

Interview: SAA Commando, Life on Aleppo's Front Lines

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One man's incredible story, defending the people of Aleppo...

On this past episode of the SUNDAY WIRE SHOW host Patrick Henningsen spoke with a special guest Patrice, a western special forces commando with an incredible story – a man who by happenstance, became caught-up in an emerging conflict, and who found himself leading a platoon on the front lines with the Syrian Arab Army defending the residents of Aleppo against a terrorist occupying army in that country's six year war against Western and Gulf-backed Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS terrorists.

21st Century Wire's associate editor, Vanessa Beeley, met with Patrice when she was covering the liberation of East Aleppo in December 2016 and following in the tracks of the Syrian Arab Army and allies, as they cleansed each district of the terrorist and extremist occupiers, releasing the Syrian civilians from a five year brutal, sectarian imprisonment. She had this to say:

"I met Patrice on the night of the official liberation of Aleppo, the 14th December 2016. We celebrated this victory for the Syrian Arab Army, its allies, and above all, the Syrian people, together with various other Aleppo representatives such as Fares Shehabi, independent parliamentarian and head of the Aleppo Chamber of Commerce that had been destroyed by the NATO and Gulf state funded/armed extremist forces, earlier in the conflict.

Patrice was an ordinary man who took on an extraordinary role to defend Syria. He abandoned his own close knit family in Europe to fight for the freedom of the Syrian people, to determine their own future without foreign, political and proxy, military intervention. He gave up his own freedom and put his life on the line for almost six years because he believed in the sovereignty of Syria and despised the prefabricated campaign to destroy this ancient civilization.

Patrice talked about the horrors he had witnessed and expressed his sadness at the exploitation of children, in particular, who were used as weapons by the extremist groups, as human shields, as forced fighters, as propaganda props.

That night, taxi drivers wept with elation, civilians took to their streets in their thousands, gunfire rang out in celebration, and car horns honked deep into the night. Patrice's celebration was a quiet, reflection on the senselessness of this war and the huge loss he had witnessed and endured."



The following is the transcript of the interview, followed by the audio recording:

PATRICK: Just tell us a bit about yourself and how you ended up fighting in this war.

PATRICE: What you are saying is correct, sadly, when you are there, you watch “foreign news” and it’s all one sided. To someone living there it’s completely irrelevant, there is no truth in it at all. In 2011, obviously we were having a recession in Europe, if you remember from 2007 to 2010. There were good opportunities to do some business in Syria, I actually drove there, I got in my pick-up truck. I thought I will go and see what its like there [Syria], for an opportunity. I was quite impressed, you know, I wasn’t expecting what I saw, in an Arabic country, that is “third world”. It was quite advanced, it was opening up and for my businesses that I was into, there was a good opportunity so I thought I will study the market, see what I can sell there, or take there, or what have you. I picked up a couple of brands, came back to the UK, took the brands, some Italian brands and went back there, that was 2011 summertime, sort of, June 2011.

Unfortunately the troubles started, aggravating itself then, I spent the summer there, made some contacts. Beginning of 2012, the war started breaking out in certain parts of Syria and I thought, probably a good time to exit now, I didn’t want to be caught up with that now, not with my kids, my family who are all in the UK & Europe. First time I felt threatened or even an attempt on my life, it was around maybe January, February 2012, on the Turkish border. I got there to a petrol station in an area just before the border, called Kilis, which is a well known border crossing, as I was filling up my vehicle with petrol to exit Syria.

There was nobody there, little police, no police at all actually. A little kid about 14 or 15, pulled an AK47 on me after I had filled up the vehicle and asked me to dismount. Luckily enough, with my experience, I managed to overpower the guy and take his weapon and get in my car. As I was about to head for Turkey, I saw two motorbikes, little 125cc scooters, and each one had three guys on them. They were all carrying weapons, so I thought that was his back-up coming towards me, and they started firing towards me, obviously they didnt hit me.

