

CHAPTER X

ZEKI BEY

ON the afternoon of February 19th I rode to Kilid Bahr and crossed to Chanak to meet Zeki Bey. At headquarters of the 28th Division I was disappointed to hear from Major Collis that the ship had been delayed until the 21st. However the delay disconcerted me alone; the rest of the Mission would be only too glad for a chance to catch up with their work.

On the 21st our visitor duly arrived by tender at the pier where a staff officer of the 28th Division and I were waiting for him. He proved to be a smartly but quietly uniformed officer, of perhaps slightly under average height. He spoke to us in French, and his very quiet voice and reserved manner closely matched his appearance. He had the complexion of a pleasantly browned European, a slight, dark moustache, deep brown eyes and a quick smile. His uniform was not unlike the German field grey, with red shoulder patches, black gaiters, and a Turkish helmet of dark felt material. After making arrangements with the British staff at Chanak, I crossed with him to Kilid Bahr, and there and on our ride to Anzac I had the opportunity of learning from him something of his Gallipoli experience.

He was a Salonica Turk of, I should say, about 29 years. At the outbreak of war he had been an officer on the regular staff of the Turkish Army, but later, when some new battalions were being formed,¹ he had volun-

¹ From the fourth companies of existing battalions.

teered for command and had been given the 1st Battalion of the 57th Turkish Regiment, which was brigaded with two Arab regiments, the 72nd and 77th, to form the 19th Division of the Turkish Army. This was the division which, in the redistribution carried out by the German General Liman von Sanders after the failure of our Navy's attempt on March 18th to force the passage of the Straits by warships alone, had been stationed on the Peninsula a little north of Kilid Bahr as reserve for the southern end of the Peninsula. Zeki Bey and his battalion had formed part of the force which was thrown in to bar our advance on the day of the Landing. He had been wounded in that fight, but had returned a month or so later and taken over with his battalion the position at German Officers' Trench. After a long term at that post he was rushed with his troops as the first reserve to meet our thrust at Lone Pine; and after fighting through that battle he was given command of a regiment—the 21st—whose leader had been killed on August 9th near Hill 60. Through malaria Zeki Bey missed the main fighting at Hill 60 in August but he commanded there for the rest of the campaign and at the Evacuation.

I had never dreamt of being able to obtain information of the Turkish side from an authority with such experience. Here was one who, from his close association with the staff, could speak with knowledge of the major plans, and who at the same time could give us at least a battalion commander's personal account of the most important incidents of the campaign, so far as these concerned Anzac. I had yet to learn the degree to which Zeki Bey had actually taken part in the fighting, and of his close association with the greatest commander on Gallipoli. That he should have been selected to visit us was not, of course, mere good luck; it was due to the help of Cameron, Crawford, Murphy and the head of the Turkish General Staff, Kiazim Pasha, whom I had not yet had the privilege of meeting.



MAJOR ZEKI BEY
COMMANDANT OF TURKISH REGIMENT
AT GALLIPOLI.

32. LAMBERT'S DRAWING OF OUR GUEST

From the Australian War Memorial Collection



33. THE TURKISH CORPS COMMANDER'S LOOKOUT AT SCRUBBY KNOLL

In the foreground is a ruined shelter; Essad Pasha's observation post is seen beyond it

A. W. M. photo, C. 2024

The two winters spent as a youngster in Belgium had made French a fairly easy medium for me; and by the time Zeki Bey and I, and an English groom with our visitor's spare horse, rode over Third Ridge, and into the valley, so familiar to him, in which we camped, I had obtained most of this information, and much besides. He had not, I think, seen Lone Pine since the days of the critical struggle there—certainly not since the months following the campaign, and he was intensely interested. Accordingly, after a cup of tea we climbed up there, and he began the graphic account given in the next chapter.

