survive the war, they are in this way honoured and commemorated in the most appropriate place in Israel, together with our non-Jewish friends to whom we owe so much and in whose names trees are planted in the Avenue of the Righteous in Yad Vashem.

And finally from macro to micro, what did finally happen to my immediate family?

After my parents, brother and sisters had spent seven months in Westerbork, they were deported to the 'Star Camp' in Bergen-Belsen in January 1944. This camp was also known as 'Vorzugslager' because people there had a chance to be exchanged for Germans who had fallen into the hands of the Allies.

They stayed there until the end of April 1944, when they were transferred to a special camp with 277 camp mates, from where they were supposed to go to Palestine.

Eventually there were too many candidates, and my family was sent back to the 'Star Camp' along with 50 others, saying that they would not be exchanged. The disappointment must have been inhuman: it was a relapse of hope or illusion to the reality of hunger and the hell of Bergen-Belsen.

The remaining 222 people actually left by train through the Balkans and Turkey to Palestine.

Thereafter my family spent another ten months in the camp, during which they were exposed to the greatest misery and hardship. On April 10, 1945, they were deported back and forth in real agony between the US and Russian fronts along with 2500 camp mates. The train consisting of 45 wagons became later known as 'The Lost Transport.'

In a notebook, now in the possession of my sister Ro, father noted the vicissitudes of his last trip. I quote:

Tuesday 10.4. By train to Soltou.

Thursday 12.4. Still on the train, we are already stagnated from last night 20:00 h.

Friday 13.4. Departure from Uelzen, further Luneburg direction. At 15.00 machine gun attack on the train. 3 or 4 injured (one deceased).

Saturday 14.4. At night on to Hamburg, after heavy shelling the train stops.

Tuesday 17.4. Arriving at dawn in Berlin (Spandau). Further Adlershof and Grunau. The trees more sprouted than in Wittenberge. The chestnuts already in bloom.

Wednesday 18.4. Departure at 14.45 at noon, at 15:30 airplane attack.

Here, the story suddenly stops, the last two days, the handwriting became much more shaky and uncertain. No more notes because father died on the April 19, 1945, while the train was in Schipkau in eastern Germany, and he was buried in a mass grave.

How could he, two days earlier, in all the misery and at the end of his strength, still have the energy and interest to mention the sprouting trees and the blooming chestnuts!

Father had been altogether twenty-two months in captivity and finally four days before the liberation of the train in Tröbitz he succumbed. The most cruel and miserable fate.

Mother's fate was still worse. She was liberated by the Russian army, but she was famished and died in Mühlberg on May 10, 1945. She was buried in a mass grave.

Elie, Fre and Ro returned to the Netherlands, but Elie suffered from typhus and had to be admitted in a hospital in Eindhoven where he died on July 14, 1945, nearly three months after his liberation.

I received a postcard from him, which is still in my possession, in which he writes that he is recovering and that he will soon join me in Palestine.

Since postal links were miserable poor immediately after the war, it lasted six weeks before the card reached me, a month after Elie's death, long after I had learned already the bitter message from others.

The only consolation is that Fre and Ro survived happily as well as Friedchen who safe and sound emerged from her hiding place.

In May 1995, my wife Trudi and I, her brother and his wife made the difficult journey to Mauthausen and Auschwitz, where their parents died.

Hereafter we continued our journey to Tröbitz, Schipkau and Mühlberg. In Tröbitz we visited the memorial wall with names of the 526 passengers of the lost transport '.

In all these places, I said Kaddish, the prayer for the merit of the departed and we had the feeling that in this way, although long overdue, were able to pay a last honour to our parents.



De herdenkingsmuur in Tröbitz

The memorial wall in Trobitz.

May their memory be blessed

יהי זכרם ברוך

Berrie wrote this book in Dutch in 1996.



Berrie Asscher werd geboren in 1924 in Amsterdam in een orthodox joods gezin. In 1944 arriveerde hij in het toenmalige Palestina, waar hij na een kort verblijf in een kibboets naar Jeruzalem vertrok om daar aan het leraarsseminarium van de Jeugd Aliya een opleiding te volgen. In 1947 zond de Zionistische Wereldorganisatie hem naar Nederland als leider van de jeugdhachshara in Gouda. Terug in Israël ging hij wonen in een *moshaw*, eerst als landbouwer, en de laatste jaren als onderwijzer.

In 1955 vertrok hij naar Beersheva als leraar aan de lagere school, tot zijn benoeming als districtsinspecteur voor het onderwijs aan volwassenen. In 1963 verbleef hij twee jaar in België als leider van het joods cultureel werk, gevolgd door een derde jaar in Nederland als directeur van het Tarboetressort.

Na 28 jaar in het onderwijs werkzaam te zijn geweest, nam hij in 1980 vervroegd pensioen om een gidsencursus van het Ministerie van Toerisme te volgen. Sindsdien werkt hij als gids voor Nederlandse toeristen in Israël.

Berrie Asscher was born in 1924 in Amsterdam in an orthodox Jewish family. In 1944 he arrived in what was then Palestine, where after a short stay in a kibbutz he left for Jerusalem to study at the teacher seminar of Youth Aliya. In 1947 the Zionist World Organization sent him to the Netherlands as leader of the youth hachshara in Gouda. Back in Israel he went to live in a moshaw, first as a farmer, and in recent years as a teacher.

In 1955 he left for Beersheva as a primary school teacher, until his appointment as district inspector for adult education. In 1963 he spent two years in Belgium as leader of the Jewish cultural work, followed by a third year in the Netherlands as director of the Tarboetressort.

After working in education for 28 years, he retired early in 1980 to take a Guidance Course from the Ministry of Tourism. Since then he has been working as a guide for Dutch tourists in Israel. Berrie Asscher passed away in 2012.