

FRIENDS OF ZION: *Patterson & Wingate*

CHAPTER 1

foz

HOOFBEATS POUNDED the ground outside our house with a thunderous *thump, thump, thump* so hard and heavy they rattled the panes in our bedroom window and jarred me from a dreamless sleep. As the animals pranced and pawed and darted back and forth, I felt the weight of their every step against my chest. Startled and scared, I lay motionless on my bed, my eyes wide open and alert while the veins in my neck throbbed.

The room I shared with Amos, my older brother, was dark except for a thin shaft of moonlight that shone through a tiny gap in the curtains. When I stole a glance in that direction, I saw his bed was empty, the blanket thrown aside to reveal the bare sheets and pillow. I lay there a moment longer, wondering where Amos was.

As I listened, the sound of the hoofbeats moved away, toward the end of the house, circled around, faded to the opposite side, then grew loud again as they made the turn and started back toward us. They went around once—their hooves pounding the earth with the sound of rumbling thunder—then circled back again, then fell silent.

Amos called to me from across the room. “Get up,” he said in a whisper almost as loud and demanding as a shout. “Get up and get over here,” he ordered.

I glanced in the direction of his voice and saw him crouched in the corner by the wall near the end of his bed. He was always telling me what to do, so my first instinct was to lie right where I was and do nothing, then shots rang out. Panes in the window shattered, sending shards of glass across the room. Pieces of it rained down on me, stinging my cheeks and lips. A salty flavor filled my mouth, but before I could swallow, there was a loud *whap! whap! whap!* and bullets whizzed overhead. They struck the wall beside my bed, creating a row of pockmarks in the plaster less than a meter above my head.

Knowing what I know now, I should have been off the bed and out the door to the front room, but right then time seemed to slow and an unhurried sense of deliberateness swept over me. As if the row of marks on the wall gave me a strange sense of relief. They were shooting at me, I surely knew that, but if they meant to kill me they would have aimed lower. Wouldn't they?

Instead of running like a frightened child, I glanced around once more and saw the floor beside me was littered with glass. It shimmered in the moonlight that now streamed through the window. I wondered why the light was so bright but then I noticed the curtain was torn from its rod on one side, leaving a gaping hole where the bullets had ripped through.

Through the opening I saw two horses standing outside the window. They were big, muscular animals and atop them were men dressed in white robes with turbans on their heads and rifles slung over their shoulders. In the moonlight, with the night sky behind them for a backdrop, they looked magnificent, like an image straight from a fine piece of literature about Arabian horses and daring Bedouins.

Still, I did not feel rushed. My shoes were tucked beneath the bed and after a moment I felt for them, drew them out, and slipped

them on. “Hurry up,” Amos snarled. “They can see you through the window.”

As my feet slipped into the shoes, I looked up in time to see one of the men outside raise a rifle to his shoulder and point it in my direction. At first the barrel was aimed high, but slowly it descended until the sights lined up and I was staring straight into the gunman’s face.

Instinctively I sensed the danger I’d ignored before and dove to the right. Two shots rang out and I heard them hit behind me. The first one struck the frame of the bed, right where I’d been seated. The second hit the pillow. But by then I was in the corner crouched at Amos’ side, my arms around his waist, squeezing him as tightly as my fourteen-year-old muscles allowed—the brave and stoic boy reduced to a sniveling child in a matter of seconds.



We’d come to that farm in Galilee ten years earlier, when I was four and Amos was seven. Back then it seemed like a grand adventure. I did not know until much later that we’d left our native Novhorod-Siverskyi, a Russian city on the banks of the Desna River, after a mob burned the synagogue where our grandparents, Abraham and Esther Davidoff, attended. No one wanted us to leave. Grandfather wanted us to stay and fight. But our father would have none of it and so we came to Palestine.

We were offered a place at Kvutzat Kinneret, a farming collective near Tiberias at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, but our mother did not like the communal lifestyle. She insisted on rearing her own children, washing her own clothes, and wearing what she wished. At the kibbutz, most people wore the same thing—gray work shirts and pants with heavy boots. Even the underwear was shared. Mama didn’t care for that.

