

*Return to Tomb*

# **OUR GOAL WAS PALESTINE**

by

**CLAIRE NEIKIND**

Rome Correspondent of the Overseas News Agency

**AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST  
WRITES OF  
HER EXPERIENCES IN A  
REFUGEE SHIP**

6d. net

Published by  
**VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD**  
LONDON

OUR GOAL WAS PALESTINE

OUR GOAL  
WAS PALESTINE

by

CLAIRE NEIKIND

*Rome Correspondent of the Overseas News Agency*

LONDON  
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD  
1946

## EMBARKATION

I had been fidgeting at my comfortable desk in Rome when I got the telephone call that started me on a journey of suffering and tragedy I will never forget. A week before, the British Embassy had told me it would take a month to get the Cyprus visa I had asked for on journalistic assignment. A month was too long.

The telephone call settled my problem. I could get to Cyprus, the voice said, if I was willing to do it the hard way. A ship was leaving in twenty-four hours, Palestine bound. It was a 100 to 1 it would be caught, its passengers sent to the concentration camp. Would I go? I would.

My instructions were simple. I was to dress like a refugee, speak anything but English, conceal my identity from my fellow passengers, and shut up in Haifa when and if the British arrived.

The saleslady who sold me my new wardrobe the next morning will never forget me. Shocked and embarrassed, she could only stammer "It's—very charming, signorina," as I selected each snappy number. Finally dressed in an ill-fitting cotton skirt and blouse, my nail polish removed and my hair flattened, and a package of Mother Sill's seasick pills in my pocket, I left Rome for the Mediterranean port where my hosts of the Underground Pipeline waited for me.

An unlucky star was shining in the harbour when I arrived. It was to follow us, unwinking, to the end of our voyage. The first news was bad news. Our ship was to be the *Fede*, whose rotten luck had become world-famous five months before. Renamed the *Four Freedoms* she had been spotted as suspicious by British and local authorities, who had boarded her that very afternoon, and probably would come back. Loading of water, food, medical supplies, and preparation of beds was not completed. A strong southwest

wind made embarkation dangerous. But we should have to leave at once.

There was no sign of confusion or panic in the seaside camp where the Jewish refugees had been waiting. For security reasons, they had not been told the time of departure until the last moment. At 10 p.m., I followed close behind the camp leader as he prepared to make his announcement. Two black market cigarette vendors first were asked to leave. "What a misfortune," one of them said. "To-day there are a thousand people here. To-morrow there will be twenty."

"Don't worry," the other said. "The next day, there will be a thousand more."

The announcement of leavetaking was made quietly. The voyage would be difficult, the water short. Fewer people would mean more comfort, but would mean keen disappointment for those left behind. Because of the difficulties of the trip, there were to be no pregnant women and no children. The ship was under orders to sail direct to Tel Aviv, whether or not the British commanded her to stop. It was possible that we should be caught and sent to Cyprus. Anyone who wanted to back out could do so; no one backed out.

Within ten minutes, a thousand and fourteen Jewish refugees were ready, in organized groups of thirty, waiting for the barges to take them to the *Fede*. They carried only the rucksacks on their backs. There was no room for excess baggage and their hands had to be free to climb aboard. There were no lights. No one talked or smoked. I filled my precious water bottle and joined them.

A small launch awaited me and the leader of the group. A mile off shore, we found the *Fede*, riding her anchor uneasily. Four barges, densely packed with refugees, nudged at her sides like puppies jostling for their mother's milk. The sea was impossibly rough. As someone threw down a rope ladder for me, I could

see the deck of the ship rising above me, sinking below me, in an unending, sickening roll. I was scared stiff. Strong hands pulled me over somehow and I flopped on to the deck.

It was not as easy for the other passengers. The heavy sea made it impossible to keep the rope ladders taut. The first man to attempt the transfer was caught between barge and ship, his leg crushed. While the others huddled in the barges, the crew worked frantically in darkness and desperate silence to make the barges fast. But with a thousand people to be transferred before daylight, caution soon had to be thrown to the winds. Flashlights cut into the darkness, shouts of command broke the silence. Progress was painfully slow.

For six hours I watched the hands clutching at ladders, the faces of old men drawn with fear, the lips of the younger people set in grim lines. As each one came on board, he was directed to the hold and given a paper bag, in which he could be seasick to his heart's content. One by one, men and women clambered to the deck and disappeared below. As dawn was breaking the last man climbed on board. At 5 a.m. we were ready to sail.

