

The Voyage of the “Latrun”



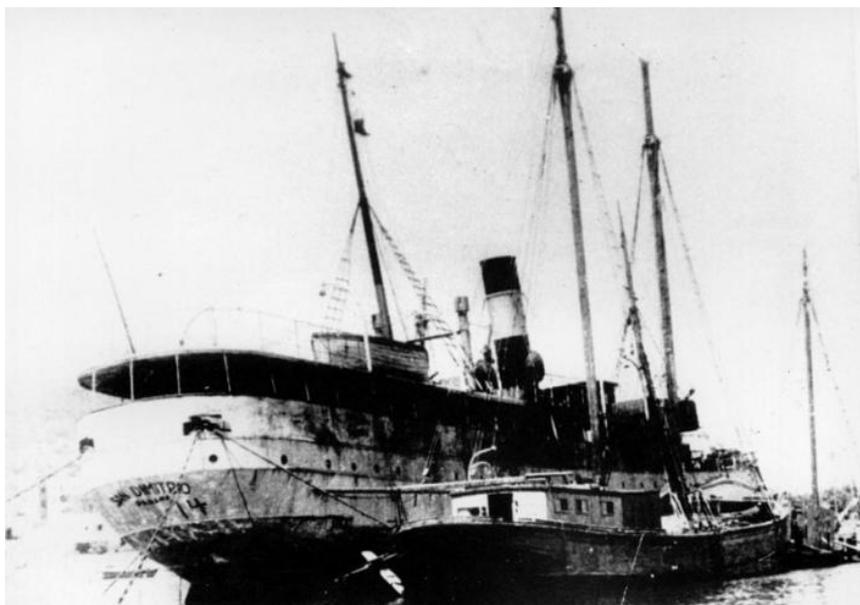
This vessel was named after the British prison camp, in which the leaders of the Yishuv were imprisoned in the mass arrests of the “Black Saturday”, on June 1946. She was purchased in Sweden as “San Dimitrio” and prepared for its voyage there and in the port of Marseilles, France. The commander was Uri Goren and the crew was Spanish. Uri (pictured here,) was accompanied by Shalom Schwartz, Benyamin Nativ and the Gideoni - Yitzchak Golan.

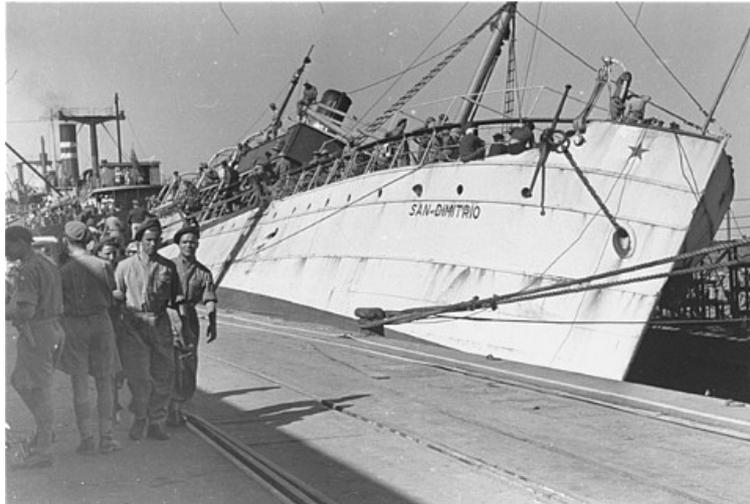
The British were aware of the vessel when it was still being prepared for its voyage in Marseilles, but their efforts to get the French to delay its departure – failed, and the French allowed the vessel, all of whose passengers had “legal” visas, to leave port. She left from Sete on October 19th 1946, carrying 1,252 Ma’apilim. She had a troubled voyage from the very outset, as she ran onto a sandbar while leaving port, but succeeded in backing off under her own power. Her actual speed was only half of what had been expected, so the trip was to take twice as long as had been planned. As the water and fuel diminished, the vessel developed problems of stability and started to keel over dangerously. The Palyamnikim were busy directing the Ma’apilim who were on deck, to go to the port or the starboard sides, in order to keep her balance. In addition, the vessel was caught in two nasty storms and drew a good deal of water. It was necessary for the Ma’apilim to work long hours, hauling buckets of water from the holds. Many of the Ma’apilim became seasick.

A British scout plane discovered the “Latrun” on October 29th. Two days later, as she neared Haifa, four British destroyers surrounded her. The Palyamnikim had organized a group of Ma’apilim, who were trained to prevent the British from taking over the vessel. On November 1st when she entered the territorial waters of Palestine, two of the destroyers ran into her in order to stop her, and a large force of soldiers boarded the vessel, using water hoses, tear gas, side arms and clubs. She was then towed into the port of Haifa. The Ma’apilim and the Palyamnikim were all deported to Cyprus, except for Shalom Schwartz who managed to hide in the hideout that had been prepared on the vessel.

Uri Goren gives a more detailed account of this voyage in his book, “Both Sides of the Crypto”.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)





The "Latrun" (San Dimitrio) at Haifa, tilting noticeably



Disembarking the "Latrun" in Haifa



The "Latrun" surrounded by British destroyers