

# From the Lions of Africa To The Lions of Judah

The Curious Tale of John Henry Patterson

by Geoffrey Clarfield (November 2016)



*This article was written to honour and commemorate the birth of Lt. Colonel John Henry Patterson, DSO (10 November 1867 – 18 June 1947).*

**I** had the pleasure of living and working in East Africa for 16 years. Our children spent much of their childhood there. As a family we were often on Safari, meaning that we would take our jeep, Land Rover, or Land Cruiser, pack up our tents, store food and camping equipment and go out into the bush of wild East Africa. We stayed in rustic tented camps, often in remote tribal areas which were sites where as an anthropologist, I was doing research.

On other occasions we stayed in the tourist lodges that are located within the

famous game parks such as the Serengeti, the Ngorongoro Crater, or the desert parks of northern Kenya where Karen Blixen used to go hunting, and where later, conservationist Joy Adamson returned her orphaned lions to a life in nature.

I also had the pleasure of meeting people who had known Karen Blixen and who had been close friends of Joy Adamson and her husband, George, who were both immortalized in the Walt Disney film *Born Free*, one of the first ecological and environmental romances of the mid 20th century.

On one occasion we were camped above the shores of Lake Manyara, the former hunting grounds of Ernest Hemingway and the subject of his book, *The Green Hills of Africa*, which describes his experience as a big game hunter. We had gone out with another family. They and their children were in one tent. We and our youngest son were in another tent. Each one of us had his vehicle parked behind their respective tents. We had oil lamps behind each of our jeeps and two more lamps. The whole site marked out a diamond shape, each with a lamp in each corner, insuring that we were well lit and marked, and in the hope that this would prevent visits from wild animals who hunt by night. All our food was sealed and kept in the jeeps. After dinner and the usual star gazing, we zipped up our tents and admired the full moon through the mosquito netting screens of our tents as we dozed off to sleep.

At about four in the morning we heard footsteps; loud, strong and animal like. We heard the distinctive grunts of lions. My wife, our son and I were frozen with fear. I saw and felt one of the lions pass by our tent. There were about four of them. We did not make a sound. And the next two hours were among the longest two hours I've ever experienced.

As the sun came up we peeked through the cracks in our tent and saw that 2 to 3 lions were camped out under a nearby tree. By that time we were able to call over to our friends in the opposite tent. At a certain point our friend leapt out of his tent and jumped into his Jeep. He turned it on and faced it towards the Lions who then disappeared into the bush. We eventually composed ourselves, made ourselves breakfast, packed up our belongings and drove out of the game Park, away from these ferocious beasts.

They were probably not man-eating lions and for this we were lucky. Immediately I thought about the most famous encounter with a man-eating lion that a European

has ever had in this part of the world, and which I had read about in a number of books. The man in question's name was John Henry Patterson. And hard as it is to believe, he was to become the ultimate founder of the Israeli Army.

During the late 19th century, the sun never set on the British Empire. And, as the British had become committed to ending the East African slave trade, a slave trade that historians now believe was almost as large as the trans-Atlantic slave trade that brought Africans to the West, the British willy-nilly became the masters of what are today the countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In order to consolidate these three territories, they decided to build a railway, from the Indian Ocean to what is now the city of Kampala, the capital of the western highlands of East Africa, and served by its international airport called Entebbe, on the shores of Lake Victoria. Historians have called it the Lunatic express.

I have ridden on the Lunatic express. It still runs from Kampala to Nairobi in the Kenyan highlands near Mount Kenya and then, all the way down to Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast. The dining car still serves wonderful meals using silverware from pre-independence times. The route passes through plains, filled with the kind of Baobab trees that we know from the illustrations of the book *The Little Prince*, and the Taru desert is a marvel to behold. And then you reach sight of the palm studded Indian Ocean beaches, just beyond the last stop in Mombasa.

Many men had to die until the railway was finished. The most dramatic part of the story was when the railway had reached the plains of Tsavo, now one of Kenya's most beautiful game parks. It had stopped being built because man eating lions were terrorizing the workforce, invading their tents and regularly carrying off workers to eat in the bush in the middle of the night.

These workers were not Africans. At that time, Africans were living completely an almost completely tribal existence and had no experience of or desire to take on the menial, repetitive labor that was the backbone of the Industrial Revolution. And so, instead, the British had imported thousands of poor Hindus and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent to build the railway and whose descendents became the commercial middle classes of 20th century East Africa, who ran the supermarkets and shops that we frequented when we lived in Nairobi.

