## Komemiut & Atzmauth

**By Hillel Yarkoni, From his book “75 years of Hebrew Shipping in Eretz Israel”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of registry:</th>
<th>S/S 22 אק</th>
<th>Komemiut</th>
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<th>Haifa</th>
<th>Komemiut</th>
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<th>24/10/1948</th>
<th>Komemiut</th>
<th>Call Sign:</th>
<th>4XVC</th>
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<td>NRT:</td>
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<td>DWT:</td>
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<td>LOA: (M)</td>
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<td>Draft: (M)</td>
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<td>Draft: (M)</td>
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*Former Names: ex Pan York, ex El Dia, ex Roanoke*
### Atzmaut - "PAN CRESCENT" as clandestine immigration ship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of registry:</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Type:</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Eng.:</td>
<td>Newport News Shipyards &amp; Drydocks Co. Newport News, Virginia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speed: (Knots)</td>
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<td>Owners:</td>
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Both ships were purchased in March 1947, from an American shipping company “United Fruit Company”, owned by American Jew, Samuel Zemurray, one of the biggest banana growers in USA. Both ships carried bananas from South America to USA. Large cargo holds, twin decks and good cargo ventilation system made the ships ideal for the Mossad’s purpose. A Jewish American Naval officer, graduate from Annapolis Naval Academy, Paul Shulman, later the first Chief of the Israeli Navy, represented the F B Shipping Co. that purchased the ships for the Mossad. Officially, the F. B. initials meant “Far Better Shipping Co.”, but actually they meant “F… Britain….”

In order to mislead British Intelligence and also to recoup some of the expenses, both ships continued to carry cargo. At this stage American crew manned them. On the 30th of April 1947, “Pan Crescent” arrived Venice. Here, the work started in order to adapt her to accommodate 7500 persons. The American crew was repatriated to USA, and replaced by another, also foreign crew under an Italian Master.

At that time, a British Navy Fleet was stationed in Venice and of course, such an extent of work could not be hidden from the eyes of British Intelligence, despite all kinds of camouflage attempts. As the works progressed an explosion occurred in the ship and a big hole opened in her hull and she sat on the ground. An unconfirmed hearsay claims that the famous British frogman, Colonel Crab did the work. The British tried to put every possible obstacle in the way. After the hole was patched, the Mossad decided to transfer the ship to Constantza. There in Romania, that was out of the sphere of British influence, were better chances to complete the work.

In the meantime in May 1947, “Pan York” arrived in Marseille. The American crew was repatriated to USA and relieved by a skeleton crew of Spanish Republicans, exiles from Franco’s Spain, led by Capt. Estaban Hernandorena in the capacity of First Officer. Once again in order to mislead British Intelligence and to earn some money, the ship sailed on commercial voyages between France and North African ports till when it was decided to send her also to Constantza. In October 1947, both ships met in the Romanian port, where the refitting works for accommodation of 7500 persons on each ship, were completed.

Mossad reached an agreement with the Romanian government, whose Ministry of Foreign Affairs was headed by Ana Pauker, a Jewess and communist, for allowing 15000 Jews to emigrate to Eretz Israel. Because the Russian Navy used Constantza as its naval base and emigration of such a number of Jews from a communist country was against the communist ideology, it was agreed that the ships would sail to Burgas, Bulgaria, where the Jewish emigrants would board them.
The British did not relent their grip. They used any and every means to prevent the ships from sailing. News of the ships carrying illegal emigrants, and Russian spies among them, appeared in British and American press close to ships’ sailing. The US government was under strong pressure from Britain to stop the ships. Also American State Department exerted pressure on the Jewish Agency in order to prevent the sailing of the ships. Britain applied to the Government of Panama with the demand to remove her flag protection from the ships. Panama refused to comply. Next, they approached the Turkish government, demanding closing the Straits of Bosphorus before the two ships. They failed also in this case.

