

אברהם ליכובסקי מעיד על פרשת הספינה 'רפיח'

ב-10 בינואר 1998 כתב אברהם ליכובסקי ז"ל – גדעוני הספינה 'רפיח' - מכתב לחבר. לצערנו יש בידינו רק קטעים ממנו, המוצגים להלן:

My assignment in Athens (and later throughout Europe) was construction of a secure communication cell and building transmitters for various ships. I joined five specific immigration and arms transport missions when Gideonim were not available or not sufficiently qualified for a mission's complexity and critical nature.

Now to your specific points:

1. *No! The Rafiach carried a single, military Ducati short wave receiver, a transmitter built from Junkyard parts (out of discarded radios, amplifiers and telephone repeaters), a Morse key supplied by Dr. Fry (not sure of the spelling) who worked for the British and the Mossad in Athens, and two automobile batteries. The antenna was a stranded L type.
The transmitter consisted of a crystal oscillator stage (6V6 vacuum tube) and a power amplifier (807 tube). As one of the batteries was lost, and the other cracked, when I tried to throw them across a widening gap to a ledge on the cliff, as the ship was sinking rapidly, I had very little power and could not transmit. Overnight I modified the transmitter to use only the oscillator stage. I estimated that I had about ten to twenty minutes of receiving or transmitting time left.*
2. *No! There was only one transmitter. I built it in Athens (with the help of Dr. Fry, supplying keys, crystals and perhaps some other components I could not find anywhere else).*
3. *No! The plan was to rendez-vous with the 'Heleni' at Kamila Inland (just a rock) almost exactly due North of the Eastern tip of Crete. The crew was to train a new crew of immigrants, for the last two days of the journey, the Heleni was to return the Greek crew to Piraeus.*
- 4-5. *As the ship was sinking, and all hands ashore, I ripped down a portion of the antenna, was able to rip the Ducati receiver off the wall of my cabin, I had to unbolt the transmitter from a table/shelf and free the batteries, outside the cabin. I had no time to unscrew the Morse key from the table. After discovering that there were shepherds on the Island (Two couples, the men armed with rifles) and their cave residences, I commandeered the bigger cave, which had a fireplace, to use as my "laboratory". I was able to transmit the next morning. I sent a plain language "SOS DE NER SIRINA" three times. NER was my personal call sign and I expected any Palmach or Mossad operator to recognize it. (the Rafiach call sign was known only to few)*

I chose the time to coincide with a scheduled communication between Mossad HQ in Tel-Aviv and satellite in Rome, and transmitted the SOS when both were supposed to scan the frequency for traffic. They both responded immediately with long R's to indicate they were reading. I then proceeded to transmit a short message of essentials followed by more detailed information on the situation and our needs.

6. *The shepherds were just that, ignorant Greek peasants, supplied once every six months by a visiting merchant. After our distress call was passed to the British and Greek governments, A Greek destroyer entered the Southern bay, just short of the sunken Rafiach which had almost made it out of the bay (by this time, what I was told, was the worst storm in the history of the Mediterranean had subsided. Skies were very stormy but the monstrous waves were now gentle swells). The destroyer daringly passed a light bridge to the cliff, and with great skill took our seriously wounded immigrants on board. They transported the wounded immediately to hospitals in Athens and never searched or interrogated anyone. It was a magnificent humanitarian action, executed with great seamanship.*

Two days later three British destroyers showed up near the North Western bay, stopping about two hundred yards off shore. They lowered long boats loaded with policemen from the island Rhodes. My guess was there were about three hundred. At first they fanned out to search the island (I hastily sneaked to the waters edge and pulled on a rope that loosed a rock slide including all my radio equipment, which is probably still lying twenty fathoms or so below the water at the foot of the cliff). Next they were able to isolate the Greek crew (the captain was all too cooperative) and began a screening to find the Mossad operatives. I believed that I was in serious danger, having used my personal call sign. I knew they had good intelligence and were probably familiar with my previous heading of communications at Palmach HQ and Mossad HQ. I quickly borrowed clothing articles from the girls and soon looked like a very young female. The captain, surrounded by half a dozen policemen, knew me well, looked right at me and passed, without recognizing me. After several hours the search was called off, the policemen withdrew, and the boats returned to load everyone on board the destroyers.

After completing the urgent message exchange with the Mossad HQ, I requested dispatch of the Heleni to Sirina to evacuate all Mossad personnel and the crew. The reply was an order to stay put. The intelligence was that the Brits were preparing new prison camps in Eritrea, to discourage immigration further. In case we were shipped to Eritrea, we were needed to maintain the spirits of the immigrants and establish Mossad infrastructure in the new camps. Once on the destroyers, the immigrants were assured by, British naval officers, that due to their hardships they will be taken to Palestine directly and released. I stayed on deck most of the time reading the blinkers from the command destroyer to the others. I intercepted the order to proceed to Famagusta. The immigrant leadership decided to refuse disembarkation in Cyprus if the Brits lied to them. When they refused to leave the hold of the LST, all vents were shut and a tear gas canister was suspended from one of the deck vents. Conditions in the hold became unbearable, and it was lucky that no one died. After about half an hour in those conditions a door was opened and the immigrants streamed out.