So I got in the vehicle and I went back into Aleppo itself and I informed the local police and the local...sort of...military units, that this is what happened and somebody was trying to kill me and take my vehicle and they said “ok we will investigate it”. Nothing happened, nothing came from it, after a couple of months, I tried to exit again, but this time I didn’t make it as far as the border. Three vehicles got shot in front of my vehicle and then they were aiming at my vehicle, so I turned around and came back and since then I couldn’t exit. They had taken over the border, what they call the “rebels”. To me its ridiculous, there is no such thing as “rebels”, to me, it was all money orientated, that’s all it was.

Then, following that, there was a siege on Aleppo. As a Christian, as a Catholic, I couldn’t go through their areas, we had no safety net because they were such extremes, if you are not Sunni, if you are not with them, or if you lived in town or if you lived in a government controlled area, you are considered as an enemy. Basically you are either beheaded, caught for a ransom, it happened to a lot of people I knew there. Even when they paid the ransom, they [the “rebels”] would behead them instead of sending the person back. So, I had no option, and Aleppo got tightened up and tightened up and literally Aleppo was three little areas, like the size of central London, lets say between Knightsbridge, Leicester Square and Covent Garden..and that was Aleppo. It was surrounded, and obviously, we had no option, I had no option but to fight, you know, I couldn’t go through them, I couldn’t get out. If I didn’t fight I would be killed basically, that was the scenario so I am a commander of a big unit. I start training my soldiers because they had no training, weapons were poor, for every

hundred soldiers you get AK47, no heavy weapons, a lot of soldiers had to buy their own ammunition. We had to buy our own uniforms, we had to buy our own food. It was a struggle, but it was a fight for survival, most people who fought, fought for their survival more than anything, not for anyone else basically.

That's how it went basically from around 2012. In Aleppo, nobody spoke about Aleppo and Aleppo suffered more than any other city...you know..like..where I was living, for example, was predominantly a Christian area and there was a lot of bombing on a daily basis, in my street, in my area, at least 18-28 mortars per day. People got scared, people paid a lot of money to the "opposition" to leave them alone, the factories got robbed, everything got robbed, food...we didn't have any food, basically.. like a pound of tomatoes, rotten tomatoes, would cost 800 [Syrian] pounds in their money, which would normally be about 20 pounds. No petrol, no heating, no water, lot of diseases, lot of stuff.

We worked on a defensive basis until 2015, literally it was just saving our lives and Aleppo itself, was made up of eight fronts, 8 points where there were battles on a daily basis, minimum we had about 2.5 - 3 hours of battle per day, on each front. We started liberating slightly, slowly, sort of expanding. The first operation I did personally, was in 2013, and that was the first time I exited Aleppo, you know...obviously we liberated certain areas. The area was called Dnet Erin, which is near the airport and we started from there and it took us until 2015, a lot of fighting, a lot of tactical stuff, we lost a lot of people, obviously.

The saddest thing about it is, everyone tells you this religious point of view, that Sunni and Shia, and I mean...me being a Christian...I had no role there...they are a minority and the Shia and Alawites are a minority. I commanded 300 fighters in general, 99.9% of them are Sunni and don't want these radical people to take control..everything they ["rebels"] get is theirs, for example, they take a village, they kill the men, kill the boys, women they turn them into slaves, turn them into Jihadi women, by having sex but with loads of people, really weird stuff.

If they don't want to use them for that reason, they sell them in markets, which is a common thing with ISIS and Al Qaeda [Nusra Front] and if you live under their rules, it is extreme, extreme..sort of...what they call their Wahhabi, which is like going back to a time 500 years ago where the woman has no rights and where she has to do everything. Its legit to marry a girl of seven, or 5 or 6, that's "fine", weird stuff..you know..and the irony of it, whenever they hit us in town, in Aleppo, that was surrounded by them, the sad thing is, 90% of the civilians were Sunni Muslim, like them. Hence the reason... the majority of Sunni living in the government side, and they [the extremists] didn't want that..the TV channels abroad made it out that the Syrian Arab Army is the terrorist and that the extremists were the good guys, which is completely the opposite.