The proclamation of the State of Israel took place in the UN on the 29th of November 1947. This still required the confirmation of the Security Council. Moshe Sharett the head of the State Department of the Jewish Agency feared that the “Pans” affair would negatively influence the vote in the Security Council. He was in favor of postponing the sailing of the ships till February 1948, after the assembly of the Security Council and, in that, David Ben-Gurion himself supported him.

A hidden struggle developed between the Jewish Agency and the Mossad. Actually the whole Zionist leadership in the country opposed the sailing of the ships. But, 15000 people, Jewish Maapilim who left their homes and burned all the bridges behind them, were waiting to board the ships. The Romanian Government was pressing to terminate this affair. It was clear to everybody that such an opportunity, to extract such a great number of Jews from the communist country would not repeat itself.

The Mossad people decided to act on their own, and to commence the operation. On the 22nd of December, both ships sailed Constantza heading for Burgas and at the same time trains, from different corners of Romania, with 15000 Jews started to move toward the Bulgarian border.

Certain suggestions were made which, everybody hoped, would also be acceptable to the British.

a) The ships would sail in the direction of Cyprus.
b) In case of an investigation it would be claimed that the ships sailed in contrary to the Jewish Agency orders.
c) Ships would not be renamed with the Hebrew names and would not call themselves “Haganah Ship …”
d) When boarded by the British, there would be no physical opposition.
e) The ships would sail wherever British ordered them, except back to the Black Sea.
These things were leaked, by different means, to the British and American authorities.

On the 27th of December 1947, both ships sailed from Burgas to Eretz Israel, with more than 15000 persons on board. On behalf of the Mossad, the commander of the whole operation was a young man of 28, Yosi Hamburger, later Harel, a veteran of clandestine immigration, one who commanded the “Exodus” and “Knesset Yisrael”. In charge of the “Pan Crescent” was a young man named Dov Magen (nicknamed Berchik) and of the “Pan York” Nisan Levitan, both of them Pal-Yam members.

The ships Captains acted two professional seamen, both of them veterans of the Allied Merchant Marines from the WW II. The Captain of “Pan Crescent” was Yitzchak Aharonovich (Ike), formerly Captain of the famous “Exodus” and the Captain of “Pan York” was Gad Hilb, previously Captain of “Chaim Arlozorov”. The previous Master of “Pan Crescent” remained on board as an observer and the Spanish Chief Officer of “Pan York” remained in the same capacity. Also Ch. Engineer Efraim Tzuker, later Tzuk, the former Chief Engineer of “Chaim Arlozorov” joined the “Pan York”. The rest of the crew was composed of Jewish American volunteers, some of them veterans from “Exodus” and “Chaim Arlozorov”, young seamen from Eretz Israel, and some foreigners.

The whole enterprise was precisely planed. The time of ships arrival to the northern entrance of the Bosporus Strait was planned for Saturday evening, 27th of December 1947. This was critical stage of the voyage. Mossad’s planners knew that British would do everything to prevent the transit of the ships through the strait. They were unable to prevent the transit in advance but it was possible to stop the ships at the entrance on any Customs or Sanitary formality excuse when checking ships’ documents. British consul in Istanbul and the diplomatic envoy in Ankara, were active from Monday to Friday. In addition the days were immediately after Christmas. Two Jewish journalists were sent to the two Turkish towns in order to interview the two British diplomats and on this occasion to invite them for a good meal and a lot of drinks. The planners presumed that the two would be neutralized at the time of ships’ arrival at the strait and there would be no one to interfere with their transit. Furthermore for a proper treatment by the proper authorities, a very friendly shift was arranged for the time of the ships’ arrival at the entrance to the strait.

