

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE JEWISH LEGION

THE BIRTH OF THE IDF



By Jerry Klinger

If we defend ourselves, we are attacked. If we don't defend ourselves we are attacked. What is worse? When those attacking Jews for defending themselves are the Jews themselves – Judith Rice

A Father's Blessing

Go, my child, and prepare the way for the liberation of your unhappy people. Go, and let your courage make your people proud. As for you, O my child, my wish is that you may rise higher and higher, until you attain the heights of Judah Maccabee. May your name be perpetuated to the end of time as a source of pride to our family and our people. I thank you, my beloved son, for having brought me so much honor. May you be able before long to receive your mother and me in the land where the sun is so warm and bright. I also wish your comrades, the heroes of the Jewish Legion, who are leaving with you on February 28, 1918, that the Guardian of Israel may watch over them and you and protect all of you so that you may reach England safely. Then, I am sure, you will fulfill the holy mission you have undertaken.

¹ A recruitment poster published in American Jewish magazines. Daughter of Zion (representing the Jewish people): 'Your Old New Land must have you! Join the Jewish regiment.'

H. Gordon, New London, Connecticut²

Gordon's son, 17 year old Maurice, was too young to serve in the American armed forces. With his parents blessing, he volunteered at the British recruiting office in New York to serve with the 39th Royal Fusiliers to liberate Palestine from the Turks. The 39th was part of what later would be known as the Jewish Legion.

British establishment Jewry was bitterly against the first Jewish fighting unit in 2,000 years.

Colonel John Henry Patterson was the commanding officer of the 38th Royal Fusiliers, the first unit of the Jewish Legion. Encountering a prominent British Jewish leader bitterly against the Legion Patterson wrote later:

"I happened by chance one day to meet a prominent member of the Sanballat³ deputation to the War Office, and, in the course of conversation, I asked him why he objected so strongly to the formation of a Jewish Regiment. He replied that he had no faith in the Russian Jews, and feared they would bring discredit on Jewry. I said that, from what I have seen in Gallipoli of the Jew from Russia, I had more faith in him than he had, and that I felt confident I could make him into a good soldier. He was kind enough to remark, *"Well, perhaps under you they will turn out to be good soldiers, but then they might win Palestine, and I don't want to be sent there to live."*⁴

The Jewish Legion was the name for five battalions of Jewish volunteers established as the British Army's 38th through 42nd (Service) Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers. The initial unit, known as the Zion Mule Corps, was formed in 1914-1915 during World War I, when Britain was at war against the Ottoman Turks, as Zionists around the world saw an opportunity to promote the idea of a Jewish National Homeland.

² War and Hope, A History of the Jewish Legion, Elias Gilner, Herzl Press, 1969 pg. 167

³ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=S&artid=218>

⁴ The Seven Lives of Colonel Patterson, Denis Brian, Syracuse University Press, 2008, pg. 125



Joseph Trumpeldor

Vladimir Jabotinsky

In December 1914, Zeev Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor raised the idea of the formation of a Jewish unit that would participate in the British military effort to conquer Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, and by the end of March 1915, 500 Jewish volunteers from the Jews in Egypt who had been deported there by the Turks had started training. The Zion Mule Corps served on the Gallipoli front, as for political reasons the British opposed the participation of Jewish volunteers on the Palestinian front, but ultimately, in August 1917, the formation of a Jewish regiment was officially announced. The soldiers of the 38th and 39th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers, made up almost entirely of Jews from Britain, Russia, the United States and Canada and later, the 40th Battalion, composed of Jews from the Ottoman provinces of Palestine and other areas, served in the Jordan Valley and fought the Turks some 20 miles north of Jerusalem.⁵

“Vladimir Jabotinsky was born in Odessa, Russian in 1880. He was raised in a Jewish middle-class home and educated in Russian schools. While he took Hebrew lessons as a child, Jabotinsky wrote in his autobiography that his upbringing was divorced from Jewish faith and tradition.

Jabotinsky's talents as a journalist became apparent even before he finished high school. His first writings were published in Odessa newspapers when he was 16. Upon graduation he was sent to Bern, Switzerland and later to Italy as a reporter for the Russian press. He wrote under the pseudonym "Altalena" (the Italian word for 'swing'; see also Altalena Affair). While abroad, he also studied law at the University of Rome, but it was only upon his return to Russia that he qualified as an attorney. His dispatches from Italy earned him recognition as one of the

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Legion

brightest young Russian-language journalists: he later edited newspapers in Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew.”⁶

In 1903, when he witnessed the shattering aftermath of the Kishinev pogrom, Jabotinsky realized that a Jew would never be more than a despised stepson in Russia. “When rumors reached him of impending excesses in Dubossary, a small town ear Odessa, he helped to organize one of the first Jewish self-defense groups Russia. The dreaded massacre did not take place, but Jabotinsky had taken his first step as an active participant in Jewish life. It was then that he first began to frequent the Besyeda Club. Zionism was beginning to claim his serious interest; and the Jewish people and its heritage became his main concern.”⁷

“His interviews with the leading Young Turks had convinced him of the futility of political negotiations with them. He realized that Zionists could expect no more from that regime than they could from the crafty, grasping old Sultan. No large commercial transactions and no amount of substantial bribes would induce the Turks to grant the Jews the autonomous status they were seeking in Palestine. The Turks, themselves a minority in the far-flung Ottoman Empire, could not risk aggravating the threat to their hegemony by granting independence to the Jews.”⁸

Herzlian Zionism centered on the proposal that the Jews would assume the Turkish debt in return for autonomy in Palestine. Jabotinsky knew it would never work. He knew that only a conflict, with Turkey on the losing side and the Jews on the victorious side, would change the future of Zionism.

The politics of international arrogance provided the catalyst.