Luckily you can see their videos, posted all over YouTube, and stuff like that. In one battle, a soldier of mine, went to take a piss... literally a room forward, three minutes later, we thought he didn't come back, so I sent two scouts to see where he was. They went there and they found his head on the floor and his body had disappeared.

It was all scary..what do you call it...all their tactics to scare you...I know you shoot people and they die, this and that...but to them that wasn't enough, you know, you have to behead the person, you have to chop him up, which is just not humane. If they catch a soldier, or something, they always ask for a ransom and at the end of it they behead him live.

Recently they beheaded a thirteen year old boy which had nothing to do with the conflict, he wasn't even Syrian, he was a Palestinian refugee, which was all over the news. The same thing in Damascus, about four months ago, some guy sent his daughter who is 9 years old, who cant even speak properly, and his 7 year old, to be a martyr, and she exploded herself in a police station, for example.

Its what we used to see in the Taliban, if you remember the days of the Taliban, the strictness and backwardness, that is what they wanted to enforce. But the reality of the matter is that the people there don't want that...

PATRICK: The scripting of the conflict has been very much, Assad persecuting the Sunni "rebels".

PATRICE: To be honest with you, you look at the town itself, Aleppo was like the industrial zone of Syria..and the revenue of the whole government, the country, was...like...70% out of Aleppo, which hasn't got petrol, just the factories in it, and these factories, for example, when the war started, first thing, these factories got dismantled and sold into Turkey. Their aim is to destroy the country, the wealthiest people in Syria are Sunni. I have friends of mine, for example, there is a guy called Fares Shehabi who is a well known guy and he is one of the wealthiest people, they are actually living better than we are living in Europe.

In my opinion, the war is for two reasons, its to destroy Syria...(A)..they didn't want it to be too advanced and be a threat to Europe, or our neighbours, the Israelis, or whatever it is, thats one thing, and the second thing is the dispute over the petrol lines and the gas lines because Qatar and Saudi wanted their stuff, its such a complicated thing, but the religious factor is nothing to do with it. The people there, in town, the people living there, the majority of the Sunni don't want radicals because they are happy how they are, they want their daughters, their wives, their kids to work, to study. Under the "other ones", the jihadis, you cant do all that, you got no freedom, you cant have TVs, you cant have this, cant have that, you cant study, you cant educate yourself, thats not what the people want there. People there, want to keep their religion but they don't want to kill each other for their religion if you see what I mean...so this religion story is ridiculous.

The fact is, take an example like my soldiers, who gave their lives, they are all Sunni. You cant say they were fighting for the money..because their wages are ridiculous, equivalent to about \$20 per month, and you are putting your life on the line, so its not like we were giving them thousands of dollars... no! They wanted to fight for their way of living, its just ridiculous [the religious story], I don't know how to put it any other way.

PATRICK: They are patriots at the end of the day, fighting for their families, their relatives, their country. They have been demonized and villainized...by western politicians and media.

PATRICE: I think, any country in the world, anywhere in the world, you have every right as a government, to defend against terrorism, to defend against armed people. Its free in Syria, you can say what you like, its not like people make out, you cant speak etc. The judicial system is good. Me, as a commando, I got stopped and put into prison for 48 days, just for a misunderstanding, but then when they investigated it and found I was right, they let me go, which is a bit extreme, but its right.

I saved a guy from a group that had kidnapped him. I saved him from kidnapping and killing...you know...they were going to kill him... and basically they were asking for a

ransom, and I saved them but because I saved them too “quickly” the security thought I was the one who kidnapped him or pretended to save him. So I said, ok fine, go and get your stories right, if you think its me, prove its me, its the other way round.

Its fine, the judicial system is good, maybe its a little over the top but its good, at least you get your chance. We had kids, volunteering to fight, to be in the army, but we couldn't take them in because under the law they have to be 18 so the six years I was there, I had kids I had known from the beginning of the conflict, they waited and as they got to 18 years old, they came and joined our forces. They didn't want to live under pressure, they didn't want to live under someone's control, they wanted normal lives, stability, to prosper, they wanted their religion to themselves, they didn't want to force it on you and they didn't want anyone dictating to them, what they should eat etc.

