

By Yehuda Ben-Tzur

An Arms Ship to Israel in the War of Independence

## **S/S Kefalos > 'Dromit'**

[Ship's data on the last page.](#)



In April, 2008 I was approached via the Palyam & Aliya Bet Website by Professor Renato Barahona, who researches the story of the ship and by his father, Professor Carlos Blanco, a Spanish Republican of Basque descent, whose family was exiled to Mexico, and who in 1948 joined the crew of the ship in the port of Tampico - both live in the USA. Since then we have continued to share and exchange information via email. This information includes original documents which had not been in our hands previously. It forced me to alter several important particulars in the article about the ship, especially regarding the non-stop long course on which the ship sailed from Tampico to Tel Aviv. Instead of patching up the original article on the site, I preferred to rewrite the whole document, and here it is before you, the reader.

The immense and generous assistance we have received from the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, is hereby acknowledged.

### **First Voyage - Arms**

**Arrival:** Tel - Aviv anchorage on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1948.

**Accompanists:** Five Jewish-American youngsters supplied by the Hagana's delegation in the USA: Nathaniel Ratner- 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer (eventually, Chief Engineer), Bob Keller – 2<sup>nd</sup> mate, Avraham Ela'azarov-Alvin Ellis - super cargo, Jack Rothman – communication officer, and Arie Kesselman (Israeli

student) - communication assistant. The five were the accompanying crew, representing the owners – the Hagana, but their status was different from accompanists of the arms ships in Europe, in that they were subject to the orders of the captain, not to mention that four of them acted as members of the crew.



**"The Jewish boat" - the five in Tampico, Mexico**

**Cargo:** Particulars are presented in a report sent to Ben-Gurion after the cargo had been offloaded in Tel Aviv on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1948. An additional 1,400 tons of sugar were loaded to be used as a "cover" cargo to hide the arms and a big quantity of airplanes fuel was loaded just before departure<sup>1</sup>.

The 'Kefalos', a 6,000 cargo ship, was the seventh and last that the Hagana's Procurement System bought on May 1948 and registered her directly – under a false front – to Manuel Enterprises<sup>2</sup> (Panama City). More arms vessels were leased when needed for a specific voyage or special period. The first six arms ships were purchased by the European Procurement delegation whereas the 'Kefalos' was the first to be purchased by the American Delegation in New York for procurement of arms from the American continent. The operation was called 'Dromi' (South) and the ship was called 'Dromit' (Southerner), because the main deal was done with Mexico, although additional items were smuggled from the USA to Mexico and carried aboard the vessel.

<sup>1</sup> Different cargo data is given by other sources. See Doron Rozen, 'In Quest of the American Treasure', 2008 (Hebrew), p' 274.

<sup>2</sup> The company vanished. No traces left.

The ship had been purchased for \$ 190,000 by the members of the Procurement delegation in New York, Eli Shalit and Raphael Recanati. Then they approached Captain Adolph S. Oko Jr., a veteran Jewish-American sailor and asked him to take it upon himself to bring this cargo to Tel Aviv anchorage (The city itself had been cleared of British presence since February 1948, whereas part of the port of Haifa remained a British enclave until June 30<sup>th</sup>).

The captain was aware that shipping this cargo was in breach of the international embargo that had been placed on supplying weapons to both warring sides, but he accepted the challenge and gathered together a crew whom he knew from former activities. Many of these men were Republicans Spaniards who had escaped from Franco's Spain, some were South Americans, and still others were from other nations, such as Canada, Finland and Portugal.

The ship was handed over to the captain in the port of Portland, Maine on 1st June 1948. From there she sailed to a dry dock in New York. Almost immediately after leaving Portland a serious fire broke out in the engine hold. According to the captain the fire was "due to the filthy condition" of the ship. The crew succeeded, however, in getting it under control quickly without the need of outside help. It seems that the ship was in need of total refitting, which had not been done despite the captain's request that it was necessary to do so. The captain had also demanded that the cranes on the ship be replaced with new ones, and this had also not been done. The reason given was that there was no time to waste, and the result was that the ship's entire cargo would have to be offloaded with those same old cranes in Tel Aviv anchorage and brought to shore on barges.

On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1948, just as the ship was about to leave New York for Mexico, Teddy Kollek, head of the Hagana delagation in the USA, gave the captain a set of confidential 'instructions'. At that point - end of the British Mandate - the main problem confronting Israel was the UN observers posted in the Israeli ports, whose task was to prevent arms from being unloaded. Therefore, the cargo had to be secret and hidden or in some way disguised, and in some cases even the destination port was to remain hidden from the crew. For these reasons the 'Kefalos' was given sailing orders for Buenos Aires, as the first port of call [Interestingly, the *New York Times* reported on 15th June that the vessel was headed for Montevideo]. On 14<sup>th</sup> June the ship left New York harbor. While on the high seas, the crew was informed that the ship was sailing to Tampico for some minor repairs and to take on some produce, while the officers were briefed by Captain Oko about the real aim of the voyage.

Obviously, once she had taken on its vital cargo, the 'Dromit' had to head for its final destination - a distance of more than 7,000 nautical miles, without refueling en route. For that reason she had to take on enough provisions and extra fuel in barrels to ascertain that she would have enough to last the distance + 1,200 extra miles to enable her reaching an Italian port, because there were not fuel facilities in Tel Aviv.

According to his instructions the captain had also to change the ship's name after leaving Tampico, and he was given three choices: Esperanza, Adelanta or Pinzon. After choosing the name he was to report it to New York for

authorization by the Panamanian consulate in New York. The captain was also given the special code which would connect him to the Hagana's 'Gideon' and 'Tamar' transmitting networks. He was also supposed to contact a station in Prague two days before the ship's arrival to Tel Aviv. Just before departure from N-Y, Eli Shalit's last words to the captain were: "Oko, this is for you alone. It should not even be discussed with your wife. We have no insurance on this ship". I asked, "Does that mean that my men are without insurance?"..."Yes, but don't you worry. We will see... if anything happens... the men's families will be protected". The captain's wife, Gladys Oko, was an active crew member although she was paid only \$1.00 per day as purser (she also acted as the ship's nurse).

### **Tampico**

Concurrently, there were negotiations going on with the Mexicans regarding procurement of the arms. On 11<sup>th</sup> June, three days before the ship was to leave New York a very pessimistic report was forwarded to P. Vaza, the head of the Procurement unit in Israel by Eliyahu Sacharov, a member of the Procurement commission: "As I told you in our brief telephone conversation, there is a crisis regarding this plan... under the present circumstances our people can only keep matters 'at a slow boil'...so that \$100,000 which have been invested so far will not go to waste...our people have begun preparations ...to carry out the plan which is scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> of June...today or tomorrow we will know how things have fallen into place. We bought the ship for \$190,000. According to experts, the price was very cheap and the ship is in good condition. (On these two points the captain's opinion was altogether different. He found out that the seller had bought the ship two years earlier for \$102,000 !). The captain is 'one of us' and the crew...consists [for the most part] of Spanish republicans [among them there are some of Basque origin] and we have made all plans for sailing according to our predetermined plan. However, the change in attitude of 'the Southerner' [meaning the Mexican president] has spoiled these plans. We have loaded onto the ship a number of vital materials. If we shall not be able to conclude the negotiations... positively within a few days' then we will send you the ship [meaning to the Mediterranean]. Amongst other things, we have loaded the ship with 4 sets of radar equipment... [Vaza added that]: We learned from this letter that even in Mexico matters had not worked out to our satisfaction".