One of the two journalists Moise Perlman, was in possession of dual citizenship. British and American. Having two passports and, thanks to good connections, an ability to use international telephones in the American embassy. He situated himself in a hotel overlooking the Bosporus and visually monitored the ships progress through the strait. In case of any hindrance he was to report immediately to the Mossad and report to the whole world in case the British will cause any trouble.
Due to some technical reasons, the ships left Burgas after some delay. A Russian pilot guided them through the WW II mine fields and on the noon of 28th of December both “Pans” transited the Strait of Bosphorus without any obstacles.

The encounter with the British Navy took place immediately after ships left the Strait of Dardanelles. Here, two frigates of the British Navy awaited them. These were joined shortly by a fleet of two cruisers and six destroyers, under Vice Admiral Richard Victor Saymonds Tayler on the cruiser “Mauritius”. The whole convoy formed itself, headed by “Pan York, followed by “Pan Crescent” and the Royal Navy fleet behind them.

In the meantime an agreement in the spirit of the previously mentioned suggestions was reached with the British Authorities and appropriate instructions enforcing this agreement were relayed to the ships. After some dealings with the Commanding Officer of the British fleet, which were performed by shouting and loud speakers, it was agreed that the British would board the ships unarmed and they would take over the navigation and main engine operation. The radio communication with the Mossad and the control over the immigrants would remain in the hands of the Jewish crew. There would be no search and the immigrants would disembark together with their belongings. Actually, the whole ships’ operation remained all the time in the Jewish hands.

Regarding the foreign crew, the Jewish commanders requested that no measures be taken against them and they would be free to join the immigrants in the camps in Cyprus. Alternatively they would be repatriated to their countries or to the port where they joined the ships, each according to his wish. After confirmation from the Navy Command in Malta, The British Admiral agreed to these terms.

On the 31st of December 1947, at 1500 in position N 34º 06'; E 031º 22', British soldiers boarded the ships. They boarded unarmed and without helmets. They asked the ships’ crews to continue and operate the ships. The Jews answered that they are ready to steer the ship only on the course to Haifa. A compromise was reached. Jews would operate the engine and the British steer the ship. Shortly after this demonstration, the whole operation of the ships returned to the crew.

At this stage a radio cable was received on board, with the instruction to change the names of the two ships. “Pan Crescent” to be renamed “Atzmauth” (Independence) and “Pan York” to be renamed “Kibutz Galuyot” (Gathering of the Exiles). On the 1st of January 1948 morning, the ships arrived at Famagusta. “Kibutz Galuyot” docked at Famagusta berth and Atzmauth remained on anchor. The Royal Navy completed its task and the responsibility for the two ships and their “passengers” was transferred to the British Governor of Cyprus. At this stage Gad Hilb, the Master of “Kibutz Galuyot” asked to talk to the British Admiral. The meeting took place on the pier, the Admiral surrounded by
entourage of adjutants, all in clean official British Navy uniforms and in front of them a young Jewish sailor in worn out clothes along with the second mate, Werner Salomon in the capacity of his adjutant. Gad Hilb asked for a written document regarding the agreement about the foreign crewmembers. He remarked that otherwise the crew will leave the ships and the whole burden of the 15000 immigrants will rest with the British. Also, with the foresight of keeping the ships ready to sail he asked for supply of fuel. After some come and go between the Admiral and the Governor, Gad Hilb received the document and a destroyer transferred fuel to both ships.

Disembarkation of the 15000 persons proceeded generally without problems and took three days. Among the Maapilim on the “Atzmauth” was a couple, Moshe and Rachel Bursuk with their two sons, Michael 12 and Abraham 10 years of age. Michael, later Admiral Barkai (nicknamed Yomi) Chief of Israeli Navy, hero of the Yom Kippur War and Abraham (nicknamed Bumi) later the second in command of the ill fated submarine “Dakar”.

Ships anchored about 7 miles north of Famagusta near the village of Boghaz. The Masters and crews of both ships remained on board and busied themselves with the maintenance of the ships waiting to reactivate them. They were anchored there for five and half months. All the initiative for retaining the crew and keeping the ships in constant readiness came from the two Captains themselves, without any instructions from the Mossad. The Panamanian government finally surrendered to British pressure and withdrew the protection of its flag. The ships were in the status of arrested ships.

