ZION MULE CORPS IN THE GALLIPOLI WAR

A.Murat AĞDEMİR

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The Zion Mule Corps (ZMC) was a unit of Jewish mule-drivers who acted as ammunition carriers in the Gallipoli War. The ZMC was formed in 1915 as the Zionists around the world saw the World War I as an opportunity to promote the idea of a Jewish homeland. The service of the ZMC, and especially the Jewish Legion which was formed after the ZMC was disbanded, established a precedent that Jews could fight to achieve the aims of Zionism. It showed that the Jews should not wait for Palestine to be offered by other nations; and showed that they would take their future in their own hands.

The ZMC in the British Army in the Gallipoli War was initiated by Zionist activists Vladimir Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor. Jabotinsky’s influence on Israel’s history and politics is substantial as indicated by his role as the ideological forebear of the Herut and Likud political parties. His ideas have been especially influential on the thinking and policies of the future prime ministers of Israel, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, and Benjamin Netanyahu. Trumpeldor was a zionist pioneer born in Russia, and then settled in Palestine in 1912. He was a volunteer for the Russian army, and became the first ever Jewish officer in the Russian army. Jabotinsky, together with Trumpeldor conceived the idea of raising a Jewish military unit to join the Allies in the liberation of Palestine. The ZMC was mainly made up of these Jews exiled by the Ottomans to Alexandria after the start of the war. When the Allies agreed to attack Gallipoli, the British determined that the ZMC should serve on that front. After training and encouragement from the local Jewish community the ZMC left on ships bound for Gallipoli in April 1915. After serving in the British supply units, the ZMC received orders to disband and evacuate in December 1915, and then it left Gallipoli together with the British evacuation in January 1916. Probably the ZMC was the first purely Jewish fighting unit that went into action since Jerusalem fell to the Roman armies in 70 AD.

Even though they did not participate in active fighting, the service of this unit was remarkable and significant on some levels. An important and practical result of the establishment of the ZMC was that members of it gained valuable organizational and military experience. The ZMC was an important step to the creation of organized, trained,

---

1Bu makale Crosscheck sistemi tarafından taramanın ve bu sistem sonuçlarına göre orijinal bir makale olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

**Dr., Uluslararası Güvenlik ve Terörizm, Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, El-mek: amagdemi@mynet.com**
Jewish defense units. After the evacuation from Gallipoli and the dispersal of the ZMC in 1916, Jabotinsky made renewed efforts and worked hard in London to establish a fullyfledged Jewish legion to fight with the British army. The service of the ZMC in the Gallipoli campaign benefited Jabotinsky’s subsequent efforts to establish the Jewish Legion of the World War I.

The Jewish Legion was the name of the battalions of Jewish volunteers which fought in British Army in Palestine. Composed of Jews from many countries, later Israeli statesmen such as David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi enlisted in, as did Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor. The 38th Battalion was recruited in England mainly from Russian immigrants, and was sent to Egypt and then Palestine in February 1918. The 39th Battalion enlisted some 2,000 men in the United States under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. It arrived in Egypt in August 1918 and was sent to Palestine. Though both of them had opposed to the formation of the ZMC, after hearing of the success of the ZMC, they supported the formation of the Jewish Legion for the Palestine Campaign. They were not allied with Jabotinsky politically; however, they believed that fighting in Palestine as part of the Jewish Legion was important. They began to think that the Jewish Legion was one of the most important factors in the realization of the aims of political zionism. The 40th Battalion was recruited from Palestinian Jews in British-controlled southern Palestine in July 1918. All these units participated in Edmund Allenby’s campaigns in Palestine and Syria in 1918. At the end of the war, the 38th and 39th Battalions were disbanded, and the 40th Battalion remained in active service as part of the British forces in Palestine until after the riots of May 1921. Jabotinsky was enlisted in the 38th Battalion as a private, then was later promoted to lieutenant and distinguished himself in battle as commander of the first company to cross the Jordan in pursuit of the Ottoman Army.