Ten days later while sailing towards Tampico it seemed that things were falling into place satisfactorily. On 21<sup>st</sup> June Ben Gurion wrote in his diary: "The ship has been bought in Canada and its name is 'Kefalos' (flag of Panama) and she was sent to Mexico. She will bring 38 M-5 tanks and 32 75 mm cannons, machine guns and bombs for airplanes. They might arrive at the end of the cease fire [The first cease fire ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July and the ship arrived at Tel Aviv two months later, during the second cease fire]. The ship carried also 200 tons of TNT, 18,000 bazooka grenades and other assorted articles." Those particulars do not match with those that were loaded onto the ship and tanks were not included in its cargo.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June the 'Dromit' entered the port of Tampico and anchored near the market square. The person who was supposed to meet them there and take care of their needs - David Gritzewsky - did not appear. According to the captain, David flew to New York in order to receive \$ 4,000 for the upkeep of the vessel and from there he was flown for the same purpose to Mexico City. The captain complained that he was forced to act "as the owner of the ship, the captain and the agent, all in one". It soon became clear to him that matters were not proceeding as planned, and as a result the ship anchored in that port for 42 days and most of the time the captain was ill with dysentery. He had harsh criticism of the spots at which the ship had been anchored, and also complained of the capabilities of those who had been chosen to buy the weapons, and of those who ran the whole operation in Mexico.

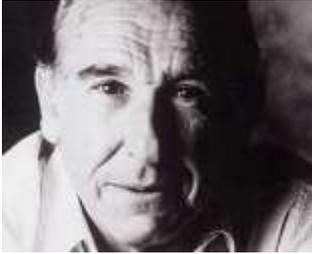
Captain Oko thought that the weapons were in a very poor condition and that an exorbitant amount had been paid as a bribe: "...In all my experience I have never seen a lower grade of men than these that represented the Israel arms shipment out of Mexico". One of these, according to the captain, was known during World War II as a Nazi agent and anti-Semite, and Oko prevented his coming onto the ship. On the other hand he specifically mentioned that David Gritzewsky was not one of the 'bad guys': " I can also state that I have never seen such a low grade of arms... 2 of the 75mm [cannons] tested in Israel exploded killing 2 soldiers. Further to the stupidity of handling the arms shipment the loading took place adjacent to the Market Place. This market is the Sirio-Libaneses village and the possibilities of sabotage [were] very real". A week after the shipment had reached Israel and Shaul reported to Ben Gurion: "Two of the Mexican cannons were tested and both of them exploded. Now an investigation is trying to determine if the shell or the cannon was to blame. 32 similar cannons were brought from Mexico".

At one point, the ship was anchored in a location to which the public had free access and this led very quickly to a police investigation and caused the ship to become interesting to the newspapers. The New York Times published an article detailing that the name of the ship at the time it had been purchased was 'Larranga'. Under the circumstances, it was obvious that the attempt to keep the ports of arrival a secret from the crew were doomed to failure.

#### Arms at Tampico Investigated

TAMPICO, Mexico, July 19 (U.P.) —Police sought today to trace a large arms shipment, including cannon and machine-guns, discovered as it was being loaded on a ship. It was reported without confirmation that a Jewish group was shipping the weapons from the United States to Palestine via Mexico.

The ship was nominally the Keslos of Panamanian registry. Investigators discovered that the lifeboats carried the name "Larranga." Lloyd's Register lists the Larranga, out of New York, as a 3,804-ton freighter owned by the United States Maritime Commission.



Carlos Blanco (on the left), a crew member, described to me what ensued: "I was told that the ship was going to Argentina carrying sugar. Then, I found out that all crew members thought so. Until, after a very long wait, we finally docked to load the 'Kefalos'. Much to our surprise, we saw that the very long train that was waiting for us was guarded by Mexican soldiers. Of course, nobody said anything except to comment that it was a peculiar way to "protect" a simple sugar delivery. But then, the Tampico newspapers began to say that ours was a very strange ship to have its cargo guarded by the Mexican army. Shortly afterwards the whole thing "exploded" and all of Tampico, including, of course , the crew, found out that we were going to load war arsenal".

According to Carlos, the captain reacted well. He gathered the crew and told them the truth. He promised that if anyone wished to leave the ship and go back to where he came from, he would pay his way. On the other hand, he promised to those that would remain that they would be paid by the rate of American sailors and that they would also get a bonus, a double wage from the moment the ship entered the Mediterranean. The only one who left the ship was the Chief Engineer, an Estonian, anxious to see his new-born baby in the U.S.A.

Leonard Slater, author of 'The Pledge', provides details of how the weapons were procured for Israel: "Al Schwimmer [later, the Chairman of the Israel Aircraft Industries] made a trip to Mexico to deliver \$ 260,000 in cash to his government friends for the long-postponed purchase of Mexican arms. Despite exposes in the Mexico City newspapers and [protests by the] representation by the country's influential Syrian community, the Mexicans went through with the deal, delivering the arms to the port of Tampico on a railroad train guarded by Mexican Army troops. Hank Greenspun was on hand to see them loaded aboard the 'Kefalos', a small ship of Panamanian registry that Schalit had bought and had refitted at the Tood shipyard in Brooklyn. It was a smaller haul than Greenspun had expected: 36 French howitzers 75mm, 17,000 shells, 2,000 aerial bombs, 500 machine guns and sub-machine guns... including those that Greenspun had obtained in Hawaii and brought to Mexico on the yacht Idalya and 7 million bullets. There was still room in the 'Kefalos' hold. At the last moment the Mexicans put aboard aviation gasoline, in drums rushed down from California by Schalit. 1,400 tons of sugar were loaded on top to hide the other cargo, in case the British Navy should intercept the 'Kefalos' off Gibraltar" [in the unloading report sent to Ben-Gurion, only 1,000 tons sugar are mentioned and the fuel is not mentioned at all]".

According to evidence given in the early 1950's by Yehuda Arazi, a senior procurement activist, Greenspun had been involved in "procuring" heavy machine guns from surplus supplies of the US Air Force in the Hawaiian Islands in March 1948: "I sent Greenspun, a young Jewish lawyer, to check the possibility of getting things out of there. He managed to do so with the machine guns, to wrap them and ship them to San Francisco. He then hired a yacht ['Idalia'] which would bring the weapons to Tampico, Mexico. While en route the

crew rebelled and refused to continue. He had to threaten the skipper [Lee Lewis, a Jewish youngster]...with a revolver in order to force him to continue... to Tampico. In a trial which took place later, Greenspun was fined \$10 000 which we paid [and] he lost his citizenship also. The trial gave him lots of publicity. He went into the casino business and made a pile of money. He then bought a newspaper - the Las Vegas Sun - and became a sworn enemy of Senator Joe McCarthy...". Later he was pardoned by President Kennedy.

