

The Voyage of the “Palmach”

This vessel, named in honor of the elite fighting force of the Yishuv, was prepared for its voyage at La Spezia, Italy, by a crew under the direction of Avraham Zakai. She left from Bocca di Magra, Italy, on September 11th 1946, carrying 431 Ma'apilim. Her commander was Moshe Rabinowitz, who was accompanied by Amos Fink and the Gideoni - Avinoam Kopstein. In accord with the policy of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliya Bet, of combining two voyages into one, , the “Palmach” was scheduled to meet with the vessel ‘Albertina’, who left one day later, carrying 180 Ma'apilim, accompanied by the Gideoni - Oved Sadeh.

The two vessels met at sea on September 19th and the Ma'apilim of the ‘Albertina’ boarded the ‘Palmach’. The foreign crew on the ‘Palmach’ went over to the ‘Albertina’, except for the chief engineer, returning with her to Italy. On September 22nd, a British destroyer discovered the “Palmach” when it was near Rosh HaNikra and ordered her to halt. When the vessel continued on her course the destroyer shoved her with her prow. The Ma'apilim threw cans of conserves on the soldiers and a bitter fight ensued, with the British using water hoses and tear gas, as well as small fire arms. In this fight, the Ma'apil Yona Dov Schwartz was killed. He was the first Ma'apil to be killed since the end of WW II. The commander of the vessel, Moshe Rabinowitz was wounded as were a number of other Ma'apilim. They were taken to a hospital in Palestine and later on interned at Atlit. The other Ma'apilim were deported to the Cyprus detention camps.

(Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur)



“Palmach” at Haifa



British soldiers on board the "Palmach", at Haifa