I went to say goodnight to the captain. He was worried. The ship was light, only 650 tons in weight, and 43 metres long. Unless most of our thousand passengers stayed below, she would be constantly and dangerously off keel. "And you can't keep them below very long," he said. "When you've seen what the hold is like you'll understand what I mean." I left him on that pleasant note and went to my cabin.

A tiny stateroom had been allotted to me, big enough for a bunk, a sink and a chair. Holding to the door to keep from falling, I turned on the light to survey my new home. Securely tied to the swaying back of the chair was a slim vase of roses. On the straw pillow

65 nestled a bottle of old cognac. Someone had been wishing me luck.

As I climbed on to the bunk, my foot touched something strange, and I bent to investigate. Three child stowaways were curled up on the floor below me. مردی در آنجا بود Beside them were their paper bags, neatly balanced. They were fast asleep. I wondered how long it would be before they—and I—saw land again—if we ever did. I patted their heads and went to bed.

A hot sun was shining when I woke up. My child stowaways were briskly sweeping the patch of cabin floor, folding blankets and bumping into each other. I tried to get water from the sink tap to brush my teeth. There was none, of course, and there would be none. The children couldn't speak my language or I theirs, but we grinned wordlessly at that and understood each other. Hand-in-hand we stumbled up the narrow steps of the crew's quarters to the deck.

افسانه I picked my way through crates, sacks and human beings that covered every inch of deck, stairs and rail, to the captain's bridge, where I found the group leader. "How are we fixed?" I asked cheerfully. "Give it to me straight."

He gave it to me straight. We were going to take a long run, lasting about ten days, to avoid the twin dangers of the mines and the British. That would cut our slim water supply. Our water ration therefore would be a half pint a day. Because cooking facilities for a thousand people would have made our ship suspicious, we would have no hot food except a possible cup of tea. Our food would be limited largely to hardtack, sausage, cheese, canned meat and vegetables, a little canned milk and dried pears.

We had no doctor, but there were a dentist and two nurses. Medicines were limited to aspirin and morphine. Seventy pregnant women had lied about their condition and got aboard, and two of them were in their eighth month. We could only cross our fingers and hope no one was born during the voyage.

The bed problem was really bad. Only five hundred beds were completed in the hold, most of which were allotted to women. Five hundred people would have to sleep on deck. I wouldn't have thought you could fit 500 china dolls on that deck, but then, I had a lot to learn.

Lack of beds wasn't just uncomfortable—it was dangerous. More than a handful of people on deck would excite the curiosity of any passing ship, and without facilities for people below it would be next to impossible to keep them down there. "Can you get them down fast if you sight a ship?" I asked. "We'll see," I was told. "Wait until the first ship comes along."

دو While I waited, I took stock. My fellow passengers were making what adjustments they could to the life of the ship. Many were drenching themselves in buckets of sea water to get relief from the burning heat. Others were shaving, combing matted hair, fashioning paper hats to avoid the sun's glare. There wasn't a scrap of shade anywhere. An old man lucky enough to have one of the three books on board was reading, ignoring the feet and knees that jostled him with each passer-by. At least three-quarters of the people visible bore on their arms the blue tattooed numbers of Dachau, Maidenek, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Birkenau.

I got a flashlight and went down to see the hold. Clinging to a rope line for support, I could neither move, see nor breathe. I felt immediately faint from the hot, sour air, and the sweaty bodies pressing against me on all sides.

The beds lining the hold were tiers of sagging canvas

strips less than a yard wide, each two feet above the other. Most people lay on these strips without moving or speaking. Many were retching into their paper bags. A few tried to play cards by the watery light near the stairs. I spoke to some as I pushed along through the gloom. Were they all right? Did they want anything? They wanted air and water. That I couldn't give them.

Smack at the bottom of the hold, my flashlight picked out the head of a little old man, bald and toothless, yellow skin tightly drawn over his bones. He peered up at the light, blinking. I thought of the coal miners in Zola's *Germinal*.