It even got to the point where they [the extremists] said that a dad should not sit with his daughter in a room, imagine this. I have three daughters, I cant imagine myself not sitting down and cuddling my daughters. ISIS recently came up with this...I dont know what you would call it in English...but their prince or their Sheikh, said that guys can sleep with each other because if they go into battle, into martyrdom, they can carry explosive more easily in their backside..this is the sort of weird stuff you hear on the battlefield. Where do these people come from?

Another thing they recently came up with..that a guy can sleep with his sister or his mum if he is on the battle front for more than a week...imagine this stuff..I mean its ridiculous...

PATRICK: Its just medieval barbarism...

PATRICE: When the fighters take over an area, as I have said, they kill the men and the boys..then the women..they take them for Jihadi Niqah which is...I don't know the term for it in English..but these girls are like a sexual machine for all the fighters...so in their eyes, its legal for them...its like a “whore house”.. for the fighters...the Sheikh will be there and the fighter will come in and marry her for forty hours, sleep with her, then divorce her, then he walks out and the next one will come in.

In certain operations, we go into the houses and see the Sheikhs/princes there, with serious amounts of alcohol, money, gold. They are a bunch of thieves, even amongst each other. You probably hear, every month or so, a commander gets killed and another takes his place, its all money oriented. They become a commander, rip off the area, fight between each other, get as much money as they can and then exit. Many of them are now living in Europe with millions of dollars.

At one point, we thought we lost the battle to be honest with you...our battles got very aggressive, we had no support, our fighters were not that experienced to be honest with you, a lot of the soldiers were dying because of lack of experience, basic fighting, they dont know how to fight and there its all street fighting..you know...some battle fronts between us and the enemy... were only anything from 2.5m to 12m..so its ridiculous and it taught us a lot.

War teaches you a lot of things, how to adapt, even how to teach you to be a better fighter, you see people die in front of you for no reason, sadly its not how the west portrays it... you got these *White Helmets*...I mean, for fucks sake.... the guy wearing the white helmet you see him the evening after or the day before as Jabhat Al Nusra [Al Qaeda], a well known

terrorist organisation.

When we liberated Aleppo, they said they had no food..the european agencies, the media, were all crying about them. With my own eyes..me and my soldiers went into a house, there was two tonnes of wheat in that house...you know what you could do with that, make enough bread for hundreds of thousands of people. All these UN packages that they send them, food, we found loads of them and the people who came to our side and were shot at by them [extremists] because they came to us, to the government side, they [the people] started talking..they said, you either fight with them to get the food or you do services for them or you pay through the nose to get that food.

First we thought it was just stories so we can feel sorry for them, but when we liberated, it was amazing..I mean..they had medical equipment...in Europe we dont even have the same...an MRI scanner, I think in all of Syria there is one..and we found three in one street...just to give you an idea of the back-up they had. The amount of food was enough to feed all of Aleppo..and it was all just stored...in a military compound. Basically these people [the extremists] controlled and propogandized the way they wanted the west to see it, but they had everything.

We had fighters [extremists] running away from a battle-field, coming to our side and throwing down their weapons, they said, *"please, I dont want this, I have been forced, they threatened me if I dont fight with them, they will kill my family that is living there"*...it happened a lot.

Unfortunately to the West, its completely different to what it is on the ground..as a military commander, my post never got hit by mortars from the enemy, the only places that they hit...and I have showed it to people...are civilian places, and the majority were either Christian or Muslim Sunni. So..their propaganda..is to empty the town and kill as many as possible...but thank god now...I look at the town..I left about a week ago...and the town is prospering, there is food, they started connecting the water...they said electricity, about two weeks...Five years ago there was no water, none..we had to drink water from rivers which were filthy and we had no petrol, no diesel, no food, no proper food, eating crap basically. And nobody said anything about it in the West, they were right, we were wrong, we were the terrorists.

I don't think you have ever seen a Syrian soldier eating someone's heart or liver, or beheading someone. As a soldier, its his job to defend, not to do these...what I consider...beyond humane stuff...

