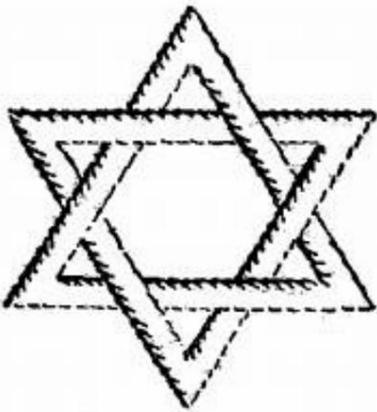


# About The Zion Mule Corps (1915) and The Jewish Legion (1917-1918)

## Introduction

Although *The Zion Mule Corps* only existed for barely a year, its existence goes back much further. The reason for this is that the corps was the first military unit in modern times to consist exclusively of soldiers of Jewish descent. The unit thus came to play a role in the development that later led to the establishment of the State of Israel and thus the Israeli army.

## The Zion Mule Corps



*Shoulder Badge*

*The Zion Mule Corps, 1915.*  
From Source 9

## Historical summary

March 1915: The Zion Mule Corps is established.

April 1915: The corps is sent to Gallipoli.

December 1915: The corps is withdrawn from Gallipoli.

January 1916: Personnel return to Alexandria and demobilization begins.

May 1916: The corps is disbanded.

The Corps was established in Egypt in March 1915 prior to the Gallipoli campaign, with the aim of giving Jews the opportunity to contribute to the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. A total of 650 men signed up for the corps, of which 562 came to serve on the Gallipoli peninsula, for a shorter or longer time.

One half of the soldiers were recruited from among Jews of primarily Russian descent who stayed in refugee camps in Egypt after being expelled from Palestine by Turkey's entry into the First World War. The other half of the soldiers were recruited from among Egyptian Jews. The two groups had very different reasons for signing up - the first was driven by idealism and the fear of being conscripted into the Russian army, while the second was motivated rather by a sense of adventure and, not least, the possibility of paid employment.

The language of command was English and Hebrew, but Yiddish was also used to a large extent, as Yiddish was in practice the common language of the Jewish soldiers.

## Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson



*Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson.*  
From Source 1.

The commander of the corps became the English lieutenant-colonel John Henry Patterson [1](#)), of Irish-Protestant descent, who (for reasons unknown to me) was in Alexandria.

Patterson was an engineer officer [2](#)), specializing in the construction of railways. After some time in India, he came to Africa in 1898 to direct the construction of a railway bridge over the Tsavo River. During the building, Indian and African workers were violently mauled by two lions, which Patterson promptly shot.

He then wrote the book *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*, which President Theodore Roosevelt, himself an active big game hunter, is said to have called "the most thrilling book of true stories ever written". During the Boer War, John Henry Patterson served in the Imperial Yeomanry, where he attained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his efforts.

A scandal [3](#)) in [1908](#) led to his having to resign from the army. During a safari, he fell in love with the wife of a fellow officer while the latter lay ill with fever in his tent. The husband found out about the affair and committed suicide, after which the new couple continued the safari...

## Captain Joseph Trumpeldor



*Captain Joseph Trumpeldor.*  
From Source 7.

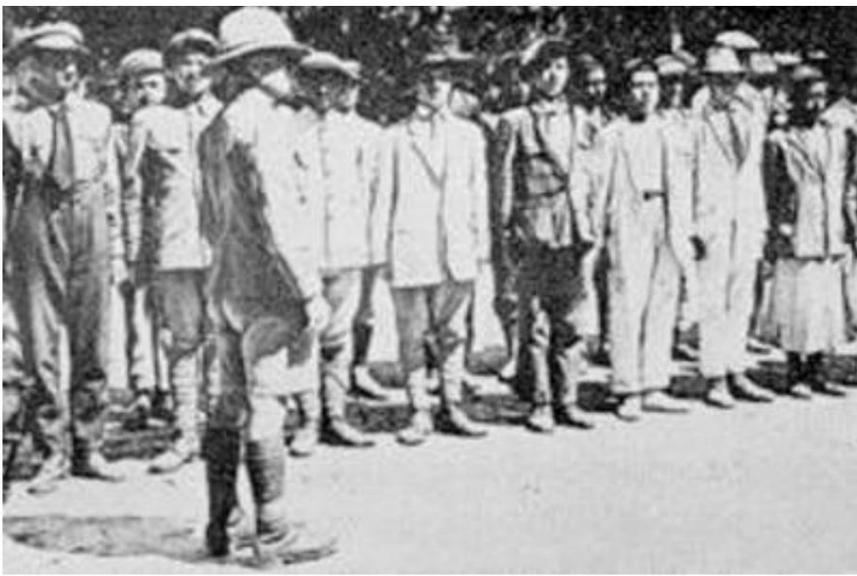
The second in command of the corps, Captain Joseph Trumpeldor [4](#)), was a prominent Zionist, with military experience from the Russian army.

