

(3) THE ARAB REBELLION – AN EVALUATION BY
COLONEL LAWRENCE

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible. This I did. I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts. So high an aim called out the inherent nobility of their minds, and made them play a generous part in events: but when we won, it was charged against me that the British petrol royalties in Mesopotamia were become dubious, and French colonial policy ruined in the Levant.

I am afraid that I hope so. We pay for these things too much in honour and in innocent lives. I went up the Tigris with one hundred Devon Territorials, young, clean, delightful fellows, full of the power of happiness and of making women and children glad. By them one saw vividly how great it was to be their kin, and English. And we were casting them by thousands into the fire to the worst of deaths, not to win the war but that the corn and rice and oil of Mesopotamia might be ours. The only need was to defeat our enemies (Turkey among them), and this was at last done in the wisdom of Allenby with less than four hundred killed, by turning to our uses the hands of the oppressed in Turkey. I am proudest of my thirty fights in that I did not have any of our own blood shed. All our subject provinces to me were not worth one dead Englishman.

*T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom,
London, 1955, p. 23.*

(4) THE OTTOMAN CITIZENSHIP CAMPAIGN IN ERETZ ISRAEL
DURING WORLD WAR I

The Russo-Turkish declaration of war on 30 October 1914 at the beginning of World War I, followed by hostilities between Turkey and Britain brought many difficulties to the Jews of Eretz Israel. Food was scarce and Jews were ordered to enlist into the Turkish army. All enemy citizens – the majority being Russian Jews – were ordered to leave the country or renounce their foreign nationality in favour of Ottoman citizenship and remain in Eretz Israel. Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sought ways to prevent expulsion and the "Poalei-Zion" party (which included David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Zalman Shazar and others) decided on obligatory application for Ottoman citizenship. Thus began the period of "Ottomanization" and at least 15,000 Jews were thus able to remain in Eretz Israel. At the same time

a group of Jews volunteered for the Turkish army on the express condition that their unit remain as a Jewish battalion in Eretz Israel. The text of the proclamation on the establishment of a national Jewish defence militia within the framework of the Ottoman army runs as follows:

A few days ago the government announced the need of establishing a local, national defence corps and has summoned the residents of Jerusalem, regardless of religion or national identity to enrol as national defence volunteers. The hour has struck for the nation to take up arms. The war has taken our finest and stoutest youth who have entered the ranks of the army which is fighting for fatherland and people. However, we, the residents cannot rest satisfied whilst only a part of us — the fighting army alone — is defending the country, what with hostilities spreading further and further in our direction. Accordingly it is up to us residents, to come to the help of the fatherland and authorities. The government does not ask us to volunteer for the army, but only to save the fatherland at this very place. We must form units of young and old and learn how to fight, so as to withstand the enemy who dares to attack us and our fatherland. The formation of a local national defence corps, will enable the deployment of a great number of fighting men, at present posted in the city, at the battlefield and thereby strengthen the country's defence forces. The value of voluntary defence lies in the moral as well as material realms: the example shown by hundreds of young volunteers displaying bravery in the face of the enemy, will provide encouragement for the people. The appeal of the fatherland, made to all residents, without distinction between one people and another, has a special significance for us Jews. By answering this call, we will for the first time display an ability to defend our country and the honour of our fatherland. National self-respect requires that we should not have to be ashamed in the face of other residents, who will doubtless fulfil their duty in good faith by promptly responding to the plea of the government. Remember, brothers, that the period we are passing through is of great historical significance, being decisive for both the future of our country as also for the fate of the entire Jewish community in this land. The crucial consequences of the situation ought to be fully realized. All men capable of wielding a weapon, whatever their background and convictions should hasten to join the defence corps and volunteer for national defence.

Defence Committee — the Militia

All those who wish to join the defence army should apply to the Chief Rabbi's (Haham Bashi) committee for Ottoman citizenship.

However, soon after this voluntary recruitment an order came from Damascus to disband the Jewish battalion. The Turkish government now proceeded to attack Zionism. A series of harsh decrees followed one another. An order issued by the

commander of the Turkish army declared that anyone found with Jewish National Fund stamps or a portrait of Herzl will be sentenced to death. The government threatened to treat the Jews as it had treated the Armenians . . . One after the other all Hebrew newspapers were closed down.

(5) WHY A JEWISH LEGION?

