

The Voyage of “Medinat Israel” [The State of Israel]

The vessel “Medinat Israel” was prepared for her voyage in the Bay of Gaeta, Italy. Her commander was Ami Amir, accompanied by Sefi Dichter and the Gideoni - Oved Sadeh. The vessel sailed from the Bay of Brindisi on May 8th 1948, carrying 243 Ma’apilim.

The vessel “Le’Nitzachon” sailed from the same region at the same time, carrying 189 Ma’apilim, and was scheduled to meet with “Medinat Israel” at sea, and have her Ma’apilim transferred to it when they would be about 200 miles from Palestine. The foreign crew on “Medinat Israel” was to go to the “Le’Nitzachon”, which would then head back to Europe. As 15th May was approaching, this plan was abandoned and both vessels proceeded towards Palestine. Several births occurred on both vessels, so the one doctor on board had to hop from vessel to vessel, delivering babies on each one. “Medinat Israel” carried some light weapons hidden in it, to be prepared for a possible attack by an Arab vessel, en route

Both vessels were discovered by the British on May 15th, near Tel Aviv, but they did not act, because they had already declared their leaving the country. The vessels had to wait out the Egyptian bombing of Tel Aviv before the Ma’apilim could debark safely. They finally disembarked on 17th May, on the shore of Tel Aviv, in broad daylight, arriving at the recently declared free State of Israel. Two days later both vessels returned to Italy.

This vessel continued to serve the function of bringing Olim, and smuggling young men who were fit for battle, from among the inmates of the Cyprus detention camps to Israel. (These men were banned by the British from immigrating to Israel, due to the War of Independence, even after the declaration of the State.) While in this service, the vessel was once blown to the Syrian shore during a storm, but was retrieved from the shore with the aid of the navy ship “INS Maoz” K-24 (formerly the “Ben Hecht”).

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)