In fact, the ZMC, and especially the Jewish Legion indeed became identified with Jabotinsky. It made him famous, led to his first exile from Palestine and, was one of the factors that set him and his followers apart from the rest of the zionist movement. As an historic force, Jabotinsky is considered to be the founding father of the Zionist Right (Herut and Likud line in Israeli politics). Jabotinsky announced his opposition to the 1922 Churchill White Paper which limited the establishment of the Jewish settlement to the territory west of the Jordan River and excluded east of the river. His position on this issue led him to resign from the WZO after Ben-Gurion and other leaders accepted the British position. Jabotinsky later established an alternative zionist organization, which is to be called revisionists. Revisionist Zionism was born as a reaction to mainstream zionism of Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann especially during mandate era. Since the establishment of Revisionist Union in April 1925 by Jabotinsky, revisionists were in critique of inactivity and incompetence of official zionist leadership. The revisionist movement triggered the activist nature of Jewish people which had been forgotten for centuries. Indeed, they were the man of deed which believed the salvation by revolt and uprising. The revisionist movement transformed the idea of diplomatic, passive Jews into the fighting family. It was a historic action for them.
They aimed to form a Jewish identity which would react to practical necessities of nation. The activist, disciplined and believer nature of revisionist fighters appeared to stand behind the Jewish masses.

Most probably, without the creation of the ZMC, the Jewish Legion and the Jewish Brigade of World War II, from which so many of Israel’s trained military leadership emerged to lead battles in the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, might never have been formed. At the same time, the vision of Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor has been directly responsible for the creation of the Israel Defense Forces. Despite the fact that the number of recruits did not establish a massive Jewish force, and despite the limited role of both the ZMC and the Legion in the battles of the World War I, they may be commemorated as being the foundation of Jewish national aspirations. In Israel, both were the basis of the pre-state defence force Haganah, and the Israel Defence Forces. They were the first Jewish military formation in the modern era, and thus the cornerstone for the birth and the history of Israel.

Key Words: Israel, Mule Corps, the Gallipoli, Jabotinsky, Trumpeldor.

ÇANAKKALE SAVAŞI’NDA YAHUDİ KATIR BİRLİĞİ

ÖZET

The World War I had a profound effect on humanity which still resounds in the current state system and the structure of International Organisations. 2015 marks the centenary of the outbreak of the Gallipoli War as one of the fronts of the World War I. During the war, the Allies faced numerous problems on the Western Front and began to look for alternative military strategies to win. A campaign in Gallipoli seemed like a viable option, and a discussion of action in the Dardanelles began in the fall of 1914. The Allies believed that attacking Istanbul would throw Ottoman Empire out of the war, thwart Germany’s intentions for the Middle East, and provide new ports for Allied shipping (Hickey, 1995, p.40).

As for other peoples, the World War I had a profound impact on world Jewry. This was due to the existence of a large concentration of Jews within one of the principal arenas of the war, on the eastern front. The war between Russia and the Central Powers was fought on territories that were home to many of the world Jewry. Many of these Jewish communities, especially on the eastern front, were displaced. Moreover, the enlistment of Jews to the armies of the belligerent nations, and the success of Jewish leaders in influencing the political policies of the major powers were the main areas which affected the lives of Jews during the war. Jew fought against Jew across the different fighting fronts, and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (L. Rubinstein, Sherbok, Edelheit, D. Rubinstein, 2002, pp.317-320) which declared the British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, emerged in the midst of this great conflict.

Besides many Jews serving in their country of birth during the war, the Zionists tried to save Palestine as a national home for the Jews. In addition to immigration and settlement activities, a unified Jewish military group committed to championing zionist goals grew out of the chaos of the World War I. With the choice of the Ottoman Empire to join the Central Powers, it appeared to the young Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky that after two thousand years, the time had come for the Jews to fight again (King, 2014). Jabotinsky was the prominent figure and he first conceived the idea of the Jewish Legion, as the nucleus of a Jewish army. The World War I created the perfect setting for his idea to come to fruition. The world was at war and each country needed more manpower to overcome the enemy. At the beginning of the war, the British government opposed the participation of such as group of Jewish force the campaigns in Palestine. Despite this opposition, in 1917, after the efforts of Jabotinsky and one other famous zionist, Joseph Trumpeldor, and with the support of prominent Zionist figures in England, the formation of the Jewish Legion was officially announced. However, it was initially formed as the Zion Mule Corps (ZMC). The ZMC participated in the Gallipoli campaign of the Allies and was disbanded in 1916.