Germany invaded Belgium August, 1914. October 28, 1914, Turkey joined Germany, linking its forces in an Axis of power. Russia, France and Britain allied themselves against the Axis.

Russian forces broke across Central Europe toward Germany, through the Pale of Jewish settlement, racing to create a second front for the Germans. Jewish communities along the battlefield were ravaged by both German and Russian armies. The Russian army was particularly vicious with the Jews in its path, looting, murdering, raping and then deporting en-mass Jews. Starvation, desperation and death became the Jewish reality. Ultimately a mini-Holocaust with the death of hundreds of thousands of Jews ensued.

Jewish communities in the West did what they could – protest.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ze'ev_Jabotinsky

⁷ War and Hope, A History of the Jewish Legion, pg. 16

⁸ Ibid. pg. 17

Jabotinsky was a journalist in Belgium when the German invasion began. He escaped to France and followed the fleeing French government to Bordeaux when the news of the Turkish alliance came through. He was elated.

“A Jewish Legion, fighting on the side of the Allies would spell the beginning of the end of this persecution. Jabotinsky did not yet know how to give his idea flesh and blood, but it was imperative for him to get supporters and fighting men. Time and again he was rebuffed, but undaunted; he traveled to Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. On December 14, 1914, he was on his way to Alexandria; casting about for ways of recruiting men for the Legion....The Turkish regime unwittingly came to Jabotinsky’s aid. On December 14, 1914, claiming exigencies of war – a substantial number of Palestine’s Jews were of Russian origin and hence enemy aliens – the Turks issued an edict expelling these Jews from Palestine.”⁹

“Joseph Trumpeldor was born in Pyatigorsk, Russia. His father, Wulf Trumpeldor, served as a cantonist in the Caucasian War, and as a "useful Jew", was allowed to settle outside the Pale of Settlement. Though proudly Jewish, Trumpeldor's upbringing was more Russian than traditionally Jewish. Originally in training as a dentist, Joseph Trumpeldor volunteered for the Russian army in 1902. During the Russo-Japanese War, he participated in the siege of Port Arthur, where he lost his left arm to shrapnel. He spent a hundred days in the hospital recovering, but elected to complete his service. Trumpeldor was truly dedicated to his country. When he was questioned about his decisions and told that he was heavily advised not to continue fighting given his handicap, he responded "but i still have another arm to give to the motherland". When Port Arthur surrendered, Trumpeldor went into Japanese captivity. He spent his time printing a newspaper on Jewish affairs and organized history, geography and literature classes. He also befriended several prisoners who shared his desire of founding a communal farm in Palestine. On return from captivity, he moved to St. Petersburg. Trumpeldor subsequently received four decorations for bravery including the Cross of St. George, which made him the most decorated Jewish soldier in Russia. In 1906 he became the first Jew in the army to receive an officer's commission.

Due to his handicap he began to study law. He gathered a group of young Zionists around him and in 1911 they emigrated to Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. When World War I broke out, being an enemy national, he was deported to Egypt.¹⁰

Though the Yishuv professed loyalty to the Turks and offered their young men to serve in the Turkish army, Palestinian Jews were increasingly terrorized by the Turkish and Arab majority. Eventually, 11,000 brutalized Palestinian Jews passed through Alexandria seeking safety. Many other Palestinian Jews began fleeing for their lives, abandoning their homes and dreams of Zionism.

⁹ Ibid. pg. 21

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Trumpeldor

Turkey may have been known as the sick man of Europe but her leaders still had visions of military expansion and Empire. Mid-January 1915, Jamal Pasha, the ambitious military ruler of Palestine, assembled an army to invade British Egypt and conquer the Suez Canal for Turkey. He gathered 35,000 troops from Syria and another 20,000 from Mosul. His plan was direct. He would invade through the Sinai desert and attack across the Canal before the British could react. Jamal Pasha relied upon Arab "intelligence" sources, giving British General Maxwell false information, to keep him in the dark.

A Christian Dominican Monk, Abu Zuzan, was able to warn the British as the Turkish army neared.

February 2-4, 1915, Jamal Pasha's army was crushed by British artillery and combined British and French naval forces. He struggled back, badly bloodied but not submissive. He still controlled Palestine from the Sinai to Damascus.

As the Jewish refugees arrived in Alexandria throughout December, the British erected two refugee camps for them, Gabbari and Mafruza. Conditions were difficult and the British did the best they could for the refugees. Every few days, fresh boat loads of desperate Jews arrived from Palestine. Some were transported from Jaffa on the U.S.S Tennessee, an American armored cruiser that had been sent to the area to protect American citizens.

Jabotinsky arrived at the camps late in December. 1,500 Palestinian Jewish refugees had already arrived. He immediately began organizing them, becoming a very useful liaison for the British. March 3, 1915, he called a meeting of Palestinian Jewish leaders in the Gabbari Barracks. The purpose of the meeting was to create a Jewish response to the Turkish banishment from Palestine. At the meeting Jabotinsky met the one armed Trumpeldor. The meeting was stormy. But the Jewish leadership "voted to recruit, from among the young men in the camps, a Jewish unit to fight on the side of the British Army on the Palestinian front for the liberation of Eretz Yisrael.

....One week later, 200 young men met in a converted stable in Mafruza to consider their options. Jabotinsky argued, "It is impossible to sit here with folded arms and subsist on charity. On the other hand, there is no doubt that sooner or later the British will march on Palestine. The news from Jaffa is dismal. The Turks forbade Hebrew signs. Although he is German born, they deported Dr. Arthur Ruppin, writer, sociologist and director of the Zionist movement. Meir Dizengoff and other Jewish leaders were arrested. It was decreed to prohibit Jewish immigration after the War. Well, then..."¹¹ 180 volunteers stepped forward immediately.