Who was he and where did he come from? I asked. He was Polish, had fought with the Russian partisans two years, then been caught and sent to Auschwitz. His entire family had been burned in the crematorium there. He was thirty-two years old. Was he O.K. now? I asked. "Sure, sure," he said. "This will only last a few days." Was there anything he wanted? Nothing. Well, yes, there was one little thing, he amended. He had no teeth and couldn't chew the hard-tack. Could I get him some extra water or tea in which to soften it? I didn't think I could, but I could try.

Feeling stifled and sick, I escaped into the open air. Could these people survive ten days of this, I pondered. And could we put a single other person below?

Apparently we could, for the first ship passed us that afternoon and we did. Spotters in the crow's nest, who kept 24 hours' vigil, shouted the news. In fifteen minutes, I could see the glistening foreheads at the top of the hold. But not a head was visible over the rails.

When the all-clear was given a half hour later, our first cases of fainting and heart attack were carried out for air. Those gasping breaths and heaving breasts were to become familiar symptoms in the next ten days. All we could do, then and later, was to put wet cloths below their hearts and bite our lips.

I was going to my room at sundown when I heard a young voice from the starboard lifeboat, moaning, "Mamma, Mamma, Mamma." I ran over, to see the dentist standing helplessly by a girl of seventeen, who was flushed with fever. It was appendicitis. We rushed her to my cabin, afraid to say what we were thinking.

A crew member found a spot for my new bed. It was to be a canvas sheet, four feet square, stretching above the bridge from the crow's nest to the port-side light. I climbed up and held fast to its sides to avoid sliding into the seas. The captain shouted up another cheering good-night message. We were to pass the Straits of Messina in the morning. Everyone would have to stay below at least three hours to avoid detection. I closed my eyes to block out the vision of that hold with a thousand people in it for three hours. But the vision wouldn't go away.

We passed Messina without incident. After that, two or three times a day every day we went below, sailing past the scrutiny of merchant ships, oilers and an aircraft carrier.

After each period of hiding, the sick ranks grew. Two days of stormy weather turned our crackerbox craft into a floating hospital. The pregnant women were unable to eat at all, and many of them swallowed nothing for ten days.

I spent my time learning about the people on board, coming mainly from Poland, Hungary and Rumania. There were none whose life had not been shadowed by deep personal tragedy. The stories were similar. Two, four, six years in a concentration camp. Families burned in the crematorium. Or as many years with partisan units, living in the woods, being wounded.

At the end of each story, I put the same question: "Why do you want to go to Palestine? Why not America—if you can get in? Or some other country?" A few did want to go to America—if they could get in. The majority, however, wanted only Palestine, and explained why.

An attractive Polish girl gave me her reasons. When the Nazis came to Warsaw, she got forged Christian papers from friends and went to work in the headquarters of the Polish Underground Army. She remained there two years with no one aware that she was Jewish. While there, she saw directives from General Sikorsky, instructing the underground to do nothing to prevent Nazis from killing Jews. She also saw her fellow partisans kill Jewish partisans and leave their bodies for the Germans with notes pinned to their sleeves reading: "Here is a Jew who fought against you."

She fled Poland as soon as she could; to make her way to Palestine. "I have done enough fighting for someone else's country," she said. "Now I want to fight for my own."

The reasoning of the others was much the same. Few had religious motives. They believed simply they would never be safe from anti-Semitism in any country except a Jewish state.

I have said the stories were similar. I want here to tell one of those stories, as it was told me by a 26-year-old Greek Jew with the engaging smile of a boy and the eyes of a quite old man.

Eliko Cohen, number 114,222, is sturdy-shouldered and proud, filled with a deep warmth and passion for his people. In February 1943 he was taken from Salonika with his father, mother, fiancée and 11-year-old brother, to the concentration camp at Birkenau.

His parents were sent to the crematorium immediately. His little brother was in the convalescent

block six months. One night the boy told Eliko his group had been selected for transfer to another camp. They said goodbye. At midnight, Eliko heard the cries of his brother's group. They had been transferred to the crematorium.

After the boy's death, Eliko did not want to live. He stopped eating. An old camper talked to him one night. "If you want vengeance for your brother," he said, "you must live. If you decide to live, you must forget everyone, learn to cheat and steal, become the most supreme egocentric in the world."

He resolved to live. Since by then he knew that intellectuals were first to die, he resolutely put his college background aside. "I changed my way of talking and sought the company of old-time thieves," he told me. "I said I had been a bandit myself in Salonika. I learned to steal. I forced myself to search the dungheaps for food."