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the second President of the State of Israel and the author of the proclamation was expelled from Palestine in 1915 by the Turks together with his friend David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel. The two spent three years as exiles in the United States where they established the "Hehalutz" pioneering movement whose aim was to encourage immigration to Eretz Israel, to build up the country and to protect it from its enemies. They also worked towards creating a Jewish battalion which would play a significant role in the war for the conquest of Palestine.

Why do we need a Jewish Legion?

This question no longer concerns the five thousand pioneers, from England and from America, who are already in the ranks of the first Jewish army. Nor does it concern the thousands of Jewish youth who are prepared, today or tomorrow, to join the Jewish army. But it does concern the tens of thousands of youth who are still distant from us. The Jewish volunteers astounded them, and forced them, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to consider more deeply their own course of action in the future. We wish to give them our reply.

Why should there be a Jewish Legion? Has so little Jewish blood been spilt in this pitiful war, the worst of all wars? Is it not enough that there are almost a million Jewish soldiers fighting in the various armies, under every flag in the world? What, in the final analysis, will a few thousand legionnaires of our own add to the vast sea of millions of soldiers?

These are the questions which face every man whose sleeve bears the white badge with the red legend 'The Hebrew Battalion' upon it. They are also the questions which face every speaker at mass meetings in lecture halls and beneath the open sky.

And this is our reply:

True, the Jews have contributed hundreds of thousands of soldiers to every army, on every front. Moreover, the Jews have sacrificed, in proportion to their numbers, more casualties than any other nation — even more than the Belgians. The number of Jewish soldiers, approximately one million, is three times greater than the whole Turkish army, and twice as great as the entire population of Montenegro. According to the rule of equity accepted in the

world, this fact should suffice to demonstrate the participation of our people in this great war. The world, however, does not always take equity into account. In the eyes of the world the Jewish soldiers, who are separated and scattered on all the fronts — as is the entire Jewish people — *nowhere appear as Jewish combatants*: on no front do Jewish soldiers take part as an independent national military body, in no place do they fly the Jewish national flag, they give no voice to any Jewish slogan, and no one perceives them — a million Jewish soldiers — as Jews, neither in battle nor in death. When the bloodshed is ended and the nations of the world come together around a “peace table” in order to secure the rights of the world’s peoples, no consideration will be given to the contribution of the Jewish people in the war, because at the time they did not represent an independent national force.

The Zionist Congress took upon itself the task of organizing all the Jews into a national unit which would claim the attention and regard of the entire world. The intention of the Jewish Legion is exactly the same: to train the first Jewish national force and to be represented at the peace conference. The apparent difference between the Jewish Zionist Congress and the Jewish Army lies only in their respective modes of action: the Congress will bring its influence to bear with its declarations and resolutions, and the Jewish Army — with its revolutionary practical operations. The influence of the Congress will make itself felt by demonstrations, while the Army will be an active physical factor in the war . . . We must mobilize our own independent army, under our own national flag, and fight on the soil which has been recognized as ours — the soil of Eretz Israel.

Our army will have enormous value and meaning, both in the eyes of the world and in our own eyes. A Jewish army in Eretz Israel cannot be disregarded in time of war; and when peace comes it will be impossible to ignore us. The Jewish army indeed, will not immediately constitute an impressive armed force, but the very fact of its existence will demonstrate the strength of our will and our inflexible determination to bring about a national renaissance.

Furthermore: this war, which has dragged into it both our nation and others, is also tied to the fate of our ancient homeland; the British army has already driven the Turks from the Land of Judea. The Turks reigned over Eretz Israel for four hundred consecutive years, but they proved incapable of developing the country, either culturally or economically, and they never recognized the value of the existent Jewish community as a factor in the country’s revival and development. When the English came into Eretz Israel, the mighty voice of the greatest power in the world openly proclaimed its recognition of our national identity and of our right to renew our historical existence in Eretz Israel.

Will it not be the greatest wrong in all Jewish history if, at this time, we cannot find thousands and tens of thousands of Jewish young men who are

prepared to sacrifice their lives for the Jewish cause? Should we not become a mockery in the eyes of the generations who follow us, who will justly scorn their forefathers for not rising to the occasion when the hour of redemption was at hand?

