

Aliyah Bet

Aliyah Bet ([Hebrew](#): יב היילע, "[Aliyah](#) 'B'" – [bet](#) being the second letter of the [Hebrew alphabet](#)) was the code name given to illegal immigration to [Mandatory Palestine](#) from 1920 to 1948 by [Jews](#), mostly from Europe. In the 1930s and 1940s, many were [refugees](#) escaping from [Nazi Germany](#) or other Nazi-controlled countries.^{[1][2]} In the postwar years, they included [Holocaust survivors](#).^{[1][3][4]} The later immigration to Palestine^[1] violated restrictions laid out in the British [White Paper of 1939](#), but nonetheless the numbers dramatically increased between 1939 and 1948.^[3] With the [establishment of the State of Israel](#) in May 1948, Jewish displaced persons and refugees from Europe began streaming into the new state in the midst of the [1948 Palestine war](#).^[3]

In modern-day [Israel](#), it has also been called by the Hebrew term **Ha'apala** (Hebrew: הַלְפָעָה, "Ascension"). Those who underwent Ha'apala are known as **Ma'apilim**. The *Aliyah Bet* is distinguished from the *Aliyah Aleph* ("Aliyah 'A'", [Aleph](#) being the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet), which refers to the limited Jewish immigration permitted by British authorities during the same period. The name *Aliya B* is also shortened for *Aliya Bilti Legalit* (Hebrew: תִּילֵאגְלִייתֵלֵב היילע, lit. 'illegal immigration').



The Palmach, Immigration to Israel

History

Over 100,000 people attempted to illegally enter Mandatory Palestine. There were 142 voyages by 120 ships. Over half were stopped by the British patrols. The [Royal Navy](#) had eight ships on station in Palestine, and additional ships were tasked with tracking suspicious vessels heading for Palestine. Most of the intercepted immigrants were sent to [internment camps](#) in [Cyprus](#): (Karaolos near [Famagusta](#), [Nicosia](#), [Dhekelia](#), and [Xylotymbou](#). Some were sent to the [Atlit detention camp](#) in Palestine, and some to [Mauritius](#). The British held as many as 50,000 people in these camps (see [Jews in British camps on Cyprus](#)). Over 1,600 drowned at sea. Only a few thousand actually entered Palestine.

The pivotal event in *Ha'apala* program was the [Exodus](#) incident in 1947. *Exodus* was intercepted and boarded by a [Royal Navy](#) patrol. Despite significant resistance, passengers from *Exodus* were forcibly returned to Europe, and eventually put in camps in Germany. This was publicized, to the great embarrassment of the British government.

One account of Aliyah Bet is given by journalist [I. F. Stone](#) in his 1946 book [Underground to Palestine](#), a first-person account of traveling from Europe with displaced persons attempting to reach the Jewish homeland.^[7]

More than 300 volunteers, most of them American World War II veterans, including [Murray Greenfield](#) (of the ship [HaTikva](#)), volunteered to sail ten ships ("The Jews' Secret Fleet") from the United States to Europe to load 35,000 survivors of the Holocaust (half of the illegal immigrants to Palestine), only to be deported to detention camps on Cyprus.

Before World War II

- In 1934, the first attempt to bring in a large number of illegal immigrants by sea happened when some 350 Jews sailed on the *Vallos*, a chartered ship, without the permission of the [Jewish Agency](#), who feared illegal immigration would cause the British to restrict legal immigration. She arrived off the coast of Palestine on 25 August, and the passengers disembarked with the help of the [Haganah](#), which received special permission to assist them.
- On 29 July 1939, the *Colorado*, flying under the Panamanian flag and carrying 378 Jewish refugees from Europe was intercepted by the British; the illegal immigrants were arrested and taken into Haifa.^[8]
- On 19 August, the *Aghios Nikolaus*, a Greek owned ship, transferred 840 immigrants to smaller vessels off the coast and sent them to shore.^[8]
- On 23 August, the *Parita*, carrying some 700 refugees on board, was deliberately beached at Tel Aviv by the passengers, the captain and crew having fled in a small boat.^[8]



SS *Parita* aground off Tel Aviv, August 1939



SS *Patria* sinking in Haifa port

During World War II

- On 2 September, the *Tiger Hill*, a 1,499-ton ship built in 1887, was intercepted and fired on by [Royal Navy](#) gunboats off [Tel Aviv](#), killing two passengers (Dr Robert Schneider and Zvi Binder); the ship HMCS *Belleville* beached on the shore with 1,205 immigrants on board; the *Tiger Hill* had sailed from [Constanța](#), Romania, on 3 August 1939, with about 750 immigrants on board and had taken on board the passengers from the *Frossoula*, another illegal immigrant ship that was marooned in [Lebanon](#).^{[8][9][10][11]}
- On 16 September, the *Rudnitchan* transferred 364 Jewish refugees into five lifeboats outside the territorial waters of the Mandate and sent them ashore as illegal immigrants.