Soon after, he learned his fiancée was dead. Hoping to get better treatment, she had told the Nazis she had had malaria, although it wasn't true. She was sent to the Maidanek crematorium.

Eliko was transferred to a labour camp in Warsaw. He lived seven months there without a bath or change of clothes. Each night before the lights went out he would pick fleas and lice from his clothes. After lights-out, that was impossible. He could not sleep because of the itching. He still bears on his legs the sprawling pockmarks of lice typhus. His friends told him: "Eliko, you have the smell of the earth. You will die in two or three days." He laughed at them. "I haven't that much good luck."

Each morning when he went to work, his Cappel had orders to kill a quota of Jews. This was done largely by beating them to death. When the Red Army approached Warsaw, his camp was evacuated. The Jews began a 150-kilometre march on foot. They were

without food or water three days. At night they would dig into the ground with spoons to suck the moist earth. Some tore gold teeth from their mouths to bribe the guards for a drink. On the third day they passed a river and broke ranks. All those who ran to the river's edge were shot. The river was red with blood.

That night they camped in a forest. It began to rain. Soon the ground was deep in water. They slept on their sides to keep their heads above water. After two days there, they were transferred to sealed cattle-cars, with no urinals or open windows. Finally they arrived at Dachau.

Four days later, they were sent to "Kaufering 54" to build an underground factory. "For every square foot of tunnel we built," Eliko said, "a hundred Jews died." He became adept at sneaking from the camp to steal potatoes. "When we had a dozen potatoes, we wouldn't change places with the king of England," he told me.

In early 1945, they heard the sound of American guns. His guards told him: "You will never live to see them. You will be shot even if they are one kilometre away." But when the Americans got close, the camp was evacuated. Twenty-five thousand prisoners were led on foot to the Austrian Tyrol. On the second night of that march, in the darkness and heavy snow, Eliko slipped out of line and into the woods. He hid in barns and backhouses until the Americans came.

When Eliko finished his story, he was crying, and I was crying, too. "Yes, I am liberated," he said. "I am free. But who wants me? In Palestine there might be life—not for me, for mine is finished, but for my children. But they will not let us in, you will see. They will send us to a concentration camp again."

It was useless to deny it. The next morning we would enter the 200-mile zone, where British planes

and destroyers searched the sea. Could anyone—could we—break through that blockade?

When we reached the 200 mile zone off Palestine, our food had run out and we were down to our last pint of water each. In order to reach Tel Aviv at night, we had to cut our speed to three knots an hour. This meant two days of sailing in waters whose every wave might conceal a British searching party.

Orders were given to everyone to remain below through the daylight hours. The stench and heat in the hold had by this time become unbearable, and the people most seriously ill, many only semi-conscious, were left in a corner of the deck hidden by improvised blanket tents.

With raw nerves and empty stomachs we sailed through the first day and night, and the next morning, without passing a single vessel. At 2 p.m. on Monday, September 2nd, when we were almost within sight of Tel Aviv, it happened. A four-motored British Lancaster swooped down on us from the sun.

It had come so swiftly that we were numb with shock. It circled above us slowly and deliberately, as if to say "The game is up"—and we knew it was. At a hasty meeting of the group, the question was put: "Do we stop when the destroyers come, or do we keep going to Tel Aviv, try to beach the ship, and land as many people as possible?" The answer was unanimous—we would try for Tel Aviv.

I went into a huddle with the few aboard who knew I was a journalist. How could we hide my identity papers successfully? We decided to divide the parts of my uniform between two girls. The tabs reading "US Correspondent," together with my passport,

شقة افكار  
credentials and travellers' cheques, we put into a waterproof envelope, tied it to the arm of a girl partisan, and covered it with a cast and sling. She had the most convincing-looking broken arm I've ever seen.

5  
A destroyer arrived at 3.30. As it drew near, the refugees held up roughly painted signs: "We are a thousand Jewish refugees seeking a home. Do not stop us, we are unarmed." While someone hoisted the blue and white Zionist flag, the Jews sang "Hatikvah" defiantly. The British shouted orders through a megaphone. We were entering the three-mile territorial waters of Palestine, they said, and would have to stop. If we did not, they would stop us.