Instead, we purchased a small farm to the north of the settlement. Still within easy walking distance if we needed help or wanted to see a friendly face but far enough away to be on our own. We grew vegetables—tomatoes, melons, peppers, and zucchini—which we sold at the market in Tiberias.

Our nearest neighbors were the Riskins—David and Tzipi. Like us, they'd come to Palestine to avoid European persecution and, also like us, they eschewed the farming settlement, preferring to make a go of it on their own. They had two sons, both of them a little older than us, and one daughter, Dalia.



More bullets zipped through the window and whizzed past us, but we were tucked in the corner, out of the line of fire and so they went past us without doing harm. Then Amos nudged me and said, “Come on. Let’s go.”

I shook my head. “No, let’s stay right here.”

But he would not be dissuaded. “We have to see about Mama and Papa.”

Amos shoved me aside and crawled to the door, then reached up to open it and pushed it aside, too. As the door swung out of the way I saw Papa in the front room, crouched at an open window, loading his rifle. He glanced over his shoulder in our direction. “You boys all right?” he asked as he cocked the hammer on the gun.

“Yes, sir,” Amos replied.

“What are they doing?” I wailed.

Instead of answering my question, Papa raised up from his hiding position, poked the barrel of the rifle through the window, and squeezed off a shot. From the shouting that followed outside, I supposed that he hit whatever he was aiming for.

Just then, the door opened from a room to the right and Mama appeared. Dressed in a nightgown, she walked fully upright and confident. Head high, shoulders back, a smile on her face. In one hand she held a rifle and in the other a small sack of ammunition. Papa saw her and his eyes were wide with fear. “Sonya!” he snapped in an angry tone. “Get down. They’ll see you.”

“Elad,” she said as she continued toward him. “This is my home. I will not cower to a gang of thugs in my own home. They can do as they—”

Whap! Whap! Whap!

A burst of gunfire interrupted her in midsentence. The panes of glass that remained in the window shattered.

One bullet struck a vase that sat on a table near the corner by the door Mama had just opened. It had belonged to our grandmother, and Mama had insisted she had to bring it with us. The bullet shattered the vase in an instant, splintering it into a thousand pieces.

The second shot whizzed past my head and lodged in the frame of our bedroom door. The third made no sound at all and as I glanced around I saw not a stray mark from it. I was about to ask Amos where it hit when I noticed Mama.

She was standing in the center of the room, directly opposite the window. Her body fully erect with her chin in a regal pose. Her eyes were fixed on an unknown point in the middle distance and on her face was the strangest look—as if she were listening to a distant conversation, straining to hear every word.

Without warning, the rifle slipped from her hand and clattered to the floor. The ammunition bag dropped at her side and her knees buckled as she collapsed in a heap beside it, her head landing only inches from my feet.

Papa, still across the room, stared at her a moment, then turned back quickly to the window and fired a shot from his rifle. While the report echoed through the night, he tossed the gun aside and crawled quickly to where Mama lay. He lifted her gently from the floor and cradled her head in his lap, one hand beneath her and the other gently stroking her cheek. That's when I saw the blood dripping from his fingers and noticed the gaping hole near Mama's ear.

Suddenly all the air was sucked from my lungs. I gasped for breath but none would come and then the room started to spin. Papa must have noticed the look on my face because he slapped me on the chest and shouted, "Yoel!"

Startled by the impact of his hand, I looked over at him but I must have appeared as dazed and confused as I felt, because in the next instant he glanced past me to Amos and said, "Take your brother and get out of here."

Amos protested. "We can stay and help."

"No, you can't," Papa replied. "Now take your brother and go."

"Where?"

"Go to the Riskins. Tell them what's happened. Tell them to be ready because they may be next."

"But what about you?" Amos continued. "What about Mama?"

Papa shook his head. "Your mother is dead," he said in a solemn voice. "She's gone now. And I'll take care of myself." Then he gave Amos a shove. "But you have to go. So do as I say. Take your brother and go."

