

Fire in the hole: Blasting the Altalena by Joanna Saidel

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Sixty-five years after the Irgun ship was shelled by order of Ben-Gurion, with the loss of 16 lives, previously unpublished interviews with several interested parties underline how deeply the animosities over the affair still lingered decades later.



[Altalena off Tel-Aviv Beach](#)

Sixty-five years ago, on the night of June 20, 1948, the Irgun cargo ship, Altalena, was attacked by Israeli Navy gunboats off the coast of Kfar Vitkin. Sixteen men were killed and scores of others wounded, initially with small arms fire which progressed to heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The Altalena incident was a flashpoint between political rivals in Israel's earliest statehood days. The parties

involved were some of Israel's most renowned figures, and the animosity resulting from those hostilities remained profound many years later.

David Ben-Gurion initiated the action in an attempt to consolidate power. Shmuel Katz, later an adviser to prime minister Menachem Begin, subsequently charged that Ben-Gurion also wanted to eliminate Begin, then the Irgun leader. (Katz was not present at the time.) If so, Begin evidently forgave him; in June 1967, Begin was part of a delegation which urged Ben-Gurion to return to the premiership.

The chain of command ran via Yigal Allon to Yitzhak Rabin, commander of the Palmach's Harel Brigade. Decades later, the specifics of the attack, and the circumstances that led to it, were still bitterly disputed – largely on the basis of political affiliation – as the material below underlines. It includes excerpts from extensive interviews I conducted with the former foreign minister and ambassador Abba Eban, prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, and prime minister Begin's adviser Katz.

But first, some context.

During the wrenched days of World War II, as the Allied Powers fought the Nazis, primarily in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific, another war was taking place, a quieter war but an important one nonetheless. This was the Jewish war for independence from British Mandate rule in Palestine. Varying approaches were employed which resulted in a concerted effort to dismantle the status quo of the day. Current major political parties such as Labor and Likud (formerly Herut) can find their roots in the factions which led this effort, primarily the Haganah and the Irgun. Facing the British stranglehold on Jewish immigration by edict of the infamous "White Paper," the Haganah approach was a slow, methodical movement toward independence, while supporting illegal immigration operations and, simultaneously, backing the British in their war effort against the Axis Powers. As Ben-Gurion famously put it, "We shall fight the war against Hitler as if there were no White Paper, and we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war."

The Irgun, on the other hand, and particularly its more extreme faction, Lehi, favored the use of military force to evict the British from Palestine. Its method was to attack the British while they were weak and stretched to the limit – that is, during the World War. Two major assassination plots were carried out by the Irgun under the leadership of Yitzhak Shamir: the murders of Lord Moyne and Count Bernadotte. Following the Moyne operation in 1944, Haganah leader Ben-Gurion labeled the Irgun as “the enemy of the Jewish people.” The Haganah joined the British in rounding up Irgun members – kidnapping, interrogating, and deporting them to prison camps in Africa, particularly in Carthago, Sudan and in Sembel, Eritrea. This action was known as “La Saison,” or “The Hunting Season.” Shamir was among those deported to Eritrea.

‘What Abba Eban may have been hinting at is his acceptance of the idea that the Altalena was an act of rebellion against the provisional government – which was nonsense!’

By 1947, Shamir was part of a group who dug a 200-foot tunnel and escaped to Djibouti. With the help of the Irgun, he made his way to Paris where he was granted political asylum. In Paris, Irgun High Command member Shmuel Katz helped organize a cargo ship full of arms and fighting men to assist the Irgun in Palestine. On this ship was another of Israel’s later prime ministers, Begin, who had ordered the bombing of the British military headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946. With the declaration of statehood two years later, Ben-Gurion and Begin began intense negotiations which broke down despite an agreement that 20% of the arms would go to the Irgun’s ongoing struggle in Jerusalem – which was not yet under Israeli government control – while the rest would go to non-Irgun units as well as to a few Irgun battalions in the IDF.

