

## **The Voyage of the “Enzo Sereni”**

Sometime during 1945, Yehuda Arazi - the head of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet in Italy, purchased through a 'front man' named Pinter, a new vessel that had just been built that went by the name of "Rondine". This was a wooden vessel with an overall weight of 410 tons and a 300 hp diesel engine that gave it a speed of 7.5 knots.

The vessel sailed on 7 January 1946 from a small fishing pier in Vado Ligura, near Savona, Italy, carrying 908 Ma'apilim on board; this was a record number compared to what other vessels of its size had taken until then. Among the Ma'apilim was a group of children called "The Children of Salvino", who were orphans, survivors of the Holocaust, gathered by the members of the Jewish units in the British Army and cared for in a camp erected for them in the village of Salvino. Accompanying the Ma'apilim on this voyage were three Palyam members, Zalman Perach, Gad Lasker, who was the commander of the vessel and Gideon Etzion who was Gideoni (communications person). The vessel was renamed for this voyage and called "Enzo Sereni", in memory of the pioneer and fighter who was parachuted into Italy, captured by the Nazis and tortured and killed in Dachau in 1944. (His wife Ada was a leading figure in Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet in Italy and later replaced Yehuda Arazi as head of the Mossad in Italy; she played an important role in the purchase of this vessel).

On 17 January 1946 the vessel was captured by the British Navy, which had been called in urgently by the Mandatory Government, in response to the previous success of eight vessels of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet in breaking the British blockade and bring their passengers - the Ma'apilim - to shore. The Ma'apilim of the 'Enzo Sereni' were interned at the Atlith detention camp. This was the first time that a vessel had been taken into custody outside the territorial waters; for this reason Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet decided to bring the Mandatory government to trial – through the 'front man' who was the legal owner of the vessel. Following a long trial the vessel was returned to its owner and in June of 1947 it sailed back to Italy with a crew of Palyamnikim. Another reaction of the Yishuv [the Jewish settlement in Palestine] to the capture of this vessel was the blow-up of the radar station on the French Carmel in 1946.

In 1948 the vessel made three more trips; one in February with Ma'apilim when the vessel was called "Bonim Ve'Lochamim" [Builders & Fighters], and two more trips that arrived after the Declaration of Independence (carrying volunteers for the Israeli Army). At the end of that year she was sold in Italy.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben Tzur)