Members of the Zionist movement around the world saw the formation of Jewish military units as an opportunity to promote the idea of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The significance of the ZMC lies not only in its service, but also in its formation. It was the first time in history when Jews collaborated in a practical way that served the aims of Zionism. The notion that

---

1 The Jewish Legion was the name of the five battalions of Jewish volunteers. These were the British Army’s 38th through 42nd Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers which were created in 1917. Composed of Jews from many countries, later Israeli statesmen such as David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi enlisted in, as did Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor. See Rubinstein et al., *The Jews in the Modern World: A History Since 1750*, p.318.
formerly displaced Jews were fighting with a unique identity as Jewish soldiers was important. The formation of a unit of Jews for service in the British Army was an event without precedent in history, owing to the fact that it fought for the restoration of the Jewish people to the “Promised Land.” In this context, while 2015 marks the centenary of the Gallipoli War, the Jewish efforts and contribution in this war marks an important milestone in Jewish history. Bearing this fact in mind, this paper takes a close look at the first Jewish-identified military formation since the days of Bar Kochba2 (revolutionary leader of the revolt against Hadrian) almost 2000 years ago.

The Zion Mule Corps

The ZMC in the British Army in the Gallipoli War was initiated by Zionist activists Vladimir Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor. They realized that active Jewish support of the Allies during the World War I was important to gain national standing when the war ended (Keren, Keren, 2007, p.70). Jabotinsky was born in Odessa, Russia, and he was the founder of the World Union of Zionist Revisionists in 1925, which later branched off into the New Zionist Organization. His influence on Israel’s history and politics is substantial as indicated by his role as the ideological forebear of the Herut and Likud political parties. His ideas have been especially influential on the thinking and policies of the future prime ministers of Israel, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, and Benjamin Netanyahu (Peleg, 2005, pp.127-129).

He had been interested in the Zionist cause with the growth of pogroms in Russia. During the World War I, he promoted the idea of a Jewish Legion as a component of the British army that would liberate Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. Odessa was then was ripe with violent antisemitic activities. He began to consider to what extent the Zionist movement could provide a long term answer to the Jewish Question and pointed the need to encourage Jews to take up attitudes of self defense in answer to attacks. He helped to initiate a Jewish self-defense group in Odessa of a type that soon spread throughout Russia, particularly in the wake of the Kishinev pogrom later in 1903 (Simon, 2009, p.24).

At the beginning of the World War I, there were conflicting views in the Jewish world, and particularly the Zionist movement, as to how Jews could and should be involved in the war. Majority of the world Jewry were either pro-German or were socialists. They opposed to both the Allies and the Central Powers. In Britain and France, the native Jews identified themselves with their country of birth. Moreover, at that time, the mortal enemy of the Jews was Russia and most of the Jews were reluctant to fight. In fact, when the Germans defeated Russia at Tannenberg, “the Jews hailed them as their saviors.” (Johnson, 1988, p.423). Thus, the immigrant group from Russia saw Britain and France strictly as the Tsar’s allies, and opposed the war from its onset (Brenner, 1984, p.34). In short, the World War I was a dilemma for the Jews:

“Palestine was then ruled by the Ottoman Turks, who supported Germany. Should zionists then make common cause with them in the hope that they would be sympathetic towards zionist aspirations in

---

2 The Romans conquered Jerusalem 70 AD. The Jews revolted against Romans under the leadership of Simon Bar Kochba in 132, and this revolt lasted for 3 years. During the revolt, Jerusalem was destroyed and large numbers of Jews were killed or enslaved. Jewish sovereignty over the area was terminated, and many Jews were dispersed throughout the world. Bar Kochba is credited with organizing a nearly total popular revolt against the Romans. See Bernard Reich and David H. Goldberg, Historical Dictionary of Israel (Lanham, 2008), p.64.
Palestine, or should they rather throw their weight behind the Allies in the hope of a favorable outcome that would end Ottoman rule in Palestine? A further factor was that there were many Jews fighting in the German and Austrian armies, and the prospect of Jew fighting Jew was distasteful to many.” (Simon, 2009, p.24)

