



Colonel John Henry Patterson

Pray with me that I should not only, as Moses, behold Canaan from afar, but be divinely permitted to lead you into the Promised Land.'

Col. John Henry Patterson, at the swearing in the new volunteers to the 'Zion Mule Corps' on March 31, 1915



Colonel John Henry Patterson is remembered as the great British East African game hunter who faced and killed the man eaters of Tsavo. He had been sent there by the British government to build a railroad bridge over the Tsavo River extending British influence in East Africa. The project was threatened with failure by man-eating lions. One hundred and thirty five workers had been killed. Patterson faced and killed the lions. He achieved worldwide notoriety through his book, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*. In 1996, Hollywood produced a movie about his African exploits starring Val Kilmer, *The Ghost and the Darkness*. Far less well known was the vitally important role he played in the creation of the Jewish Legion the antecedent of the IDF, the Israel Defense Forces.

Patterson, an Irish Protestant career soldier, was appointed the commanding officer of the Zion Mule

Corp in 1915. The British did not think it proper for a Jew to be placed in command. The unit, composed of Palestinian Jewish refugees from Turkish oppression, was organized in Egypt. The Zion Mule Corps saw active, distinguished service during World War I in the tragic Gallipoli campaign.

Years later, Patterson 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."*¹

Gallipoli was a failure. It cost almost 133,000 British and Turkish lives. The Allies withdrew. The Zion Mule Corps returned to Alexandria and was slowly disbanded. Col. Patterson, seriously ill, was



Ze'ev Jabotinsky

invalided back to Britain. His second in command, a one armed Jewish Russian soldier, Captain Joseph 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.

Valdimir Jabotinsky, the Jewish visionary leader who had first conceived of the idea of an independent Jewish fighting army to liberate

Palestine from the Turks, had refused to join the Zion Mule Corps. British anti-Semitism and Jewish timidity had stayed him. Jabotinsky 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 rejected Jabotinsky. Rothschild was not interested in promoting the idea.

Defeated three times, Jabotinsky went to London. At least in London, Chaim Weizmann, the leader of British Zionism, was sympathetic. But Weizmann 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 World War I. 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, only Jewish 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? Dr. Moses Gaster, the Chief Rabbi of Britain's Sephardic Community, who was related to Samuel, merely replied: "Oh, just a talker."²

June 1915, the Executive Committee of the World Zionist Organization was meeting in Copenhagen.... The World Zionist Organization had disowned Jabotinsky and declared him persona non-gratta.

"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

2 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

entity from 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 internationally respected philosopher of cultural Zionism."³

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 also had been kept informed of how Patterson had been as a leader of the Zion Mule Corps; how he treated and related to the Jewish men under his command.

The Soldier's Convalescent Hospital, located at 40 Upper Grosvenor Street, was run by Lady Violet Brassy. Patterson had begun writing his third book, *With the Zionists in Gallipoli*, while under her care 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"

3 War and Hope, A History of the Jewish Legion, Elias Gilner, Herzl Press, 1969 pg. 89

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.



Jewish Legion at the Western Wall, Jerusalem, circa 1919

A few months earlier, March 26, 1916, one hundred and twenty former members of the Zion Mule Corps agreed to join Trumpeldor and stay together as a unit. They would stay together 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 work to help form one.

"Nothing would give me greater gratification," Patterson concluded, "than to raise, train and command a Jewish fighting unit."⁴

Jabotinsky called on Patterson at the hospital.

"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."⁵

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.

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

4 The Seven Lives of Col. Patterson, pg. 107

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

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 Legion. 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.

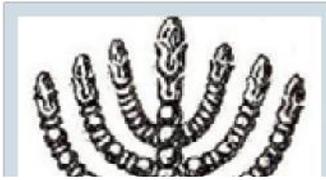
Patterson knew the *"right"* people to introduce Jabotinsky to. In the later struggles for the Jewish Legion, Patterson fought for a unique Jewish identity for the regiment, even fighting for kosher food for his men. The British army had no problem with Hal-

lal food for its Muslim men or special Hindu rations. It did have a problem with Kosher food for Jewish fighting men.