At a certain point, the workers went on strike and the lions kept on eating them. The workers believed that these Lions had supernatural powers and that it was hopeless to oppose them. The British had to invite one of the most famous lion hunters and soldiers of that era, an Irish-born soldier named John Henry Patterson to track and kill them.

Patterson was born, most likely, because we are not quite sure about his origins, into an upper class military family of Protestant Irishmen. It was most likely that he began his career at the age of 17 and showed exceptional prowess as a military man and as an Army engineer in India. The fact that he already spoke Hindi, the language of the workers, and had been a successful tiger hunter in India, made him the ideal person for the job.

It took much improvisation, and many close calls in the construction of many traps, as well as a large number of all nighters until Patterson finally killed the Lions. He then became the hero of the workers. The stuffed lions are still on display in the Museum of Natural History in Chicago. He also managed to oversee the construction of bridges over the rivers of Tsavo. And so, months later, the railway finally reached Uganda and thus incorporated East Africa into the modern world system, opening it up to European settlement, colonial status and finally independence after World War II.

John Henry Patterson was born in 1867 and was in his late 20s when he was called to Tsavo. He was a tall man, handsome, disciplined, tough, honest, and had a way with the women. He was also a gifted raconteur, public speaker and writer. His successful killing of these man-eating lions saved scores of men's lives and the story became the basis of his book, *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*. The book became an instant bestseller at the beginning of the 20th century. It was read with relish by Theodore Roosevelt. The upper classes, middle income classes and newspaper readers read it with enthusiasm, as did the newspaper editors and literary world. Even, the Prince of Wales had a copy.

Within a short time the book turned Patterson from a well-known British officer and big game hunter into an international celebrity, as famous as the earlier 19th century explorers such as Burton, Stanley and Livingstone who also became literary celebrities, writing books about their search for the source of the Nile and opening up East Africa, just a few years before Patterson arrived there.

Newly married, Patterson returned to England where he was the talk of the town, making friends with England's most famous theatre actors and being hosted by aristocrats close to the royal family, who were largely the movers and shakers of the British Empire before the death of Queen Victoria, when the Empire was at its apex and when it was the most powerful Empire in the world. Patterson had arrived.

Patterson also fought in the Boer war and was decorated, and this locked in a pattern where he went back and forth from the colonies to the capital city of London until after WWI when he moved to the US.

But all was not light and success with John Henry Patterson. At a certain point, he was appointed the first game warden of East Africa. While on safari, north of Isiolo, a violent area of nomadic tribes which I know well, he was travelling with a married couple. In the middle of the safari, the husband apparently shot himself during a bout of malarial fever. After his travelling companion's death, it took many weeks for Patterson's safari to return to Nairobi. The rumor and gossip mill of that new colonial capital suggested that Patterson had had an affair with the dead man's wife and had arranged for his death. The case eventually reached the House of Lords where Patterson was cleared of any wrongdoing, but even Winston Churchill had his doubts and expressed them in writing at the time. Curiously, none of Churchill's biographers have written up this anecdote and at the time, Churchill had to retract his accusation or face legal action in the courts. Not surprisingly, at the age of 44 in 1911 John Henry Patterson resigned his full-time commission with the British Army.

By then he had published his second book about his further adventures in East Africa and was still quite the celebrity and man about town. Within 36 months England was at war, in the war to end all wars and which was at fever pitch in the trenches of France. Patterson was looking for some way that he could use his skills and experience in the war effort. He was well connected among the military and civilian elite of the British Empire and one of his close colleagues and friends was now the head of the Egyptian expeditionary force based in Cairo.

What Patterson's admirers did not know, was that from an early age, Patterson read the Bible, both the old Testaments and New Testament. And, he was more interested in the Old Testament than the New Testament. He saw the ancient

Israelite military heroes – Moses, Joshua, Debora and the Maccabees – as role models. He saw these ancient Israelites as good people, as people who had to deal with war, and achieved much good for their people, and who had overall been just, despite their failings. And, he was fascinated that these people's descendants survived as a persecuted, cowed minority among the British and Europeans of his time. Yet at the start of World War I, Patterson had had almost no interpersonal experience with actual living Jews.