From out front, two more shots passed through the window. They landed harmlessly against the rear wall of the house. At the sound of them, Papa glanced toward the window with an angry glare. The horsemen were still outside and I could see them preparing to fire at us again.

Papa laid Mama on the floor and crawled toward the window. I sat there, watching, trying to make sense of it all, trying not to pass out, while Amos hurried back to our room and returned with our pants.

“Here,” he said in a tone that sounded just like Papa. “Put these on.” When I didn’t move, he snapped at me. “Do it now, Yoel. We have to hurry.” I slipped the pants on and stood, just like Mama.

Amos screamed at me, “Get down, you idiot!” But I paid him no attention and walked calmly to the back door.

Papa shouted over his shoulder in our direction, “Amos, take care of your brother!” Then he looked me in the eye, “Yoel, do as he says.”

As I stared back at Papa—wanting with all my heart to run to him, to wrap my arms around his neck, to feel his wrapped around mine—I heard a noise from our bedroom. Amos was at my side by then and heard it, too.

“They’re in our room. Come on.” Then he opened the back door and pushed me outside.

As we stumbled from the house, the Arabs were nowhere to be seen. Their horses, riderless and abandoned, loitered near our bedroom window. Today, after all that happened to us and all we saw and did, I would run to the nearest one, climb onto its back, and ride away. Amos would do the same, giving us the advantage of speed and leaving our attackers to travel on foot—if they could escape Papa’s marksmanship. But back then, we were young and scared. Seeing the horses riderless and unattended told us the gunmen were inside the house, so instead of maximizing even the smallest opportunity to inflict some harm on our opponents, we ran away on foot as fast as our legs would carry us.



ALTHOUGH BASED ON historic incidents, *Friends of Zion: Patterson and Wingate* is a work of fiction. Events have been portrayed as realistically as possible but with an eye toward creating an entertaining and engaging story. Characters, events, and locations are the work of the author's imagination and have been arranged and compiled with the story of Yoel and his brother Amos, fictional characters, in an attempt to provide the reader with a poignant glimpse of the lives of John Henry Patterson and Orde Charles Wingate. Two men who were very much real people and proved to be true friends of Israel and of the Jewish cause.

After leading the Zion Mule Corps during World War I, Colonel Patterson helped organize the Jewish Legion and led its brave soldiers in the fight to liberate Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. Shortly after the close of World War I, he returned to England where he lived with his family to enjoy a much-deserved retirement—but not for long.

The rise to power of the Nazi Party in Germany drew him once more into the cause of Zionism. For the remainder of his life, he traveled the world as an advocate for Jews everywhere, raising money, giving speeches, and doing all in his power to win support for the as-yet undeclared state of Israel.

Later in life, Colonel Patterson settled permanently in the United States where he died on June 19, 1947. On December 4, 2014, in fulfillment of his final request, Colonel Patterson's remains and those of his wife were disinterred from the United States and reinterred at the Avihayil cemetery in Israel, near the graves of some of the men he'd led during World War I.

Speaking at the reburial ceremony, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Colonel Patterson as a "great friend of our people, a great champion of Zionism and a great believer in the Jewish state and the Jewish people...."



After serving in Palestine, Orde Charles Wingate went on to a brilliant, though short-lived, military career. While attempting to adapt his night-raid strategy to conditions in Asia during World War II, Wingate traveled to Burma to check on guerilla teams operating in the region. On March 24, 1944, as he was returning to India, the plane in which he was riding crashed. He and the nine other passengers on board were killed.

The bodies of all ten victims were damaged by fire beyond the ability of medical examiners to determine their identities. As a result, all ten were buried in a common grave near Bishnupur, India. However, seven of the people who died in the crash were US servicemen. After the war, their bodies were disinterred and reburied at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Both John Henry Patterson and Orde Charles Wingate proved critical in the development of the state of Israel. Patterson for creating the Zion Mule Corps and the Jewish Legion, which became a cadre of soldiers trained in the traditional military role from which Israel Defense Forces leadership sprang. Wingate for instilling in Haganah

a can-do bravado that remains with the Israel Defense Forces to this day. To both men, free people everywhere owe a deep debt of gratitude.