

RUSSIAN JEWS IN THE GALLIPOLI BATTLE



Many Russian Jews took part in the Gallipoli battle. First of all, we have to mention a captain of the 16th Infantry Regiment of the Australian army [Eliezer \(Lazar\) Markovich Margolin](#). He was born in 1874 in Belgorod and in 1892 migrated together with his parents to Palestine to an agricultural colony Rekhovot where he worked and participated in guarding of it. Already in Palestine he became an excellent rider and shot. In 1900 after the death of his parents he moved to Australia. Margolin distinguished himself at Gallipoli, then fought at the Western front in Flanders and was promoted to the lieutenant-colonel rank. After being wounded he was sent to London for recovery and here a leader of the Russian Zionist movement [V. Zhabotinsky](#), who had heard about him in St-Petersburg from his brother, found him. Zhabotinsky offered him to head one of the units of "Jewish Legion" then being formed in Great Britain - the 39th Royal Fusiliers battalion which consisted of Jewish volunteers from the USA, Canada, England (the latter were mostly migrants from Russia). Margolin accepted the offer and

was transferred to the British army with a significant loss in salary. In the summer of 1918 this battalion participated in a breakthrough of the Turkish front on the Jordan River and capture of As-Salt in Transjordan, where Margolin became a commander of the British garrison. In December 1919 after amalgamation of all Jewish battalions into the "Jewish Legion" he was assigned to command it in the rank of colonel.

Margolin energetically but unsuccessfully resisted the intentions of British authorities to disband the Legion seeing in it a core of a future regular Jewish army. Having become a commander of a Jewish unit of mixed Arab-Jewish police detachments formed instead of the Legion, he allowed the Jewish self-defense groups to use weapons from British military stores during anti-Jewish riots in Jaffa and Jerusalem in spring 1921 and, by his own initiative, entered Jaffa with a group of soldiers in order to prevent a Jewish pogrom. Since a court martial threatened him for it he had to retire and return to Australia. In Australia he became a businessman and vice-president of Western Australian Zionist association. He died in 1944 in Sydney, in 1950 his ashes were moved to Israel and buried in Rekhovot.



A former officer of the Russian army [Josef Vladimirovich Trumpeldor](#) also took part in the Gallipoli battle. He was born in 1880 in Piatigorsk in a family of ex-soldier. In 1902 he volunteered to the army. He distinguished himself during the Russo-Japanese war at Port-Arthur, lost a hand in a battle and spent a year in Japanese captivity. Trumpeldor was awarded for valor with four Orders (crosses) of Saint George, gold saber and promoted to an officer rank - a unique case for a unbaptised Jew in Russia. In 1902 he was received by the Tsarina. In 1912 he migrated to Palestine and in the beginning of WW2 found himself in Alexandria along with 12000 Jews who had mostly migrated from Russia. They had been deported by Turks to Egypt as they had refused to accept the Turkish citizenship. Here he met V. Zhabotinsky who offered him to refer to the commander of the British forces in Egypt [John Maxwell](#) with a request to allow to form a Jewish Legion to fight against Turks in Palestine. The petition was handed on the 22nd of March 1915. Maxwell declined the request referring to the ban on draft of foreigners into the British army. Instead of it he advised to form a transport unit out of volunteers to serve in any other sector of British fronts. Zhabotinsky turned it down but Trumpeldor agreed having said: "... from a soldier's point of view... so that to liberate Palestine we have to destroy Turks. And where to beat them, from south or north is already a technical question. Each front leads to Zion".

On the 23rd of May 1915 such a unit (Zion Mule Corps), which used mules as a transport means, was formed. There were many former soldiers of the Russian army in it. A British colonel [John Patterson](#) was assigned to command it, Trumpeldor became his deputy. The unit consisted of 650 people, including 5 British and 5 Jewish officers. It headed towards the Gallipoli coast on the 17th of April 1915 and landed on the 25th of April in the thick of the first battles. The unit was divided into two ones - one joined the ANZACs, another - the 29th British division. The first half was soon sent back to Egypt, the second became the only transport unit on its bridgehead.