A new committee was organized, including Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor who was described as "tall, broad-shouldered, lean, with tranquil Nordic features and a special touch of dignity lent

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 37

by his empty sleeve, Trumpeldor could not fail to impress the British administrators"¹². They left for Alexandria to present their case to General Maxwell.

General Maxwell's response was bitterly disappointing.

"I have heard nothing of an offensive against Palestine,' he said,' and I doubt whether such an offensive will be launched at all. Also, the law doesn't admit foreign soldiers into the British Army. I can make only one suggestion – that your young men enlist in a mule transport unit for some other sector of the Turkish front. I cannot do more than that."¹³

Jabotinsky was insulted. He wanted to be a soldier, not a mule driver. He wanted to fight in a Jewish unit, not be a backup for others. Trumpeldor, the experienced soldier, understood what Maxwell was saying to them. He understood that Maxwell could not tell them what, where and when the British plans were developing. They wanted men. He was offering them an opportunity.

Trumpeldor told Jabotinsky, after they left Maxwell, "to get the Turks out of Palestine, we've got to smash the Turk, on which front you begin smashing is a question of tactics. Any front leads to Zion."¹⁴

The arguments between Jabotinsky, Trumpeldor and the committee continued bitterly through the night. In the morning, Trumpeldor had carried the majority. He explained the dangerous and vital role of supply during battle. It was not as glamorous but it was vital to the war effort. Jabotinsky refused to join the proposed and renamed, Zion Mule Corps. He returned to Europe to pursue his dream of a direct, Jewish fighting unit to liberate Palestine. Trumpeldor reported the committee's agreement to Maxwell to support the Zion Mule Corps. The Jewish committee members, the British and Trumpeldor's task became to convince the young Jewish refugees to volunteer for the Corps.

General Maxwell had not suddenly come up with the supply project. Planning had been underway for awhile. Maxwell knew of a major proposed operation to crush the Turks by striking directly at the heart of the Turkish territory. The sea born invasion and the battle of Gallipoli were being planned. The British needed men. Maxwell had investigated and concluded that foreign volunteers to a supply corps were not technically enlistees of the British army. A Jewish Mule Corps did not violate the law. Maxwell had already selected the man to command the Mule Corps.

¹² Ibid. pg. 38

¹³ The Story of the Jewish Legion, Jabotinsky, New York, 1945. Pg. 19

¹⁴ Ibid.

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Col. J.H. Patterson

John Henry Patterson, DSO (November 10, 1867 – June 18, 1947), was born in 1867 in Forgney, Ballymahon, County Westmeath, Ireland, to a Protestant father and Roman Catholic mother. Young Patterson joined the British Army at age seventeen, rose quickly through the ranks, and eventually attained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Essex Yeomanry. In 1898, then Lt.-Col. Patterson was commissioned by the British East Africa Company to oversee the construction of a railway bridge over the Tsavo river in present-day Kenya. He arrived at the site in March of that year. The project was threatened with failure by man-eating lions, having killed 135 workers. In a feat of personal daring, Patterson faced and killed the lions. He wrote about his exploits in a book that brought him world recognition in *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*. His courageous confrontations in East Africa were made into Hollywood movies. Most recently, 1996, Val Kilmer starred in the academy award winning production of *The Ghost and the Darkness*.

Patterson's reputation collapsed when he was accused in the suicide/affair of a fellow officer Audley Blyth and his wife. He was leading them on a safari mission. Patterson retired from the army in 1911. With the outbreak of World War I, Patterson rejoined the British army, at first serving in Flanders. Unable to secure a stable commission because of his alleged impropriety, Patterson traveled to Egypt to seek an assignment through Generals Dudley and Maxwell whom he had known while serving in the Boer War. Fortuitously, he arrived in Alexandria as Jabotinsky converged from the West and Trumpeldor from the East.

Maxwell, understaffed, desperate for experienced officers, offered Patterson the command of a Mule Corps. Patterson, eager to get back into the fighting, accepted. It was to be a fateful decision for him and for Zionism.

Patterson, years later, reflected on his being chosen to command the Zion Mule Corps.

“It was strange, therefore that I, so imbued with the Jewish traditions should have arrived in Egypt at the psychological moment when General Sir John Maxwell, the C-in-C in Egypt, was looking for a suitable officer to recruit a Jewish unit. A Jewish unit had been unknown for 2,000 years, since the day of the Maccabees, those heroic sons of Israel who fought so valiantly, and for a time so successfully, to wrest Jerusalem from the Roman Legions.... It is curious that General Maxwell should have chosen me (to command a Jewish unit), because he knew nothing of my knowledge of Jewish history and my sympathy for the Jewish race. When as a boy I eagerly devoured the records of the glorious deeds of the Jewish military captains, such as Joshua, Joab, Gideon, Judas Maccabee, I never dreamed that I in a small way would become a captain of a host of the Children of Israel.”¹⁵

March 19, 1915, Trumpeldor returned to the Marfuz Stables. Appealing to the Palestinian volunteers skeptical about enlisting in a Mule Corps, he said to them “A new and bright era rises for our people, an era which will enable us to fulfill the dream and vision of our prophets and our own vision of redeeming our land from the hands of strangers and to rebuild it. And we will do it with our own hands and not with the hands of strangers. History is giving us an opportunity which has not been given us in almost all the centuries of our exile... We will be the first to fight with our blood for the liberation of our land. We will be followed by thousands of other young Jews....”¹⁶

For the Christian Patterson and the Jewish Trumpeldor, both men knew that they were part of a momentous event. For Patterson, the Zion Mule Corps was imbued with Biblical and prophetic overtones. For Trumpeldor, the Zion Mule Corps was a historic opportunity of Jewish endeavor. For the men who volunteered, it may have been both.