Patterson was bitterly contested by the British Jewish establishment. They feared the accusation of dual loyalty and the loss of their hard won toleration. The establishment were successful in that they changed the identity of the Jewish brigade to the 38th Royal Fusiliers. The brigade was still recognized by all as *"the Jewish Brigade."*

Patterson was appointed the first commander of the brigade. Jabotinsky had recommended him to Amery precisely because he was not a Jew. Patterson led the 38th across the Sinai desert and into battle north of Jerusalem clearing the Turks from Palestine.

Jabotinsky had struggled to create a Jewish Legion but he was never able to make the key connections to the power centers in the government who would make the Legion possible. Patterson had the keys. Working closely with Jabotinsky, Patterson because he was not a Jew, made the Jewish unit a reality. Within two years the 38th was followed by four more Jewish brigades. Together they were known as the Jewish Legion with their own insignia, the Jewish Menorah.



Jewish Legion Cap Insignia



Jewish Legion Veterans Badge

The British Army vindictively resented Patterson for his efforts on behalf of his Jews. The British “retired” Patterson as soon as possible at the end of the war. He was the only field officer never to be promoted during the War. However, Patterson’s efforts on behalf of the Jewish people, Zionism and a Jewish army did not cease.

As the Holocaust became widely known in Europe in 1940, Patterson was living in California. He joined with Jabotinsky once again, lending his voice loudly as a Christian and a soldier, protesting the Holocaust, demanding the Jews have the right

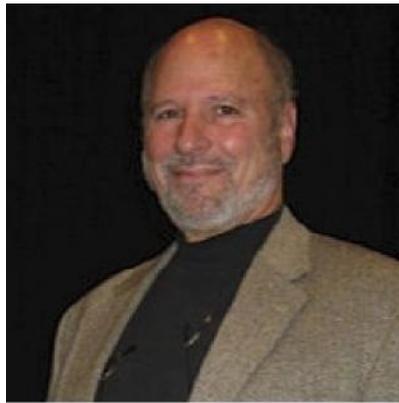
to form a Jewish army to defeat Nazism. As during World War I, he was opposed, only now by American establishment Jewry fearful of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and American anti-Semitism.

Because of the precedent established by the earlier Jewish Legion, the British formed the Jewish Brigade during World War II. Composed of Palestinian Jews they fought with extreme distinction in North Africa against the Nazis and again in Italy. From within the Jewish Brigade, the leadership elements that would form the backbone of the later Israel Defense Forces grew. Without Patterson it is very doubtful if Jabotinsky would have been successful in creating the Jewish Legion. Without the Jewish Legion, the creation of the famed Jewish Brigade would not have come into being.

Colonel Patterson did what no Jew could do.

The LORD your God hath given you this land to possess it; ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all the men of valour.

DEUTERONOMY (3:18)



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Jerry Klinger is President and founder of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. The Society has completed projects in 25 states and in four countries.

He was born in Washington, D C and is the son of Holocaust survivors. Jerry was Yeshivah educated and as a young man served in the Israeli army.

As an Associate member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, in coordination with Chairman Warren Miller, built the Jewish Memorial at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. President Obama visited the site in 2009.

Jerry periodically writes for the Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He is the author of over seventy

articles on American Jewish History and Christian Zionist history. Jerry speaks on Christian Zionism and other topics at Churches, schools and Synagogue communities around the U.S.

He is founder of *To Save A Life*, a charity focused on helping small Israeli and American charities. He is a past President of his Synagogue.

Jerry has a BA, and MA degrees from the University of Maryland. He did Doctoral work at the University of Maryland as well. He recently retired as a senior vice president with Merrill Lynch/ Bank of America. Jerry is married to the former Judith Rice. They have three sons, five grandchildren and a small Cockatzu dog named *Norman*.

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