It's said that the past is a foreign country. And so we have to delve deeply into the start of World War I to imagine what life was like. At that time, the elites of Britain believed that the war would be over soon, that they would walk over the Germans and the Austro Hungarians with their French allies to the West and with their Russian allies to the East, but this was not the case. As well, America decided to be neutral and the war was not going well.

During WWI the cabinet of the British government was made up of relatively wealthy men from the upper middle classes. They had many prejudices. One of them was that Jews were disproportionately represented in the modern world economy. The other was that the Jewish people had suffered unfairly for 2000 years and deserved a state of their own.

These early British Christian Zionists, or at least some of them were also theological restorationists. This meant that from their evangelical Christian perspective, they believed that when all Jews had finally returned to the land of Israel, they would eventually convert to Christianity and bring on the second coming of Christ.

From within the Jewish community there was a parallel birth of Zionism. Zionism produced a number of unique men, two of whom are central to our story and to the story of John Henry Patterson. The first was Joseph Trumpler and the second was Vladimir Jabotinsky. Both of them came from within the Russian Empire, both of them were somewhat secular although they had a strong Jewish identity. Trumpler was a one-armed Russian Jewish war hero who had been decorated by the Tsar. Jabotinsky, a son of the port city of Odessa had organized Jewish self-defense against the pogromists. Jabotinsky studied law in Rome and was a journalist for a liberal Russian paper. Trumpler was a soldier, an officer.

Both men believed that World War had given the Jewish people an opportunity to

learn once again the art of war and self-defence, which had been dead to the Jewish people since the Romans conquered Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the war, the three men found themselves in Cairo and Alexandria. John Henry Patterson had come to Cairo to ask his friend Gen. Murray, the head of the British forces in Egypt for some sort of military job. Trumpeldor and Jabotinsky were there in the hope of persuading the British government to create battalions of Jewish soldiers to liberate the land of Israel from the Ottoman Turks, who had already joined the Germans and the Austro-Hungarian side. These Young Turks had already begun the slaughter of the Armenians, a slaughter that was the 20th century rehearsal for the Holocaust.

Zionist Jews and many Jews from Arab lands had begun to return to the land of Israel in the late 19th century. Some, like Theodore Herzl, hoped that either the Ottomans would support the reconstitution of a Jewish state in the land of Israel, or that the European powers would do so.

At the beginning of World War I, the Turks in the land of Israel expelled almost every Jew and declared that they could not return. They tortured and imprisoned many and stated that after the war, no Jews would be allowed to return or come to Palestine. They quickly forced thousands of Jews to flee to Egypt in a reverse exodus. The British authorities in Egypt created refugee camps for them. At the same time these Jewish refugees received support in cash and kind from the then prosperous Jewish communities of Cairo and Alexandria.

Jabotinsky had enrolled as a private in the British Army, as a foreigner. Both he and Trumpeldor lobbied the British to create an all Jewish fighting force that would help liberate the land of Israel from the Turks. Surprisingly the British accepted. However they stipulated two conditions. The first was that the score of soldiers would work as a supply group, yet at the same time to be trained as fighting infantrymen. The second was that they would not fight in Palestine for there was as yet no official British plan to invade Palestine and therefore they would have to fight the Turks where ever the Allies fought the Turks.

The British explained that they needed a Mule Corps, men who could bring the ammunition, water, medicine and food from the rear lines to the front lines, especially when under fire, and that this was a very dangerous mission.

Jabotinsky felt it was demeaning and did not join. Trumpeldor, the older of the two accepted for as a man who had experienced many battles, he realized and he was proven right, that eventually almost all of his soldiers would end up fighting on the front lines.

General Murray was looking for an officer with training and experience to command these troops and it was almost miraculous that he chose Patterson. No one knew that Patterson had a deep and abiding love and respect for the Jewish people. I've read his biography and two of his books and there is no evidence in him of any of the traditional anti-Semitism that characterized so much of British society at the beginning of the 1900s. On the contrary, he believed that the spirit of the Maccabees lay dormant in the soul of every Jewish man and it was Patterson's military and moral obligation to show the world that this was the case.

