

The Voyage of “Medinat Ha’Yehudim” [The Jewish State]

This vessel was originally an ice-breaker in the service of the US Coast Guard. It was named after the book written by the Father of Modern Zionism – Theodor Herzl. The vessel had been scheduled to pick up Ma’apilim from the port of Gdansk, Poland, but after the whole affair of the vessel “Exodus”, it was decided to bring Ma’apilim from the Communist Bloc via the Black Sea. The commander of the vessel was Yosef (Yoske) Almog, accompanied by Avraham Meron and Shmuel Hochman (Haram); the Gideonim were Aharon Michaeli and Ptachiya Page. The captain was the American - Morgan Mitchell.

On September 23rd 1947, 2,664 Ma’apilim came on board in the port of Burgas, Bulgaria, where it waited for the departure of the “Geula”. Both of these vessels were of the group that had been purchased in the USA by Ha’Mossad Le’Aliya Bet. Their crews consisted mainly of Jewish volunteers from North America. Both vessels left port on September 26th and traveled in sight of each other as far as Rhodes. Here their paths split; the “Geula” headed for Haifa and “Medinat Ha’Yehudim” made for Tel Aviv.

On October 2nd a British destroyer started circling about her and although Ha’Mossad Le’Aliya Bet had ordered that resistance should remain passive, a clash developed and in the course of the action the vessel rammed the destroyer, causing significant damage as well as injuries to both sides; a baby choked on tear gas. Then about five miles from Tel Aviv, the British boarded the vessel and towed her to Haifa. The same fate became the “Geula”. The Ma’apilim were kept on their vessels for three days before everyone was deported to Cyprus.

When the Israeli Navy was formed after the creation of the state, this was the first vessel of the shadow fleet to be commissioned; it became the MS “Eilat” (A -16), commanded, once again, by Yoske Almog.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)



“Medinat Ha’Yehudim” at Haifa, with the “Geula” behind her



"Medinat Ha'Yehudim" at Haifa



Mother with child in a cane basket, one of 150 babies on board the vessel