PATRICK: Western propaganda completely inverted the truth...these are the "rebels" that the West has been supporting..

PATRICE: When they [the west] opened the humanitarian corridors the first time, they gave them [the extremists] weapons, Grad missiles, this is a fact, long range Grad missiles...we found ammunication that was dated 2016...brand new and top of the range...I found ammunication that could have lasted the Syrian Army, not just Aleppo, two years of battle..and it was all brand new, dust had not had time to accummulate on the boxes...so they [the West] werent just giving them food, they were giving them weapons...they gave them 100 tanks as well, from Turkey. They [the extremists] were saying on their own TV, that they had received 200 missiles and in my opinion much more than that, because in one day, they hit the airport with 80 missiles and when they attacked Aleppo, to "liberate" it

allegedly....in one day we had 180 rockets, Grad rockets which is a destructive rocket and next to my house, for example, one of these rockets hit a market...and that market was full of students and women. Me and my unit, we cleared 18 bodies and they were not bodies in one piece, they were in bits and pieces..

These are civilians, they are from the same religion, why are they killing them?

The Syrians and the Russians said they wanted to check the stuff before it got to the terrorists...but they [UN] didnt want that, they wanted the stuff to reach Nusra Front without being controlled....and every time the SAA accepted the ceasefire, they [terrorists] prepared themselves, got stronger, they got more weapons and attacked Aleppo even more. Dont forget, they attacked Aleppo three times and it was lethal..if you remember...we lost the Academy...we lost the Artillery school...these are well know defensive points so Aleppo was on the brink of falling down to them [extremists] but obviously it didnt happen, thank God.

When we hit...and this is civilians from their side told me this story...he said to me " *you know why they are saying you are hitting civilians?*" ...I said why?... he said, because, " *for example, an anti-aircraft gun for Nusra Front..they wouldnt fire at the Syrian army from a normal point, he would go into a civilian area and launch an attack*". Obviously, as a defensive, you have to hit it, so I have to hit him back, wherever he is and that is a tactic they used a lot, they used human shields.

PATRICK: That is exactly what they are doing in Mosul, Iraq now..

PATRICE: That is their tactic in Aleppo for the last six years, if they tell you otherwise, dont believe it. Look, whenever they take an area..like now, recently in Damascus..when the Syrian Army feels like its going to do a lot of damage to civilian areas, it pulls back and then it prepares itself, it gets as many civilians out as possible, and then it goes back in.

This has always been our policy...you know..if I tell you this..this is actually quite a crucial point...the war started officially in 2011, we had orders from the High Command of the military that we are not allowed to carry weapons visibly or fire at our enemy without an order...can you believe that? So..we used to get fired at, and by law we couldnt return fire...that was an official order..that was probably the hardest time of the fighting...you are sitting in a corner, behind a couple of sand-bags and people firing at you, you have the weapon but you cant fire back, and that was to avoid bloodshed and to calm it down..it didnt work...the more we did like that...the more aggressive they got.

The good thing is they did their own publicity, you could see it all over YouTube...it wasnt just them [extremists] killing, its unreal..I have seen it for myself..in a battle...I shoot someone who is attacking me....and this guy is under so much drugs...Captagon and stuff like that...you actually have to shoot the guy 18 times until he drops, the amount of drugs in them is unbelievable and we found it in places we liberated...we found needles...we found..you know how can you associate drugs with extreme religion...

PATRICK: So you came face to face with Nusra fighters, what percentage are foreign fighters?

PATRICE: So this is from my own experience...the foreign ones are highly trained and professional soldiers, as fighters, out of all the fighters we fought, I would say Nusra are probably the strongest fighters and tactically they are superior to anyone else...so when you

are fighting someone like that...particularly the foreign ones...you got the Turkistan, the Chechyen, Moroccans, Tunisians, Saudis...these are considered the mercenaries..because I am a professional soldier so I can tell when someone is properly trained...how they move, how they fight, how tactically advanced they are... and some of them are probably the most aggressive fighters I have ever fought..Nusra Front.