Slater describes Greenspun as "a tough guy who was formerly an officer in the American munitions corps and a company commander in General Patton's forces during 2<sup>nd</sup> World War". He details how the machine guns made their way from Hawaii to the west coast of the USA and from there to Mexico onboard the yacht *Idalia*, and continues with the trial of Hank Greenspun in 1950. He does not however mention the involvement of Arazi in this operation. When this operation was over, Greenspun was asked by Teddy Kollek, who was then in charge of Procurement in the USA, to go back to Mexico and to assist in the Procurement of weapons from Latin America until they would be transferred to the 'Kefalos'. Greenspun succeeded, with the aid of forged documents, to convince the President of Mexico that the weapons were meant to go to Nationalist China, and in that manner the 'Kefalos' was finally able to sail with its arms cargo in early August.

Friction was unavoidable between the two strong personalities, Hank Greenspun and Captain Oko, and this was cause for a conflict which the captain never forgot until his sudden death in September, 1963; this tension can be seen in what the captain wrote near the end of 1960: "I couldn't have been in worse hands unless I was in the hands of Israel's liaison down below which consisted of Hank Greenspun". In contrast to his opinion, Hank's name was mentioned favorably in Israeli newspapers several times. In 1950 with relations to the story of his trial in California in which he was fined and lost some of his civil rights, and in 1961 having received a pardon from President John Kennedy. As a sign of honor for all he did he was even invited to meet Ben-Gurion:

**Israel Honors U.S. Editor**  
 Special to The New York Times.  
*New York Times (1857-Current file): Aug 31, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2005)*  
 pg. 4

### **Israel Honors U. S. Editor**

Special to The New York Times,  
**TEL AVIV, Israel, Aug. 30—**  
**Premier David Ben-Gurion honored today an American who was convicted by a United States court for gun-running to Israel. The Premier received Hank Greenspun, editor of The Las Vegas (Nev.) Sun. In reporting the meeting, the Government press office referred to Mr. Greenspun's "gallant help to Israel during the difficult period of 1948."**

Al Ellis (Alvin Ellis aka Avraham Ela'azarov) had also something to say about the long period of time - 42 days - that the crew spent in Tampico. He took part with Greenspun leading the Idalia to Mexico and then joined as a super-cargo with the other youngsters who were accompanying the 'Kefalos'. In a letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1950 he wrote to Mrs. Daniels, probably the sister of the signals officer Jack Rothman, a copy of which reached Shoshana Yadin-Kesselman, the sister of Aryeh Kesselman, after 20 years: "As you know, Jack and I were more than 'just friends'... in times of stress (in our case – the war and our activity in Mexico) we have become blood-brothers... when I met Jack he was the signals officer on the 'Kefalos' and I was active in matters of the 'Hagana' in Mexico. At that time we were trying to load a few thousand tons of cannons and ammunition onto the ship. We were only five young guys, American Jews. The Mexican government blocked us in every possible way and only after six weeks of threats and struggle were we able to get under way with our load. You should be proud to know that it was mostly thanks to Jack that we were able to sail and I am not saying that just because he is a relative. His main task was one of 'smoothing the way'. Frequently, the captain was threatening to do all sorts of crazy things and it was only because of the influence of Jack that held him from carrying out his threats. These were liable to threaten not only his life, but the life of all the others as well, and could have brought the whole voyage to a catastrophic conclusion. Jack was the only member of the 'Hagana' that the captain was prepared to hear what he had to say... ". After numerous delays for a variety of reasons and complications, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1948 the 'Kefalos' steamed out, heading non-stop for Israel.

### **Tampico Directly to Tel Aviv**

Several days prior to 'Dromit's departure from Tampico, a report was forwarded to Ben-Gurion: "There are continual delays in the ship's leaving. It is clear at any rate that there will not be 32 tanks in this cargo". Permission to leave port was received shortly before leaving. Afterwards, on Nov' 1949, Captain Oko referred to: "\$ 36,000... the 'pay-off' that secured our clearance after 42 days in Tampico... my Spaniards in the crew... know that this was a matter that could have been settled with the Port Director, Dr. Gomez Soriol for 3,000 to \$10,000". The 'ultimate destination' of the voyage was given as... Shanghai, China.

Alvin Ellis continued to detail the troubles of those accompanying the ship during the voyage: "...When we left Mexico we thought our troubles are over. Quite soon we realized that they had only begun. During the first days we painted the ship a different color and changed the name to M.V Pinzon [canvas covers on the bridge were changed to wood] in order to make things more difficult for the British and the UN to recognize her true identity.



**First Mate Forbes changing the ship's name**



**Al Ellis looking forward on watch**

We five also hid away several of the machine guns on the deck, to be there for any emergency. Jack and Kesselman's son controlled the ship, since they were the ones who received and sent the coded telegrams from the stations all along our route. We five met every night in order to determine our next day's work. As you can tell, the captain was counted as our 'enemy'. After 36 days of miserable sailing we finally arrived at Tel Aviv anchorage [on 8<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1948]. We had no more fuel and we didn't have water for the last three days. The cannons, the bombs and the ammunition were unloaded at night. This was the largest shipment of weapons that had ever reached the "Holy Land". As a result of this shipment, Tzahal [IDF] was able to change from defensive to offensive tactics and succeeded in two operations in the Negev and also to 'clean up' the Galilee."

On 19<sup>th</sup> Aug', while the ship was crossing the Atlantic Ocean, Ben-Gurion received another report: "En route to Israel (from Mexico) 23 field c'<sup>3</sup> [cannons], 2 howitzers 75 mm...". The illegal voyage – by definition a violation of the international embargo on arms for either side in Palestine – was planned to sail directly from Tampico to Tel Aviv. The load of sugar had two purposes: **a.**- to disguise the real reason for the voyage (that was the only cargo listed in the ship's documents); **b.**- to cover the weapons in cases such as the necessity to enter a port along the route, or a search on the high seas or an inspection by the UN observers at Tel Aviv. The water hold at the bow of the ship was converted to an additional fuel hold and the drinking water were stored in barrels. During

<sup>3</sup> Must be a misprint. There were 32 cannons.

the voyage itself, about ten tons of rainwater was gathered by a canvas which was spread on the deck.

The name of the ship was changed to M.V Pinzon with the “permission” of the Panamanian consul in New York (Pinzon was an active ship serving on the line England-Spain. The name was Columbus famous navigator). The name had to be changed also on the lifeboats and the life belts. This change of name was a “patent” that the Procurement headquarters had used previously on other vessels in order to fool the UN observers.

Despite the fact that the captain and the signal officer had received from Broshi, the second in command of the Procurement unit of the 'Hagana', the “key” to the code (an "agreement" about the rules of contact with the 'Hagana' transmitting stations) prior to leaving New York, no contact was established with the stations in Europe and Israel from the day the ship entered the Mediterranean on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug' until she suddenly appeared in Tel Aviv anchorage on 8<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1948. According to Captain Oko: “We were supposed to make contact two days prior to arrival to the shores of Israel with a secret ('shu-shu') illegal station in Prague and receive instructions regarding the continuance of our voyage. We did not receive any instructions”. One may assume that the silence occurred because proper instructions had not been given to the captain and the signal officer by a qualified ‘Gideoni’ (radio-operator).