Recruiting a corps with its own Jewish insignia attracted the interest of many of the men in the refugee camps of Egypt who had just personally experienced the brutality of the Turks in Israel. Hundreds enlisted and they were trained as full infantry soldiers. They learn how to use the rifles which had been liberated from the Turkish soldiers who had failed in their attempt to conquer the Sinai. They also learn how to use their bayonets. They learnt all aspects of military discipline. They learned how to care for their mules. And, they learned the strict drilling patterns of the British Army, excelling at inspection and parade.

Patterson insisted that they have a Jewish chaplain, that their food be kosher and that they have the same rights to an alcoholic bar and drinking privileges as all other soldiers. But since his Jewish soldiers themselves were uninterested in drinking, the bar was closed down.

He often insisted on and joined the men at Sabbath prayers and encouraged the singing of Hatikvah at points during drills and inspection. The British commanders were so impressed with these new recruits that they allowed them to parade through the streets of Alexandria on their way to the front and be blessed by the grand Rabbi of Alexandria.

One must remember that the Turkish army at the beginning of World War I had been rigorously trained by the Germans over the last 20 years. They had up-to-date



guns and ammunition. Their discipline was excellent and their motivation high. Moreover, at the beginning of the war, the Ottoman Sultan declared that this war against the allies was a Jihad.

The Zion Mule Corps was facing a strong enemy. So soon after their successful training in Egypt this Zion mule Corps, the first fully Jewish fighting force in 2000 years, was ready to be sent to one of the bloodiest fronts of World War I, the beaches of Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. Patterson had appointed Joseph Trumpeldor as his second-in-command. They became fast friends until Trumpeldor's death after the war, while defending a village of Jews from Arab marauders in the north of Israel.

The campaign in Gallipoli was designed by the British to overwhelm Turks and open the road to Constantinople, creating a front on the south eastern side of the Germans and Austro Hungarians that would strengthen Russia's hand and surround the Germans and Austro-Hungarian, supposedly ending the war. Instead, the Turks killed hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers and fought them to a standstill on the shores of Gallipoli. For those who've seen the Mel Gibson film Gallipoli, you get a taste of what happened. It was trench warfare as bad as that of the Western front, as wave upon wave of British and Allied soldiers tried to struggle up to the hills that were so well fortified by the Turks. The fighting went on for months until the allies finally withdrew.

In the midst of this slaughter, the Zion mule Corps under the leadership of John Henry Patterson and Joseph Trumpeldor stood firm. Day in and day out the soldiers of the Zion Mule Corps brought ammunition, water, food and medicine to troops on the front line.

At times the troops that they were supporting were so depleted, that they themselves took up their rifles and bayonets dived into the trenches, fighting the Turks face-to-face. Trumpeldor had been right in his recognition that ultimately this force would have the opportunity of fighting on the front lines.

Not everything went smoothly however. Patterson tells us a story of one of his new recruits who was separated from the troops and was arrested by the French allies. As he only spoke a mishmash of Hebrew, Arabic and English, the French concluded that he was Turkish spy and lined him up to be shot. In the nick of time, one of his fellow Zion mule Corps soldiers got wind of what was happening

and as he spoke French, persuaded the French and explained to them that this man was their ally. This saved his life.

Patterson noticed that it took this soldier a full six months to work through this trauma, notwithstanding that they were suffering bombardment and being shot at every day. There was no understanding of PTSD in those days.

A number of Zion Mule Corps men were killed by Turkish snipers, shrapnel and bombs. But this did not affect their discipline and dedication. Patterson wrote that whenever the Zion Mule Corps had anything to do with soldiers from New Zealand or Australia, these colonial outliers of England treated them with equality and respect. Many of the Zion mule Corps soldiers were redecorated for their service and bravery. And like many of the soldiers in Gallipoli they lost comrades. Patterson and Trumpeldor had to return to Egypt to recruit more volunteers.

Word had gotten around the people in camps of Egypt that the Zion Mule Corps were a success. Despite the fact that they had suffered casualties and many had been wounded many more young men were willing to take the training and join on this dangerous mission, for they felt that by fighting the Turks in Gallipoli, they were taking the first steps to liberate Palestine the land of Israel from heavy hand of the Turkish oppressors. Events proved them right!

And so Patterson and Trumpeldor went back for second round of fighting. The Dardanelles in Gallipoli can get very cold during the winter. And so Patterson found a neglected stone house under a tree which he turned into the Mule corps shared winter barrack and with some luck which protected his soldiers from enemy fire. As they readied the structure and as they were digging in to the floor, they discovered an ancient marble tombstone with Hebrew writing and Jewish symbols on it. Patterson believed it could be from the time of Solomon, but it was most likely from the Hellenistic and Roman period when Jews had established synagogues and communities across the Roman world. Patterson and his men believed this to be a good luck charm and their structure survived shelling, providing them with warmth and protection in between their dangerous forays to supply the allied lines.