Trumpeldor joined the Russian army in 1902 and took part in the battles for Port Arthur, where he lost most of his left arm. In 1906 he was appointed an officer - reportedly the first Jewish officer in the Russian army.

He emigrated in 1911 to Palestine, and after the outbreak of the First World War came to Egypt, where, together with another prominent Zionist - Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky [5](#)) - he agitated for the establishment of a Jewish military unit.

### **Strength and organization**

Enthusiasm for this possible contribution to the struggle for the liberation of Palestine was not shared, but since it was not possible to enlist foreign nationals in a fighting unit, the enthusiastic Jews were instead offered the opportunity to form a wooden company.



*Jewish volunteers, perhaps in Alexandria.*  
From Source 5.

This was not "military" enough for Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who then traveled to England to continue his struggle for the creation of a Jewish fighting unit - see below under The Jewish Legion.

Among the many Jews in refugee camps in Alexandria, the necessary number of soldiers was quickly recruited and the equipment and material necessary for the corps' function was provided.

The caption reads *Jewish volunteers in England*. The soldier in the foreground is clearly wearing a troop uniform, which is why the picture was rather taken in the Middle East.



*North American mules from a New Zealand training unit.*  
From Source 6

The mules are described in some places as coming from "darkest Africa" and without any form of schooling, while in other places they are described as North American. Regardless of lineage, the mules performed excellently already well over a month after their entry into the corps.

From the English side, the corps was considered on an equal footing with other "native" units. The Jewish officers, who were selected from among the volunteers, thus received a lower salary than the English ones, which already gave rise to dissatisfaction in the contemporaries.

The corps was divided into a staff and 4 divisions (*troops*) - 2 "Russian" and 2 "Egyptian". Each division consisted of 4 groups (*sections*) divided into 2 teams (*sub-sections*). The platoon leaders were English lieutenants, each with a Jewish lieutenant as second-in-command. The group leaders were sergeants and the team leaders were corporals.

## **Force Overview - Zion Mule Corps**

Personnel	Number Equipment and material	Number
Lieutenant Colonel (English)	1 Horses (for officers and certain non-commissioned officers)	20
Captain (second in command)	1 Riding saddle	20
Lieutenants (English)	5 Mules	750
Second Lieutenants	5 Pack saddles	750
Doctor <u>6</u> (added rank of captain)	1 Rifles (Mauser) <u>7</u> , with bayonets	1 Rifle
Veterinary Officer	ammunition (= 20 rounds per gun)	7,240
Intendant (added rank of captain)	1 Revolvers	12
Staff Sergeant	1 Revolver ammunition	
(= 20+ rounds per gun)	273 Chief Sergeants	3 Belts
362 Interpreter		
	1 Cartridge bags	362
Sergeants	25 Uniforms	477
Sergeant, farrier	1 Raincoat	1
Sergeant, saddler	Blankets	25
Corporals	Personal equipment (cooking pots, etc.)	475
Hardware smiths	5 Tents	28
Saddle makers	5 Gasket, fitter	4
Crew (original)	400 Gasket, saddle maker	<b>482</b>
<b>Total</b>		