The Atlalena, commandeered by captain Monroe Fine and military commander Eliahu Lankin, reached the shores of Kfar Vitkin on June 20, 1948. Ben-Gurion demanded that Begin, who was in charge of this Irgun operation, hand over the weapons and the ship. The decision was made to attack the ship if the following ultimatum was not complied with. It stated:

To: M. Begin

By special order from the Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, I am empowered to confiscate the weapons and military materials which have arrived on the Israeli coast in the area of my jurisdiction in the name of the Israel Government. I have been authorized to demand that you hand over the weapons to me for safekeeping and to inform you that you should establish contact with the supreme command. You are required to carry out this order immediately. If you do not agree to carry out this order, I shall use all the means at my disposal in order to implement the order and to requisition the weapons which have reached shore and transfer them from private possession into the possession of the Israel government. I wish to inform you that the entire area is surrounded by fully armed military units and armored cars, and all roads are blocked. I hold you fully responsible for any consequences in the event of your refusal to carry out this order. The immigrants – unarmed – will be permitted to travel to the camps in accordance with your arrangements. You have ten minutes to give me your answer.

D.E., Brigade Commander

Begin refused to comply. The ship was attacked. Yitzhak Rabin, under the command of Ben-Gurion, gave the order to fire the cannon which ignited the Altalena in flames.



The view from the shore. (photo credit: Israel Government Press Office)

It has been charged that Begin's actions were part of a conspiracy to overthrow the government by force. Altalena military commander, Elyahu Lankin, counter-charged that "the accusation of a conspiracy to overthrow the Government of the State of Israel is the most vicious and the least credible of the claims leveled by Ben-Gurion's faction."

Begin himself had stated his support for a Provisional Government and the disbanding of the Irgun. On May 15, 1948, he had made an emotional speech in which he pledged loyalty to the new government, saying, "The Irgun is leaving the underground inside the boundaries of the Hebrew independent State. We went underground, we arose in the underground, under a rule of oppression in order to strike at oppression and to overthrow it. And right well we have struck. Now, for the time being, we have a Hebrew rule in part of our homeland. And as in this part there will be Hebrew Law – and that is the only rightful law in this country – there is no need for a Hebrew underground. In the State of Israel we shall be soldiers and builders. And we shall respect its government, for it is our government."

Thus, the animosity between Begin and Ben-Gurion was set aside in the public sphere. Begin took a position of humility, handing the reins over to Israel's first prime minister.

While the bombing of the Altalena is generally considered a tragedy, some think otherwise. On September 6, 1993, as part of my doctoral research, I conducted an interview with former Israeli ambassador to the UN Abba Eban which, in part, dealt with his perception of the Altalena affair. The following are excerpts from that interview.

Saidel: How about the Altalena incident? Do you have any comment on that?

Eban: Yes. I was then in the United Nations and I must say that whatever the effects, the wounds are still fresh. The international effects were certainly beneficial because the fight then was – Israel had already been established as a state but the problem of recognition was very sticky.



Abba Eban and David Ben-Gurion light a menorah with President Truman in the Oval Office, May 8, 1951. (photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Office of Presidential Libraries. Harry S. Truman Library)

And one of the arguments against was that there was no proof that the Provisional Government of Israel, as we then called it, really had authority, or full authority, and Ben-Gurion's action was really

related to the need to secure a minimal degree of recognition with which to live in the international context. You cannot live simply as a state with no international connections, and he asserted, really, the sovereignty of Israel. And it was one of his most dramatic, one of his most courageous, but also one of his most, I would say, poignant actions and, after that, the Provisional Government of Israel became respected as **the** government of Israel, because you can't be a government unless you have a monopoly of violence. Once you have two armies in a country, then that means that neither of them can be a government. It becomes a Lebanon with militias, like now (1993).

