

The Voyage of “Lamed Heh Heroes of Gush Etzion” [The 35 Heroes of the Etzion Bloc]

This vessel was named in honor of the 35 fighters, men of the Palmach and the Hagana Reserves, who were sent to reinforce the defenders of the besieged Etzion Bloc, near Jerusalem. On January 16th 1948, they were ambushed on the way to the settlements, and fought against hundreds of Arabs, until they ran out of ammunition and were all killed.

The vessel was prepared for her voyage in the port of Venice, Italy. It sailed on January 17th 1948, carrying 273 Ma’apilim, with commander Yitzchak Landaur, (who had been the commander of the ‘Af Al Pi Chen’) and the Gideoni - Yechiel Admoni. On her way out of the port, she ran up a sandbar and tugs were needed to pull her off. The voyage was a difficult one and the crew had to overcome severe storms, as well as a breakdown of the engine. These events prolonged the voyage beyond what was planned; as a result, food and water had to be severely rationed, causing the physical condition of the Ma’apilim to deteriorate

The original plan was for this vessel to rendezvous with the “Rondine”¹ at sea, in order to transfer her Ma’apilim to the “Rondine”. This plan was abandoned due to the various problems described above, and the “Lamed Heh” sailed on to Palestine. She was sighted by a British scout plane on January 31st and soon after a British destroyer showed up, to follow her. The following day, another destroyer joined the little convoy. When the vessel was about 30 miles from the coast of Lebanon, the two destroyers barred her way and commandeered her without resistance. She was towed to Haifa and the Ma’apilim, together with the accompanying Palyamnikim, were all deported to the Cyprus detention camps.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)



¹ The Rondine was the vessel that made the voyage of “Enzo Sereni” in July 1946 and the voyage of “Builders and Fighters” in February 1948.