

**Levi, Enrico**

Born in Cremona, Italy

Made Aliya in 1945 as Captain of the "Dalin" (the 1<sup>st</sup> post WW-II Aliya Bet ship)

Joined the Palyam in Italy in 1945

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### **This is the Way it Was**

**Childhood and youth**

Enrico was born in Cremona to an assimilated family which had very weak connections with Judaism. Among friends of the family there was Raphael Cantoni, a singular character whom he met later in anti-fascist activity and still later, after the war, in his work in Aliya Bet. Enrico's father was a teacher of mathematics in a school and it was difficult for the father to accept the fact that his son did not want to become an engineer, but was drawn to the sea and firmly set on that course. Even before his Bar Mitzva, the son had reached that decision, and went to the naval school of Sebastian Venier in Venice. This school had educated generations of Italian sailors, including many famous ones.

The youths received their sea training in a motorized yacht named "Amedea". Voyages on this yacht were a strong attraction for the youngsters. When his studies were over in 1936, Enrico was experienced in handling ropes and sails and had knowledge of navigation, particularly along the shore. His knowledge and his dexterity earned him a place as one of eight boys, chosen from all the naval schools in Italy, to sail as a deckhand on a ship. The tanker, "Brennero" sailed for Batumi in the Black Sea, and besides the experience in seamanship, Enrico absorbed the liberal-minded outlook on life of the sailors and their anti-fascist leanings. When his studies were over in 1937, he won a competition to sail as a cadet on the "Patria". This was a ship of 3,000 tons that had 5 masts. When he returned to Italy several months later he found an altogether different Italy. Because he was a Jew he was not accepted into the army and was also forbidden to leave the country. There were many other laws and limitations on the lives of the Jews. This threatened their status and their identity as Italians.

**The Second World War**

During the years 1938 – 1943 he did anti-fascist work as the aide of Raphaelo Cantoni and in helping Jewish refugees who reached Italy at the beginning of the war from Germany and later, from other countries. He helped them to improve their living conditions and assisted them to leave the country. For some time he helped run a training farm and those who finished their term there were issued certificates to immigrate to Palestine. When the Allied forces advanced in Italy in 1943, Enrico went south and joined the English forces. He offered to serve in intelligence for them. They gave him work as first mate on the tanker, "Anarela", an Italian ship that had been confiscated by the British. He had two positions on this ship: 1- He was the officer responsible for the crew, and 2- He was the officer who was the contact between the crew and the British. The "Anarella" supplied fuel to British warships. This was very dangerous work

because the fuel was liable to burst into flame if they were hit by bombs or shells. They also had to refuel in all kinds of weather and in calm sea or rough, by day or by night, so they worked under great tension. At the same time he passed his examinations for Captain.

At Passover of 1945, the ship was anchored in Naples and Enrico saw on a British Headquarters' bulletin board an invitation from the Rabbi of the British fleet, to participate in a Passover Seder. Meir Bar-Rav-Hai and Yechezkel Sacharov also participated and Enrico had a long talk with them. This meeting with Jews from Eretz Israel, was a turning point in his life. This was the first time that he had heard of the Sho'ah, and the vastness of the Holocaust. He had never heard of mass extermination and of the hunger, disease, and degradation.

### **Ha'apala (Aliya Bet)**

This section is based on interviews with, and on articles by Enrico Levi, and on the books, "Double Identity" and "Leaning Masts", both by Reuven Aharoni. Italy was the focal point of the activity of the Mosad for Aliya Bet. Refugees streamed there from all over Europe and from there the people involved in Aliya Bet did their best to send them on to Palestine, either with certificates or without. The most practical way was by vessel. The people who worked in Aliya Bet were not seamen and they did not know Italian or the ways of Italians. All this was of cardinal importance in underground work. The meeting of Bar-Rav-Hai and Sacharov with the young Captain was a gift from heaven. For the first time this gave them contact with an experienced seaman who was Italian and Jewish. Enrico entered the arena of Aliya Bet that was the sea route from Europe to Palestine. (Before the outbreak of WW II this route had already been used with success.) The day after the Seder Bar-Rav-Hai visited Enrico on the "Anarella" and asked him to smuggle 3-4 refugees to Palestine on his ship.

Despite the shock he had received from the encounter with Israelis, Enrico understood that the system of smuggling a few individuals when the occasion presented itself was no solution to the problem and was liable to do more harm than good. He suggested that they buy a fishing vessel and put as many Ma'apilim as possible in it for transport to Palestine. He thought that a fishing vessel would have the best chance of success for several reasons: there were hardly any other vessels available or on sale at that time; the Italian fishing vessels were built of wood, and wood did not attract magnetic sea mines; they would be more difficult for British radar to detect; and there were many such fishing vessels lying idly at anchor as the British did not wish that they be moved, lest they be used for sabotage purposes against the British fleet.