The lack of radio contact with the ship in the middle of a cease-fire caused quite an uproar, which even reached as far as Ben-Gurion. Because of the publicity the vessel acquired in Tampico, Shaul Avigur<sup>4</sup> feared the ship would be seized by the UN observers. In order to forestall such an eventuality, he decided to divert the ship towards Yugoslavia and to divide the cargo among three smaller vessels. Carrying out such a complicated maneuver necessitated good communications, but as has noted, there was no contact at all. We learn about Shaul’s worries from a telephone conversation on the 25<sup>th</sup> Aug' in which 'Zaki' and Pino (Zakimovitch-Moshe, in charge of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya' branch in Italy; Pinchas Ginzberg, treasurer of the Procurement Center in Geneva) reported to Shaul that: “There is no contact with the 'Dromit' as yet. We are searching for her with everything we have” [meaning with all our stations].

Five days later, Shaul telegraphed to Pinchas Kozlovski-Sapir who had taken over from him as chief of Procurement in Europe: “let us know how the 'Dromit' is doing and what contact you have with her.” Then, the following day, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Sept', he calmed every one down with a peculiar telegram, sent out to 'all interested parties': “The capital [Rome station] announced that the contact between the 'Dromit' and 'Arnon' [the mosad in Israel] is OK. That was information that we received from ‘Gideon’ [the network of radio contact with ships] and I find it necessary to tell you not to worry; but this announcement was not completely reliable”. In truth, it turned out that this was a false statement.

That same day Shaul received a phone call from 'Zaki': “There is [as yet] no news of the 'Dromit'. We are searching [by radio] 24 hours a day”. As if that was not enough for this day, several urgent telegrams flew back and forth

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<sup>4</sup> Shaul returned to Israel on July 1948 after his son was killed in action. Sapir replaced him in Geneva, and he became Ben Gurion's Senior Aide.

between the heads of the 'Mosad' and the Procurement people, which depicted a general state of panic. These are some of the more salient communications:

'Pino' and Sapir to Shaul and Eshkol: "We have no contact with the 'Dromit'. Search for her according to the "key" [the 'Gideoni' signal code] which 'Borshi' brought with him." After this urgent telegram, Tzvi [probably Tzvi Dinstein from Geneva] phoned Shaul: "The 'Gideoni' from 'Ofri' [Prague, Czech] notified us that 'Leonard' [Italy] received a message that 'Arnon' [the 'Mosad' in Israel] had made contact with the 'Dromit'. He assumes that this message went out before contact was established." This is what is called 'crossed wires'.

To Eshkol–Shaul: "We are constantly searching for the 'Dromit', without success. We intend looking for her in North African ports and other places... We need some details... Let us know your decision whether it is time to search for her officially. We guess that you are looking in your area by sea and by air."

From Eshkol to Sapir: "We are very worried as to the fate of the 'Dromit'. If you succeed in making contact with her – direct her to 'Yoram' [Yugoslavia]. Send to 'Yoram' immediately two implements [ships] that will be able to take at least part of the cargo. The cannons must be loaded so that they will be ready for action with reserve parts handy and 'stones' [shells]. Let us know daily how communication is with her. If contact is lost we will send planes to look for her and when we find her we will send implements to meet her. Remember that the cannons are vitally necessary for quick action this month".

On that same day, 1<sup>st</sup> Sep' 1948, Shaul decided to share his worries with Ben-Gurion: "Shaul is worried about the Mexican ship... worried about her being caught by the UN observers when it arrives in Israel [the observers were stationed in the Israeli ports]. He advises to divert the ship to Yugoslavia and the cargo transferred to three of our smaller ships. Meanwhile we have agreed to send two ships for that purpose, but not yet to decide diverting the Mexican ship to sail there". Ben-Gurion's decision calmed the atmosphere somewhat.

Shortly after that, Eshkol telegraphed Sapir: "The transfer of the equipment [arms] from the 'Dromit' and 'H.S.' [Swiss anti-aircraft cannons] to other ships [in Yugoslavia] will occupy too many of our ships. we should give priority to shipments of 'heavy' equipment [cannons]. It would even be preferable to delay shipments of 'flour' [explosives], pipes [rifles] etc. in order to give priority to the arrival of the cannons." That same day Sapir updated Shaike Dan in Yugoslavia: "... The 'Dromit' has not been found yet". The open question remains: Were the Yugoslavs - at that time involved in a bitter dispute with the Soviet Union - ready to 'host' the Israeli Procurement "fleet" in one of their ports ?

After a day filled with one-way communications, it was surmised that the 'bride' – the 'Kefalos', whose name had been changed to Pinzon, prior to meeting her 'groom' at Tel Aviv - had no idea that the "family" wanted to 'undress' her one week before her arrival to the 'marriage canopy' in Tel Aviv's anchorage. According to the ships log written by the captain, the ship had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar 3 days previously, on the 29<sup>th</sup> Aug'. She continued on a course south of Crete. Meanwhile there were vigorous attempts to establish radio contact with her. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Sep' Eshkol and Shaul telegraphed Sapir and 'Pino': "The UN observers know that the 'Kefalos' sailed from Tampico to Genoa, and from there

she will continue to 'Arnon' [Israel]. Check that".

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of Sep' 'Pino' and Sapir sent an urgent telegram to Shaul and Eshkol: "We are still searching for the 'Dromit' without success. The details that 'Matti' [Eliyahu Sacharov's nickname; a Procurement officer who was active in the Mexican deal] gave us are: the 'Gideoni' [Signal Officer] is an American Jew [Jack Rothman]. His second is an Israeli student [Arie Kesselman]. According to experienced seamen they determined average speed as 6 knots and she should now be somewhere near the straits of Gibraltar.

The experts were very wrong. The ship's average speed was around 8.5-9 knots. As had been previously agreed upon, after passing Crete she tried to establish contact, but without success. Two days later, on 8<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1948, the S.S. 'Kefalos' carrying the name Pinzon, reached Tel Aviv anchorage. Captain Oko's report in 1949 points out the problems involved of sailing without contact with the ship's owners, the Procurement System: "We arrived off Tel Aviv on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Sep' 1948 with no radio contact, in spite of "instructions to the master" enclosed dated June 12<sup>th</sup> 1948... I am still without knowledge why Israel failed to contact us or what had happened that would not enable us to reach them on the wavelengths they had given to my radio operator. This could have been serious – fortunately it wasn't...the ship had one hour fresh water left for her boilers...This is no safety margin". In other words - "More luck than brains".

The unplanned 'communications blackout' saved many bureaucratic headaches, economic ones and perhaps political ones also. More important, it saved a great waste of time, and some vital arms and the airplanes fuel arrived quicker than they would have otherwise.