Our younger generation has indeed proved its worth. The Jewish Legion is no longer in the planning stage. It has already become a reality. The first thousands of Legionnaires are already in Eretz Israel. Others are in army camps in Canada and in England; units are being formed in Bolshevik Russia, in the Ukraine, and in South Africa. But we need thousands and tens of thousands. We need them not merely to take part in the war, but also to take part in the work to be done after the war. The soldiers of today are, in effect, the pioneers of tomorrow; it is they who will determine the future of the people of Israel in its land.

*Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Essays and Reminiscences (Hebrew)
Jerusalem, 1968, p. 214*

(6) JEWISH TROOPS IN WORLD WAR I

The thought came originally from Ze'ev Jabotinsky: . . . "it would be a good idea if the Jews were to create a unit of their own and take part in the conquest of Eretz Israel".

The setting up of a Jewish force to fight on the side of the Allies against Turkey and Germany ran counter to the policy of neutrality adopted by the Zionist leadership, actuated by fear for the plight of the Yishuv and Zionist efforts in Eretz Israel under Turkish rule. The implementation of the idea of a body of Jewish volunteers in the Service of the British in the liberation of Eretz Israel fell to Yosef Trumpeldor.

There were three stages in the enlistment of Jewish volunteers: the establishment of the Zion Mule Corps in Egypt; the London Battalion; and volunteer enlistment in the U.S.A. and Canada . . . It has been decided: "To enlist a group of volunteers from among the exiles of Eretz Israel for disposal with the British Government with a view to their deployment in the Eretz Israel campaign". A temporary founding committee is to be set up immediately, its members being: Sluskin, Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor. The news is spreading like wildfire — the men of the founding committee don't waste time. The following evening, the first meeting of the group is held. The Chief Rabbi of Alexandria, Professor Raphael de la Pergola, is invited to take honorary chair. The founding proclamation of the group is formulated:

(a) A legion of Jewish volunteers for disposal with the British Government has been set up in Alexandria, in order to participate in the liberation of

Eretz Israel.

(b) At the head of the legion will stand a governing body appointed by the founding committee and the volunteers will choose three delegates to participate in the governing body.

(c) Each volunteer will take an oath that he will do everything in his power and if necessary sacrifice his life for the liberation of Eretz Israel; that he will submit to the governing body and not leave the legion until it has fulfilled its task.

(d) All volunteers will receive from the founding committee living-quarters and sustenance.

Alexandria, Egypt in the 1847th year of our Exile (1917)

Companies A and B, the first companies of the battalion, composed largely of volunteers from Eretz Israel, embarked with Patterson, Trumpeldor, the Anglo-Egyptian officers, Jay and Rollo — and the Jewish officers Goldin, Auerbach and Meer. Companies C and D composed mainly of troops mobilized in Alexandria . . . boarded the "Ango-Egyptian".

It was only by a miracle that the uniforms (minus buttons) arrived on the last day before they boarded the ships. The Jews of Alexandria and the camp members gathered on the quay — and the air was tense with emotion. Towards evening, the soldiers were allowed to descend from the ship and mingle with the crowd below. Soldiers stood with their families, young men and their girl friends, no one knew the destination but all wanted to believe that they were bound for Eretz Israel. This was the rumour that circulated on the quay "where are we heading for — for Gaza?" David Yudelevitz asked Colonel Patterson as he climbed up the gangway . . . The time was 4 p.m. Saturday 17 April 1915. "I don't know," Patterson answered. In his hand he held a sealed order which he would open in mid-ocean, one hour after departure.

On the 13 December 1918, after Weizmann had sent at least three telegrams to Brandeis, through Aaron Aaronsohn who was sent to the United States as Liaison Officer between the Zionist offices in London and New York, De Haas the secretary of the Zionist Office in New York answered him as follows: "The task here is not an easy one. The United States is not at war with Turkey and so it will be impossible to mobilize volunteers for a Jewish or a Zionist unit in the U.S.A." However, De Haas suggested an alternative project: "We have been thinking here for some time that if the British government, in agreement with the U.S. government would arrange that the British and Canadian recruitment stations be granted permission to recruit for Jewish units to be trained in Canada, success would be assured . . ."

