

British Reserve Inspector - Captain James Wesley Mackenzie

In the Anglican Cathedral of St George in Jerusalem there is a plaque commemorating a Captain James Wesley Mackenzie who died a hero's death.

James, born in Belfast, was a medical student in Cambridge when WW1 broke out. He immediately joined up. After training, he was sent to France as a Lieutenant with the Royal Fusiliers. Although severely wounded twice, once in the Battle of Loos and again in the battle of the Somme, he survived the war and was demobilised in Egypt in 1920.

Rather than returning to Cambridge to finish his studies, he joined the newly formed Palestine Police in what was still officially Enemy Occupied Territory, with the rank of British Reserve Inspector, the term used in those days for deputy assistant superintendents.

The first two years of his service were spent in hedonistic post-war Jerusalem, enjoying the company of the fishing-fleet, (debutantes whose mothers who dragged them through the middle-east and India in search of eligible sons-in-law, a commodity rare specimens in England after the carnage of WW1.) Despite this, James was immensely popular with his male colleagues.

Early in 1922, he was posted from Jerusalem into the real Palestine, to become police district commander in upper Galilee, where bandits roamed the wild hills and most of his time was spent patrolling the countryside on horseback in charge of a team of Arab and Jewish Police.

The job of the police in Northern Palestine was not made any easier by the indignation of the local Arabs over the terms of the 1919 Paris Peace agreement when the Balfour Declaration had been taken up by the League of Nations. Instead of becoming part of the Arab Caliphate promised by the British, Arabs had come under the control of Western governments.

On April 15th 1922, James was leading a patrol consisting of himself, Inspector Ibrahim Effendi Oweida and six Arab Constables all on horseback about ten kilometres south of Lake Galilee. Down there in the Rift Valley so far below sea- level, the temperature, touching on 100 F, was almost unbearable. The surrounding countryside was barren wilderness, apart from a jungle of reeds and low trees lining both sides of the River Jordan which from the sounds of it was in full spring flood. James realised his horse needed water, but he had to wait for a path trampled through the reed before he ride his horse down to the river.

One of his men warned him that the Jordan at that time of the year was treacherous, but Inspector Oweida contradicted the man and rode into the water where he allowed his horse to stand still to drink. Mackenzie followed him but Oweida's horse struggled as it began to sink into the soft mud of the river bed. The inspector, who was unable to swim, was thrown into the water. James immediately jumped off his own horse and succeeded in

getting hold of the Inspector, but handicapped by the man's weight, found himself unable to beat the strong current. Both men were carried away, never to be seen alive again.

When James' body was recovered, the British dark headstone over his grave was the first of the many that were to appear among the local white stones in the cemetery on Mt. Zion.

Some good, however, came from his sacrifice. The Police Force had no more difficulties in recruiting local Arabs because it was said among them, "These Inglizi will sacrifice their lives for us."

The plaque in the cathedral reads,

"To the glory of God and in memory of Capt. James Wesley Mackenzie of the Palestine Police (late Royal Fus,) who met his death in a gallant attempt to save the life of a brother officer, Inspector Effendi Oweida, in the river Jordan nr Jisr Mejamieh on 15th April 1922. Erected by his officers and friends.