**The ship's log –  
Tampico - Tel Aviv -  
prepared by Captain  
Oko**

TAMPICO TO TEL AVIV									
AUG				dept.	12:30p.m.		draft fwd 13'8" aft 18'10" " 16'3"		
3	Tampico, Mexico			187	7.95	90	2218		
4	22	17n	94 24w	198	8.25	81t	2416		
5	22	41n	87 31w	190	7.91	92	2606		
6	22	20n	84 20w	180	7.5	77	2786		
7	24	16n	80 40w	211	9.1	74	2997		
8	28	32n	79 42w	271	11.29	var	3268		
9	31	21.5	77 54w	202	8.41	var	3470		
10	33	34.5	75	200	8.55	48	3670		
11	35	37	72 10	187	7.79	47	3857 advanced clocks 1 hour		
12	36	36	69 03	163	7.08	69	4020		
13	37	49	65 29	185	7.7	67	4205		
14	39	21	61 39	202	8.41	63	4407		
15	40	15	57 56	179	7.45	72	4586 advanced clocks 1 hour		
16	41	16	54	189	7.87	72	4775		
17	41	12	49 51	187	8.13	91	4962		
18	48	28	45 20	201	8.37	86	5163		
19	41	23	40 57	198	8.25	92	5361 advanced clocks 1 hour		
20	41	20	36 41	192	8.34	91	5553		
21	40	58	33 04	166	6.91	98	5719		
22	41	00	28 43	197	8.2	90	5916 dead reconingn no sun		
23	40		25 13	172	7.16	111	6088 advanced clocks 1hr		
24	39	12	21 23w	185	8	103	6273		
25	38	08	17 35	189	7.87	109	6462		
26	36	35	13 52	200	8.33	118	6662		
27	36	11	9 35	209	8.7	97	6871 clocks advanced to GCT		
28	36		5 12	216	9.4	var	7087 /Gibraltar 10:50p 8.5 mi		
29	36	34	35w	226	9.41	81	7313		
30	37	23n	3 05E	183	7.62	75	7496		
SEPT									
1	37	30	6 47e	176	7.33	88	7672		
2	37	16	11 02E	206	8.95	var	7878 12:40 cape bon 10 mi conning lites thru Sicily S		
3	35	12N	14 34E	213	8.87	var	8091 to go 1026m (5da)		
4	34	47	18 41E	205	8.54	97	8296 to go 821m		
5	34	28	22 31	192	8.34	95	8488 clocks advanced 1hr		
6	34	22	26 36	203	8.5	92	8691 to go 436mi		
7	34	03	31 09	226	9.41	95	8917 to go 210 mi		
8	Tel Aviv			210	9.4		9127 from Tampico 7096mi 35d		

### **Tel Aviv Anchorage**

On 9<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1948, Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary: "The Mexican ship has arrived. It was checked by UN observers and authorized to unload [the sugar]. They will start tonight." That same night 'Zaki' reported to Sapir: "The 'Gideonim' [radio-operators] reported that the 'Dromit' arrived at Tel Aviv. This report comes from a station in Israel." On 10<sup>th</sup> Sep', while the ship was still being unloaded, Shaul telegraphed the Swiss Procurement office in Geneva: "without our knowing beforehand and without succeeding to establish contact, the 'Dromit' arrived at Tel Aviv. She is now being unloaded and we can hope for a successful end... Let Teddy know [Teddy Kollek in the USA, Chief of the Hagana delegation] ". Three of the Jewish volunteers – Al, Arie and Jack - left the ship and joined the IDF. Alvin Ellis joined the Naval Comando. Aryeh Kesselman (of blessed memory), 23 years old, volunteered for the Intelligence Corps and was killed by driving on a mine in the Negev on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1948.



Jack Rothman (of blessed memory) the signals officer, 37 years old, volunteered for the Air Force. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 1948 he was killed in an airplane accident in Italy together with a group of Israelis (NYT, 1st January 1949). Captain Oko saw fit to point out that Jack had taught at Columbia University, and that his contribution to the State of Israel was worthy of due recognition.

### **Jack and Arie are commemorated as fallen Palyam members.**

On 11<sup>th</sup> Sep' Shaul - Eshkol telegraphed Sapir: "The 'Dromit' will soon be free to move out in a day or two. She can carry 5,000 tons. Do you need her in 'Binyamin' [code name for Italy] ? Will you be able to load 'flour' [explosives] there? And other covering cargo that we need in Israel? The next day Shaul and Eshkol telegraphed Geneva again: "Regarding 'Kefalos', the ship anchored here under the name – Pinzon. On the last day of unloading the UN observers received information about her. Nevertheless, the job was concluded successfully. The situation was volatile... The name Pinzon is not to be mentioned again". It took about five days to unload the 'Dromit', and when the ship was almost empty Shaul and Eshkol telegraphed again to Sapir and 'Zaki': "Kefalos'-'Dromit', speed 8 knots, Captain Oko accompanied by Aryeh Mambush<sup>5</sup>. There is a 'Gideon' [radio] unit on her, she would leave [on] 13/9 from 'Arnon' to Naples... Arrange papers for her. She would load in Italy civilian 'kosher' merchandise [non-military] for Israel...".

<sup>5</sup> Arie – changed his name Ambash – was a member of the procurement unit. His duty was to arrange Kosher papers for the ship.



**Tel Aviv - the "Pinzon" crew weren't allowed to leave the ship**

Two UN observers, a Frenchman and a Belgian, came on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Sep' to check the ship... after it had been unloaded. The captain and his wife Gladys invited them to lunch and he wrote about it: "The Okos were never more charming, socially". There is no doubt that the 'trick' of changing the name of the ship was very important in keeping the observers away from the arms shipment. As noted, the observers were waiting for the 'Kefalos', which according to reports from Tampico, headed for Genoa and then to Israel (and not to China, as specified in the permit to leave Tampico port). Meanwhile, the 'Pinzon' had emptied its cargo under their noses.

On the following day, 13<sup>th</sup> Sep', Ben-Gurion listed in his diary the ship's cargo: "We received 32 field cannons of 75 mm [on 19th Aug' he wrote "23 field cannons of 75 mm". Looks like it was a typographical error] with 16,000 shells, 2 American howitzers of 75 mm, 4,000 shells, 170 airplane bombs of 50 kgs each, 500 Browning [airplane machine guns 0.3"], 6-10 million rounds of ammunition, 4 sets of marine radar equipment, 60 Vickers [heavy machine guns] with ammunition, 15,000 helmets and 1,000 tons of sugar [used as 'cover' cargo. L. Slater wrote that: "1,400 tons were loaded in Tampico". A typographical error? or...??!!]. (The ship approached the anchorage under the name of 'Pinzon'). (original name 'Kefalos')". Soon after, Shaul cabled Sapir: About 'Kefalos'. She anchored here under the name 'Pinzon'. The UN observers were notified about her only on the last day. Despite that, unloading proceeded normally...let Tedi [Kolek] know that. The name 'Pinzon' will not be mentioned again." Ben-Gurion didn't mention the 100-octane airplane fuel. Could it be because it was considered a consumable item?

### Loading fuel barrels<sup>6</sup>

In Jan' 2009 I discussed this with Eli Shalit. He said that he shipped barrels of fuel to Israel on two ships, one of them might have been the 'Kefalos'. A report of the Air Force notes that in preparation for 'Operation Ten Plagues', Israeli C-46 airplanes made many sorties over the Negev when it was under siege, and the reserves of fuel were very low:



“There is a danger that there will not be a drop of fuel left for the operation itself, but 'Kefalos' is on its way from

Mexico and she is carrying a load of fuel. It was therefore decided to continue the aerial bridge to the Negev and hope for the best. When the 'Kefalos' reached Israel [on 8<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1948] the bombs and the fuel were the first items to be unloaded and they were transferred hurriedly to the Air Force. For that reason it was decided to continue the air bridge to the Negev”. It allowed the Air Force: “To carry about 2,000 tons of food, equipment and fuel” to the besieged Negev in operation “Negev Stone”, in preparation for “Operation Yoav” - Removal of the siege on the Negev.