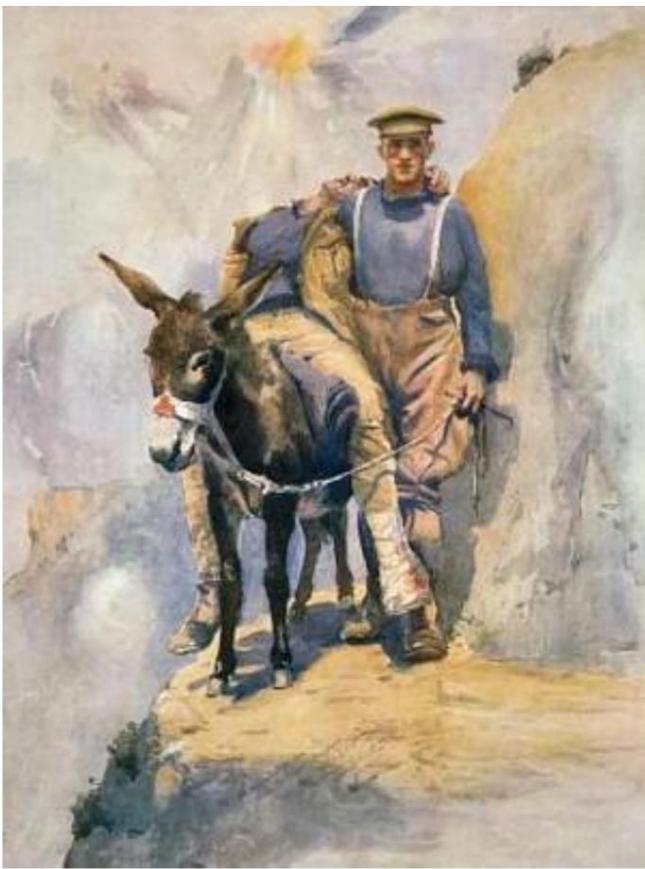
(Source 4)

### Unit marking and uniforming



*Variant shoulder badge from  
The Zion Mule Corps.  
From Source 9.*

The Corps' shoulder badge is seen in two variants - the very simple Star of David shown at the outset, and this circular badge. However, my sources cannot shed any further light on the two variants.



*Simpson and his Donkey.*  
Painted by Horace Moore-Jones.

My rendition may come from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, which in any case contains a similar rendition.

The sources are even more silent about the uniform, but I assume that it was a regular khaki uniform - in canvas version (troop uniform) and/or field uniform Model 1902.

The headgear may very well have been a cap that was commonly used throughout the campaign, alternatively a trope helmet.

I have not been able to find any pictures showing soldiers of The Zion Mule Corps, but they may well have gone out as shown in this rendering of Australian soldier John Simpson rd

Kirkpatrick, from 3 Australian Field Ambulance, one of the heroes of the Gallipoli campaign.

In the corps camp, a "Zionist" flag flew, side by side with the Union Jack. My sources do not state what this flag looked like, but it could have looked like the one shown next.



*Flag of the First World Zionist Congress in 1885 and the later Israeli national flag.*



*Flag of the Second World Zionist Congress in 1898.*

## On the way to the front

Three weeks after its formation, the Corps was inspected by the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, Sir Ian Hamilton, and he expressed satisfaction with what he saw, and was apparently so pleased that he included the Corps in the force which, from mid-April 1915, faced Gallipoli.



*The Objectives for 25th April 1915.*

The corps was divided among the transport vessels:

**HMT (His Majesty's Troopship) Hymettus:** 1st and 2nd Platoons (the Russians) and the staff, and **HMT Anglo-Egyptian:** 3rd and 4th Platoons (the Egyptians).

with a view to deployment together with the English *29th Infantry Division and Australian* respectively *New Zealand Division*.

Lieutenant Colonel Patterson was not thrilled at the prospect of his untried corps being deployed in two halves - one of which would be outside his direct command, but could not reverse the decision.