The World Zionist Organization (WZO) was officially neutral; however, of the central figures, Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow were pro-Allies (Brenner, 1984, p.34). Initially Jabotinsky did not favor either side, and he left Russia as a journalist to represent the Moscow daily Russkiya Vedomosti in Western Europe (Simon, 2009, p.24) and from there he travelled to Middle East (Johnson, 1988, p.433). His views changed when Ottoman Empire allied with Germany. He believed that the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire was imminent and that the Zionist movement should abandon its neutral stand between the warring nations in order to achieve its aims in Palestine at the end of the war (Mehlman, 2010, p.6). With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, many states would be established (Demir, 2011, p.692) and Jabotinsky outlined the reasons why each country had to seek the destruction and partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. He stated in his book, “Turkey and the War” that “the claimants on Turkey’s future spoils are England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, perhaps Austria, then also Greece and Bulgaria.” (Jabotinsky, 1917, p.66). This partitioning would provide an unparalleled opportunity for Jews, and Jabotinsky believed that Jews should take an active role in the military destruction of the Ottoman Empire. According to him, as in the case of these other nations, in order to further their own purposes, Jews should take the initiative to fight for Palestine. As he wrote in his book, “The Story of the Jewish Legion:”

“My barrack-room neighbors had gone on parade, but I stayed behind, as my leave was still on, to admire and fondle no less a treasure than the advance copy of my own book, Turkey and the War, just then delivered by the mail-corporal. That was the book where I proved to the hilt that Turkey must be divided, and why, and who should get each part of the spoils.” (Jabotinsky, 1945, p.85)

Jabotinsky was a firm believer in the value of military force, and tried to lead a campaign for the creation of a Jewish Legion to fight alongside with British troops to liberate Palestine (Endelmann, 2002, p.191). He tried to convince the WZO to back the idea; however, the results were exactly the opposite of what he had hoped. WZO officials feared that the Ottomans would retaliate on the zionist community in Palestine (Brenner, 1984, p.34). Jabotinsky found another committed Zionist, a Russian Jew, Joseph Trumpeldor as his companion in his efforts. Trumpeldor was a zionist pioneer born in Russia, and then settled in Palestine in 1912. (Reich, Goldberg, 2008, p.500). He was a volunteer for the Russian army, and during the Russo-Japanese War, he lost his left arm. He was awarded the St George Order, the highest Russian military award for bravery, and became the first ever Jewish officer in the Russian army (Sugarman, 2014). Jabotinsky had heard of Trumpeldor’s military successes, and together with Trumpeldor, he conceived the idea of raising a Jewish legion to join the Allies in the liberation of Palestine (Simon, 2009, p.24).

In Alexandria, Egypt, the British had established two Jewish refugee camps that housed around 1,200 Jews (Gilner, 1969, p.35), and the ZMC was mainly made up of these Jews exiled by the Ottomans to Alexandria after the start of the war (Keren, Keren, 2007, p.70). Jabotinsky met

---

3 The position of the Zionist movement before and at the beginning of the World War I was one of neutrality. Many of the Zionists thought that if they had been on the side of Allies, the Jews in Palestine would have been in a potentially dangerous situation. However, when the war prolonged, they realized that Jews are in a position to be courted by both the Allies and the Entente. They even expected some kind of declaration of support from Germany. This country was seen by the Zionist movement as its potential supporter, and Jews saw this country as the liberators of the Jews, especially after Germany defeated Russia. This situation changed when Germany failed to declare its official support, and Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. From then on, the Zionists tried to secure the British support for their cause and worked hard for Palestine to stay under British control. See Rubinstein et al., The Jews in the Modern World: A History Since 1750, p.317.
with Trumpeldor in Alexandria, and they together raised the idea of the formation of a Jewish unit
that would participate in the British military effort to conquer Palestine from the Ottoman Empire.
They approached the Jewish committee overseeing the refugees, and received their support on 3
March 1915 (Katz, 1996, p.157). Next, both men prepared a resolution which stated, “to form a
Jewish legion and to propose to England to make use of it in Palestine.” (Jabotinsky, 1945, p.40). A
refugee reported that “as soon as Jabotinsky arrived, everything changed as if by magic, and the
variegated community became a unified entity.” (Katz, 1996, p.151). The legion’s main aim would
be to serve in British forces to liberate the “land of Israel” as stated in the oath of the Jewish
Legion:

“I volunteer to serve with the national Jewish Legion, fighting alongside British forces to liberate our
land, the land of Israel, swearing this blood oath to work truthfully and faithfully in the Jewish Legion
to defend with honesty and integrity the honor of the land, the honor of The Legion and the honor of
Britain.” (Hauser, 1997, p.54)

Though the resolution had many supporters, some Jews opposed the efforts to form a
Jewish fighting unit. For example, David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi opposed because they
believed that the Ottomans would take revenge on the Jews remaining in Palestine (Katz, 1996,
p.162). In spite of this, a delegation traveled to Cairo to meet with the Adviser to the Egyptian
Ministry of the Interior, Ronald Graham. He supported their idea to form a Jewish military unit;
however, did not have the authority to make such a decision. On 22 March 1915, Jabotinsky and
Trumpeldor submitted the resolution to the commander of British forces in Egypt, General
Maxwell, and asked him “to form a Jewish Legion and propose to England its utilisation in
Palestine.” The commander told his visitors that

“I have heard nothing of an offensive in Palestine, and I doubt whether such an offensive will be
launched at all. I am prohibited by regulations from admitting foreign soldiers in the British Army. I
can make only one suggestion—that your young men form themselves into a detachment for mule
transport, to be made use of on some other sector of the Turkish front. I cannot do more than that.”
(Jabotinsky, 1945, p.41).

Jabotinsky felt that this was an insult to the Jews and refused the offer. This response
deeply disappointed him, because he hoped for a true Jewish fighting unit. However, Trumpeldor
believed that a mule transport detachment would be an important first step for achieving greater
goals. He saw little difference between trenches and transport, and agreed to the offer. Jabotinsky
lacked a military background and did not understand strategy as well as Trumpeldor. Trumpeldor
stated that “to get the Turk out of Palestine we’ve got to smash the Turk. Which side you begin the
smashing, north or south, is just technique. Any front leads to Zion.” (Ibid, p.42). However,
Jabotinsky was dismayed that their efforts resulted in a mere transport unit and it would serve on
the Gallipoli front far from Palestine. And as a result, he did not join the unit. Soon enough, he
realized that he had made a mistake over the issue of the ZMC. He accepted that the ZMC opened
the doors of important government offices for him and easened the connections he wanted to make:

“It was that donkey battalion from Alexandria, ridiculed by all wits in Israel, which opened before me
the doors of the government offices in Whitehall. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg
wrote about it to Count Benkendorf, the Russian Ambassador in London; the Russian Embassy
forwarded reports on it to the British Foreign Office; the chief Counsellor of the Embassy, the late
Constantine Nabokov who afterward succeeded the Ambassador, arranged for my meetings with
British Ministers.” (Ibid, p.74).

The ZMC was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson, with Trumpeldor
his deputy (Schechtman, 2007, p.303). Both Patterson and Trumpeldor knew that they were part of
a momentous event. For Patterson, the ZMC was imbued with Biblical and prophetic overtones,
whereas for Trumpeldor, the ZMC was a historic opportunity of Jewish endeavor:

Turkish Studies
International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 10/1 Winter 2015
“In a solemn ceremony on April 1, 1915, 500 volunteers were sworn in by the Grand Rabbi of Alexandria, Raphael Della Pergola, in the presence of many dignitaries and a mighty crowd which did not hide its enthusiasm. Lt. Col. Patterson assumed command; Joseph Trumpeldor, Captain became second in command… The commands were given in Hebrew as well as in English. The uniform was British, but the badge was the Star of David.” (Gilner, 1969, p.41),

Of his appointment as the commander of the ZMC, Patterson wrote, “It certainly was curious that the General’s choice should have fallen upon me, for, of course, he knew nothing of my knowledge of Jewish history or of my sympathy for the Jewish race.” (Patterson, 1916, p.33). His account of the ZMC is full of with Biblical citations, therefore it might be assumed that his Christianity played a role in his great interest in the Jewish history and the Jews. However, he also references the Bar Kochba, so his knowledge extended beyond the Bible. He wrote, “I am not an alien in sympathy and admiration for the people who have given the world some of its greatest men, not to mention The Man who has so profoundly changed the world’s outlook.” (Ibid, p.vi).