...And his logic was that, unless you have the army under a single jurisdiction you couldn't honestly say that you were a state. Now, he even applied that unto his own camp because he also went on and he liquidated the separate Palmach. In other words, his obsession with a unified Israel defense force took him into combat with both the left and the right. To the right against what he called the Porishim, the seceders, and to the left the Palmach. In 1947, he was obsessed with idea of how to force the right-wing resistance under his own sway.

Saidel: So would you consider him the father of the IDF then?

Eban: Yes. When I came in to see him to tell him that we had... I produced, I brought to him, the UNSCOP report on the establishment of a Jewish state. He was in Zurich. I went to Zurich to talk and he almost showed no interest. He just said, "Got to finish with the Porishim, got to finish with them, got to finish with them."

I said, "Prime Minister" – he wasn't even Prime Minister – I said, "Ben-Gurion, listen, this is an important report." In other words, he was obsessed in 1947 and, of course, the murder of Bernadotte played into his hands to that extent because then, he proceeded with full fury against the separatism of the Irgun and the Lehi and he brought the Irgun under unified Zionist command. Then Begin made his famous parade speech. There was a parade in which he handed the Irgun over to the provisional government.

Shamir – the hardliner weighs in

On October 25, 1993, I continued my series of interviews. I sat down with former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir in his office at the Knesset in Jerusalem, where we spoke about his role in the Altalena incident. I was curious what he would say about the comments of Eban, knowing that Shamir has been a dedicated Irgun / Lehi operative and, later, a Likud hardliner.

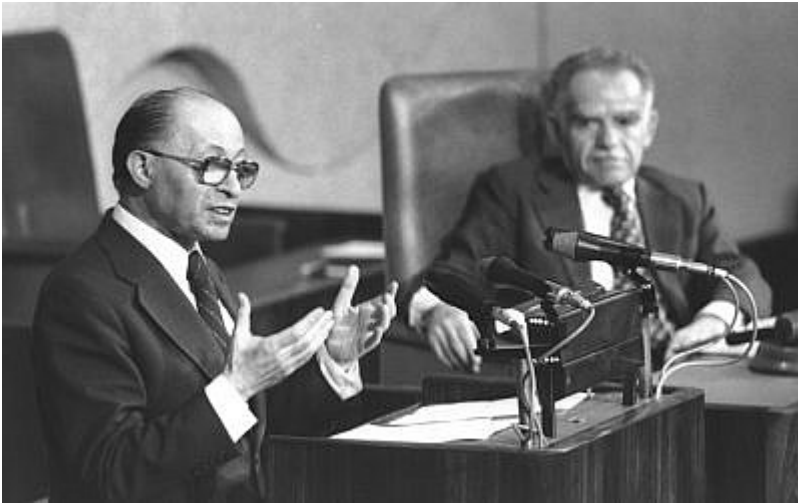
Shamir: Well, the Altalena was an operation organized by the group of Hillel Kook in France. And especially by a man who worked with this group by the name of Ariel, Shmuel Ariel. He died here in Jerusalem a few years ago. He was a good friend of mine. And this man, Ariel, had excellent relations with the French government. And by his connections with the French Army, and the French government, and especially with the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, they concluded, he concluded on behalf of the Irgun, a treaty with the French government for cooperation, cooperation with the aim of supporting the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel. And the first operation in this direction was the organization of this ship, Altalena. It was a ship, a rescue ship, with some few thousands of Jewish refugees, young refugees, who were interested in coming to Israel and in serving in the Israeli army in this war with the Arabs. And the French army decided to give it a pretty large quantity of arms. This was Altalena.

..France was sympathetic to the Jewish national liberation movement and particularly the work of the Irgun. This attitude was for overtly political reasons. The French government had been outraged by the fact that Britain had usurped French hegemony in Syria and Lebanon, siding with the Arabs against France.

Saidel: Was there a deal? Did Ben-Gurion know about...

Shamir: Ben-Gurion? Ben-Gurion?

Saidel: I read the book... that said that eighty percent of the arms were supposed to go to the Haganah.