The lieutenant colonel's fears were not put to shame, for "something" went wrong with the two "Egyptian" platoons (145 men), which miraculously three weeks after the landing found themselves on their way back to Alexandria, having

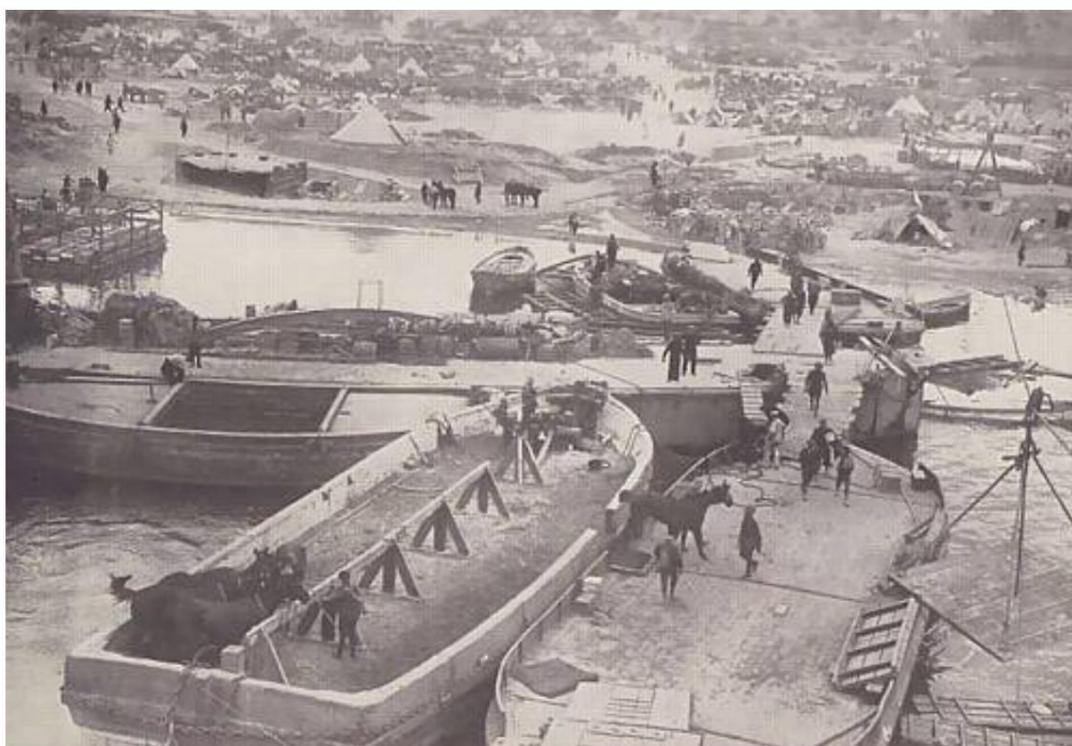
their mules were taken over by Australians and New Zealanders. The reason is not known, but Source 1 interprets it as an expression of opposition to the idea of a Jewish military unit.

In Alexandria, the soldiers were not allowed to disembark and a mutiny broke out - 60 men were arrested and 75 demobilized; the 10 missing up to 145 were wounded during the action - 6 by enemy bullets and 4 by mules - along with the *Australian and New Zealand Division*.

Source 1, on which several of the other sources are based, suggests that it might be a *less than satisfactory service*... that was the cause, but adds that the (English) officers of the corps should have been held responsible, rather than the soldiers, for lack of training and poor discipline. Whether the real reason can be clarified I do not know, but it seems difficult to find an objective presentation of the matter, all the while that sympathies and antipathies play a large role in the presentation of the subject.

Via Lemnos, the fleet reached Moudros (both Greek islands), which was the base port of the expeditionary force. Here HMT Anglo-Egyptian ran aground, and with great effort, and with the invaluable help of soldiers from an Indian mule corps 8), succeeded in transferring soldiers (about 300) and animals to the transport ship HMT Dundrennon.

### At the front



*Gallipoli, "V" Beach  
Landing of supplies, horses and ammunition, 6 May 1915 9).*                

Together with the invasion fleet, HMT Dundrennon now sets course for Gallipoli, where on 27 April 1915 the corps begins unloading on "V" Beach - an operation that was to extend over a full three days, hampered by enemy fire and heavy rain.

The Corps' first task will be to send 200 mules with water supplies from "V" Beach to the hard-pressed forces on "W" Beach 10).



Gallipoli, "V" Beach - as it appeared in 1922 [11](#)). [\\_\\_\\_](#)

The operation was made difficult by enemy fire, which not least frightened the mules, but the corps solved the task with flying colors, and with only a few injured soldiers and animals.

Read about the Corps' efforts during the campaign in *The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli* by Martin Sugarman (Source 3).