Patterson, years later, reflected on his being chosen to command the ZMC:

“It was strange, therefore that I, so imbued with the Jewish traditions should have arrived in Egypt at the psychological moment when General Sir John Maxwell, the C-in-C in Egypt, was looking for a suitable officer to recruit a Jewish unit. A Jewish unit had been unknown for 2,000 years, since the day of the Maccabees, those heroic sons of Israel who fought so valiantly, and for a time so successfully, to wrest Jerusalem form the Roman Legions… It is curious that General Maxwell should have chosen me (to command a Jewish unit), because he knew nothing of my knowledge of Jewish history and my sympathy for the Jewish race. When as a boy I eagerly devoured the records of the glorious deeds of the Jewish military captains, such as Joshua, Joab, Gideon, Judas Maccabee, I never dreamed that I in a small way would become a captain of a host of the Children of Israel.” (Brian, 2008, pp.86-87).

When the Allies agreed to attack Gallipoli, the British determined that the ZMC should serve on that front. After three weeks of training and encouragement from the local Jewish community the ZMC left on ships bound for Gallipoli in April 1915. After serving in the British supply units, the ZMC received orders to disband and evacuate in December 1915, and then it left Gallipoli together with the British evacuation in January 1916. Probably the ZMC was the first purely Jewish fighting unit that went into action since Jerusalem fell to the Roman armies in 70 AD. Its services were highly appreciated by General Ian Hamilton, commander of the Gallipoli Expeditionary Force. He wrote to Jabotinsky about them, and pointed the usefulness of the unit: “the men have done extremely well, working their mules calmly under heavy shell and rifle fire, and thus showing a more difficult type of bravery than the men in the front line who had the excitement of combat to keep them going.” (Schechtman, 2007, p.303). After the Gallipoli campaign ended, the ZMC returned to Alexandria and was demobilized, but 120 reenlisted in late 1916 and were brought to Britain, where they were assigned to another British military unit (Brenner, 1984, p.36). Overall, of the 650 men who enlisted, 562 were sent to Gallipoli. Of that number, 15 were killed, over 60 were wounded (including Trumpeldor), and three were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Though the campaign was not successful, many soldiers and units served with distinction, including the ZMC. Patterson wrote:

“Wherever they went it was gratifying to know that they performed their duties satisfactorily… they would invariably bring back a letter from the Transport Officer to say how well the men had worked, and how well they had behaved when under fire. I have dozens of such letters, which testify to their good work and how well they got on with their British comrades.” (Patterson, 1916, p.203).

---

1 Sugarman, “Modern Jewish History: The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli (March 1915-May 1916),”
2 Sugarman, “Modern Jewish History: The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli (March 1915-May 1916),”

Turkish Studies
International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 10/1 Winter 2015
Conclusions

The ZMC was a unit of Jewish mule-drivers who acted as ammunition carriers in the Gallipoli War. Even though they did not participate in active fighting, the service of this unit was remarkable and significant on some levels. The ZMC was formed in 1915 as the Zionists around the world saw the World War I as an opportunity to promote the idea of a Jewish homeland. The service of the ZMC, and especially the Jewish Legion which was formed after the ZMC was disbanded, established a precedent that Jews could fight to achieve the aims of Zionism. It showed that the Jews should not wait for Palestine to be offered by other nations; and showed that they would take their future in their own hands.

An important and practical result of the establishment of the ZMC was that members of it gained valuable organizational and military experience. The ZMC was an important step to the creation of organized, trained, Jewish defense units. After the evacuation from Gallipoli and the dispersal of the ZMC in 1916, Jabotinsky made renewed efforts and worked hard in London to establish a fullyfledged Jewish legion to fight with the British army. The service of the ZMC in the Gallipoli campaign benefited Jabotinsky’s subsequent efforts to establish the Jewish Legion.