While the ship was being unloaded, there were many discussions in the Procurement Headquarters about what the 'Dromit' should do next. At this stage, the Procurement people in Geneva were busy trying to find suitable transport for 30 Sherman tanks that had been purchased in Italy by Arazi. They had neither cannons nor other auxiliary weapons. The authorities in Israel were not eager to absorb these articles in this condition, but Arazi continued to apply pressure on... Sapir. Later that day, Sapir did obtain Eshkol-Shaul's agreement: “Without the equipment the 'Sherman's' [the tanks] are not worth very much. We were worried that we would not have the ships to move them, [but] since the 'Dromit' is free, then we do not object transporting them immediately. That obligates you to find the rest of the necessary equipment ASAP”.

Sapir, who feared that the agreement was tied to the immediate procurement of the equipment, telegraphed Eshkol the following day: “Since we do not [as yet] have the weapons to transfer to the 'Dromit' [in Yugoslavia], we repeat our request that you agree to load the Shermans that 'Alon' [Arazi] bought without waiting for the [auxiliary] equipment and ammunition. Their shipment will not lessen in the least our efforts to get the weapons and other equipment.

<sup>6</sup>. Doron Rozen, 'In Quest of the American Treasure', p' 273-4 – “Stock of about 2,000 tons of airoplanens fuel”.

'Alon' also stresses that all this materials cannot be left in 'Leonard' [Italy]. Don't forget that some repairs will also have to be made in 'Arnon' [Israel]. Instruct us ASAP."

On the 13<sup>th</sup> the 'Dromit' sailed through Haifa, refueled at sea by a small Greek tanker and kept on to Italy under its original name 'Kefalos'. The unloading had proceeded well, but the cannons did not pass the first test. On 16 Sep' Shaul reported to Ben-Gurion: "Two Mexican Cannons were tried out and they both exploded. We are now checking if the shell or the barrel is to blame. 32 of these were brought from Mexico." And is if that were not bad enough, two weeks later, 'Oscar', a Procurement officer in Paris, reported to Sapir that: "No more 75 mm shells are being manufactured that are suitable for the 'Dromit' shipment". The cannons were called "Cucaracha" by the Israeli gunners (The ones that came from France, 65mm, were called "Napoleonchikim").

The Arms Voyage mission was over. The name 'Pinzon' thrown into the waste basket of history and the 'Dromit' went back to its original name – 'Kefalos'. Several of the leading characters in the 'Kefalos'-Dromit episode were brought to trial in the USA, charged with violations of various neutrality acts and provisions. Hank Greenspun was tried for smuggling arms from Hawaii and transferring them to the 'Dromit'. However, the FBI was not satisfied in catching only the 'big fish', amongst whom was also Al Schwimmer. The FBI went for the 'small fry' also. Two crew members of the 'Dromit', Nathaniel Ratner and Alvin Ellis who had assisted in the smuggling operation, were put on trial for their part "in exporting arms [from the USA] without permission of the Secretary of State". In the end they were both pardoned by President Harry Truman. It should be pointed out that Captain Oko did not have the 'honour' of being included among those indicted, although he was questioned by the FBI. Oko, unlike the others, had not carried arms out of the USA.

### Naples

At this stage the Procurement Center in Tel Aviv realized that the 'Kefalos' was too big for their needs, because most of the arm deals in Europe weighed about 500-1,000 tons. The idea was to use the ship as a 'kosher' commercial freighter. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Sep', prior to entering Naples port, Shaul Avigur instructed Sapir and 'Zaki': "Regarding the 'Kefalos' we remind you that the shipment must be completely Kosher". On that same day 'Zaki' replied to Shaul: "Don't worry about the 'Kefalos', worry about the kosher shipments." Sapir was not pleased with the additional task that he had been burdened with – dealing with commercial shipments - and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep' he telegraphed Eshkol and Shaul: "All the papers of the 'Dromit' have been completely taken care of. As for the cargo, we are looking for [a kosher one]. My opinion is that it is not our task to be in the shipping [commercial] business and we should give this job to a Pool [through a qualified agent]. Send instructions."

Meanwhile the Procurement Center in Geneva dropped the idea of shipping thirty tanks on the 'Dromit' and entered into negotiations with the 'Mosad Le'Aliya' to sell them the ship for moving Olim (passengers). On 30 Sep' 1948 'Kadmon' (Barpal, a leading figure in the 'Mosad') and Sapir talked about it: The

'Mosad' wants to hire the 'Dromit' for three months on the condition that they will pay the full price." A report of this conversation was sent by 'Pino' and Sapir to Shaul and Eshkol that same day: "We agreed in principle to lease the 'Dromit' to the 'Mosad'". Shaul and Eshkol replied almost immediately: "We will discuss this after the ship is examined by a marine expert." Three days later Sapir and Barpal met in Paris and agreed in principle on leasing the ship to the 'Mosad' for \$ 16,500 per month, but on the other hand, Barpal "demanded money for the ships that we [the Procurement System] took", and used as arm ships

To the captain's chagrin, work was started on the beginning of Oct' 1948 in a dry dock in Naples to convert the freighter into a passengers ship. On 8th Oct' Sapir telegraphed Eshkol and Shaul: "The situation with the 'Dromit' is as follows: The 'Mosad' has leased her from the 1<sup>st</sup> Oct'. We have not yet agreed on the price. The 'Mosad' has difficulty covering the cost and we may cancel the lease. Daily upkeep of the ship is 1,000 'Stephens' [\$]. According to "Zaki", there is no hope of a suitable [kosher & commercial] cargo in the Mediterranean. In the event that the 'Mosad' will forego leasing the ship, then we will have to find some other lessee or a buyer".

It seemed that the 'Dromit' was just a dead weight on the shoulders of its owners, but two days later, on 10th Oct', 'Zaki' suggested to Sapir: "220,000 'Stephens' for the 'Dromit' ". The Procurement System made a good "bargain". Half a year before, the ship had been purchased in the USA for \$ 190 000.00 !!! In between, on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct', the 'Dromit' was asked to assist the arms ship Scio which had run into trouble not far from Capri. The captain agreed to tow Scio to Naples on condition that the crew be paid overtime wages only. Captain Oko received thank-you letters from the Mosad Le'Aliya in Italy and Scio's captain.

While negotiations were being conducted between the Mosad and the Procurement System, the idea came up once again in Israel to use the 'Dromit' to move Arazi's tanks. On 13<sup>th</sup> Oct' an urgent telegram was sent to Geneva: "After further consideration and examination of the situation in the port, we agree to 'Zaki's' suggestion to load the 'crawlers' [tanks] onto the 'Dromit'. They have to be arranged so that her cranes will be able to unload them [from the ship]. 'Cover' [cargo] too is of course absolutely necessary."

On the following day, Eshkol added to Sapir: "Tiber [Rami, a Procurement activist] notifies us that in Reike [Northern Yugoslavia] there are 3,000 tons of lumber, and the 'crawlers' are in the vicinity of Bologna. This allows the 'Dromit' to pick up the 'crawlers' in Northeastern 'Leonard' [Italy] and the lumber for its cover..." In reaction to this, Sapir had to remind him that on 1st Oct' 1948 the 'Dromit' had already been transferred to the 'Mosad': "We let you know that the sum for the lease of the ship would be settled by mutual agreement between you and the Mosad". It turned out that 'Zaki's' suggestion had not been coordinated with his superior, Barpal.