Audrey Herbert, who served as an intelligence officer in The New Zealand Division, wrote in her diary [12](#)):

*"We had with us, too, a remarkable body of men who were more than suspect, and whose presence fed the wildest rumours. These were called Zionists, Zionites, and many other names. They were the Jewish exiles from Syria, who looked after the mules, and constituted the Mule Corps, under Colonel Patterson, of lion hunting fame. They performed very fine service, and gave proof of the greatest courage. On several occasions I saw the mules blown to bits, and the men of the Mule Corps perfectly calm, among their charges."*

### **Disciplinary problems**

It must be added, however, that all was not "joy and fun", as during quiet periods there were sometimes such serious disciplinary problems with individuals and groups that corporal punishment had to be resorted to to keep the troublemakers down. Although punishment by whipping was abolished in the English army in 1881, Source 1 mentions several cases of this form of punishment for disobedience.

The main causes of the problems had their origin in the improvised nature of the corps and the very different cultural backgrounds of the soldiers. The more idealistic "Russians" apparently gave rise to fewer problems than the "Egyptians". Another cause of problems was purely linguistic, as even the commander and second-in-command were unable to communicate without an interpreter - the lieutenant-colonel could not speak Russian, Yiddish or Hebrew, and the second-in-command could not speak English.

The soldiers were given the prospect that their families would receive support while they were at the front, but the support did not appear at all or did not live up to the promises. The soldiers complained of discrimination in that they were not given the same opportunities for leave as others. They also complained that the English officers treated them with contempt, harshness, and apparently even worse than Egyptian laborers, whom everyone apparently looked down upon.

Be that as it may, it must be stated that the soldiers were probably familiar with their field tasks or at least learned them to the extent necessary, while officers and non-commissioned officers were not

trained to solve their managerial tasks.



*Distinguished Conduct Medal.*

Reproduced

from *The Wonder Book of Soldiers*,  
Ward, Lock & Co, London, no  
year (circa 1915).

The corps' total casualties are calculated at 14 dead and more than 60 wounded. The figures vary from source to source. Source 3, from which these figures originate, refers to studies up to September 2000 of various field hospitals' lists of wounded.

Three soldiers were awarded *the Distinguished Conduct Medal* and several were mentioned in the day's command (*mentioned in despatches*).

## **The Jewish Legion**

The strategic considerations that led to the landing at Gallipoli did not make much sense to the soldiers, who were more intent on taking an active part in the liberation of Palestine itself from Turkish occupation. As mentioned, Vladimir Jabotinsky traveled to England, where he was one of the main men in an extensive lobbying effort that led in August 1917 to the creation of a battalion of Jewish volunteers.



*The Royal Fusiliers.*

Cigarette card No. 30 from the  
*Army Badges series*, issued in 1939  
by the tobacco company Gallaher Ltd.

The Jewish Legion, or The Jewish Regiment, which was the original "working title", became the collective term for three battalions of Jewish volunteers. Originally it should have been an independent regiment, but such an honor and a separate mark would only be given to the unit if it earned it in battle. Instead, the three battalions referred to below are created as battalions in The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment).

The following is written on the back of the card:

*This famous London regiment was founded in 1685 by James II. They were the first regiment to be equipped with rifles, and their function was to protect the ordnance of the time. Many of their early recruits came from the celebrated London Train Bands, and they have the privilege of marching through the City with fixed bayonets, flying colors and beating drums. Their honors show a long service dating from Namur, 1695.*

### **38th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers**

Some of the soldiers were tailors or workers from the clothing industry and the battalion - *38th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers* - then also got the nickname *The Tailors*. Among the soldiers were also 60 veterans of *The Zion Mule Corps*, including Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson, who was given command of the battalion. Jabotinsky himself, after some paperwork challenges, was awarded the rank of first lieutenant and served as a platoon leader.



*Vladimir Jabotinsky, as  
First Lieutenant in The  
Royal Fusiliers.  
From Source 7.*



*Lieutenant Colonel Eliezer Margolin.  
From Source 12.*

### **39th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers**

In America, similar lobbying was carried out for the Zionist cause and recruitment of soldiers for another battalion, which later became the *39th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers*, nicknamed *The Americans* after the soldiers' belonging to the Jewish population groups in America, Canada and Argentina.