Much the greater portion of his narrative of that and other events was taken down by me, from that evening onwards, as we sat over our mess-table after dinner. The mess-tent was lighted by a couple of hurricane lamps whose rays barely reached its corners, and in the snow-storms and sleety nights the tent was very cold. We had only tea to warm us. But Zeki Bey, sitting on the bench beside our table, let me cross-examine him for hours at a time, just as I had done throughout the war with officers of the A.I.F. Wilkins would be in his dark-room tank; Balfour writing up his records; the others working or yarning. The evenings were so cold that Rogers suggested building a fireplace, and eventually got leave to do so. He and Lambert spent a day making it of bricks from parts of the Turkish trenches, with some bits of galvanised iron for the chimney. They were helped by a fatigue party of our 28th Division men, "whose greatest effort," Lambert wrote to his wife, "was making exclamations of admiration." That night Lambert in his studio-tent could hear them "discussing where we learnt to make so many gadgets. They have placed me," he wrote,² "as a chap who rose from navvy to artist (quite right) and Sergeant Rogers as an architect who descended from a high position for the purpose of helping his country." I suppose it was by Rogers' skill and not by pure luck that our mar-

² *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, pp. 107-8.

quee survived the fire that we thenceforth enjoyed; anyway it became a much better place to work in.

The answers of Zeki Bey to my questions proved absorbingly interesting from the start, at least to us Anzacs. I must here repeat the warning which I have given in the preface to this book, that in writing Zeki Bey's narrative here I have made its order consecutive, often combining several conversations that dealt with a single subject, and have made him speak in the first person, whereas my notes are in the third. Also in a few places I have amplified my notes from memory, where my memory is certain. In any case my original diaries will be in the War Memorial for any authentic student to read.

Needless to say I did not begin my interrogations with pencil and notebook in hand (as in a portrait which George Lambert some years later did me the honour of painting), firing questions at Zeki Bey and expecting him to answer them. Never since my earliest days as a reporter have I produced a notebook or pencil at the beginning of such an interview. One must, of course, let one's subject know that he is speaking for publication, but if one also starts by bringing out this apparatus any but the most hardened public person is immediately scared. Any statement elicited is frozen by self-consciousness. On the other hand it is easy to turn the conversation in some direction that requires a sketch-map, and then say, "Hold on—I don't quite follow; I take it you mean this—perhaps we'd better have a diagram." Out comes your pencil with some scrap of paper. "Here's where you were standing . . ." and you mark down this or whatever other point you seize on to illustrate, "and the other man was over there . . ." Your man may correct you, but whatever he says you note it down on the diagram: "Smith here, other man there . . ." and the ice is broken. You may then sit, as I have often done, for three-quarters of the night taking down word for word the rest of the story of your new

friend (which he usually becomes) in an atmosphere of complete ease. Anyway, that was the atmosphere in which Zeki Bey and I, side by side under the lantern at our mess-table, fired our imperfect French at one another, mutually eager to thrash out the story.

I should say here that our visitor was given one of the three bell tents for himself. To serve as his batman and orderly, Hughes had suggested that we should obtain one of the Turkish soldiers guarding the 6-inch gun on Baby 700; they seemed to look upon Hughes as both commander and protector. Next evening two of them (I had asked only for one) reported to our camp. "I fancy they, poor devils, come in for a feed," wrote Lambert that night,³ "as the Turkish officer doesn't seem to remember any order that was issued commanding them to report. However, they will make excellent models. One of them has a uniform of which at least six square inches is of the original material." Actually the guard on the gun seemed to have been forgotten by the Turkish War Office. (I have known larger units forgotten by our own command.) They told Zeki Bey that the officer formerly in charge of the gun had left for Constantinople some weeks earlier, after telling them that the British would shortly be taking over the gun. They had been given three weeks' Turkish rations and told that no more would be coming as the British would take charge of "the fort" before that time ended. They had since heard no more, and as their rations were nearly finished I reported the position to the 28th Division. I fancy they lived largely on rations from Hughes' camp and did small services in return.

Before Zeki Bey retired for the night I gave him an outline of our daily arrangements: call time, 7.30 a.m.; breakfast, 8; start for the field, 9 o'clock, unless otherwise arranged, always taking our lunch with us. Dinner, 7

³ *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*. p. 105.

p.m. I had, of course, given orders that no food that was prohibited to Mohammedans should be included in our meals while he was there. When he left us that night for his tent the verdict of the Mission, as the nightly five minutes of gossip flew over the six of us in our sleeping bags or blankets in the dark of the big marquee, was that we had gained a pleasant and interesting companion. Strangely enough the one who throughout, while conversing cheerily in French, maintained longest an inward non-committal attitude towards our visitor, was Lambert.

Next day we were to begin with Zeki Bey a systematic survey of Anzac from the north southwards. But as his nightly answers to my interrogations illuminated nearly all the problems for these searches, I shall interpose here his account of the Landing and return later to our work in the field.