

The Voyage of “La'Negev” [To the Negevⁱ]

This vessel, code name - “Atzil” [Hebrew: noble] was a two-mast yacht named “Merica”, with a 400 tons dead weight and a 150 HP engine, that could give her a speed of 6 knots. She was leased in Italy from “Stubby” (the ship dealer Dandaria), who prepared her to carry Ma’apilim. The commander of the vessel was Ephraim Talmon, accompanied by Moshe Dafni (The Sailor) and a Gideoni Yosef, who has not been identified. The vessel left the port of Sete, France, on January 18th 1947 carrying 647 Ma’apilim.

After a difficult winter voyage and a series of technical mishaps, the vessel arrived three weeks later at the shore of Palestine. On the night of the 8th- 9th February she was caught by the British navy in the vicinity of Caesarea, where the Ma’apilim had been scheduled to land. A fight broke out and the Ma’apil Herbert Laser (RIP) was killed.ⁱⁱ

At the same time, the British surrounded kibbutz Sdot Yam and a boat of the Palyam which had just arrived there from Neve Yam was caught and the Palyamnikim in the boat were arrested for several days. The siege on the kibbutz was lifted in the morning and the Ma’apilim were deported to Cyprus.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)

ⁱ Negev - the southern, dry part of Israel

ⁱⁱ At the time the death was first announced to the public, the name of this Ma’apil was not yet known and he was called “The Unknown Ma’apil”. This became the name of the next vessel of Ma’apilim to reach Palestine on February 17th.