Begin and Shamir – on dry land. (photo credit: Israel Government Press Office)

Shamir: Yes. Yes. But the initiative was of this group, Ariel, Hillel Kook, all these people. But Begin, here in Israel, informed the government that we will bring such a ship to Tel Aviv in the next few weeks or months, and they bargained, they made a bargain about giving a part of the arms, for Jerusalem, for the Etzel Irgun in Jerusalem... because Jerusalem was not yet a part of the State of Israel. According to the United Nations decisions, Jerusalem was designated to be an international city. And, therefore, the Irgun proposed to the Israeli government – it was the provisional government at this time – to give the greater part of the arms to the army, to the existing army, Zahal, as we call it. And part of it, twenty percent or so, for Jerusalem. The government agreed? Or did not agree? It's not clear yet. It's not clear. Because there have been talks with, not with Ben-Gurion himself. The talks have been with various emissaries of Ben-Gurion – that was Galili, and there were others. And before the ship arrived here, on the beach of Netanya, Ben-Gurion changed his mind and asked the Irgun to give up, to the army, to give to the army all the arms! The ship with all the arms! With all the contents of the ship! And, well, the people with Begin have not agreed and, therefore, came this confrontation. That's it.

Saidel: What did you think of what happened?

Shamir: Look. Well, it was a tragedy. It was a tragedy. It could be avoided. But the relations had been such... of such a character, that

the parties have not been able to agree, to come to an understanding. Ben-Gurion was a very hard, a very... you know... (says something in Hebrew). Like me. Like...

(Shamir's aide chimes in and translates: "Very tough. Hard man. Hard person.")

Shamir: Not tough. There is a special description of such a... He was very...

Saidel: Determined?

Shamir: Not determined. Not determined. It's a special word. A man who stands on his views, on his mind, and is not ready to... to... to make any change and to compromise.

Saidel: This probably won't surprise you, but Abba Eban also said that he thought that the move by Ben-Gurion to blow up the Altalena was a good thing because it consolidated the power and made Israel viable in the international community.

Shamir: It was Abba Eban's view.

Saidel: Yes, I know. I just want you to comment on that.

Shamir: And it doesn't surprise me. But it was not necessary for the prestige of Israel. It was necessary for the outside world. A compromise could be very helpful. Why not?! Yes. It was practical but... *intransigent!* Voila! This is the word! And all of these people who have been intransigent, Begin on one side, Ben-Gurion on the other side... and Ben-Gurion at this time thought that he has to create a normal state, and that all existing views and groups have to be unified under his command. And he did the same with the Palmach. It was a part of his Haganah. But that comes afterward. But this was the line. This was the policy of Ben-Gurion. But it was not absolutely necessary and Rabin was, at this time, in charge of this small unit who bombarded, that bombarded the ship!

Saidel: Oh, really.

Shamir: Yeah. They called it, they called it the “Holy Gun”!

Jewish cannons shelling a Jewish ship

Rabin had joined the elite Haganah unit, Palmach, in 1940. He was in charge of the Harel Brigade in 1948, under the command of senior IDF general, Yigal Allon. In a 2011 article, President Shimon Peres recalled the incident this way. Allon “ordered a cannon deployed. Yitzhak Rabin was in command of it. The first shell fell wide, but the second struck the vessel. Fire broke out in the hold. Those on board began to abandon ship. (It stood barely one hundred yards from the beach.) But before they could all do so, an explosion tore through the ship, destroying it. Sixteen Etzel men and three IDF soldiers died in the episode; dozens more were wounded.”

The ship was repaired, altered, and loaded with cargo – ammunition and explosives. They set sail in the evening on June 11, with 850 passengers singing ‘HaTikvah’ as it departed

Archival material from Machal (overseas volunteers in the War of Independence) contains the testimony of Hillel Daleski, son of the Vice-Chairman of the South African Revisionist Party. Hillel was a Haganah recruit who had been in what was still called Palestine for only two months. He was under the command of Rabin, who ordered him to fire the artillery cannon that destroyed the Altalena. When he refused to fire, Daleski was threatened with court-martial. He fired. Years later, in an interview, he commented, “If only the Altalena episode could be expunged from my memory for all time”.