5  
The younger men on board grasped sticks and bits of pipe. If any soldiers tried to board us from launches, we would beat them off, they said. We kept going full speed. Suddenly the destroyer headed straight for us. Manoeuvring into a tangent, she rammed our port side. Our ship tilted dangerously, the sick women on deck rolling against the starboard rail with a thud. Heavy hoses, pumping thick streams of water from the destroyer, knocked others off their feet. A dozen British sailors with tommy-guns jumped down to our deck. The women began to scream.

20  
Shouting "Heil Hitler" and "Nazi" the refugees fought with sticks and fists, and took the sailors hostage. One of them, his nose bloody, was held in the crow's nest. His captors pointed to the concentration camp numbers on their arms, saying bitterly. "Auschwitz!", "Buchenwald!" He offered them cigarettes, and cried: "What do you want from me? I don't want to be here. I want to be home with my girl in London."

Another destroyer approached. Both rammed our sides simultaneously, playing hoses again, and dropping more sailors. They fought their way to the engine room and stopped the ship. The megaphones directed us to

تحت  
get down into the hold so that the British officers might come aboard. No one budged. "If you do not go below at once, we will fire," the megaphone said. The refugees began to sing.

20  
From a light gun, one of the destroyers then fired her first shot, across us and into the sea. Another followed, landing in the ventilator a few feet from my head. I pushed up to the bridge. A tear gas bomb landed below me and someone picked it up and threw it back.

For four hours, as hand-to-hand fighting continued, bullets and salt water sprayed the deck. When darkness fell, the British captured the bridge. The refugees, exhausted from lack of food and water, surrendered. British soldiers picked me up and dumped me unceremoniously from the bridge to the deck. Soaking wet and shivering, we were herded into the hold, a soldier shoving me after the others with the butt of his gun, muttering "Get down there, you bloody swine."

20  
Piled one above the other in the steaming hold, unable to move, we waited. Several hours later, I remembered the rucksack I had left on the bridge. Struggling past the guards, I ran to the bridge and was permitted to go up with an armed guard. My rucksack was there, empty.

20  
I glared at the soldiers and demanded in Italian: "Where are my fifteen packages of American cigarettes? And my gold wristwatch? And my Leica camera? And my gold compact?" Unaware that I could understand English, the soldiers laughed and dropped some choice Anglo-Saxon phrases. I put my hand in one of their pockets and retrieved my compact. Another came through with one package of Lucky Strikes. That was all. I dropped on my knees and searched the muddy floor, unreasonably and in vain, for my toothbrush and the lipstick I had dreamed of one day using again. It was absurd, I knew, but it was the loss of the toothbrush and lipstick that made me want to cry.

24  
As I left the bridge, I heard a soldier saying: "Do you know what that fraulein wanted? She was looking for a bloody lipstick!"

Back in the hold, we realized we would be kept there all night, still without water or food. "Where are we going?" I heard in whispers all around me. "What will they do to us?" In the quiet that settled over the ship I heard the British commanding officer shout from the stern: "Are you all set up forward?" The voice of another officer came back through the dark: "All men have their guns, sir, and only three are without bayonets."

We were permitted to leave the hold in the morning, and we came up aching, dirty and wretchedly ill. More than a hundred men had been wounded in the battle, most of them on the head, and their cuts were caked with blood.

Around the ship were destroyers, several cutters and small craft. Two 'planes circled above. We had been towed from Tel Aviv and were approaching Haifa. Our ship was a complete shambles, its rails stove in, the lifeboats smashed, the bridge splintered.

Thirst had become an excruciating torture. Some people drank salt water, and soon after they began to writhe on the deck in agony, tearing at their clothes, faces and bodies with their nails, and moaning. Everywhere men and women were fainting, collapsing silently into heaps where they stood. Others cried without stopping. In the face of such an orgy of suffering, the British soldiers averted their eyes.

At noon we arrived at Haifa harbour, and saw our prison ship, the *Empire Heywood*, waiting. Our request to see a representative of the Jewish Agency from Palestine had been denied. We were to have no

contact with the shore, but were to be transferred at once to the ship that would take us to Cyprus. "Like Moses," Eliko said softly. "We have seen the Promised Land. But we cannot enter it."

By late afternoon, the flat landing barge had been made fast between our ship and the *Empire Heywood*. Water was brought down from the big ship to the barge. Half dead with thirst, the refugees rushed over our ship's side to get at the water. "It is just the same," Eliko told me bitterly. "They will turn us into animals again, fighting with each other for a drop to eat or drink."