On the 14th of May 1948, during the central ceremony on board "Kibutz Galuyot", in presence of some people from the organization of “Joint” and the Papavasiliu family, friends of Israel and “ZIM” representatives in Cyprus till today, the Israeli flags were hoisted and the name of the home port PANAMA was replaced by HAIFA.

After waiting, without result, for more than a month for some instructions from Israel, both Captains decided to sail from Cyprus and join the War of Independence effort in Israel. They advised their decision to the commander of the guarding patrol ship, giving the excuse of urgently required fumigation of the ships, which could not be made in Cyprus. The answer was that the ships would be not allowed to enter Haifa, as Haifa was still controlled by the British, and no fuel would be supplied to the ships. Nevertheless both ships were properly manned and with sufficient amount of fuel, as both Captains took care to receive small amounts of fuel all the time during their stay in Cyprus. On the 18th of July 1948, both ships sailed for Haifa.

During the short trip from Cyprus to Haifa, the ships tried unsuccessfully to contact the Mossad in Israel and to advise them of the ships’ approach and
receive instructions. Nearing Haifa, a British destroyer approached the ships and advised them to anchor in a designated place outside the breakwater but within the Haifa Port limits. It meant within the area still under British control. Ships dropped anchors in the designated sites and tried constantly to contact Mossad, again without result. Some British officers tried to board “Kibbutz Galuyoth” but Gad Hilb refused to allow them, claiming lack of quarantine clearance. Next, a Navy tugboat came alongside; a British officer climbed the gangway and demanded the Master to sign a document, that the ships would not leave the anchorage, without the permission of British Authorities. When he again refused he was taken off the ship by force and confined in the British camp in Bat Galim. He was court marshaled by the British and released three days later.

“The voyage of the PANS”, the way it is named in the literature dealing with the clandestine immigration, is considered to be the biggest and best organized undertaking of the Mossad during the whole period of this immigration and marks the peak of its activity.

Later the “Kibbutz Galuyoth” was renamed “Komemiut” (Sovereignty). With the opening of free immigration to Israel, both ships continued to bring myriads of new immigrants to the country. Shortly they joined “ZIM” and hoisted Israeli flag.

“Atzmauth” was sold for scrap in 1950 in Haifa after 49 years of dutiful service. “Komemiut” continued to bring new immigrants and later returned to be a regular general cargo ship. She was sold to breakers in Briton Ferry in 1952 after 51 years of service.
Hebrew version:

במרץ 1947 נרכשו בארצות הברית שתי אניות שעסקו בהובלת בננות מארצות אמריקה הדרומית, נרכשו מידי חברת ספנות אמריקאית, במגדר אנשי ספנות ומגדלי הבננות בארה"ב . בבעלות יהודי (Sam Zemurray), שמואל זמורה, בוגר אקדמית אנאפוליס היוקרתית, אמריקאי- ים יהודי-קצין. המוסד לעליה ייצג את חברת , הים הישראלי- לימים המפקד הראשון של חיל, שולמן . במגדלי אנשי ספנות ומגדלי הבננותсорו עשו את האניות המתאימות למטרות סיפוני ביניים, מחסני מטען גדולים למגדלי אנשי ספנות ומגדלי הבננותсорו עשו את האניות המתאימות למטרות סיפוני ביניים, מחסני מטען גדולים. המוסד לעליה ייצג את חברת , הים הישראלי- לימים המפקד הראשון של חיל, שולמן . במגדלי אנשי ספנות ומגדלי הבננותсорו עשו את האניות המתאימות למטרות סיפוני ביניים, מחסני מטען גדולים. המוסד לעליה ייצג את חברת , הים הישראלי- לימים המפקד הראשון של חיל, שולמן . במגדלי אנשי ספנות ומגדלי הבננותсорו עשו את האניות המתאימות למטרות סיפוני ביניים, מחסני מטען גדולים.
In December 1947, the"Aliyah Ha-Ovedah" movement, also known as the "Aliyah Ha-Ovedah" or "Aliyah Ha-Ovedah Hakivun," embarked on a daring mission to rescue thousands of Jewish refugees from Europe. The operation, code-named "Exodus," was a calculated risk to bypass the Israeli government's restrictions on Jewish immigration.