In 1945 Enrico received a 'laissez passer' from the British Admiralty which allowed him to go anywhere in Italy, and he searched for a vessel that could be as suitable and safe as possible to take a good number of refugees to Palestine. He found a vessel in the port of Monopoli and another in the port of Barlatte, north of Bari. At the same time he noted the many idle and unemployed Italian seamen whose vessels had been expropriated by the

English and American armies. Enrico was given the go-ahead to buy a vessel and organize a crew. He was also given maps of mined areas of the Mediterranean that Danny Stern and Gorochov (men from "The Gang") had procured for him from the Headquarters of the Italian Navy. Enrico also took care of procuring fuel, water and food, as well as a motor and propeller for a boat or launch. In August 1945 the vessel was ready to be christened. Enrico made certain to invite the priest from the nearest village and even donated a sum of money to his church. The priest blessed the vessel and thanked Enrico for the donation and from then on there was full cooperation between the Italians and the Israelis. The vessel was named the "Dalin", Eliyahu Golomb's code name, but was officially listed as "Dahlia" which was more familiar to the Italian authorities.

On 21 August 1945, only 1½ months after Enrico had begun working, the ship sailed early one morning with 37 Ma'apilim on board, including 3 women. The captain was Enrico Levi, the commander was Yisrael Charkovsky, and Aryeh Cheikind, (Zerubabel) was the Gideoni. On 28 August the Ma'apilim descended on the shore at Caesarea. After this voyage Enrico decided that a larger vessel would be even better as it would be safer and could carry more people. He purchased another vessel and this was called "Neptune" but was given the name, "Nathan A", and it carried 73 Ma'apilim. Enrico assembled a crew and another captain. He also obtained the fuel, food water, and maps necessary for the voyage. He directed the captain as to the course to take in order to avoid mine fields. The ship sailed in August 1945 with another Italian captain and its commander was Yosef Landauer. It arrived at the shore of Caesarea at the beginning of September and its Ma'apilim disembarked with the aid of the men of the Palyam without incident.

**Cantoni, Enrico's story:**

"There is a side to the story of the "Fede" with which I have a personal connection. The "Fede", a name given to the vessel "Dov Hoz", stood in the port of La Spezia with 675 Ma'apilim on board and ready to sail. The Italian authorities found out about this and notified the British. At the same time that Yehuda Arazi was arranging the hunger strike, which aroused such a reaction in Palestine and in Europe, there was also necessity for some political act by an important person that would add to the pressure to release the ship. Raphaelo Cantoni read about this incident in the newspapers and contacted me, since he knew that I was active in Aliya Bet and was in the midst of this activity. Cantoni was one of the most important people in the Socialist Party in Western Europe. He knew Harold Laski who was then at the head of the British Socialist Party, and he also knew that Laski was then in Italy. Cantoni asked Enrico to help him bring Laski to La Spezia and Enrico was very willing to help him. Cantoni knew that Laski was to be traveling from Turin to Rome on the express highway, which passes close by La Spezia. We waited on the appointed day by the side of the road and looked for his car. It was easy to spot because of the flags that had in front. I pushed my car onto the road and forced his to stop. Cantoni and Laski exchanged greetings which I translated English and Italian for both of them. After that Cantoni asked Laski to come and see what was going on at the

pier, and to see the Ma'apilim and their suffering with his own eyes. Laski did so; although the area was closed to all visitors. He was allowed to go through the cordon because of his status. He was also allowed to go aboard the vessel. He spoke with Moshe Rabinovitch, the Palyam commander, and what he saw with his own eyes convinced him that he must help the Ma'apilim. He exercised his influence and the Ma'apilim were given certificates and allowed to enter Palestine".

### **Procurement**

In the winter of 1947 Enrico went into a partnership with another Italian. They salvaged a sunken vessel and repaired and refitted it. The vessel was called "Monica". Enrico sailed as first mate. The vessel hauled cement on a route, Split – Bari – Latakia – Haifa. Some cement was off-loaded there, but the important cargo was under the cement and was unloaded at night. They unloaded weapons destined for the Hagana.

### **Shipping in Israel**

The fame of the Italian captain came to the ear of Dr Naftali Wiedra, chairman of the Shipping and Fishing Department of the Jewish Agency in Haifa. He boarded the "Monica" to meet the famed Enrico. He asked him to take over the "Kedma" and that was how Enrico's career in Israeli shipping began. He made a number of voyages as captain of the Kedma and then went onto the "Etrog" of the Zim Line. He thereafter set up a school for naval officers in Acre. He chose the place for the school at the foot of the wall of the old city and perfected a course for study which developed generations of students who later became senior officers in Israeli merchant shipping and in the Israeli Navy. He once took two cargo vessels of the Zim Line, the "Nachshon" and the "Gefen" with all his students as the seamen. He was Captain and Emil Rosenthal was Chief Engineer. The crew performed as experienced seamen in every way.

During this period, Enrico went to Ghana in West Africa and set up a school for seamen there, similar to the one at Acre. He found a suitable building, set up a boarding school and developed a program of study. He also went to England and, together with Commander Miller, bought a yacht for the President of Ghana, Nkruma.

When he resigned his position as Director of the Naval School, he accepted the position of manager of the port of Eilat and later managed the port of Ashdod. From 1971, Capt Levi was Managing Director of Maritime Overseas Co. London, till he retired in 1991. He spent his remaining year in Haifa where he died in 2007.