

The Voyage of the “Hagana”

This vessel began its career as a corvette in the Canadian Navy during WW II, named the “Norsyd”. When the war ended it was put up for sale as surplus war materiel and purchased by a front company of the Hagana, sardonically named the FB company (FB = F... Britain). The purchase took place in 1946 and its sister ship, the “Beauharnois” (later renamed “Josiah Wedgwood”) was purchased with it. The vessels were made serviceable for crossing the Atlantic at a shipyard in Staten Island, New York, and the “Beauharnois” left the harbor of New York on April 1st 1946. The “Norsyd” left shortly afterwards, heading for Marseilles, France, under the name “Balboa”, posing as a boat in service of UNRA. The crew of both vessels consisted of ex-GI’s and others, all of whom were members of the Ha’Bonim and Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair Youth Movements in America and Canada. The captain of the “Norsyd” was a Swedish seaman who signed on to deliver the ship to a port in Europe. The Palyamnik Aryeh Friedman served as First Mate.

In Marseilles, the vessel was prepared for carrying Ma’apilim, the Swedish captain left the ship and Aryeh Friedman took over. The “Balboa” took aboard 999 Ma’apilim and carried them within 50 miles of Palestine. She met with an old Turkish tub, the “Akbel” at a preset coordinate at sea, and transferred all the Ma’apilim to the Turkish vessel by launch. Betzalel Drori went with the Ma’apilim as commander and was the only Palyamnik on board. (See The Voyage of the Biria).

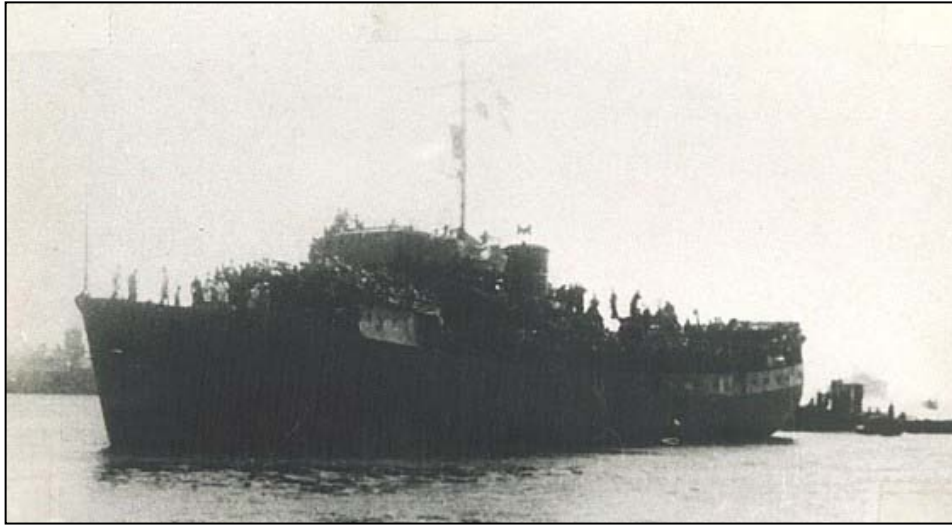
The “Balboa” was commanded by Yehoshua Baharav. She changed names once again and became the “Hagana”. She sailed from that rendezvous point in the Mediterranean to the Yugoslav port of Bakar with Aryeh Friedman as captain and Abraham Lichovski as the Gideoni. The all-American crew went along all the way.

The “Hagana” left Bakar on July 24th, 1946, carrying 2,678 Ma’apilim. (This was the most that any Hagana vessel had carried, up to this point.) She was the first vessel to leave from a Yugoslav port, but there were more to follow. The voyage was uneventful until the engine broke down near Cyprus. While it was being repaired the vessel was discovered by a British destroyer, who accompanied her to the port of Haifa. She was ordered by the destroyer to halt near Haifa and when she refused to do so, the destroyer butted her severely, causing her to keel over so dangerously that her engine had to be shut down. British soldiers overran the deck and took the vessel in tow into port.

The British High Commissioner decided to leave the Ma’apilim on the vessel at sea, as means of pressure on the British cabinet, to decide what to do about the increased stream of illegal Aliya. He had hoped that the Ma’apilim would be deported from Palestine. They were finally removed from the vessel on August 2nd and sent to the Atlit detention camp. The Ma’apilim of the “Ha’Chayal Ha’lvri”, who had also been caught about the same time were sent to Atlit as well. They were the last not to be deported. Two weeks later the British began the “Igloo” operation - the deportation of Ma’apilim to Cyprus.

With the creation of the Israeli Navy, the former Canadian corvette became the K-18 “Hagana”.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben Tzur and Aryeh Malkin)



The "Hagana" entering the port of Haifa



The Israeli Navy "Hagana K-20"