

The Voyage of the “Josiah Wedgwood”

Josiah Wedgwood was a member of the British Parliament, who was a stalwart supporter of the Zionist cause, who openly urged Jews to disobey the infamous “White Paper”, limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine. Wedgwood was of the British nobility and was a Colonel in the British Army. This vessel, named after him following his death in 1946, began its nautical career as a corvette in the Canadian Navy during WW II, where it accompanied convoys of ships across the North Atlantic, under the name of “Beauharnois”. It was to be sold as surplus war materiel when the war was over, and as such it was purchased by a front company, (sardonically named the F.B. Co., - abbreviation for f...k the British) of Ha’Mossad Le’Aliya Bet. The vessel “Norsyd”, later renamed the “Hagana” was purchased at the same time.



After initial repairs in the harbor of New York, the vessel sailed for Europe on April 1st 1946. After a rather long voyage, due to technical breakdowns, the vessel arrived in Savona, Italy, towards the end of May. It was in this port that the ship was prepared to take on Ma’apilim. Its future commander - Dov (Berchik) Magen (pictured here) was accompanied by Israel Auerbach, Benyamin Nativ, Shalom Shwartz and Tzvi (Miri) Katzenelson. The Chief Engineer was Arie Kolomeitzov and the Gideonim were Moshe (Mario) Yerushalmi and Milton Miller. The Captain was an American Jewish veteran seaman - Jerry Lichtman and the First Mate was also a veteran seaman and close friend of the captain - Hans Fliegler. (These two were IWWⁱ men [anarchists] who signed on to fight against British imperialism). The rest of the crew consisted of young American and Canadian volunteers of the Zionist Youth Movements, many of them veteran soldiers or sailors of WW II, who signed on for the voyage and worked without pay. Many of them remained and settled in Palestine/ Israel.

The vessel left Savona and picked up 1,257 Ma’apilim at a small pier, several miles north of Savona on June 19th 1946. The British heard that the ship was about to leave and approached the Italian police, asking them to halt its sailing. Yehuda Arazi and the American journalist, I. F. Stone, who had been invited to make the journey with the Ma’apilim raised hell. With the disturbance that was created, the “Wedgwood” managed to cut its lines and sailed out to the open sea. Poor Stone was disappointed in missing the ride, but representatives of Ha’Mossad Le’Aliya Bet on the scene promised him they would send him on the sister ship of the “Wedgwood”, the “Hagana”/ “Biria”, which was then readying to sail from the Marseilles, France region. Stone’s impressions of his journey were published in his book: “Underground to Palestine”.

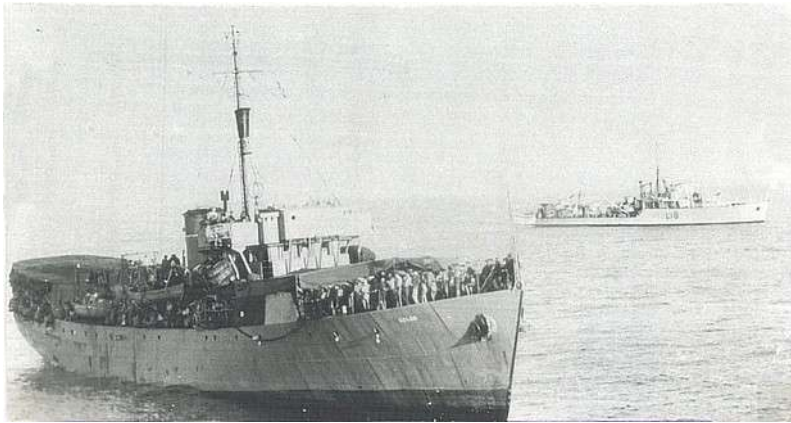
The British had no trouble identifying this vessel, and it was waylaid on June 25th, when still about 75 miles from the shore of Palestine. Four British destroyers surrounded the vessel and accompanied her to the port of Haifa. An attempt was made by the Palyamnikim to have the vessel captured outside the territorial waters of Palestine, so that there would be no grounds for its confiscation by the British. That attempt failed and another attempt was made to lower a launch to the water, in order to land 25 young men on the shore of Kiryat Chaim, but the launch was intercepted and the men were taken into custody. The Wedgwood was running out of gas, and finally surrendered to the British troops, who boarded the vessel on June 27th and turned it to the Haifa port.

As the ship arrived in Haifa shortly before the infamous ‘Black Saturday’, (June 29th), by the time the Ma’apilim were transferred to the detention camp in Atlit, it was filled with arrested Israelis, so the Ma’apilim were housed in tents next to the permanent barracks for the first week of their stay. The Palyamnikim managed to disappear between the disembarkation from the vessel and the boarding of the buses, which took the Ma’apilim to Atlit.

When the Israeli navy was formed in 1948, some of the 'Shadow Fleet' of Aliya Bet vessels were put into the service of the Navy. The "Wedgwood" was the second vessel to be commissioned and became navy ship "Ha'Shomer K-18" [Hebrew: The Guard].

Compiled by Tzvi Ben-Tzur and Aryeh Malkin (who was a sailor on the "Wedgwood")

ⁱ International Workers of the World



The "Wedgwood" with a British destroyer at the background



Disembarking from the "Wedgwood" at Haifa