On 15<sup>th</sup> Oct' Sapir made it clear to 'Zaki': "You want to load 'snakes' [tanks] onto the 'Dromit' but I already told you that the 'Dromit' is now designated to carry Olim and you cannot have her [for cargo]." Soon after, Sapir finalized the case with Barpal: "I informed him of the mixup concerning the 'Dromit'. I certified that from 1<sup>st</sup> Oct' the ship is leased to the 'Mosad'. Let your people know that

negotiations must be made directly with them [whereas] 'Zaki' notified 'Arnon' and that is what caused the mixup...after clearing up how much we owe the 'Mosad', we will settle that whole sum minus 100,000 'Stephens' [\$] “.

Later that day Arazi informed Sapir that he is still interested: “...In shipping twelve 'snakes' [not 30] with the 'Dromit'. I have expressed my fears and I shall consult it with 'Ben Kedem' [Sharet] and 'Kadmon' [Barpal].” At this point Sapir decided to consult it with Eshkol – Shaul too: “Let me know if it is worth sending you the 'snakes' together with the Olim on the 'Dromit' otherwise we will have to leave the rest of the 'snakes' until we find suitable transport. The 'Mosad' people will also ask 'Ben Kedem' for his opinion. Await your immediate answer.”

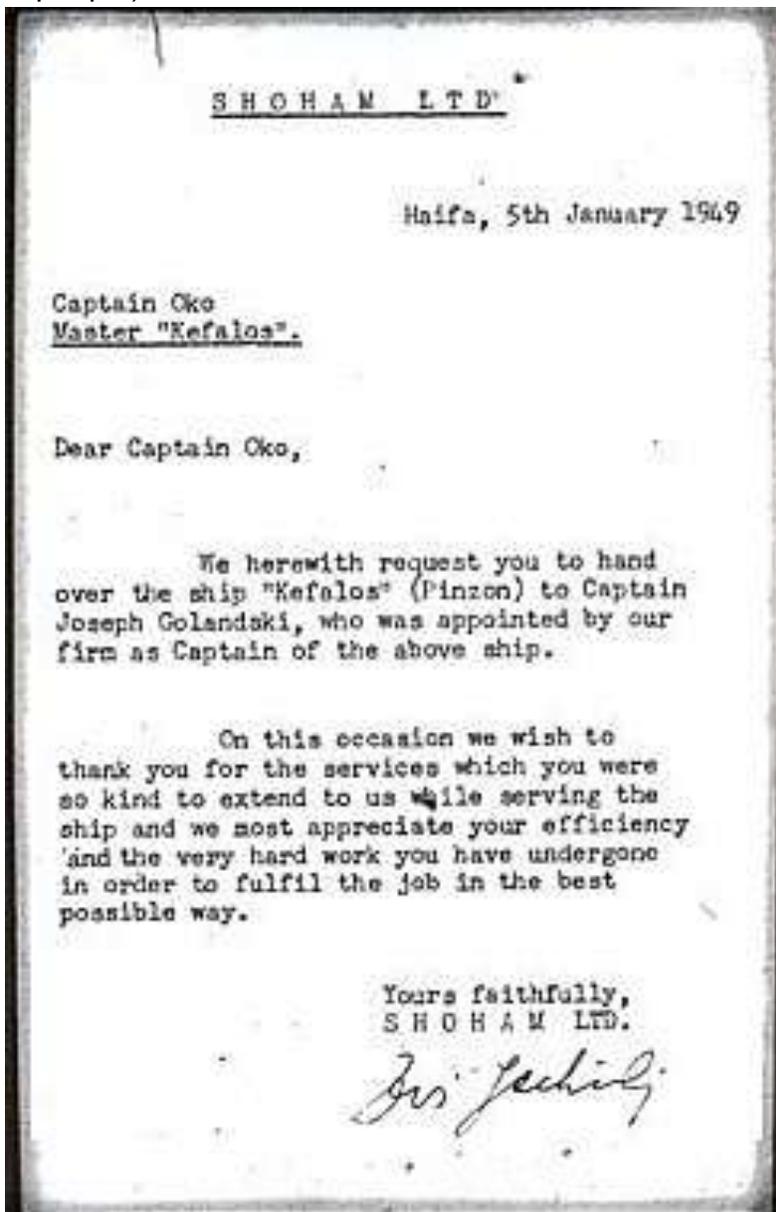
On 20<sup>th</sup> Oct' 1948 Sapir had to address once again to Eshkol and Shaul Avigur: “I am sorry but on the 7<sup>th</sup> Oct' it was suggested to you by 'Zaki' and 'Alon' to ship the 'snakes' with the 'Dromit', but she was transferred on the first of the month to the 'Mosad' and that agreement cannot be retracted. The 'Mosad' has invested large sums in order to make the 'Dromit' suitable to carry Olim. Let me know your answer about loading some of the 'snakes' into the holds of the 'Dromit' ”. Their answer was: “A- We agree to loading some of the 'snakes' onto the 'Dromit'. B- It is absolutely necessary that the 'snakes' be loaded so that the winches of the 'Dromit' will be able to remove them from the ship to the pier.” It should be mentioned that despite the negotiations regarding loading the tanks, work continued at the dry dock in Naples on fitting the 'Dromit' for carrying passengers and in any case, over \$ 700 were paid for refitting the old cranes.

On 8<sup>th</sup> Nov' the 'Dromit' left Naples and sailed for Yugoslavia to pick up about 4,000 Olim, most of them from Bulgaria. On the 28<sup>th</sup> she left Haifa to pick up a second transport. While en route she was ordered by Barpal to enter the port of Bari, most probably to check if she is suitable to load the tanks, in addition to the Olim. On 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec' 1948 the captain reacted to the demands of the 'Mosad' in Italy regarding entering the port of Bari: “We continue towards 'Yoram' [Yugoslavia] and there is no reason for us to delay. We shall try to hurry. We only have room for 3,500 because of problems with the air supply and I ask you not to load more than this number of passengers.”

On 6<sup>th</sup> Dec', one day before entering the Yugoslavian port, 3 telegrams were sent from the 'Dromit' at 14.00 (the order of these telegrams is not clear): 1. From the 'Dromit' to Rome: “We are about 40 miles from Split”. 2. To the 'Mosad' from those accompanying the 'Dromit': "The captain fears that upon his return to Bari some hidden plot is in store for him. He does not want to reveal how much fuel is left, but just says that there is enough. We have enough fuel to return to 'Arnon' [Israel], but not enough to return [to Europe]. We have enough food for five days for 4,000 people. Remember that if you will direct us back to Bari, the captain and the whole crew will be very strongly against doing so.” 3. To 'Kadmon' [Barpal] from Captain Oko: “Again – we do not need anything and we shall not need anything if we are in 'Yoram' for 3-4 days. Tonight we shall be at Split.” 'Shu'ik'-Yehoshua Barlev, the number one Palyam seaman accompanying the ship, recalls the whole incident clearly. According to him, Barpal did not make clear why they were to go to Bari, and he, to this very day does not know what Barpal had in mind. As a representative of the owners – the 'Mosad' – he was the

one who transmitted to the captain the directions he got from Barpal. Captain Oko, a seasoned veteran of the seven seas, who regarded the captain's position as only second to God, refused to cooperate with the owners, and they were forced to go along with him.