Patterson noticed that his brave, hard fighting new Jewish recruits, whom he likened to the Maccabees, would do anything to retrieve the body of a dead

comrade and unlike the British they would cry and moan at the funeral of any of their fallen comrades.

He also found that they were musical and that they sung in English, Hebrew and Arabic. He found many of the melodies were sad and touching. Yet it was Patterson who inserted the singing of Hatikvah into the regimental culture of this new fighting unit, who insisted on Sabbath prayers and eating kosher food, which Patterson felt was only fair, since these men were risking their lives for King and country and, for the soon to be liberated land of Israel.

When the British finally realized that they could not penetrate Turkish defenses they withdrew. Yet Patterson wrote that in his military opinion that the men on the beaches of Gallipoli had held up a major part of the Turkish army, which otherwise could have sorely weakened the Allied effort if they had been distributed across different fronts. There may be something to his theory.

120 men of this fighting force returned to England and promised to remain in touch. The British, for their part, suggested that if indeed there was to be an invasion of Palestine, these men could form a new exclusively Jewish unit to do so and they would be kept together.

By this time, Jabotinsky was in London sharing a house with Chaim Weitzman, the head of the Zionist organization, and Jabotinsky was lobbying for a full Jewish Legion of 50,000 men who would fight with the British to liberate Palestine from the Turks.

Meanwhile Patterson who was being wined and dined by high society in London at the time wrote a book about his experience *With the Zion Mule Corps in Gallipoli*, which was widely read and which helped the Jews who wanted to return to the land of Israel to fight, to gain the support of the elites and opinion makers.

After two years of war, and just before the Bolshevik revolution, the British were desperate. The Americans had not yet entered the war and partly on the basis of the success the Zion mule Corps and the lobbying of both Christian and Jewish Zionists, his Majesty's government published the Balfour Declaration obligating the British towards the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine.

Patterson quickly re-established an alliance with Jabotinsky and together they lobbied the British government for the right to create a Jewish Legion that would fight the Turks in Palestine. By this time, after the Russian revolution, the Jewish immigrant population resident in Great Britain were free of the idea that by fighting for the British they were also fighting for her ally the Tsar and his anti-Semitic generals, as the Bolshevik revolution took Russia out of the war. They now felt that their Jewish loyalties and British loyalties were one.

However Patterson, to his shock and surprise, found that significant numbers of the Jews of upper class Britain were totally against the formation of the Jewish Legion. At one high-level meeting of government ministers and representatives of the British Jewish community, Patterson, with private Jabotinsky at his side suggested that whoever was in the room that did not support the government's Balfour Declaration and the commitment to a Jewish Legion should kindly leave the room. Everyone stayed.

In retrospect we have to conclude that only a celebrity can get away with this kind of behavior. Patterson was that kind of celebrity; an insider in the system, handsome, famous, and eloquent, battle hardened and confident that he had transformed a rabble of men into fearless Jews and decorated fighters in one of the most violent theaters of World War I. The Jewish Legion was on its way!

Jabotinsky and Weizmann knew very well that if any Jew was to be appointed the head of this legion, he would not be up to take on the deeply ingrained anti-Semitism in the British military establishment as well as among the upper ranks of the British Jewish community, who were staunch assimilationists and who quietly opposed and sometimes not so quietly opposed to Zionism.

Patterson once again took on the training of raw recruits, this time with Jabotinsky as his second in command, with a full Jewish chaplain, kosher food, and of course, the singing of Hatikvah. Once again the Jews excelled. This time they were trained as fully fledged infantrymen.

They successfully completed their training and were granted the honor of a full parade, with bayonets fixed, through the streets of London and through the Jewish areas of that city where native Jews greeted them with awe and ecstasy, as the Jews of London were witnessing the first fully Jewish Legion to walk the

face of the earth in 2000 years.

At that time, any English-speaking citizen of the British Empire must have imagined that Jewish and British interests were one, for the soldiers had been promised that they would fight Turks exclusively in the liberation of Palestine and now with the Balfour Declaration, the fight would be for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the land of Israel.