Following the incident, Ben-Gurion made a speech in which he is quoted as having said, “Blessed be the cannon that bombed that ship!”

According to the eyewitness account of the captain of the ship, Monroe Fine, the Altalena had been marking time until May 24, 1948, by running commercially between Marseilles and Casablanca, carrying fruit, vegetables, and general cargo as an ordinary merchant vessel, of the shipping company, Three-Star Line Inc. of New York. In late May, negotiations for the sale of the ship resulted in its purchase by the Irgun. It was moved from Marseilles to Port du Buc, and from there

to a coal dock in Caronte. The ship was repaired, altered, and loaded with cargo – ammunition and explosives.

The ship set sail at 8:30 in the evening on June 11 with 850 passengers singing “HaTikvah” as it departed. The plan was for the ship to land at the foot of Frishman Street in Tel Aviv where it would be unloaded. However, one day before their arrival, they were instructed to go to Kfar Vitkin instead. They reached there at 3:30 a.m. on June 19th. Rough seas resulted in the postponement of unloading until the following night, when, at 9:00 p.m., the ship unloaded passengers, including women and a number of sick persons. Next they began to unload the cargo using lifeboats.

As Fine puts it, “At some time during the night, we noticed that two unidentified ships had taken up positions about one mile to seaward, but as they made no attempt to interfere with our operation, we contented ourselves with watching them closely until daylight... At daybreak we identified the ships as corvettes of the Israel Navy and consequently paid very little attention to them the rest of that time.”

The crew of the Altalena continued unloading the ship throughout the day until late afternoon when they were instructed, without explanation, to suspend activity briefly. At this time, only 20% of the cargo had been unloaded. Small arms fire erupted from the beach, taking the crew by surprise. Thinking they were under attack by Arabs they decided to try to get the ship out to sea. There were now only about thirty people on board. Monroe Fine recalls: “Suddenly, and without any warning whatsoever, both corvettes opened fire on the Altalena with heavy machine-guns. We were completely unprepared for such an attack and could not begin to return fire.”

The Altalena was signaled by the corvettes to proceed to Tel Aviv, which it began to do. The captain attempted to stay on the shore side of the corvettes, in hope that they would be close to population centers and not be fired upon again or driven out to sea. They succeeded in reaching Tel Aviv and believed there was not much danger of further attack. However, as they began to move southward toward

Frishman Street, they were fired on again. "After the second burst of machine-gun fire from the corvette, we were forced to give answering fire with the Bren-guns mounted on our deck. We fired one burst and then both ships ceased firing."

Eventually negotiations began but stalemated. A crowd began to gather on the beach. Two boatloads of men went ashore to prepare to continue unloading cargo but gunfire erupted once again. "The fact that the crew of the boat was waving a white flag did not seem to diminish the firing." The ship continued to receive "heavy firing from the shore for a period of about one-and-a-half hours. Some of the heavy machine-guns ashore were using armor-piercing ammunition which passed right through steel bulkheads of the ship. This fact began to cause us numerous casualties."



The ship goes down. (photo credit: Israel Government Press Office)

A cease fire was arranged – but not adhered to – by the Palmach, despite the white flag being raised on the ship. Shortly thereafter "there was a direct hit on the ship which started a large fire in the cargo-hold. The ship's crew made immediate and valiant efforts to put

out this fire, but because of the nature of the cargo it proved beyond our capacity, and I ordered all men aboard to prepare to abandon the ship." Some men jumped off and attempted to swim ashore under fire. "I rushed to the bridge and began waving a white flag... At the same time another man hoisted a large piece of white canvas on the halyard, but these efforts were of little avail, as the firing continued." Men both on the ship and ashore attempted to help the wounded. As more and more explosions erupted within the ship it became "highly dangerous to remain on the ship any longer, all men were ordered over the side, and the ship left burning and exploding violently."