“In a solemn ceremony on April 1, 1915, 500 volunteers were sworn in by the Grand Rabbi of Alexandria, Raphael Della Pergola, in the presence of many dignitaries and a mighty crowd which did not hide its enthusiasm. Lt. Col. Patterson assumed command; Joseph Trumpeldor, Captain became second in command.....The commands were given in Hebrew as well as in English. The uniform was British, but the badge was the Star of David.”¹⁷

“On Saturday afternoon, April 17, the Zion Mule Corps or Zion Muleteers, as they were also known, sailed from Alexandria for Gallipoli under the escort of British warships. Some distance away in the harbor, the band of the USS Tennessee, which chanced to be there, played a farewell march. The Muleteers were electrified. Suddenly, from the Hymettus, singing could be heard. The song echoed over the sunlit Egyptian harbor, over the masts of the fishing craft, over the stacks of ocean liners, over the towers and superstructures of the British men-of-war. It was a song of sorrow, dignity and all-encompassing hope, destined to become the anthem of a nation to be reborn a little over thirty years later – the HaTikva.”

¹⁵ The Seven Lives of Col. Patterson pg. 86-87

¹⁶ Hadani ‘am beMilhamto p.18

¹⁷ War and Hope, pg. 41

They sailed to the future. Some would never return.



The Gallipoli campaign took place at Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1916, during the First World War. A joint British and French operation was mounted to capture the Ottoman capital of Istanbul^[6] and secure a sea route to Russia. The attempt failed, with heavy casualties on both sides.

Gallipoli was one of the Allies great disasters in World War One. Gallipoli was the plan thought up by Winston Churchill to end the war early by creating a new war front that the Central Powers could not cope with.

The Zion Mule Corps completed their assigned duties with bravery and honor. Only a small percentage of the men returned not wounded, killed or severely ill from disease.

Gallipoli was a failure, costing almost 133,000 lives on both sides. The Allies withdrew. The Zion Mule Corps returned to Alexandria and was slowly disbanded. Col. Patterson, seriously ill, was invalided back to Britain. Captain Trumpeldor assumed command of the dwindling Zion Mule Corps. Within a matter of months, the Zion Mule Corp was down to a fraction of its original size.

Jabotinsky had refused to join the Zion Mule Corps. He returned to Europe to begin his long, lonely ordeal to raise awareness and support for a Jewish Legion. He had failed in Egypt and then subsequently failed in Italy. By the spring of 1915 he was in Paris trying to interest the French in the opportunity. Baron Edmond de Rothschild was not interested in promoting the idea. Through Gustave Herve, Jabotinsky was introduced to Theophile Delcasse, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs who rejected the idea. Delcasse's rejection of the Jewish Legion idea and Jabotinsky also ended France's opportunity to have a direct say in the future of Palestine.

Defeated three times, Jabotinsky went to London. At least in London, Chaim Weizmann was sympathetic but followed the Zionist official policy of outward neutrality. The Zionist community was deeply concerned about being perceived as taking one side or the other. Jews were fighting in all armies and against each other in this war. The Zionists, reasonably feared, that repercussions would be taken against the indigenous Jewish populations of Britain or France if the Germans should win. They also reasoned, if the Allies should win the Jews in Germany, Austria and other Axis states would be in danger. Jabotinsky ignored them and pushed ahead.

In England he met with Field Marshall Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of War. Kitchener was not interested in “fancy battalions”. He summarily rejected Jabotinsky. Kitchener had no problem with Moslem or Hindu battalions.

“Jabotinsky sought to meet Herbert Samuel, a (Jewish) member of the Asquith Cabinet. Weizmann wanted to introduce Jabotinsky to Samuel, but the idea was vetoed by the prominent members of the (Zionist) Inner Actions Committee. However, Samuel became interested of his own accord after reading a report on the Zion Muleteers in *the Jewish Chronicle*. At a meeting, he asked who Jabotinsky was, but Dr. Moses Gaster, the Chief Rabbi of Britain’s Sephardic Community, who was related to Samuel, merely replied: “Oh, just a talker.”¹⁸

June 1915, the Executive Committee of the World Zionist Organization was meeting in Copenhagen. Jabotinsky wrote to his old friend Dr. Victor Jacobson to help argue his case at the meeting. Jabotinsky understood that the Legion project was to be discussed and the Russian Zionist delegation, led by Menachim Ussishkin, was adamantly against it. Ussishkin forcefully argued that the Jews owed a historic debt to the Turks. They had provided a safe haven, a welcoming refuge to the Jews exiled by the Spanish inquisition. He ignored the fact that Turkey was at war with Spain at the time.

Jabotinsky responded that because of the mistreatment of the Jews of Palestine by the Turks, any debt of gratitude had been forfeited. “If the Jews in Palestine were not slaughtered wholesale, it was not due to Turkey’s humaneness towards the Jews but to the presence of Ambassador (Henry) Morgenthau in Constantinople and of two American cruisers off Jaffa, which demonstratively served us. And if the German Ambassador in Turkey advised the Turks not to quarrel with the Jews in Palestine, it was also due to his fear of the Americans.”¹⁹ He further argued that the Europeans did not know or care about the Jews with the exception of the British. If the Jews wished to have a representation in the future of Palestine after the Allied victory, they had to take part in the fight for it.

Three key members of the committee, Otto Warburg, Ussishkin and Alfred Klee were opposed to the Legion. They demanded, even before the committee meeting in Copenhagen commenced, that the Legion issue be dealt with. It must not put on the agenda.

“Jabotinsky was invited to a private conference by Tschlenow and Jacobson, who were briefly joined by Arthur Hantke. For three hours, the three men (particularly Hantke) tried to convince Jabotinsky that Germany would win the war that the Zion Mule Corps was a grave mistake and that further propaganda for a Jewish Legion would destroy Zionism.”²⁰

¹⁸ Final report to the Inner Actions Committee on Jabotinsky’s participation in the sessions of the Greater Actions committee, June 10-11, 19015, signed by Dr. E.W. Tschlenow

¹⁹ Jabotinsky’s letter from London to Dr. Victor Jacobson, May 4, 1915.