They arrived once again in Egypt and the British under General Allenby began to push the Turks out of Gaza and Jerusalem. Allenby is famous for his humility entering Jerusalem on foot. He did not want to come in on a horse, as his Savior Jesus, had walked the streets of Jerusalem on foot.

Eventually the British Army began to prepare for the push across the Jordan. There were some very hostile men around Allenby who we can say with some confidence were classical anti-Semites. They did not want the Jewish Legion to succeed and they did not want to honor the Balfour Declaration. As Patterson writes, they wanted to turn it into a mere piece of paper. The fact that the British were pouring hundreds of thousands of pounds, enormous amounts of soldiers and military material to support an ambivalent Arab revolt against the Turks under the supervision of T. E. Lawrence, meant that these officers did not want five or 6000 well motivated Jewish soldiers to show up their rather expensive project. And so they maneuvered to send the Jewish Legion into the Jordan Valley during the height of the summer with some its impossible heat and its malarial mosquitoes and insured that the Jewish Legion was exposed on one of the most dangerous and exposed parts of the Turkish front.

Patterson in later years recognized that this was indeed the case in these near impossible conditions and that their placement had been designed to demoralize and break up his men but this did not happen. Instead they re-doubled their efforts and began to harass the Turks so successfully, that Turkish soldiers began to desert and go over to the British as captives of the Jewish Legion.

Patterson, who understood the power of psychological warfare, once offered one of these Turkish prisoners to return to his own lines. The reasoning was that the Turk had told him that his commanding officers had said that the British were barbarians and mistreated all prisoners of war. Clearly this was not the case and so Patterson offered to return the man to his lines but the prisoner

refused. Clearly he preferred to be a prisoner of the Jewish Legion as did many others who surrendered.

During one of many skirmishes one of Patterson's few non-Jewish soldiers went missing. Many months later on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Patterson was finally writing a letter of condolence to the man's wife telling her that he was probably dead or at best, missing in action. As Patterson was sitting in his tent after sending out the letter by dispatch, a voice was heard outside of the tent flap.

Patterson felt that he was hearing things until the missing soldier walked through the door of his tent. He had been captured by the Turks and imprisoned in Damascus. When Allenby's troops entered Damascus he escaped and managed to return to the lines. Patterson quickly telegraphed the soldier's wife to make sure that the telegram would get there before Patterson's official letter telling her that her husband was no longer among the living.

The hostility of the British military authorities in Palestine included giving inadequate tents and medical attention to the Jewish battalion. Many of them died of diseases like malaria. Periodically Patterson would threaten to resign and every once in a while he would send out a letter above his authority to rectify these attacks. On one occasion he sent a letter to General Allenby himself. Each time he threatened to resign, the British gave in because Patterson was a celebrity and they knew he could return to London and easily use the press to seek justice for him and his men.

Just to give you an idea of the level of anti-Semitism they had to deal with, when Patterson was outside of his camp, a high-ranking British officer entered the camp and began to verbally and physically abuse a number of Jewish soldiers. Patterson quickly returned and ordered his Jewish soldiers to fix bayonets and surround the officer until he formally apologized. Any officer other than Patterson would have been court-martialed and shot for such behavior, but Patterson had that same crazy Anglo-Irish charm that his counterpart among the Arabs, T.E. Lawrence also seemed to have and which Patterson used it in support of his much abused under-appreciated and remarkable soldiers.

When the Bolsheviks pulled out and the Americans arrived, the war was soon over. The British were in control of the land of Israel. They were supposed to hand

over to the civil administration but before doing so, higher-ups the British administration encouraged the Arabs of Jerusalem and Haj Amin al Husseini to carry out a classic pogrom against Jews in Jerusalem itself.

For three days in 1920, Arabs murdered, raped and killed Jews, while the British posted armed guards at the gates of Jerusalem and let no one in. Jabotinsky managed to get some former Jewish legion members and guns and defend the defenseless Jews until the Arabs backed off.

The British then tried Jabotinsky for treason and sentenced him to 15 years hard labor. Eventually he only served one year in prison in the port city of ACCO. An international outcry supported by Patterson about Jabotinsky eventually caused him to be freed, but banned by the British from entering Palestine from then on. Ultimately he was decorated by the British military authorities.