The unit remained at the front till the very end of the battle dispatching ammunition, food and fresh water to the trenches under fire. Patterson was several times wounded and was evacuated, Trumpeldor replaced him. The soldiers did their duty to the end. Six of them died, 25 were wounded (according to other sources - 8 and 55 accordingly), including Trumpeldor, who had his shoulder shot through. The Russian Jews distinguished themselves well - three of them were awarded with British Medals. On the 26th of May 1916 the unit was disbanded. Approximately 120 soldiers out of its ranks reached England and later continued their service in new Jewish troops.

At a later stage of war Patterson commanded the 38th Battalion of Royal Fusiliers of the Jewish Legion at the Palestine front. Trumpeldor returned to Russia in 1917 and referred to the Provisional Government with a request to form a Jewish Legion in the Russian army to fight Turks in the Caucasus. However, the history had left no time for it. In 1918 he returned to Palestine where he took part in forming of Jewish self-defense forces. On the 1st of March 1920 he died in a skirmish with Arabs.

FROM MEMOIR OF VLADIMIR (ZEEV) ZHABOTINSKY



Zion Mule Corps - beginning of 1915, Alexandria, camp of Russian Jews expelled from Palestine.

In a week we summoned the refugee youth for a meeting in the "Mafruz" barrack... Sooner or later the British army will move from Egypt to Palestine. Sad news are coming from Jaffa daily: the Turks have banned Jewish signs in the streets... arrested leaders of the Jewish population and declare that after the war they will not allow any Jewish immigration. So?...

The document we signed in that bare and dark barrack that spring night one day will be handed to the National Library in Jerusalem. It is a piece of paper of a common study size; on it there is a resolution that a Jewish regiment, which will offer its service to English, is raised for operations in Palestine, and about one hundred signatures. On the next morning... I found a whole parade in the yard. Three groups of young people were taught to march; instructors were from their own midst, from former

Russian soldiers. The girls were embroidering a banner; a special committee of high school students was already making noise all over the camp discussing how to translate some military term into the language of the Bible.

Then Trumpeldor arrived, all three platoons made a column marched past him - or, at least, wanted to do a ceremonial march. He smiled with a sympathy. I told him quietly: "They are marching terribly. As sheep". - He replied: "It's not important"...

After this a delegation went to see General Maxwell who then was a commander of British troops in Egypt. We had made poor Trumpeldor to hang on himself all four of his St George Crosses: two copper and two gold ones. General looked at them attentively and asked briefly: "Port-Arthur?". But his answer to our proposals deeply disappointed us: "I haven't heard anything about an offensive towards Palestine and doubt if such an offensive will happen. Besides, under the law I am not entitled to accept foreigners into the British army. I can offer you only one thing: to form a mule transport unit from your young people and send it to any other Turkish front. I cannot do anything else. That night... we sat till morning, discussing what to do. It seemed to us, civilians, that we had to decline the Maxwell's proposal. A French word "Corps de muletiers" he had used sounded for us too uncomplimentary, nearly contemptuously: was it a decent combination - a first Jewish unit over the whole history of diaspora, resurrection, Zion and mule drovers? Secondly, - "another Turkish front". Why should we care about "other" fronts?.. One thing was clear: they will not be led to Palestine. So, we had to refuse.

Trumpeldor was of a different opinion. "Reasoning as a soldier, - he said, - I think, you are exaggerating the difference. There is no much difference between trenches or transport. Both are soldiers, you cannot get by without either; and danger is often the same. I think you are just embarrassed by the word "mule". It's completely childish." - "But this is not a Palestinian front?" - "And this is irrelevant for a soldier's reason. So that to liberate Palestine, we have to destroy Turks. But where to beat them - from south or north - is a technical question. Each front leads to Zion".

Thus, we did not decide anything. Walking home with Trumpeldor, I told him: "Maybe, you are right, but I won't join such a unit". - "But I, perhaps, will", - he answered.

