

The Voyage of “Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha’Sira” [The 23 Seamen]

This vessel was so named in honor of the 23 members of the Hagana, whose launch departed from Haifa on May 18th 1941. The launch disappeared at sea during a mission to Tripoli, Lebanon, in the service of the British Army against the Vichy French Forces. A British Major was also on board the launch, and lost his life together with the Hagana fighters, at sea.



“Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha’Sira” was prepared for its voyage in Portovenere, Italy, just south of La Spezia. She sailed on August 2nd 1946 from the port of Bocca di Magra, Italy, carrying 790 Ma’apilim. Its commander was Israel Rotem (pictured here) and he was accompanied by Shaul Oren and the Gideoni - Yitzchak Hektin. On this voyage, which was to be carried out in the method of two vessels cooperating and combining their passengers, the Ma’apilim of the vessel “Katriel Jaffe” were to be transferred to “Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha’Sira”. However, two days after this latter vessel left harbor, its engine broke down and plans had to be changed. The “Katriel Jaffe” could not take the Ma’apilim of “Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha’Sira”, as she was already too crowded, so “Kaf Gimel Yordei Ha’Sira” continued its voyage at a much slower pace, at the mercy of the wind, using its sails.

The British discovered the vessel in the vicinity of Cyprus and on August 14th they captured it and towed it to Haifa. When the vessel was in their hands they informed the Ma’apilim that they would be deported to Cyprus. This new policy had been introduced just several days earlier, with the arrival of the “Yagur” and the “Henrietta Szold”. In response, the Ma’apilim declared a hunger strike, but were deported anyway on August 18th, after a stiff fight, together with the Ma’apilim of the “Katriel Jaffe”. The Palyamnikim went with them.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)