Earlier, but soon after the war was over, when the Jewish Legion was still functional, the British authorities prevented them from entering Jerusalem for the Passover Seder of 1918. The Jewish Legion was in Gaza at the time and Patterson made sure they had the best Passover Seder that he could give them. Patterson celebrated with them the ancient liberation of the Jews from Egypt, a thousands of years earlier and as descendants of these Israelites, they now commemorated the Exodus, in the land of Israel.

Soon after the war, Patterson left the Army. He began the war as Lt. Col. and ended the war as Lt. Col. He was given no further decorations. It is clear in retrospect that this was because of Patterson's outright support for the Jewish right to return to the land of Israel, for an interpretation of the Balfour Declaration that was supposed to be implemented in its spirit and to the letter, and for his near impossible transformation of a group of untrained, untried Diaspora Jews into a world-class fighting force that was mentioned positively in dispatches by General Allenby himself. As the British administration on the ground became more and more pro-Arab, and anti-Zionist, the Jewish Legion was disbanded as the thousands of Jews who had been expelled from Palestine by the Turks began to return to the land of Israel.

In addition to Trumpeldor and Jabotinsky, Patterson's soldiers included the following men:

[Gershon Agron](#), (future Mayor of Jerusalem).

[Yitzhak Ben-Zvi](#), second [Israeli President](#).

[Yaakov Dori](#), [Haganah](#) leader; first [Chief of Staff](#) of the [Israel Defense Forces](#).

[Levi Eshkol](#), third [Israeli Prime Minister](#).

[Eliyahu Golomb](#), founding member of the Haganah.

[Nachum Gutman](#), Israeli Painter

[Dov Hoz](#), Zionist activist, Haganah fighter.

Bernard Joseph, later [Dov Yosef](#), Governor of Jewish Jerusalem during the 1948 siege.

and finally, a young man David Gruen, who later adopted the name David ben Gurion.

But the story does not end there. Jabotinsky understood that World War I had weakened the British.

He believed that ultimately, the creation of the Jewish state would need the political backing of the United States. He explained and persuaded Patterson that the Zionist movement must move its focus from London, capital of the British Empire, to New York and Washington D.C., the power centers of the United States, and that it would be essential to galvanize the American Jewish community and its sympathizers in support of a Jewish state.

Jabotinsky died in New York in 1940 while trying to raise a Jewish army of Jewish soldiers from the United States to once again join the British and the fight against the Nazis. Ultimately the British did agree to form a Jewish Legion, whose soldiers wore Jewish stars as armbands and with the star of David on their arms participated in the liberation of Jews in the concentration camps.

Patterson spent the rest of his life in the United States constantly speaking and writing on behalf of Zionist causes. He became close friends with a Jewish professor named Benzion Netanyahu. Together they worked tirelessly in favor of implementing the Balfour Declaration and the creation of the State of Israel. The year before Patterson died, Netanyahu invited him to the circumcision of his



son, Jonathan. Jonathan was named after John Henry Patterson. At this Brit Milah, Patterson gave the eight-day-old Jonathan a silver cup which is kept by his family. It says: "To my dear godson, Johnathan, from your godfather, John Henry Patterson."

Jonathan or Yonatan in Hebrew, died leading the rescue at Entebbe, not far from the railway line, the Lunatic Express, that John Patterson had worked so hard to bring into existence in the late 1890s.

It was John Henry Patterson's ultimate wish that his own ashes would eventually be buried among the soldiers of the Jewish Legion in the land of Israel. In December of 2014, the remains of John Henry Patterson were brought to Israel for internment. They were brought by his grandson, Alan Patterson. Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke at the ceremony. This is what he told him:

*Your grandfather immediately saw the great potential of these Jewish warriors. He taught them. He himself re-instilled in them: He said you are the descendants of Joshua, you are descendants of Judah the Maccabee. He said this. He was versed in the Bible. He was versed in the land of old. He was versed in our heroic past. But he said: You can recreate that historic past in the present. The future is yours if you have the will, if you have the faith, if you have the discipline.*

*Your grandfather wanted to be buried next to his beloved soldiers, here in Avichail, in the Land of Israel, and I feel it's an obligation of our people, of our state, and of mine personally, to fulfill his testament. I wanted to say that to you personally...*

*"We salute you, John Henry Patterson."*

---

**Geoffrey Clarfield** is an anthropologist at large.

To comment on this article, please click