

The Voyage of “Krav Emek Ayalon” [The Battle of the Ayalon Valley]

This vessel was named in commemoration of the battle to open the way to Jerusalem, which was raging when the vessel was being prepared and began its voyage. The vessel was originally named “Fabio”, code name ‘Ha’Mored’ [Hebrew: the Rebel]. This was actually the last of the Aliya Bet vessels to sail, as it left on its voyage shortly after the declaration of the State of Israel and had been prepared by Ha’Mossad Le’Aliya Bet, therefore included in the list of its vessels. She left the Bay of Bandol, France, carrying 705 Ma’apilim. The commander was David Stern, who was accompanied by Willi Rostoker, the nurse - Giladah Levi and the Gideonit - Ruth Chaikin. The crew was Italian.

There was some fear that the Egyptian fleet would intercept the vessel, so she was armed with several machine guns. However, the voyage proceeded without incident, except for the surprise appearance of the new Israeli Navy ship - INS Eilat, which took some time to identify. On May 29th 1948, the Ma’apilim were debarked on the shore of Caesarea, with the aid of the Palyam boats. The vessel then headed for Haifa, whose port was still in British hands, but the Palyamnikim had left the vessel in a small launch, when it was still in the bay and made for the Kishon river area, east of the port, which was under the control of the Jewish forces.

During the War of Independence, this vessel made two more voyages carrying Gachal (volunteers for the Israeli army from the Diaspora) and one voyage carrying weapons procurement.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)