The process of transfer began. As we filed up the ladder of the *Heywood*, our rucksacks were taken from us to be searched at leisure. We were led along a barbed wire corridor into a small room, searched, then taken along a similar corridor to a fenced-in portion of the top deck, large enough to hold about forty people. The wire gate unlocked, we passed through, and received a blanket, plate and cup with tea leaves sticking to the bottom.

We were led then down a flight of stairs into a large cage, covered on all sides with barbed wire, and lined with canvas bunks. There were two such cages, and five hundred of us were crowded into each. There were not enough beds, and people threw themselves on the floor, exhausted. The cage was filled with the sound of sobbing.

On the posts supporting the wire, someone had scrawled in Hebrew: "You are not the first on this ship and you will not be the last." "We have been on this ship ten days." "We will see you soon in Cyprus and some day in Eretz."

At 8 p.m. soldiers arrived with buckets of cold beans and biscuits and set them on the floor. The people rioted for the food, scooping it up with their hands. Only those nearest the buckets got any. At least half of us were left with nothing. After three

days without eating, my legs felt like rubber, and friends pushed me up the stairs to the square of deck allotted to us. Weeping women were clinging to the barbed wire there, staring at the shores of Palestine as we pulled away.

*most available* { I climbed up to the roof of the lavatory, the only available place, and tried to sleep. All through the night, people stood packed on the stairs behind locked gates, waiting to get to the lavatories on deck. Guards permitted only three up at a time. They waited four and five hours for the chance.

In the morning an elderly woman brought me a bowl of tea and some biscuits. "You don't know the ways of concentration camps," she told me. "So I thought I'd better get this for you, or you would be left without food again."

I went down into the cage and fell into a bunk. The people around me were talking of their hopes and fears, of the things they had wanted to do in Palestine, of their chances of ever getting in. None of them had expected a life of luxury and ease there. They had planned to go to the kibutz (collective settlement), seeking only the chance to work in peace, free from pogroms and crematoria, and able to plan their own futures.

*6/24* We arrived at Famagusta, Cyprus, that afternoon. In small groups we went ashore and climbed into guarded open trucks. The three kilometres of road to the camp were lined with light tanks and Bren carriers. The camp itself was bounded by two high fences of barbed wire, topped with menacing coils. Between them armed jeep patrols drove ceaselessly around the camp. Above the fences, sentinels were posted at intervals, sitting on wooden platforms with huge searchlights. Behind the fences, amidst stunted eucalyptus trees, we could see weary rows of tents, iron wash houses and more guards. "Mauthausen!" my companions muttered. "Dachau!" "Birkenau!"

*The* At the camp gates we were sprayed thoroughly with DDT, then bundled into a tent to be searched again. Men and women were divided by a corrugated iron partition about five feet high. The women were told to take off their shoes, lift up their dresses, pull down their girdles. Three soldiers leaned over the partition to watch. When it came to my turn, a young A.T.S. policewoman patted me familiarly on the hips. "What, no girdle, dearie?" she said. "You shouldn't run around loose like that, a chick like you," and she winked at the soldiers. They laughed.

*SW* I was too busy to be angry. My eyes were fastened on the girl partisan with my papers. She got through it all right and I breathed again.

*pen* We proceeded to the next tent to be registered. Each of us was given a mimeographed sheet for water rations, with our numbers written at the top. On the back, jotted down in pencil, without date, name or signature, was the amount of money taken from us. This was our receipt. There was no receipt for our watches and other valuables.

We left the tent and turned to face our new home.

Once securely on the wrong side of the barbed wire, my first instinct was to find that girl with my passport. I had got in all right, but after my first look around it had become supremely important to me to get out.

*less* She was waiting for me in the wash house. I cut the cast from her arm, hugged her, and slipped my passport under my blouse. From then on, I vowed, it would never leave me. The thought of the four thousand Jews there who had no passports was sobering.

*Dep* I went house hunting. Home, I was told, was where you hung your rucksack. I found a group of friends under a tent top and moved in. My bed was a wooden

plank set on iron stands with no mattress, and a straw pillow. "My God, I wish I had a bath," I said desperately. Someone pointed to a bucket of water. There were no baths. The salt water showers which had been installed did not run. We could see the sea on the other side of the barbed wire, but we couldn't swim in it. We would have to drink, wash ourselves and our clothes with a water ration of a gallon a day.