²⁰ War and Hope, pg. 86

Jabotinsky offered to resign from the World Zionist Organization so that they could still claim neutrality. His compromise was refused.

The committee met and passed their resolution aimed at Jabotinsky, June 10-11.

“In view of the oft-repeated rumors about the formation by England of a Jewish Legion for the conquest of Palestine, the Zionist Actions Committee declares:

1. That every undertaking of this kind is in sharpest contradiction to the entire character of Zionist activities:
2. That the Zionist Organization will have nothing in common with any such undertaking;

Therefore, the Actions Committee demands that no Zionist should under any circumstances participate in or support any such undertaking.”

The World Zionist Organization had disowned Jabotinsky and declared him *persona non-gratta*.

“In Odessa, his home, where, back in 1903, he had organized the self-defense unit that had helped, spread his name throughout Russia, he was ostracized, and he was branded a traitor from the pulpit of the Yavneh Zionist Synagogue. Ussishkin stopped Jabotinsky’s mother in the street and said to her: ‘Your son should be hanged!’”²¹

Even without organized Zionist support, Jabotinsky’s efforts in London slowly advanced. Arthur Henderson, a Laborite and head of the British Board of Education, made a second attempt to get Lord Kitchener to change his mind about the Jewish Legion. He failed.

British Jewish opposition to the Jewish Legion increased. It came from three areas of British Jewry. “The assimilationists, mostly wealthy and titled Jews, were opposed to any exclusively Jewish unit ‘because they could not permit Jews to be singled out as a distinct entity the British national body.’ The official Zionists, under the influence of Tschlenow and Nahum Sokolow, who then resided in London, strongly opposed the plan because it ran counter to the official policy of the World Zionist Organization. The opposition from these ranks was given further prestige by the voice of Ahad Ha’Am, the philosopher of *cultural Zionism*.”²²

The strongest opposition came from London’s East End, the Whitechapel Jews. They were predominantly recent Russian Jewish immigrants. They felt no obligation to fight for Britain in a war they did not understand and deeply, bitterly refused to fight in any war that benefited the hated anti-Semitic Russians, Britain’s ally.

As the charnel house of war destroyed men on the battle field, the British need for manpower increased. The Home Secretary, Sir Herbert Samuel, met with representatives of the

²¹ Ibid. pg. 87

²² Ibid. pg. 89

Whitechapel Jews. Samuel had proposed deporting to Russia any Russian Jew who refused to enlist in the British cause.

“Gentlemen,” he asked them, “What else could I have done? Those Russian subjects refuse to enlist voluntarily, and resentment against them is growing. Can the Government stand idly by, watching that resentment degenerate into downright anti-Semitism? And, looking straight at Jabotinsky, he asked for his opinion.”²³

Jabotinsky responded to Samuel calmly and logically. If the government wanted the Jews to volunteer do not threaten them with deportation to Russia. Give them a positive reason to enlist. Give them a reason to fight that they will value, a Jewish Legion to free Palestine.

Samuel was sufficiently swayed by Jabotinsky’s argument that he withdrew his threat of deportation to Russia. He was not swayed enough to bring the matter before the Cabinet. Jabotinsky had been defeated again.

Early June 1916, Jabotinsky received a note from Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson. The two had written but had never met. Patterson was in London recuperating from a severe illness he incurred while leading the Zion Mule Corp in Gallipoli. Patterson had been keeping up on what was happening with Jabotinsky’s efforts for a Jewish Legion. Jabotinsky had been kept informed of how Patterson had been as a leader of the Zion Mule Corps.

The soldier’s convalescent hospital, located at 40 Upper Grosvenor Street²⁴ was run by Lady Violet Brassy. Patterson had begun writing his third book, *With the Zionists in Gallipoli* there. He concluded that Gallipoli had been a defeat but that the terrible cost had been worth it. The British had nearly destroyed a “magnificent” Turkish Army and by so doing gave invaluable help to the Russians. Patterson hoped his book would arouse public support for a Jewish fighting unit in the British army.

Back in Egypt, the Zion Mule Corps was ordered to Ireland to help suppress the Irish fighting the British for independence. The volunteers refused to go. They had volunteered to fight the Turks not suppress the Irish struggling for their freedom. March 26, 1916, the Zion Mule Corps was disbanded. 120 of its former members agreed to join Trumpeldor and stay together as a unit if they could create a separate Jewish fighting force within the British Army. The War Office ignored the offer.

Patterson had been promoting the idea of a Jewish Legion as well. “The commanding officer of the Australian and New Zealand Expeditionary Force, General Birdwood, thought a Jewish legion was a great idea, Patterson wrote. He had even suggested to Patterson that he should

²³ Ibid. pg. 90

²⁴ Some sources note the home was on Dover Street

work to help form one. “Nothing would give me greater gratification,” Patterson concluded, “than to raise, train and command a Jewish fighting unit.”²⁵

Jabotinsky called on Patterson at the hospital. He met a “tall, thin man of youthful middle age, with intelligent and cheerful eyes, the personification of what the English called Irish charm, but with no hint of those so-called Irish qualities of gloom and hair splitting. He was soon to learn that Patterson was a great student of the Bible.”²⁶

“How is your plan progressing?” Patterson asked of Jabotinsky.

“Lord Kitchener is against it.”

“Realities are stronger than Lord Kitchener,” Patterson replied.

“Will you help me?”