Proponents of Zionism believed that if their volunteers supported Britain in World War I, it would reflect favorably on their aspirations for a national home in Palestine. Jabotinky’s belief in the Zionist cause, and his conviction that the Jewish Legion would play an important role in the attainment of Zionist goals, fueled his persistence. He spent several years pushing his idea in spite of repeated rejection, and his efforts eventually paid off. Even though Jabotinsky’s idea initially faced opposition from different quarters including Britain, after much efforts, and after the dissolution of the ZMC, the Jewish Legion was eventually established. The Jewish Legion was the name of the battalions of Jewish volunteers which fought in British Army in Palestine. Composed of Jews from many countries, later Israeli statesmen such as David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi enlisted in, as did Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor. The 38th Battalion was recruited in England mainly from Russian immigrants, and was sent to Egypt and then Palestine in February 1918. The 39th Battalion enlisted some 2,000 men in the United States under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion and Yizhak Ben-Zvi. It arrived in Egypt in August 1918 and was sent to Palestine. At that time, both of them were in the United States, and they joined in the recruitment efforts for the Jewish Legion. In March 1918, Ben-Zvi mentioned to a friend about the recruitment that “we published an advertisement over the signatures of all the members of The Legion Committee, calling on our youth to join the Jewish Battalion.” (Ben-Zvi, 1969, p.53). Though both of them had opposed to the formation of the ZMC, after hearing of the success of the Corps, they supported the formation of the Jewish Legion for the Palestine Campaign. They were not allied with Jabotinsky politically; however, they believed that fighting in Palestine as part of the Jewish Legion was important. They began to think that the Jewish Legion was one of the most important factors in the realization of the aims of political zionism (Schechtman, 2007, p.305). Both of them volunteered for service, and Ben-Zvi wrote of the Jewish Legion as “the most important matter affecting Zionism at this moment.” (Ben-Zvi, 1969, p.56). The 40th Battalion was recruited from Palestininan Jews in British-controlled southern Palestine in July 1918. All these units participated in Edmund Allenby’s campaigns in Palestine and Syria in 1918. At the end of the war, the 38th and 39th Battalions were disbanded, and the 40th Battalion remained in active service as part of the British forces in Palestine until after the riots of May 1921 (Horvitz, 1987, pp.21-23). Of the recruits, Jabotinsky wrote, “in our battalions we had both volunteers and conscripts. Even in England several hundred signed on before they were called.” (Jabotinsky, 1945, p.144). Jabotinsky was enlisted in the 38th Battalion as a private, then was later promoted to lieutenant and distinguished

6 Sugarman, “Modern Jewish History: The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli (March 1915-May 1916),”

Turkish Studies
International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 10/1 Winter 2015
himself in battle as commander of the first company to cross the Jordan in pursuit of the Ottoman Army (Mehlman, 2010, p.10). As the creator of the first organized Jewish fighting force in nearly 2000 years, Jabotinsky pointed this legion’s main purpose:

“The main purpose of the creation of the Legion was not so much its participation in the war, though we naturally desired this, as its remaining as the garrison of Palestine after the war... We undoubtedly attached great value to the Jews themselves playing a part in the conquest of their homeland.” (Jabotinsky, 1945, p.144).

In fact, the ZMC, and especially the Jewish Legion indeed became identified with Jabotinsky. It made him famous, led to his first exile from Palestine and, was one of the factors that set him and his followers apart from the rest of the zionist movement (Mehlman, 2010, p.10). As an historic force, Jabotinsky is considered to be the founding father of the Zionist Right (Herut and Likud line in Israeli politics). Jabotinsky announced his opposition to the 1922 Churchill White Paper which limited the establishment of the Jewish settlement to the territory west of the Jordan River and excluded east of the river. His position on this issue led him to resign from the WZO after Ben-Gurion and other leaders accepted the British position. Jabotinsky later established an alternative zionist organization (Peleg, 2005, p.127), which is to be called revisionists. Revisionist Zionism was born as a reaction to mainstream zionism of Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann especially during mandate era. “Revisionism was at first a simple programme of action rejecting the policies of the contemporary zionist leadership, which was dominated in the 1920s by the towering figure of Chaim Weizmann.” (Zouplna, 2008, p.125). Since the establishment of Revisionist Union in April 1925 by Jabotinsky, revisionists were in critique of inactivity and incompetence of official zionist leadership.