The commander of this battalion became Lieutenant Colonel Eliezer Margolin [13](#)), an Australian officer with combat experience from Gallipoli and the Western Front.

### **40th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers**

After the liberation of the southern parts of Palestine, hundreds of Jewish men and women signed up for it

English army, which, however, showed no special interest in these volunteers. However, following political pressure, the end of the story was that a third Jewish battalion - *the 40th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers* - was created.

However, the women were rejected, but the other volunteers were - together with 92 former Turkish prisoners of war of Jewish descent - sent to Egypt to be educated. The battalion was nicknamed *The Palestinians*.

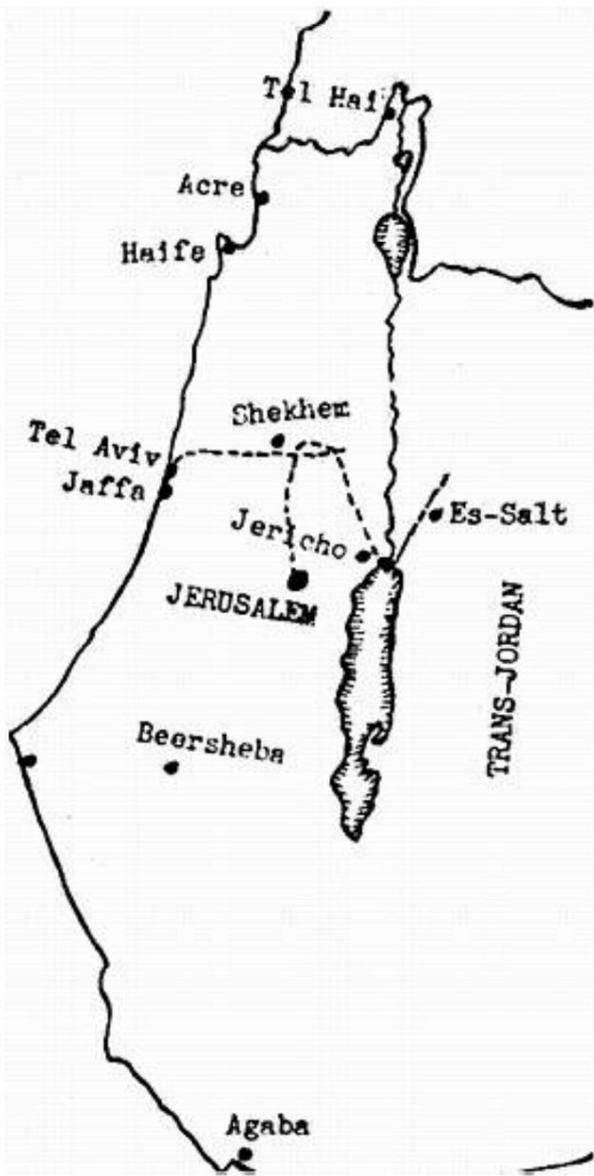
To the soldiers' great chagrin, however, the war ended before they were ready to take their turn.

were also 2 reserve battalions in England - *the 41st and Fusiliers*, which *42nd (Reserve) (Service) Battalion, Royal* There provided personnel replacement for the other three battalions.



*Weapons Inspection at 39th Bn. Royal Fusiliers outside Jerusalem, 1918.*  
From Source 1.

**At the front**



38th and 39th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers' effort in Palestine 1918.

From Source 9.

The effort in Palestine, briefly discussed in my article General Sir Edmund Allenby's joint operations in Palestine, 1917-1918 - garnered official recognition.

Major General Chaytor subsequently stated [14](#)): "By forcing the Jordan fords, you helped in no small measure to win the great victory gained at Damascus."

### First Judeans

The 38th Battalion was renamed the *First Judeans* on 9 September 1919 and was awarded the menorah as a regimental insignia.



*Regimental badge - First Judeans, 1919.*

From Source 9.

However, the battalion was soon after, in line with the other battalions, demobilized.

The mark shows the seven-armed candlestick (*menorah*) and the Hebrew inscription *Kadima*, meaning *Forward* or *Eastward*. It was precisely a brand in the style that one had hoped to be able to carry into battle from the start, but which the battalions first had to do - and thus did - deserve.

