

## **The Voyage of the “Eliahu Golomb” and the “Dov Hoz”**

During the winter of 1946 the Mosad for Aliya Bet purchased two vessels, Fede and Fenice. When they were almost ready to sail they were, as was the custom, given new names. The first was named Dov Hoz, after the leader of the Workers Party, who organized volunteers for the Jewish Brigade that fought with the British Army during WWI. He was also one of the first initiators in the establishment of the Israeli Air Force and one of the most important figures in the “Hagana”. Dov Hoz was killed in an automobile accident in 1940. (The three “Palyam” training vessels; Dov, Rivka and Tirza were named after the members of the family that were killed in this accident). The second vessel was named after Eliahu Golomb, the commander of the “Hagana” who had died a year earlier.

The original plan was for the “Dov Hoz” to depart from the port of La Spezia, where the vessel had been readied to take on its passengers. That job was completed in the beginning of April, 1946. “The Gang” (the fictitious British Transport Co. run by ex-Jewish Brigade men for the Mosad for Aliya Bet,) organized a convoy of trucks to transport 1014 Ma’apilim to the port. The Italians mistakenly thought that this was a transport of Fascists and Nazis trying to escape the country and they halted the convoy. When they realized their mistake they allowed the Ma’apilim to board the vessel. However, by then, the British became aware of what had happened and prevented the vessel from leaving port. Yehuda Arazi, the chief of the Mosad for Aliya Bet in Italy boarded the vessel and stood at the head of the battle against the British.

The Ma’apilim were stalwart and stubborn in their resistance on the ship and the adjoining wharf, and they began a hunger strike. The hunger strike and the threats of mass suicide aroused the support of the international community. The “La Spezia” incident lasted about a month, and became the center of a struggle for the support of the public and the international community. The pressure exerted upon the British forced them to agree to allow the movement of the “Eliahu Golomb” into the port, in order to take on some of the Ma’apilim of the “Dov Hoz”, which was even more crowded with passengers. The JDC supplied food for the Ma’apilim of both vessels and the battle came to an end with a bountiful Passover Seder which was attended by many others at the port who had also been invited.

Difficult negotiations ensued, in which Harold Laski, the Jewish leader of the Labor Party of England, also participated. They were concluded with the British being forced to allow the vessels to sail and to enter Palestine legally, their number being applied to the monthly quota allowed. On 8<sup>th</sup> May, and to the accompaniment of thousands of cheering onlookers, the “Dov Hoz” (carrying 675 Ma’apilim) and the “Eliahu Golomb” (carrying 339 Ma’apilim) left La Spezia bound for Palestine. They arrived at the port of Haifa on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

During 1946, the vessels Fede and Fenice made two more voyages carrying Ma’apilim. They were renamed again, the “Arba Cheruyot” (Four Freedoms) and “Bracha Fuld”, respectively.

(compiled by Tzvi Ben Tzur)