Then you get the ISIS...I put them second to Nusra..again, their foreign soldiers are their professional soldiers...so I think these soldiers were bred a long time ago..you know not just trained for a week or two..they are trained for years...another good point...we caught a lot of people smuggling weapons...and these people declared that they have been smuggling weapons since 2005...and receiving money since 2005, so the war is not just an overnight war...its well organised, well paid for...and the propaganda they use..you have Al Jazeera which is purely on their side...Sky News Arabic which is 1000% on their side...BBC the same..France 24..all these companies funded by Saudi Arabia who played a huge role in the war and Turkey probably played an even worse role..because Turkey had no border..literally every single fighter that we caught..foreigners..the last stamp on his passport is Turkey...then he just walks through.

When they tell you that Turkey is fighting terrorism, Turkey brought most of them in because they had no other way to get in, Jordan had a little role as well but not as big as Turkey. Obviously Iraq is on the border, ISIS when they expanded in Iraq, they opened up the border as well.

ISIS is different to Nusra Front. ISIS...like if ISIS take a village from the Free Syrian Army, they do not take the fighters to their side while Nusra make them become Nusra fighters...so both evil units, but each one works in its own way and ISIS work cleverly, I think, because the areas they took initially are oil rich or wheat rich areas..if you actually study where they took, its all financially viable and they made billions of dollars selling petrol from Syria. Syria never realised its the richest country in the Middle East, I always assumed it is Saudi Arabia.

All the petrol, until now, has been sold illegally to Turkey, from ISIS to Turkey and its proven. How can you buy from a terrorist? The whole world claims it is fighting ISIS, if you are buying from them it means you are supplying them..

PATRICK: What does that mean to you? Being in Europe..do you think this war would have been over years ago if Turkey, a NATO country, had not played this role?

PATRICE: I think if it hadnt been for Turkey and the whole of Europe they [the extremists] would not have reached 1% of what they reached, because everything they had..is just too advanced to be just a bunch of "rebels" ...for example..I used a lot of google earth for my war..you know..to map the area..some areas would stay on google earth for 6 months, with a cloud over it...we cant see the area..now you need support to do this..if a picture updates itself every 24 hours or every 3 or 4 days...a cloud could not stay over an area in the Middle East for like 6 months...thats part of their support, that stops my attack on them and gives them the liberty to attack me...so I think, Europe, NATO even the US...how many times, supposedly, by mistake, dropped weapons, guns and ammuniton to ISIS..or completely destroy an entire defence force of the Syrian Army while they are fighting ISIS...how could that happen?

In Raqqa, a couple of months ago, 180 soldiers got destroyed, an artillery point got

destroyed..even the electrical station in Aleppo was destroyed by American fighter jets, not by ISIS and ISIS had it under their control for 4 years..

You have to excuse my head, 6 years of fighting I cant remember everything. I will give you one example of how brutal they were.

We were liberating one section of East Aleppo..and it was door to door combat..room to room..we cleared the first four buildings..we got into the fifth building which was their second defence line. One soldier with me saw a baby, in the middle of the room. so he went to lift the baby up and the baby was booby-trapped...what kind of soldier in any military in the world would booby trap a baby..

PATRICK: ..and these are the rebels that we are backing and funding in the west. What about the tunnels in East Aleppo?

PATRICE: We called it the war of the tunnels, basically when a fighter jet hits the area it does not actually do any damage or cause any fatalities which I found very surprising but obviously with experience we started knowing whats happening...they got point of control..so on their radios which we listened to a lot, as an aircraft takes off from an airbase, they start sending the alarms..and what protects them is these tunnels. So the aircraft doesnt help us at all in killing the terrorists, it helps us in attacking because it can scare them off and we can attack and we can obviously deal with them one to one or two to one. There were a serious number of tunnels, some you could fit a tank in.