Moving in a fog of depression, we lined up for food. After standing three hours, we received a bowl of thick potato soup, a slice of bread and mud coloured tea. Since there were no lights in the camp, there was nothing for it afterwards but to go to bed and battle with the mosquitoes until morning.

Communal eating in groups of eight had been organized by the Jews themselves the next day. My stomach ached with hunger when I came to breakfast. Before me was a small, flat plate of salad, made of tomatoes, peppers and onions. It was not heaped. I assumed it was for me. I learned, however, that it was to be divided with the seven others sharing my table.

We were to enjoy little change in our diet at subsequent meals. There was a slice of bread twice daily. An occasional lump of meat found its way into the soup. Often it was rancid, since there is no refrigeration in the camp. Twice the soup was made with rice which had maggots. Once I had a small bunch of grapes. Although I was constantly starved, I was unable to finish the soup which dominated our meals. I found it too indigestible. Like many of my companions, I preferred to go hungry.

Later, I learned there were no special rations of milk or other foods for the three hundred pregnant women in the camp, or for the two hundred children from one month to fourteen years old, except Ovaltine for the youngest of them. Since all money had been taken from the inmates to prevent bribery for escape,

it was impossible to bolster the inedible camp diet with purchases from the Cypriots.

The sick despair I found among the Jews in the camp did not come only from the physical conditions under which they knew now they must live. It was the combined presence of the barbed wire and lack of anything to do that steadily and progressively pounded their morale to bits. They had been reassured that there was no crematorium in the camp, and that therefore they would not have to die. But life in Cyprus was for them not life, but merely absence of death.

Apart from five stickballs and a volleyball net donated by the Cypriots, and ten English language newspapers which few could read, there was no way to spend the days, save to gaze at the barbed wire and the sea. One inmate called this process "killing time with a rusty knife."

They would have to face those conditions, exist somehow, get married, have children, in the months, perhaps years, they would be confined there. But three days were enough for me. Attempted escape for the Jewish refugees meant three years in jail. But I could escape legally.

On Friday afternoon, September 6, I told my friends I was leaving. I prepared a note to be smuggled from the camp asking journalists on Cyprus to help me out if I hadn't been heard from when they received my message. Then I fastened an illicit roll of film in my hair, put on my uniform and started for the gates.

My eyes blurred when I got there. The whole camp had come to see me off. Crying and cheering, they clung to my arms and legs, kissed me, clutched my hand, wishing me luck and begging me to tell their story to the world. They tossed me in the air and carried me on their shoulders to the camp commandant.

I was nervous. In a quavering voice I told the Major: "I am an American newspaper woman. I've come here

with these people and stayed with them. Now I think it's time for me to go home." His face white, the major said "I think it is, too."

He put me into a closed car, and we drove off, Eliko's face before my eyes and shouts of "Shalom" ringing in my ears. I was questioned all that night, then put to bed in the billet of the A.T.S. policewomen, a small plaster hut with a tin roof.

This hut was my jail for four days, the six A.T.S. girls my guards. They were as decent as they could be under the circumstances. "You're O.K. as long as you behave," they told me. "But if you try to get out of here, we'll break your arm."

The Camp Quartermaster came to see me. "How was the food in the camp?" he asked. "Rotten," I told him. "It's no worse than what we get ourselves," he replied. In my four days there, I learned this was close to the truth. British personnel, however, can eat in the restaurants of Famagusta if they choose. As a corporal in the cookhouse explained: "We cook it, chick—but we don't eat it. Not if we can help it, we don't."

On the first morning of my imprisonment, I demanded the right to cable my Embassy. I was told my messages would be sent, but learned later they were never received. After being held incommunicado three days, I grew desperate. On the fourth day, I informed the authorities that I had stopped eating and would not eat until I was released. The following afternoon I was set free.

As I packed my few belongings, I heard some A.T.S. girls on the other side of the thin partition talking about the people in the camp. "Well, no—of course they're not criminals," one voice said. "But we can't let them get into Palestine, can we? Can we?"

"I don't care what you say," another voice said tearfully, "I know God will punish us all for what we're doing to the Jews."

100

5

37