The ship continued to burn for several days.

This testimony of Monroe Fine is corroborated by another crew member, Jerry Salaman, who adds that "Menachem Begin pleaded to the Haganah not to fight us. He also wanted to make a compromise on the arms. All guns on ship ordered not to open fire and all ammunition taken out of guns. Men were told not to fire at any cause." Salaman's testimony verified how the fighting broke out, how the white flags were displayed, and how the captain ordered all hands to abandon ship. Salaman was wounded but managed to make it ashore.

Captain Fine's account is further corroborated by crew member Michael Brecker who, in his memoirs, writes that Begin was the target: "Way out at sea, I noticed two small Israeli corvette gunboats, the Wedgwood and the Haganah. The Wedgwood was commanded by Captain Paul Shulman, a Jewish ex-US Navy officer who later became commander of the Israel Navy. To my horror, heavy machine-gun fire started to break out on shore, flying over us. With hindsight, I suspected that the Wedgwood had opened fire to stop us unloading, and instead of firing short, had overshot us and hit the Haganah troops who were now surrounding the beachhead and us, but I believe it was because they were aware that Begin was on board. Casualties occurred."

Brecker recalls meeting Rabin years later: "When I had the privilege of meeting Rabin at the Machal Memorial Dedication reunion in 1993, I told him where we had last met, at the Altalena, and he threw up his hands and with a wry smile of dismay, cried out, "Oh my, we could well

have done without that!"

On November 2, 1993, I further discussed the Altalena incident with Shmuel Katz at his home in Tel Aviv. Katz was an author, historian, member of the First Knesset of Israel, Irgun emissary of Ze'ev Jabotinsky and his biographer. He was a founding member of the Herut party and, later, adviser to Begin. I began the conversation by mentioning Ben-Gurion.

Saidel: Ben-Gurion didn't like the Irgun too much, did he?

Katz: That's a very, very great understatement. No. He tried to kill us.

Saidel: Do you think he was aware, when he blew up the Altalena...? There's a question as to whether he knew about the deal between the Haganah and the Irgun.

Katz: Oh! No question. He knew all about it.

Saidel: He knew that...

Katz: Look. I have written my book, *Days of Fire*; I don't know whether it came through in the English edition. I wrote deliberately that the Altalena was blown up not because we had so many ships. We could do with one ship less. But because Mr. Ben-Gurion wanted to kill Begin who was on the ship -- and so I expected to be sued or to be tried for libel.

Saidel: Nobody said anything?

Katz: There were some secret meetings in which I was attacked, but nobody came forth to say "This is libel, this is slander." And the fact is that I explained why I thought so. It seems quite obvious that they didn't have... anything like such a ship. It wasn't such a great ship. It was the best thing we had. It was offered to the government. It wasn't to say that we were going to use it further. The idea was to bring it. This was part of the original agreement with them.

Saidel: Eighty percent of the arms were supposed to go to the Haganah,

right?

Katz: Once it was taken off, the ship would be presented to the government. I have no doubt about it. As I said, I wrote about it – there was nobody else on board. All of the people except a handful, and they were killed, by the way – I think sixteen boys were killed on that ship... We don't know whether all the arms were taken off or not. Nobody knows whether we got all the arms off at Kfar Vitkin because that is where we brought the arms. Why did Altalena come to Kfar Vitkin? It wasn't an Irgun center. We wanted to bring the boat to Tel Aviv and get a whole lot of Irgun people to help unload it. But the agreement with Haganah said: *No. Kfar Vitkin*. Which was the center of the Labor Party. Why would we go there at all? And the arms were not in the hands of the people who came off the boat. The arms were in boxes which landed in Greece. And the people who were on the boat were taken off and sent to various parts of the country.

Saidel: What was your role in all this?

Katz: My role was not in the country. My role was in Paris.