Going back in history the castle of Aleppo, the old castle..from the castle there are tunnels to the outskirts of Aleppo and they reckon there are about 280 tunnels going back 2000 years and after that they dug, their war is all tunnels...every area we would take is full of tunneling...rooms under the ground, ammunition under the ground, fighters under the ground. We got attacked quite a lot that they would come through us under the ground and they would come out in an unprotected area or an area that we think is safe. That happened a lot.

I started using that against them as well..I started using it as a tactic because they were not expecting me to do that..so I started digging towards them..in one operation I went in and liberated a massive zone with 20 soldiers, 10 of them were in the tunnel, I dug it for a month until I got to the heart of the headquarters and that was a successful operation.

They relied on tunnels a lot, I would say 90% of their fighting

PATRICK: What was your military experience prior to this.

PATRICE: Well I learned a lot but I also had a lot of experience before, I am a trained...you could say...special forces..but obviously training and doing it for real are different things...training you do 3 months tactical and how to move, how to use weapons but real battle just teaches you a lot and you become on an auto pilot, you do stuff that you don't know you know and it gives you a huge amount of experience. We lost a lot of soldiers because they didn't know how to take cover..they died for nothing, I would say. You get to learn how to take cover properly..its so different to doing a military camp, its so different.

For three or four years, certain areas, we couldnt cross the street..I had to dig holes through walls to reach the other street because if I went across it, there were 6 or 7 snipers controlling the area..it taught us a lot, that war.

I think its a unique war, I dont think any country has dealt with terrorists like this and till the day I die i will say they are terrorists, in 7 years I cannot think of anything positive they have done..i even said to some of their fighters who came to me, just explain to me what have you done that is so positive..like Syria in general..there were no poor people...a poor guy could eat a chicken a day..through the war, for six years, people didnt even smell meat. Butchers started selling bones instead of meat because people cannot afford meat. Thats just to give you the extent of it.

Diesel, for example, used to cost about 14 pence a litre, the government was supporting it, I dont know the percentage, diesel reached 1, 200 lira a litre which is equivalent to about \$3 which is someones weekly wage.

The last period of East Aleppo, Nusra Front and Al Zinki were asking people if they wanted to leave to pay them the equivalent of \$ 150 which was 150,000 Syrian Lira..someone could work all his life and not save this amount of money but if they had it, they let them out to our side.

As a soldier I worked on the defensive point of view for four years, for four years I was just defending my life and the lives of the civilians in my area, I wasnt attacking, I wish I had been attacking, I could have liberated it ages ago..so how can I be a terrorist or how could the Army be a terrorist if he is basically on a defensive role.

Now some foreign media agencies are bringing out the truth, even my own kids abroad, they didnt know any better...my daughter told me "dad you are a terrorist"..I said no, how could I be a terrorist if I am fighting ISIS and Al Qaeda? You know..I just want to be out of here alive, I dont want to die and if I dont do what I do, I am going to die whether I like it or not.

PATRICK: Did you learn fluent Arabic?

PATRICE: Well when I was a kid I lived in the Middle East for about 7 years so I had the basis there but obviously the first two years were a bit difficult to remember but then it got ok, obviously, with the conflict. In fact I have lost my English actually...

PATRICK: You have been through a lot fighting under the flag of another country. What did you learn about Syria?

PATRICE: I have to say the people of Aleppo, who were under attack for 5 years...I have nothing but respect. They survived against all odds...they have such history, its a melting pot..going back to the crusades etc, the history they have is phenomenal..its amazing..sadly almost all that is gone..the people are survivors, they just want to go back to how it was before the war. Since we liberated, people who left are coming back to check their homes, their businesses. The day after we liberated Aleppo, the council started cleaning up..I think they are all survivors, if it wasn't for their will, they would have lost this war years ago..if it were not for their will they could not have withstood the global pressure. As a fighter, I thought the battle was lost in Aleppo but their strength of will won through and their love for each other, they are a very patriotic people..they appreciated everyone doing anything for them...they opened their houses for me, they feed me, showed their appreciation. They are an old race, not a new race, I wish them all the best and I hope they get some peace, enough is enough.

Listen to this stunning interview – the story of an incidental soldier on the front lines of the war in Syria:

Listen to the full episode [here](#).

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