

The Voyage of "Moledet" [Homeland]

The vessel "Moledet" had formerly been a cargo vessel that plied among the fjords of Norway. She had been prepared for her voyage in Sweden and in Marseilles, France. The vessel sailed from the region of Metaponto, Italy on March 23rd 1947, carrying 1,568 Ma'apilim. The Ma'apilim had been brought to the vessel by a rubber boat that was tugged along a cable, strung from ship to shore. This was done in secrecy at night. The commander of the vessel was Fabi Gaver and he was accompanied by Alex Dotan (Schecht), Gad Heilbrun, Aharon Shechtman and the Gideoni - Menachem Ben-Yami. (Menachem himself was a Ma'apil, who had participated in the signaling course for Ma'apilim in Marseilles). Several other Israelis also happened to be on this vessel. They had been on various missions in Europe and were on their way back to Palestine.

As soon as the vessel set out on her voyage, she started to list heavily. All the efforts to keep her on a level keel failed, and the list kept getting worse as the supply of food, water and fuel diminished. On March 29th the vessel was discovered by a British scout plane, not far from Cyprus. From then on, she was tailed by destroyers. When she listed at 20^o, water penetrated the engine room and the pumps broke down, an SOS was sent out. Some British technicians from the destroyer boarded to try solve the problem. It was found necessary to remove at least half of the Ma'apilim from the vessel immediately. They were brought onto the destroyers and landed in Haifa. Those remaining on the "Moledet" were towed to Haifa on March 31st. The Ma'apilim were then deported to Cyprus and displayed only passive resistance.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)