## Uniforms



*"The Jewish Legion",*

*39th (Service) Battalion,  
Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment),  
1918-1919.*

Drawn by RJ Marrion.

From left:

1. English Staff Sergeant of the Royal Fusiliers, attached to the 39th Battalion during its training in England.
2. An American volunteer on his way to a training camp at Fort Edward in Nova Scotia (Canada). A white armband with blue and red inscription is worn as a military insignia.
3. Private in troop uniform made of canvas. The soldier is ready for night patrol, and has wrapped rags around his boots to muffle the sound, and rags around his knees to protect them from sharp stones, thorns and the like. The battalion's insignia is worn on the shoulder.
4. Private in troop uniform made of canvas. Instead of a jacket, a grey-blue shirt is worn, without a collar.
5. Captain in field uniform.

In Source 10 there is a more detailed text for the plate. The badges above the three flags are the Royal Fusiliers' cap badge and shoulder badge and (in the centre) *the First Judeans'* seven-armed candlestick.

### Shoulder badges, plumes and plumes



*38th Battalion,  
Royal Fusiliers.*



*39th Battalion,  
Royal Fusiliers.*



*40th Battalion,  
Royal Fusiliers.*

Source 1 specifically refers to the 38th Battalion's color as red, despite the above drawing's apparent indication of a red Star of David on a soldier from the 39th Battalion.

The Stars of David were worn on a khaki colored background.

Internet image collection Signs of Resistance Dan "Mobius" Sieradski shows in image 21 three brands like here.

Picture 14 in the same collection shows a light blue and white banner with the inscription *First Judeans* in red and the seven-armed candlestick, also in red. An inscription in Hebrew is indicated in white letters; The Jabotinsky Museum is cited as the source. I don't know the details of this tab, it may not be official, but it may have been presented in connection with the establishment on September 9, 1919.

Three of the Royal Fusiliers' almost 80 First World War banners - *Megiddo*, *Nablus* and *Palestine 1918* - originate from the 38th and 39th Battalions. *Palestine 1918* is one of the 10 streamers selected to be worn on the regimental banners.



*Jewish soldiers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, 1918. From the Jewish Legion.*

## Closing

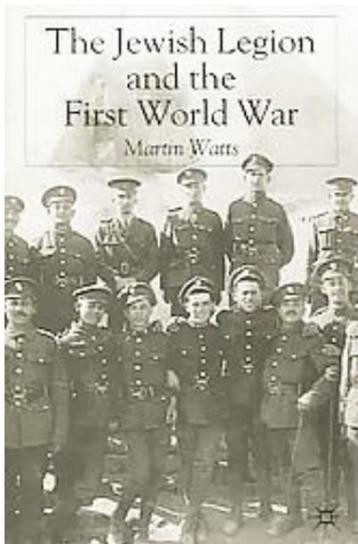
This presentation has only scratched the surface of the history of The Zion Mule Corps and later The Jewish Legion.

Big politics exerted a significant influence on the development of things, including not least the many conflicts that preceded the formation of Israel as an independent state in 1948.

Lieutenant Colonel Patterson published two books about his experiences with the Jewish soldiers:

- *With the Zionists in Gallipoli*, Hutchinson, London 1916
- *With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign*, Hutchinson, London 1922

The latter has recently been republished by the Naval & Military Press, London, but it was a mention of the Gallipoli book in an English antiquarian bookseller's catalog that started my tale...



Recently, an apparently quite extensive "regimental history" has also been published:

- *The Jewish Legion and the First World War* by Martin Watts, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2004, ISBN 1-40393-921-7. Price: approx. £58.00.