I am writing a personal memoir, not a history... But I have to acknowledge one thing: Trumpeldor was right, not I. These six hundred "muletiers" opened a new era... prior to that it had been difficult to speak about Zionism even with friendly inclined political figures: in that cruel time who out of them would care about agricultural colonization or resurrection of Jewish culture? A small detachment at Gallipoli managed to break a first slot, penetrate... into the spelled sight of the fighting world. All European newspapers mentioned the Jewish unit; all military correspondents who wrote from Gallipoli dedicated it a page or a chapter in their letters, later in books.

Zion Mule Corps played a role of a key personally for me, for my future work, opened me the doors of the British Ministry of War, door... in Paris, doors of the Foreign Ministry in Petersburg.

The war history of the Gallipoli detachment makes up a nice page in our military record book as well... from the first to the last day of the ill-fated Churchill's adventure this group of refugee youth carried out their hard and dangerous duty under Turkish fire. Trumpeldor had been right in it too: transport and trenches are both dangerous. All area taken by English covered several square versts; the Turkish guns were shelling the whole space by shrapnel from the Achi-Baba hill. They had to lead their mules packed by ammunition, bread, tinned food to the front trenches and back under this fire. They lost their killed and wounded in numbers proportionally not smaller than other regiments of the Gallipoli corps, received several medals, did their service bravely, with expedience and honor.

[General Sir Ian Hamilton](#), commander of the Gallipoli operation, wrote me about their bravery: "... they worked with their mules calmly under strong fire, in the mean time showing a form of courage higher than the one soldiers needed in front trenches as in their the battle excitement helps..."

They were under command of an excellent man, lieutenant colonel John Henry Patterson. Trumpeldor who was recognized as a captain by the English, initially was second in charge, but by the end of the campaign Patterson had been wounded and evacuated to England for recovery, and then Trumpeldor took over the command.

After the evacuation of English from Gallipoli he stayed in charge of his detachment in Alexandria for several months more: over there they bombarded the commanders with petitions requesting to to disband them, to give them an opportunity to stay together and prepare for a beginning of operations at the Palestine front; but the petitions didn't help. Zion Mule Corps was raised in April 1915 and on the 26th of May 1916 it was disbanded. Only about 120 of its participants became soldiers again and reached London - that Jewish Legion, which had taken part in the conquer of Palestine and some of whose graves are on the Heleon Hill under the sign of shield of David, formed out of this group and around it. Trumpeldor was right; although we won in the valley of Jordan, the way through Gallipoli was the right one.

Autumn 1917, forming of the Jewish Legion, London.

... But the best of all was that that managed to find L.M. Margolin. He, wounded, had been brought to one of London hospitals, and I went to see him. I heard about him long ago and a lot in Petersburg from his brother [M.M. Margolin](#), chief-secretary of editorial board of the Evfron encyclopedia, and more from legends I had heard about him nine years before in Palestine.

His family moved there during early years of colonization, when Eliezer Margolin was still a child. The boy distinguished himself both as a colonist and as a daring fellow - "he rides as Bedouin and shoos as an Englishman", - neighboring Arabs told about him. After the crisis of the 90-ties he moved to Australia, wondered a lot over there, apparently, dug and ploughed, until he settled in a town... In the meantime he joined Australian territorial police force. When the war broke out, he was in a rank of first lieutenant. He reached the major rank and a position of a deputy battalion commander in trenches of Flanders. A tall, broad in shoulders silent man, a soldier from feet to head, a Tzar and a brother for the boys of his battalion, in the meantime - an excellent master and manager.

- Join us, Lazar Markovich.

- I'm afraid. Afraid of Jews: I'll have to speak to them...

But he joined us. General aid-de-camp helped to smooth down formal difficulties in his transfer from the Australian to the British army (this entailed a significant loss in payments) and Margolin became a commander of our second battalion, officially - 39th, in the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

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Benis M. Frank. "China and the Jewish Diaspora: A Comparative Historical Perspective on Acculturation, Economic Activity, Assimilation, Anti-Semitism". Revised Version 4/26/92. 1992