“Of course,” said the Colonel.”²⁷

The hand of fate or the hand of providence intervened. Within a matter of days of Jabotinsky and Patterson’s meeting, Lord Kitchener, the enemy of the Jewish Legion, was dead. On a mission to visit with his counterpart in Russia, his ship hit a German mine. June 5, 1916, Lord Kitchener drowned. His body was never found.²⁸

Colonel Patterson and Jabotinsky climbed into a cab. Patterson took Jabotinsky to Parliament. Waiting in a hall between the House of Lords and the House of Commons, Patterson wrote out a note and handed it to an attendant. Five minutes later a small man in a military uniform came out to greet them. Patterson introduced Jabotinsky to Captain Leopold Amery. The meeting was fateful for the future of the Jewish League. It was even more fateful for the future of Zionism and the yet to be born State of Israel.

“Captain Amery knows of our project,” Jabotinsky was told. “Give him the latest update.”

Amery knew Patterson from the Boer War and the Gallipoli campaign. Because of Patterson, he was a strong supporter of the Jewish Legion.

Six months after their meeting, Captain Amery became Lloyd George’s secretary and eventually Colonial Secretary. He along with Lord Milner wrote the most crucial piece of legislation in Zionist history, the *Balfour Declaration*. The Declaration has long been erroneously credited solely to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour. Captain Amery had direct access to the British Cabinet to promote the Jewish Legion.

²⁵ The Seven Lives of Colonel Patterson, pg. 104

²⁶ Ibid. 106

²⁷ Jabotinsky, The Story of the Jewish Legion, pg. 70

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Kitchener,_1st_Earl_Kitchener

A 1999 study by Professor William Rubenstein claimed that Captain Amery had been a secret Jew. His mother had been a Hungarian Jewess. She had converted to Protestantism and was an observant, practicing Anglican all her life, as had been most of her family. Rubenstein asserted that Amery hid his Jewish background fearing anti-Semitism and discrimination. Leopold Amery never talked of his Jewish background. He was to all who knew him an observant Christian and a thorough Englishman. Prior to his death, he completed his autobiography where he mentioned, in a passing manner, some of his family background. He married as a Christian and he was buried as Christian. His Jewish identity was of no identifiable consequence in his public life. In his private life, there is no way to evaluate his Jewish identity.²⁹

Amery had two sons. One son he completely disowned. In a horrific twist of life, his son, John became a Nazi sympathizer, as was the one time King of England Edward VII, later the Duke of Windsor. John Amery went to Germany during the War, having become a rabid anti-Semite and ardent Fascist. He broadcast propaganda for the Nazis aimed at weakening British moral. John Amery became a favorite of Adolph Hitler and even attempted to organize a British Nazi unit to fight against the Allies. He was executed, as a war criminal, by the British in December, 1945.³⁰

The Russian and East European immigrant Jews continued agitating against Jabotinsky in Britain. Jabotinsky continued to press the issues. His argument was simple. They could join in a British Home defense unit or a Jewish fighting unit for Palestine. Jabotinsky called the campaign "Home or *Heim*." The Home part existed. The *Heim* part did not.

Jabotinsky's efforts, in June went into July. Feelings ran high in the immigrant community. The immigrants had conscious memories of enslavement in the Russian armies. They were not comfortable with British identity as they had not been naturalized. Many, traditionally, lived in fear trying to stay below the visibility of authorities. The Jewish immigrant community had been uprooted from its shtetl identification; religious leadership was being marginalized in the freer air of the West. Radical alternatives to Jewish suffering, such as Anarchism, Communism, Socialism, played on their search for new identity in Britain. What was uniform among the immigrants was an almost total, pathological hatred of the Russian megalith. Periodically, Jabotinsky required a personal body guard. Fears of Jewish violence against him, as he promoted British service, were real. His meetings were regularly disrupted by organized Jewish protestors blowing whistles. He was pelted with rotten tomatoes but still he pressed on.

Little by little, his message touched the souls of the Jewish world. Emotionally they were willing to sacrifice for Zion. The immigrants were not willing to die for Flanders or the Czar. The idea of a Jewish Legion amongst the immigrant Jews was slow to be accepted. They did not trust the British to honor their word. The non-Jewish world had betrayed them so many times

²⁹ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/amery.html>

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Amery

in the past, over so many years and in so many lands. They continued to refuse to fight in any way that would benefit the Russians.

Mid July, 1916 the remnants of the Zion Mule Corps reached London. The Corps, still under the command of Captain Joseph Trumpeldor, was greatly reduced. After reenlisting in Alexandria, their transport ship back to England was torpedoed by an Austrian submarine. The ship sank off of Crete. The survivors were promised, although the Mule Corps was disbanded, that they would be kept together. Trumpeldor knew it was absolutely essential that the nucleus of the Jewish Fighting Unit must remain together. The British military would destroy their cohesiveness, their unified identity, without any care.

“The very next day (after landing in Britain), Trumpeldor appeared at Jabotinsky’s Chelsea home with a message from Nissei Rosenberg, a former Zion Mule Corps sergeant: “We arrived yesterday. There are 120 of us. Come to see us at the London Barracks.”³¹

“There were moves to disperse them, but both Patterson and Amery lobbied hard and they were all placed in a separate troop in the 20th London Regiment.”³² Jabotinsky enlisted as private in the unit.

Whenever possible Jabotinsky continued making personal contacts that would prove beneficial to the creation of the Jewish Legion. Over the next few months, he became friendly with editors of mainline newspapers and periodicals such as the Liberal periodical, *The Nation*, Charles P. Scott, publisher of the *Manchester Guardian* and Henry Wickham Steed of the *Times*. Steed had been a personal friend of Theodor Herzl. Steed published in the *Times* an editorial supporting the Jewish Legion idea. Inside the British government Jabotinsky continued cultivating relationships that would prove vital up and down the administrative line, such as Joseph King, Director of the British Propaganda office. King viewed the formation of a Jewish Legion as good propaganda for the war effort.