The history of this movement was a heroic, determined and long victory march impelled by great ideas. The revisionist movement triggered the activist nature of Jewish people which had been forgotten for centuries. Indeed, they were the man of deed which believed the salvation by revolt and uprising. The revisionist movement transformed the idea of diplomatic, passive Jews into the fighting family. It was a historic action for them. They aimed to form a Jewish identity which would react to practical necessities of nation. The activist, disciplined and believer nature of revisionist fighters appeared to stand behind the Jewish masses. Revisionist movement represented the idea of greatness and heroism of Jews in world history. As Menachem Begin stated that “it was the will of historical hero or nation which turned the wheel of history.” (Sofer, 1998, p.244).

Surely, the legacy of Jabotinsky remained a perennial stream in Israel’s history and main source of Israeli right:

“Amidst such events, most figures of the distant Jewish past would rate at best as sentimental footnote. Jabotinsky is an exception. Like Theodor Herzl before him, he wasa man not merely of his own time but for all time. He defined Jewish statehood at a period when the very term ‘Jewish State’ was considered a provocation. He established adoctrine of Jewish self-defense when the idea of a Jew defending himself was still regarded as ludicrous or dangerous. He was the ‘old’ Jew-a throwback to theMaccabees and Bar Kochba-who heralded the coming of the ‘new’ Jew, fiercely proud of his ancient culture, free of the dark fears and inferiorities of the ghetto, fully capable of meeting the non-Jew on equal terms.”7

Most probably, without the creation of the ZMC, the Jewish Legion and the Jewish Brigade8 of World War II, from which so many of Israel’s trained military leadership emerged to

---

7 Mehlman, Jabotinsky...The Man and the Vision, p.i.
8 This unit was established formally by a decision of the British government in September 1944 to join in the Allied fight against the Axis in World War II. Its origins go back to 1939, when some Palestinian Jews registered as volunteers for military service against the Axis. During the war, the members of the unit served in various capacities in the fight against
lead battles in the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, might never have been formed. At the same time, the vision of Jabotinsky and Trumpeldor has been directly responsible for the creation of the Israel Defense Forces: “The experience of the Jewish Muleteers in Gallipoli was the stormy epilogue of an era of vacillation, timidity and fear, and the prelude to a new age of action, of which the Jewish Legion was only the beginning.”

Despite the fact that the number of recruits did not establish a massive Jewish force, and despite the limited role of both the ZMC and the Legion in the battles of the World War I, they may be commemorated as being the foundation of Jewish national aspirations. In Israel, both were the basis of the pre-state defence force Haganah, and the Israel Defence Forces, whereas in the United States, it was a foundation for Jewish national pride within a non-Jewish state: “American Jews received a glorious sense of their own power and of their participation in the renaissance of Jewish power in the land of their ancestors.” They were the first Jewish military formation in the modern era, and thus the cornerstone for the birth and the history of Israel. As one of the recruits of the Jewish Legion stated:

“The Jewish Legion was a living symbol of the will and fervent aspiration of the Jewsto national revival. The very idea of establishment of a Jewish Legion to redeem Palestine was in the nature of a revolution in the life of the Jewish people dispersedas it was among the nations of the world, a nation not yet recognized by the world as such, a nation many of whose sons refused to consider it a nation. The recruitment and actual existence of such a Jewish Legion was decisive proof of the existence of a Jewish People, since it entailed, in a measure, the normalization of the people.”

REFERENCES


DEMRI, Serif (2011). “Dünden Bugüne Türkiye’nin Suriye ve Ortadoğu Politikası,” TURKISH STUDIES-International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic, ISSN: 1308-2140, 6(3) (Summer 2011), www.turkishstudies.net, Doi Number: 10.7827/TurkishStudies.2275, p.691-713.


the Axis, primarily in operations in the Middle East. See Reich and Goldberg, Historical Dictionary of Israel, pp.259-260.

9 Gilner, War and Hope A History of the Jewish Legion, p.75.


11 Keren and Keren, “The Jewish Legions in the First World War As A Locus of Identity Formation,” pp.81-82.


Citation Information/Kaynakça Bilgisi

AĞDEMİR, T., Zion Mule Corps In The Gallipoli War, *Turkish Studies* - International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic Volume 10/1 Winter 2015, p. 47-58, ISSN: 1308-2140, www.turkishstudies.net, DOI Number: http://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.7791, ANKARA-TURKEY