Saidel: You were still in Europe.

Katz: Yeah. I stayed in Paris.

Saidel: Abba Eban said that he thought it was a good thing that the Altalena was blown up.

Katz: Alright. Why?

Saidel: Because it consolidated power into the hands of Ben-Gurion, therefore giving the State credibility in the international arena, and so forth. Could you comment on that?

Katz: Well, the first comment I'd make is, *Away with the bastard!* Everything that concerned him was international community, which he thought was in his pocket. Now it was in his pocket in the sense that he was in *their* pocket. And it shows you, here is a man who says that it's good to kill so many Jews because this consolidated... it shows he's an evil man. That statement itself – he doesn't have to say that!

Ben-Gurion's authority in the State was not consolidated because the Altalena was blown up. He was a Prime Minister after all... and nobody was attacking his authority.

...What Abba Eban may have been hinting at is his acceptance of the idea that the Altalena was an act of rebellion against the provisional government – which was nonsense! We had an agreement with them. No. You see, Abba Eban is a pathological liar. He always was. And if you were to bring Mr. Eban here I would tell him, maybe he doesn't know. He's a liar. He's dishonest and he's a terrific blower to his own trumpet. Even when it's not justified. Is this all being recorded?

Saidel: Yes.

Katz: Good! Abba Eban, in his policy, he was famous for claiming that he had secured agreements with some element abroad, whether it's American or British or whatever. The fact is he *had* secured agreements by the simple procedure of taking... or *accepting* their view. So he made agreements with them (laughs) and came back and said that it was he who had persuaded them, when it was the other way around. And so, even in his own party, Abba Eban's policy was described as that of the man who fires his shot and then goes along to find it, to see where the bullet hit and he draws a target around that point. That was exactly, an exact description of his behavior as a Foreign Minister.

Enemies, but not for life

Katz had been a member of the Irgun High Command, and had transported correspondence from Begin to Irgun members in Paris, regarding plans for the Altalena mission, via "diplomatic pouch" – which was actually by the insertion of typewritten messages on very thin paper, placed in the soles of Katz's shoes. These messages were directed to Eliyahu Lankin. Shamir also knew Lankin well. Both had been interred by the British in the detention camp in Eritrea. After a number of attempts, Lankin managed to escape, finding his way to Paris, where he assisted in the eventual escape of Shamir from Djibouti. Lankin later commandeered the Altalena to Kfar Vitkin.

In the aftermath of the Altalena incident, approximately 200 Irgun

fighters were arrested but released within months. The ship was towed out to sea and sunk. Notwithstanding the charge that Ben-Gurion attempted to have Begin eliminated, Begin has stated that his greatest accomplishment was not retaliating, which he believed would have caused a civil war. He stated that he refused to open fire or return fire because he he would not fight other Jews. He is quoted as saying, "A war between brothers, *never*." In fact, in June 1967, he was part of a delegation which urged Ben-Gurion to return to the premiership.

Following that meeting, Ben-Gurion remarked that had he known Begin at the time of the Altalena as he did in 1967, history would have been very different.

A stone memorial to the 16 Irgun members killed in the Altalena affair stands by the beach in Tel Aviv.

A project is underway to find and raise the ship, Altalena. The Menachem Begin Heritage Center received NIS 200,000 (roughly \$50,000) in subsidies from the Israeli government for initial exploration to locate the wreck. The search began with the disappointing discovery that the presumed coordinates were incorrect. The Begin Center charges that they may have been falsified in an attempt to thwart recovery efforts. After expanding the search area, an acoustic signature matching that of the Altalena was located in 300 meters of water off the Jaffa coast. In December 2012, it was reported that the discovery had been confirmed. The wreck will be photographed to assess its condition. It will, most likely, and perhaps ironically, be raised by the Israeli Navy.

By: Joanna Saidel

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For more information on the Altalena attack, including eye-witness testimonies, see [World Machal](#) and the [Jabotinsky Institute In Israel](#).