The movement gathered a group of young Israeli and foreign seamen, led by Yossi Maburov, later known as Yael Harlev, and backed by the "Achdut Ha-Avodah" movement led by Yehuda Ben-Zvi. The plan was executed with meticulous precision, and the operation proceeded without incident.

The movement's leaders faced a myriad of challenges, including the British, who were determined to prevent the illegal immigration of Jews to British-controlled Mandates. Despite these obstacles, the operation succeeded, and two ships, "Albatross" and "Baltimore," sailed from Constanta to Bordeaux.

The operation was conducted in the face of fierce opposition from the British government, which threatened to block the ships at any cost. However, the movement managed to secure a safe passage through the Bosphorus, thanks to the efforts of two British diplomats, who acted as intermediaries.

The operation was a triumph of courage and strategy, and it paved the way for the establishment of the State of Israel. The "Exodus" operation was a turning point in the history of Jewish immigration, and it remains a testament to the determination and resilience of the Jewish people.

End of Document.
In November, the Russians delivered them. The ships sailed from there on time, due to various delays in the port of Burgas.

During World War II, and in the field beyond, they left the port in December at sunset, to meet the British.

They crossed the Bosphorus without the Russell and without any delay or problem. A short time later, two British frigates arrived, which immediately attacked the Egyptian fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral Richard Victor Symonds Tayler, and joined her fleet of two destroyers, Taylor-Victor Simon.

The meeting was made at the main naval station and continued, after several voyages in Mauritius'. Behind her followed the 'Panzer' after her, 'Panzer York' when the British naval commander, the Englishman...

Meanwhile, a deal was reached with the British, mainly a ceasefire, which was presented to them previously and the order that followed, after a number of discussions with the British commander, the task of the merchant ships and the passengers would remain under British control, and the pilots would descend with it, there would be no search. Also, the control over the passengers, the Israeli crews would remain throughout.

From there they sailed to Valletta and later. After discussing with the British admiral, the commander of the ships requested not to take any action against the crews, in the coming months.

So, the passengers could return to their countries, in the coming months. They could, according to his choice, their residences or the port to which they joined the ships.

The British admiral agreed to the terms of 31 December at 1500, at this point; E 031º 22’ 34º 06’ N, the British went on the ships and asked the crews to continue to sail them. Without iron and without alums, the passengers and the crew refused, claiming they were ready to sail, when the ships were stopped in the sea, after this great action. They would suspend the engines and the British commander...

At this point, the ship entered through the harbor and was tied to the dock, at this point, responsibility passed to the British governor of the island, the one after the British fleet.

The meeting was held face to face. G'dal asked to speak with the British admiral, General Halil, 'Panzer York' commander of the... all the others in their shirts, as well as several aides, on the dock and in front of the admiral, was the ship's pilot, accompanied by an Israeli young shepherd, dressed in black, and a young Israeli, Werner Solomon, the commander of the ship, accompanied by a soldier who accompanied him, dressed in black, and a young army officer.

G'dal asked for a formal document regarding the deal that was reached regarding the crew. Then, the admiral's aide...

According to the deal, anyone who left the crew would be able to leave to any country of their choice, and be taken to any country of their choice, or be returned to...

The meeting was held in Palermo and later. The British fleet ended its mission, in fact. It anchored outside the harbor, 'Panzer' was tied to the dock, at this point. Responsibility passed to the British governor of the island, the...