Trumpeldor “and Jabotinsky, with Amery’s help, presented a formal petition to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, requesting the formation of the Legion. Jabotinsky then acted remarkably courageously. He signed up as an ordinary soldier in the Zion Mule Corps men’s unit, 20th London. The War Cabinet considered the petition, (early in 1917), approved of the proposal in principal and instructed the War Secretary, Lord Derby, to discuss the details with the signatories.”³³

Jabotinsky was in London staying in the small Chelsea house he shared with Chaim Weizmann.

³¹ The Seven Lives of Colonel Patterson pg. 107

³² Mad for Zion, a Biography of Colonel J.H. Patterson, by Patrick Streeter, Matching Press, Harlow, Essex, 2004, pg. 101

³³ Ibid pg. 101

“In April 1917, while Private Jabotinsky was on Passover leave in London, a War Office messenger brought him a handwritten note from General Woodward, Director of Organization, requested him to report at the War Office two o’clock that very afternoon for an interview with Lord Derby. It was clear from the tone of the letter – the salutation was “Sir” – that the General had no idea he was addressing a mere buck private.

In a hurried conference with Trumpeldor, Jabotinsky thought that it might be preferable for Trumpeldor, as a Captain, to go instead, for the sight of a mere army private about to confer with the Secretary of War was likely to cause unpredictable consternation. However, Trumpeldor felt that his English was not adequate. In the end, Trumpeldor and Jabotinsky decided to chance it together.

Lord Derby received them warmly. Jabotinsky gave a graphic description of the meeting:

‘We all sat down; the General in a corner, stiff and wooden-looking, as per regulations. The Prime Minister,’ Lord Derby said, ‘wants me to ask you for details of your Jewish unit scheme.’

(Jabotinsky rolled off the details.)

‘I see,’ said Lord Derby. ‘Now another point: do you anticipate a large number of volunteers?’

“Trumpeldor smiled disarmingly and remarked: ‘If it is to be just a regiment of Jews – perhaps. If it will be a regiment for the Palestine front – certainly. If, together with its formation, there will appear a government pronouncement in favor of Zionism – overwhelmingly.”³⁴

Lord Derby, the Minister of War, gave the project his approval. He assigned General Geddes to direct recruiting and arrange for the formalities of a Regimental uniform and identifying badge as a Jewish unit.

The Jewish Legion was born.

‘At a later meeting, Geddes asked Jabotinsky whom he would recommend to command the Regiment. He had already consulted Patterson on this point, who considered a Jewish Colonel should be found. But Jabotinsky knew that there was only one man who had the necessary tact, commitment and obstinacy for the job. A man he hoped, in due course, would be the General of a Jewish Brigade. Patterson was offered and accepted the command on 27 July 1917.”³⁵

He was assigned an office, Room 7 of the War office Annex in the National Liberal Club, Whitehall. Immediately, Patterson joined with Jabotinsky to recruit men for the Regiment.

³⁴ War and Hope pg. 100

³⁵ Mad for Zion pg. 101-102

Patterson encountered virulent opposition from a direction that, for him, was totally, incredulously, unexpected.

“There was opposition to the Regiment, not from the host community, nor from the anti-Semitic quarters, but from sections of English Jewry who were assimilationists. They feared that a separate Regiment with aspirations for a homeland would prejudice the position of those Jews who were totally at ease in England and regarded it as their home. Also coming from poor East European Jews living in Whitechapel might fail to distinguish itself.

To resolve the problem, Patterson called a meeting at the War Office of Jewish leaders from both sides, and government representatives, August 8, 1917. Present, amongst others, were Chaim Weizmann, Jabotinsky, Mark Sykes, Leopold Amery, in favor, Lionel de Rothschild and Edmund Montefiore in opposition.

Patterson stingingly rebuked the opposition to the Jewish Legion by refuting their claim that the British government intended to send the East End recruits to Flanders to “exterminate” them. Presented with the facts on that ground, General Allenby was in fact fighting in Palestine and at that moment was locked in battle outside of Gaza, did not sway the opposition. Finally, as the discussions became unpleasant, Patterson pointed out that the Legion was official British policy. Anyone not prepared to support the government’s plan should leave the room. No one did.

“On August 30, 1917, a delegation headed by Lionel de Rothschild and Lord Swaythling called on Lord Derby demanding the cancellation of the Jewish Regiment plan. They frankly questioned the courage and ability of the Russian Jews as fighters. In reporting to the War Cabinet on September 3, Lord Derby said: “The deputation had urged that some 40,000 Jews had served with distinction in the British forces, and that it was not fair to them to stake the whole reputation of English Jews as fighters on the performance of this regiment.”

While Lord Derby refused to cancel the Jewish Regiment plan outright, he agreed to deprive the unit of its Jewish character and its exclusive field of service – Palestine. This surrender to the plutocrats provoked an immediate and violent reaction among the supporters of the Legion. Colonel Patterson sent a blistering letter of resignation.

Crownhill Barracks, Plymouth

6th September, 1917.

Sir:

I was informed by the Adjutant-General that the Secretary for War has decided to rename the Jewish Regiment, to abolish its Jewish badge (The Star of David) and to treat it in every way as an ordinary British unit.

In the first place this is a distinct breach of faith and will be looked upon by the Jews as both dishonest and dishonorable-and rightly so.

The real Jews received the announcement officially made by the War Office, at the end of July, re this Regiment, with gladness. They held that the name "Jewish Regiment" and badge (The Star of David) were excellent in every way and showed a touch of imagination which greatly appealed to the sentiment of every real Jew.

This bait of a 'Jewish Regiment' was held out to the Russian Jews all the time they were making up their minds as to whether they would serve with the British Army or return to Russia. The vast majority decided to remain and serve here with a Jewish Regiment. Now that the period of the option of returning to Russia has passed the War Office are about to announce that there is to be no Jewish Regiment.