Registration at De Haas' office reveals that 2,700 soldiers enlisted for the Jewish legion in the U.S.A. between February 1918 and the end of the war. These men underwent medical examinations at the British and Canadian recruitment centres. More people came to volunteer at these recruitment

centres than were accepted. Most of the volunteers streamed to the recruitment centres during the first three months. On 17 April De Haas cabled Weizmann that: "one battalion, numbering 1,200 men, has left for Canada. A second battalion is being raised". De Haas might have been exaggerating. It was anyhow pointless to talk of battalions, the British having sent the volunteers in groups to the recruitment centre at Windsor and from there shipped them to Britain to the training centre at Plymouth where they joined the Jewish Legion . . . Joseph Breinin tried to boost up volunteer recruitment in Canada. Jabotinsky later mentions 300 volunteers from Canada. It should be taken into consideration that there were Canadian volunteers who were recruited at recruitment centres in the United States, and it could well be that the official source refers only to Jews possessing Canadian citizenship without considering volunteers possessing foreign citizenship who were recruited in Canada . . .

The London Battalion

The memorandum to the Prime Minister was sent by Jabotinsky on the very eve of his mobilization. The memorandum opens with a draft containing five clauses. This time, the proposal is not veiled with hints of long term objectives devoid of immediate consequence. This is a clear-cut proposal with the seal of a practical proposition:

- (1) The government shall create a Jewish brigade for combat service in Eretz Israel and Egypt.
- (2) This Jewish unit shall be composed of Russian Jews to be recruited in Britain, Egypt and other British territories . . .
- (3) The nucleus of the unit shall be formed immediately from 150 Russian Jews recruited in Egypt (at the Winchester camp there were no more than 60 men). A second group of 280 men was recruited in Egypt and is due to arrive during the next few weeks . . .
- (4) The government shall supply officers. There is no need to consider rank, religion or race. Jewish cadets in the British army will be allowed to volunteer for the regiment . . .
- (5) The government will support the recruitment campaign. The authors of the memorandum are ready to supply the necessary means and a team for conducting the recruitment campaign . . .

In the second part of the memorandum, the authors mention three novel considerations to justify the renewed urgency of the creation of a Jewish legion:

- (a) The British advance in Eretz Israel; (b) The problem of the 30,000 Russian Jews which had not yet been solved; (c) The plight of the Jews in Eastern Europe (i.e. Russia) used by the Germans as a basis for propaganda against the "Entente", thus presented as flouting the obligations it had undertaken . . .

The man who now most helped Jabotinsky was Weizmann. With his keen

sense of politics, Weizmann realized that at this moment, the creation of a Jewish legion was turning from an object of yearning into a palpable fact and he knew that only the recruitment of soldiers on a large scale could sweep away the opposition of the Zionist functionaries who surrounded him . . .

An announcement to the press (on 27 July) read as follows: "Preparations for the creation of a Jewish infantry regiment have been completed. Experienced British officers are now being chosen to fill the senior positions in the unit and orders have already been sent to transfer to it Jewish troops who know Yiddish and Russian and who are at present serving in British units. The Magen David has been suggested as the emblem of the regiment. Additional information on conditions of service and recruitment will be made available as soon as the necessary legal confirmations have been obtained" . . . On 9 July 1919 after the heavy and slow wheels of the British camp started to roll, the official announcement of High Command was publicized concerning "the changing of the name of the infantry unit" and the world was informed that "it has been decided to change the title of the 38th regiment, the Royal Marksmen (the City of London Regiment). This battalion will be called from the date of the publication of this order and onwards as the 38th regiment, the Royal Marksmen, the 1st Judeans."

*Y. Eilam, The Hebrew Battalions (Hebrew)
Tel Aviv, 1973, passim.*

**(7) NILI — NETZAH YISRAEL LO YESHAKER
(THE STRENGTH OF ISRAEL WILL NOT LIE)**

(a) British Foreign Ministry documents revealing British army and Intelligence Service assessment of Aaron Aaronsohn, Sarah Aaronsohn and the other members of Nili. These Documents show the importance attached by the British army H.Q. in Cairo to the spy ring of Aaronsohn in view of the attack which the British planned in Eretz Israel against the Turks and the Germans. The military heads passed the demands of Aaronsohn to the British Foreign Minister and supported them. This clearly demonstrates Nili's major importance to them.

(b) The bones of Avshalom Feinberg; Truth (historic) sprouts forth from the ground.

Aaronsohn threatens to stop his spying activities

Wingate warned Balfour that unless confidence of some kind was shown in Aaronsohn by the Zionist Federation in England, he would cease to co-operate and disband the organization which he has built up. Wingate wrote in the same letter that Aaronsohn had experienced many difficulties in his relations with fellow-Jews in Eretz Israel. They were doubtful whether he was really working in their interest and in order to clarify the situation, a