

The Story Of The Arms Ship Ressurrectio (Rex)

Written by: Yehuda Ben-tzur

Ressurrectio (nickname Rex), a 1,000 tons ship hoisting the Italian flag, arrived in Tel-Aviv port on Apr. 23 1948 - on the eve of Pessach (Passover) holiday - 21 days before the end of the British Mandate. The shipment, purchased by Arazi, included 25 20 m"m guns and 250 tons of ammunition. The ship loaded in Marseilles ,France, and made a stop in Catania, Sicily to load a "cover" cargo of potatoes and artichokes. According to the testimony of the Palyam escort, Arie ("Kipi") Kaplan, the journey passed without any problems (A day latter, the British navy caught "Mishmar Haemek", illegal ship. The emigrants were deported to Cyprus). The ship kept "Radio silence", for the simple reason that there was no radio and no "Gid'onee" (radio operator) on board. The only mishap happened during the unloading in the anchorage, where some of the stevedores - all volunteered to work during the holiday – fainted, because of the intoxicating smell coming from the rotten "cover" vegetables.

The 20-mm guns were the most "heavy cannons" the Hagana had up to that time. Some of them were allocated to the "fighting" ships that the "Marine Service" selected from the "shadow flotilla" (ex illegal immigration ships). 5 ships were repaired and commissioned in Haifa Port (still in British hands until 30 June 48). The first one, as from 21 May, the "Eilat" (ex "Northland", us ice-breaker), anchored in Tel-Aviv in order to "supply".. air cover to the area. The allocation of those guns was discussed in the General H.Q. meeting, and decided by a... vote, as we can learn from B-G.'S entry in his diary May 18 1948: "I raised the request of the "Marine Service" to arm the illegal immigration ship "Northland" to protect the immigration traffic from Cyprus. Yigal [Yadin], Ratner and Lerer objected, because the guns needed here. Shkolnik, Yosef, Israel [Galily] and myself were in favor".

As described above, Ressurrectio has been purchased in Dec. 1948. While waiting for Arazi's contracts to materialize, she was operated in legal commerce, on the line Marseilles – Algiers, in order to maintain herself and cover her real operational intentions. Looking into the time tables, one can see that the ship could have been deployed first in the beginning of Mar. 48 to ship Avriel's cargo from Shibenik and then, return on time, in the beginning of Apr., to carry Arazi's cargo from Marseilles. To ascertain that such a failure- causing the arms to wait for a ship over two weeks - would not occur, B-G. should have appointed right from the beginning, someone with full authority over the whole system. He appointed Avigur too late, and before long he realized that even he, isn't "supplying the goods".

Written by Yehuda Ben-Tzur, Caeseria, Israel, 1977

Yehuda, a Palyam and Aliya Bet veteran, escort the arms ship Maestralle that arrived on June 27th, 1948.