As has been said previously, on the first voyage from Mexico to Israel, the relations between the captain and those five Jewish Americans that accompanied him were also strained. After three voyages - one with arms and two with 7,737 Olim (passengers) – from April to December 1948, Captain Oko had had his fill. So had the owners of the ship. On 5<sup>th</sup> Jan' 1949 the parties split. The controversial captain received a letter from Shoham LTD (a shipping company based on Ha'mossad Le'aliya Bet' people):



The frustrated couple, Gladis & Adolph Oko, returned to the USA. Later, he recalled that those were the: "Eight rather hectic months of service in Israel's fleet". It should be remembered that Captain Oko "delivered the goods".

**Adolph Oko (of blessed memory) died on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep' 1963.**

< (Attention: the ship names, 'Kefalos' and Pinzon, are mentioned together – that is only three months after Shauls edict: "The name Pinzon is not to be mentioned in the future").

Tanks weren't shipped by the 'Dromit', but after the second trip with Olim while the ship was refitted to serve back as a cargo ship, the Procurement

System had to extract hurriedly a load of 'spitters', secondhand Spitfire airplanes purchased in Czechoslovakia and shipped by way of the Danube to Yugoslavia.

On 16 Jan' 1949 Sapir sent an urgent telegram to Shaul: "It seems that there is no hope of getting a suitable means of transportation for the 'spitters' in 'Yoram'. The only choice left is to use the 'Dromit' which, according to Shaik [Dan] who was familiar with the ship, she is definitely suitable for the task. Clarify with the 'Mosad' if we can use it for three weeks for one voyage. We may be able to use only some of the holds, so perhaps we will also be able to take on a number of passengers, if they agree." Three days later he sent another telegram: "Shaik strongly suggests that we use the 'Dromit' to ship the 'spitters'. Regarding the large boxes, if they will not fit in the holds then we shall place them on the deck. Give us your opinion ASAP."

On 21<sup>st</sup> Jan' 1949 Sapir and Eliezer Shoshani-'Vered', the chief representative of the Defense Ministry in Italy decided: "No action is to be taken and no preparations are to be made." The following day Sapir reported to Shaul: "We told you that the 'old man' [code name of an arm ship, Maestralle] is not suitable for hauling 'spitters'. We asked you to give us the size of the holds openings of the 'Dromit' because you cannot send it to 'Yoram' without knowing if it is suited for the job. Ask the experts again if they can be placed one container upon the other."

Shaul answered the following day: "I am surprised at your crossing the 'Dromit' off the list because of narrow hold openings. According to our calculations the boxes will fit into the bottom of the holds on condition that they go in at an angle. Placing one box on another depends only on the strength of the box and that I cannot judge from here."

The end of the story is that the 'spitters' were finally shipped by two other Procurement ships, 'Scio' and 'Arsia'. The 30 Shermans of Arazi were also shipped to Israel during Nov' 1948: "In 3 ships, 10 tanks on the 'Borea', 9 on the 'Arsia' and 11 on the 'Rex'." On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1949 the subject came up once again in a conversation between 'Avni'—Israel Dickenstein, the Chief Procurement in Italy, and Sapir: "Shermans – 'Avni' wants the 'Dromit'. It can carry all thirty Shermans".

It should be pointed out that the attempt to mix a cargo of arms with Olim on the 'Dromit' was very unusual, and I know of no other instance where it was done. When the first arms ships started their work in March 1948, Ben-Gurion instructed Shaul: "Don't mix equipment with immigration." These instructions were given when the British Mandate was still in effect, but the logic behind it was the same after the Declaration of Independence, because of the fact that both these institutions were working in defiance of the decisions of the UN. There was an arms embargo on each side and an embargo on men of military age from entering the country. Any unplanned entry of a ship into a foreign port could endanger both efforts simultaneously.

The story of the second and third voyages with 7,737 olim from Eastern Europe will have to be written separately.



**Nov' 1948, second voyage. The olim are received on the "gangway" at Bakar by Chaya'le ('gideonit') and Mambush-Ambash Arie.**

We can close the chapter of the Kefalos' by reporting that on Dec' 1948 she finished her work for the 'Mosad Le'Aliya' and went back to her original function as a regular freighter under the same owner who changed his name, first to Shoam and then to Zim company.

'Kefalos' became the first Israeli cargo ship carrying the Israeli flag and bearing formally the name – imagine! Dromit. Her first master was Captain Steve-Esteban Hernandorena, a republican Spaniard-Basque, who started his Israeli career as the Chief Mate of the Pan York – 'Aliya B' ship – in 1947 and

became an Israeli citizen. Her first voyage on Apr'-Aug' 1949 was: "The 'Dromit' will take on iron in Tunis and will return with a mixed cargo from Western Europe."

In 1955 she was sold to the Commerce & Shipping Com', which changed her name to Dvora. In August 1959 she returned to Zim Com' in partnership with 'Sea Services'. In 1962 she was deleted from the list of the Israeli merchant fleet, and in the end of March 1963 she was sold for scrap.

### Kefalos Data

S/S 'Kefalos' – Changed name in 1949

#### **Dromit - דרומית**

Courtesy: Captain Hilel Yarkoni – באדיבות: ר"ח הלל ירקוני

No. of registry:	33 א/ק S/S	מס. רישום:
Port of registry:	Haifa חיפה	נמל הרישום:
Date of registry:	26/1/1950	תאריך רישום:
Former Names:	Call Sign: • "Kefalos", ex "Larranaga", ex "Mallard", ex "American Cardinal", ex "Dicto"	אות קריאה: שמות קודמים:
Built by	Year Built: 1917 Union Iron Works Co. - Alameda - California.	שנת בניה: נבנתה על ידי:
Type: .G	C . מטען כללי	סוג:
GRT:	3804 ט. ת.	תפוסה ברוטו:
NRT:	2375 ט. ת.	תפוסה נטו:
DWT:	6000 ט.	מעמס:
LOA: (M)	108.05 מ.	אורך מרבי:
Breadth: (M)	14.7 מ.	רוחב:
Draft: (M)	8.30 מ.	שוקע:
Eng.:	Triple expansion eng., 3 cylinders. BHP - 2000	מכונה:
Built by:	Mc. Kie & Baxter Ltd. - Glasgow	נבנתה על ידי:
Speed: (Knots)	8 קשר	מהירות:
Owners :	אניות וספינות / צים, חברת השייט הישראלית בע"מ. Ships And Vessels / "Zim", Israel Nav. Co. Ltd.	בעלים:
Deleted from Israeli registry:	6/3/1962	נמחקה מהרישום הישראלי:
Scrapped:	1963	נגרטה:

### Credits:

The following photographs and documents are courtesy of the **American Jewish Archives**: First Mate Forbes Changing the Ship's Name; Al Ellis Looking Forward on Watch; The Ship's Log Prepared by Captain Oko; Loading Fuel Barrels; Letter to Captain Oko from Shoham LTD; photograph of Captain Oko and Gladys Aboard the Ship; and Nov' 1948, Second Voyage with Olim.

Photograph The Jewish Boat – The Five in Tampico, Mexico, is courtesy of the **Nathaniel Ratner Family**.