I assured many of these people-who come daily to the War Office to see me on this point-that there would be a Jewish Regiment for them to join and pointed out the War Office announcement. Many expressed the fear that this was but a trap to make them remain in this country instead of filling up ships to take them to Russia. I assured them that their fears were quite groundless as, however stupid, we were at least honest and our word was our bond. It now turns out that, after all, the pledge given to these people is to be treated as a mere "scrap of paper."

I consider the action now about to be taken highly improper and most dishonorable and it is impossible for me to identify myself with this sudden extraordinary change of policy in any way.

I beg, therefore, to be relieved of my command at the earliest possible moment.

The unit now proposed to be raised under these new conditions (where no esprit de corps can possibly exist) will form a most disastrous failure and be utterly worthless from a military point of view.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant

J. H. Patterson

From the Officer Commanding

The Jewish Regiment

Weizmann and Major Amery went at once to see Lord Milner, who was then a member of the War Cabinet. Milner had a long talk with Lord Derby, and as a result, the War Minister

consented to receive a counter-delegation to effect a compromise. Mindful of the influence of the press, Jabotinsky went to see Steed, the foreign editor of *the Times*. The next day *The Times* denounced the War Office and, while agreeing with Patterson's motives in resigning, suggested that he withdraw his resignation. The editorial was effective. The second delegation was assured by Lord Derby that the unit would be Jewish and would be sent to Palestine, but that its men would have to earn the honorable title "Jewish" on the battlefield. If they distinguished themselves in action, they would be granted a Jewish name and Jewish insignia. Until then, they would carry the no less honorable designation of Royal Fusiliers(R.F.)

This promise was kept. After the defeat of the Ottoman, the Legion was granted the official name of *Judean Regiment* and the Menorah with the Hebrew word Kadima, meaning 'Forward' as well as 'Eastward,' became its badge. But in fact the Legion had its distinctive Jewish insignia from the very outset. The Jewish colors of blue and white fluttered alongside the Union Jack; the Star of David was worn by all officers and men on their sleeves-each battalion in a different color. The color of the first battalion, the 38th Royal Fusiliers, consisting of the East End 'tailors,' was red. The War Office and the Jewish assimilationists notwithstanding, the Jewish Royal Fusiliers were referred to in official correspondence, in the press and in literature, as official correspondence, in the press and in literature, as "Legion" won out over "Regiment" and became the historic title of the Jewish Army that fought alongside the Allies in World War 1."³⁶

"In retrospect, it is easy to see that these bitter, unimaginative, narrow-minded opponents succeeded not only in limiting the number of men in the British Jewish battalion, but also in influencing the attitude of many non-Jewish British officers towards the Jews..... The Jewish Legion, the Jewish people, and in the end Britain herself, all were to pay a heavy price for this myopic prejudice."³⁷

The Balfour Declaration was issued November 2, 1917. The possibility of a huge reserve of Jewish fighting men adding to Allied forces was a factor in its acceptance. Following the issuance of the Declaration, the 38th Royal Fusiliers ranks swelled to 800 men.

³⁶ War and Hope pgs. 109-111

³⁷ Ibid. pg. 112



38th Royal Fusiliers marching in London

“On February 2, 1918, the 38th Battalion of Royal Fusiliers, their bayonets gleaming in the winter sun, marched through the city of London and Whitechapel, a purely Jewish unit marching to liberate its people from oppression, persecution and shame.”³⁸

“Tens of thousands of Jews crowded the streets, the windows, the balconies, the roofs. Blue-white flags were over every shop door; there were women crying for joy and old Jews with fluttering beards murmuring the prayer of thanksgiving: ‘Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, Who hast permitted us to live to see this day.’ Patterson was on his horse, smiling and waving, wearing a rose which a girl had thrown him from a balcony, and the boys, those ‘tailors,’ shoulder to shoulder, each step like a clap of thunder, clean, proud, their enthusiasm raised to fever pitch by the national anthems, intoxicated with the noise of the crowds and with a sense of sacred mission...”³⁹

³⁸ Ibid. pg. 112

³⁹ Jabotinsky, Slovo O Polkoo, pg. 95,
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/sugar38rf.html>



Jewish Legion at the Western Wall, Jerusalem

In America, a parallel brigade of Jewish, and even a few non-Jewish volunteers was formed, the 39th Royal Fusiliers of almost 2,500 men. Jerusalem fell to the British December 1917, almost exactly to the day that Reverend William Hechler, Theodor Herzl's first Christian Zionist supporter, his personal advisor and friend, prophesied twenty two years earlier that it would. 1,000 liberated Palestinian Jews volunteered to form the 40th Royal Fusiliers. The 38th was deployed in battle under Colonel Patterson. They bravely fought the Turks, with distinction, playing a central role in the eventual liberation of all of Palestine to the benefit of Jew, Christian and Muslim alike.

The Jewish Legion was an important transitional step to the creation of organized, trained, Jewish defense units. Without the creation of the Jewish Legion, the Jewish Brigade of World War II, from which so many of Israel's trained military leadership emerged to lead battles of the 1948 War of Independence, might never have been formed. The vision of Jabotinsky, Trumpeldor and Patterson were directly, linearly, responsible for the creation of the Israel Defense Forces, the IDF, of today.

Not far from Netanya is a small moshav, Avihayil. It was founded by members of the Jewish Legion. A museum was built there in the 1960's and was recently expanded. It is called Beit Hagdudim – the Jewish Legion Museum. Colonel Patterson's uniform and sword are displayed with honor in the museum.

Colonel Patterson died in Los Angeles in 1947, one year before the establishment of the State of Israel. His final wishes, according to his grandson Alan Patterson, were that he and his wife should be buried in Israel with his men. The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, with Alan Patterson, Canadian representation and Beit Hagdudim are seeing if they can honor his last request.

Jerry Klinger is president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation.

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