[8]

- On 19 September, the *Noemi Julia*, sailing from Sulina in Romania with 1,130 Jewish refugees from Europe on board was intercepted in the Mediterranean by a British warship and forced to Haifa port; fearing that they would be sent back, the illegal immigrants engaged in passive resistance; the British authorities brought them ashore and held them in a detention camp; they were released a month later.[8][11]
- On 24–25 November 1939, a large group of immigrants traveled by train from [Vienna](#) to [Bratislava](#) and about 2 weeks later sailed from there on the riverboat *Uranus* down the [Danube](#). At the [Romanian](#) border, the three smaller riverboats to which they had been transferred on December 14 on entering [Yugoslavia](#) were intercepted and the immigrants were forced to disembark at the old fortress town of [Kladovo](#).^[12] About 1,100 refugees were stranded there and came to be known as the [Kladovo-Sabac Group](#). In May 1941, they were still in Yugoslavia, where 915 of them were caught and eventually killed by the invading Nazis. The 800 men were shot by Nazi soldiers in a farmer's field at Zasavica; after the war, the remains of the men were re-interred in a mass grave in the Belgrade Sephardi Cemetery. The women and children were imprisoned in the Sajmiste concentration camp where they perished from hunger, disease, exposure to the bitter cold winter weather, or gassed to death in a mobile gas truck.
- On 18 May 1940 the old Italian paddle steamer *Pencho* sailed from [Bratislava](#), with 514 passengers, mostly [Betar](#) members. The *Pencho* sailed down the [Danube](#) to the [Black Sea](#) and into the [Aegean Sea](#). On 9 October, her engines failed and she was wrecked off [Mytilene](#), in the Italian-ruled [Dodecanese](#) Islands. The Italians rescued the passengers and took them to [Rhodes](#). All but two were then placed in an internment camp at [Ferramonti di Tarsia](#) in southern Italy. They were held there until [Allied](#) forces liberated the area in September 1943.^[13]
- In October 1940, a large group of refugees were allowed to leave Vienna. The exodus was organized by Berthold Storfer, a Jewish businessman who worked under [Adolf Eichmann](#). They took four river boats, *Uranus*, *Schönbrunn*, *Helios*, and *Melk*, down the Danube to Romania, where the *Uranus* passengers, about 1,000, boarded the [Pacific](#), and sailed on 11 October 1940. They arrived at [Haifa](#) on 1 November, followed by the [Milos](#) a few days later. The British transferred all the immigrants to the French liner [SS Patria](#) to take them for internment to Mauritius. To stop the *Patria* from sailing, the [Haganah](#) smuggled a [bomb aboard](#). The explosion holed her side, capsizing her and killing around 260 people. The British, by order of [Winston Churchill](#), allowed the survivors to remain in Palestine.^[14]
- In December 1940 the *Salvador*, a small [Bulgarian](#) schooner formerly named *Tsar Krum*, left [Burgas](#) with 327 refugees. On December 12 the *Salvador* was wrecked in a violent storm in the [Sea of Marmara](#), near [Istanbul](#). 223 persons, including 66 children, lost their lives. The survivors were taken to Istanbul. 125 survivors were deported back to Bulgaria,

and the remaining 70 left on the *Darien* (No. 66).^[15]

- On 11 December 1941, the [Struma](#) sailed from [Constanța](#) carrying between 760 and 790 refugees. Three days later she reached Istanbul, where Turkey detained her and her passengers for 10 weeks. On 23 February 1942, Turkish authorities towed her back into the Black Sea and cast her adrift. Early the next day the [Shch-213 torpedoed and sank her](#). Between 767 and 791 people were killed, and there was only one survivor.^[16]
- On 20 September 1942, the *Europa* sailed from Romania with 21 passengers. She was wrecked in the [Bosphorus](#).
- On 21 April 1944, the *Belasitza* sailed from Romania with 273 passengers including 120 children, who went from Istanbul to Palestine by sealed train.
- On 5 August 1944, *Bulbul*, [Mefküre](#) and *Morino* sailed from Constanța carrying about 1,000 refugees between them. In the night the [Soviet submarine Shch-215](#) sank *Mefküre* by torpedo and shellfire, and then machine-gunned survivors in the water.^[17] Between 289 and 394 refugees plus seven crew were aboard *Mefküre*; only the crew and five refugees survived. *Bulbul* rescued the few survivors and took them to Turkey.^[1]



SS *Tiger Hill* aground off Haifa, September 1, 1939

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