I don't know the book, but the publisher has done, among other things, the introductory chapter available on its website, and here is an overview of the history of The Zion Mule Corps and The Jewish Legion. See

## Sources

1. *War & Hope - a History of the Jewish Legion* by Elias Gilner, Herzl Press, New York 1969.
2. *The Jewish Legion in World War I*, published by the Museum of the Israel Defense Forces "Beit Hagdudim", ca. 1978.
3. *Army Service Corps 1902-1918* by Michael Young, Leo Cooper, London 2000, ISBN 085052-730-9. .
4. The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli by Martin Sugarman (Jewish Virtual Library).
5. From Hashomer to the Israel Defense Forces - Armed Jewish Defense in Palestine by Me'ir Pa'il (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
6. The New Zealanders at Gallipoli by Fred Waite, Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland/ New Zealand 1919 (New Zealand Electronic Text Centre).
7. The Jewish Legion (Wikipedia).
8. The Jewish Legion (Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth).
9. The Jewish Legion in Palestine World War One, 1914-1918 (Jewish East End of London Photo Gallery).
10. The Jewish Company of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps compared with Other Jewish Diaspora Fighting Units by Benis M. Frank (World War 1 Document Archive).
11. The Zion Mule Corps, the Jewish Legion, and their Irish Commander, Colonel John Henry Patterson by Yanky Fachler (The Jewish Veteran, Volume 58, Number 1 (ca. 2000)).
12. Russian Jews in the Gallipoli Battle (Vladimir Kroupnik).

## Postscript - Museum of the Jewish Legion

During a vacation in Israel in 1978, I had the opportunity to visit the Jewish Legion museum Beit Hagdudim, located near the city of Netanya. The museum is located in the agricultural collective Avichayil, established in the 1930s by former soldiers of the Legion.

I am ashamed to say that I do not remember much from my visit to the site, but Sources 1 and 2 originate from this visit. However, I do remember a diorama which showed The Zion Mule Corps at Gallipoli; the mules were shown using Britain's draft horses (in plastic) and the soldiers were, as I recall, WW1 infantry from the English toy company Crescent (also in plastic).

The museum still exists, and mentions on the Internet bring the warning that is good to keep in mind when visiting museums abroad... Call first, as opening hours can vary without notice!



A group of soldiers from the 38th (Service) Bn. Royal Fusiliers, Palestine, 1918.  
From Source 9.

Per Finsted

---

**Notes:**

- 1) John Henry Patterson (1867-1947) (Jewish War Veterans of the United States)
- 2) Most sources agree on the background; Source 3 mentions that Patterson was a reserve officer in the Army Service Corps.
- 3) The story is said to be one of the sources of inspiration for Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936). Those interested can follow this thread by e.g. to search the Internet, where there is a lot of information, including the short story.
- 4) Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920) (Wikipedia).
- 5) The Russian Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky (1880-1940) (Wikipedia) was a journalist and author and not least an active campaigner and agitator for the Zionist cause. In 1914 he was sent to Europe as a correspondent for a Russian newspaper.
- 6) The corps doctor was (Captain) Meshulam Levontin, who in 1930 founded Magen David Adom - the Israeli "Red Cross", whose mark is a red Star of David. (Source 4)
- 7) There is some doubt as to whether these rifles were Turkish or whether they came from the depots of the Egyptian police. (Source 1) However, the sources apparently all agree that it was Mauser rifles.
- 8) See my article *The Indian Army - On training units during the First World War*, in which *The Indian Mule Cart Transport Corps* is mentioned. Source 1 mentions that the Indian force was under the command of Captain Alexander, who may be the HM Alexander who later, with the rank of Major, takes command of the Indian Mule Corps.
- 9) From *On Land & Sea at the Dardanelles* by TC Bridges, Collins' Clear Type Press, London c. 1915,

10) On the landing at "W" Beach, see my article Uniform Postcard - The Lancashire Fusiliers, 1918.

11) From *History of the Great War: Operations - Gallipoli, Volume I* by Brigadier-General Aspinall Oglender, William Heinemann Ltd, London 1932,

12) From Mons, Anzac & Kut by Aubrey Herbert, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London 1919 (Carrie Electronic Library).

13) Eliezer Lazar Margolin (1874-1944) was born in Russia; emigrated to Palestine in 1892 and to Australia in 1900. For his actions at Gallipoli he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order; in the Australian Army he served with the 16th (Infantry) Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces. When he was wounded in 1917 he had the rank of major and was second in command of the battalion.

During his convalescence in London he was persuaded to take command of *the 39th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers*. Read the rest of the story in Source 11.

14) Jewish Role in World War 1 (Palestine Facts).