

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGE LAMBERT SETS TO WORK

GEORGE Lambert had not come with us on our second day's search, on Battleship Hill. He had received the "operation order" for which he constantly asked, which in fact amounted to my having discussed with him the subject of the big pictures which he would be commissioned to paint for the future memorial—one of the Landing of Australians on April 25th; one of the heroic charge of the Light Horse (dismounted, of course—they could not bring their horses to Gallipoli) at The Nek on August 7th, at the climax of the second offensive of the Allies; and possibly a third of the advance of the 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade, sent to help the British at Cape Helles, on May 8th. In our first day's work, with Howe as guide, Lambert had been over the ground both of the Landing and (though that had been a much later event in the campaign) of the charge of the Light Horse¹—indeed he had obtained his bearings there with me on the day we reached Anzac. Lambert was, I think, more sensitive than the rest of us to the tragedy—or at any rate the horror—of Anzac. At The Nek, in the last effort to seize Baby 700 or part of it, four lines of Australians charged successively to practically certain death in order to pin the attention of their opponents to that supposedly vital point, and so give the New Zealand infantry, then climbing the just visible heights of Rhododendron Spur, 1200 yards away,

¹ Not to be confounded with their mounted charge, two years later, which tipped the scale of Allenby's first campaign, at Beersheba in Palestine, and which Lambert also painted.

the supreme chance of winning the real goal, Chunuk Bair summit, and with it, possibly, the campaign. Unfortunately the New Zealand leaders, whose tired men by a wonderful effort then had the summit almost within their grasp and practically unoccupied, allowed the chance to slip. But that was unforeseen by the Light Horse who flung themselves across the narrow strip of The Nek in face of the seven or eight Turkish trenches that rose, tier after tier, across it and up the face of Baby 700 beyond. We found the low scrub there literally strewn with their relics and those of earlier Turkish attacks over the same ground. When shortly after our visit Hughes came to bury the missing in this area, he found and buried more than three hundred Australians in that strip the size of three tennis courts. Their graves today mark the site of one of the bravest actions in the history of war.

"Descriptions are all too true," wrote Lambert² to his wife. "Evidence grins coldly at us non-combatants. . . . From the point of view of the artist-historian The Nek is a wonderful setting to the tragedy." The grim, rather beautiful landscape of distant ridge-tops surrounding this upland would be his background, his foreground the patch of level scrub with the line of charging men shown at the moment when, a few yards out from their trench, the full force of the Turks' rifle-fire struck them. As he says, he regarded himself in these works as the artist-historian, and he purposed in this picture to show the reaction of different types of Australian to this shocking experience. There was to be the larrikin; and the gently-bred type; the fair-haired Scandinavian-Anzac; the lean countryman, and so on. You see them all in the picture which he painted some years afterwards in Australia from the landscape studies begun that morning on Plugge's Plateau and The Nek.

I had been answering Lambert's questions as to our

² *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, pp. 103-4

men's equipment and dress at the Landing when Balfour reminded me that the men of the 3rd Brigade, which landed first, had been told to roll up their sleeves to the elbow so that in the half-light they might be distinguished from the Turks. Like Balfour, I thought this might add something to the vigour of the picture, though I did not say so when I mentioned the fact to Lambert.

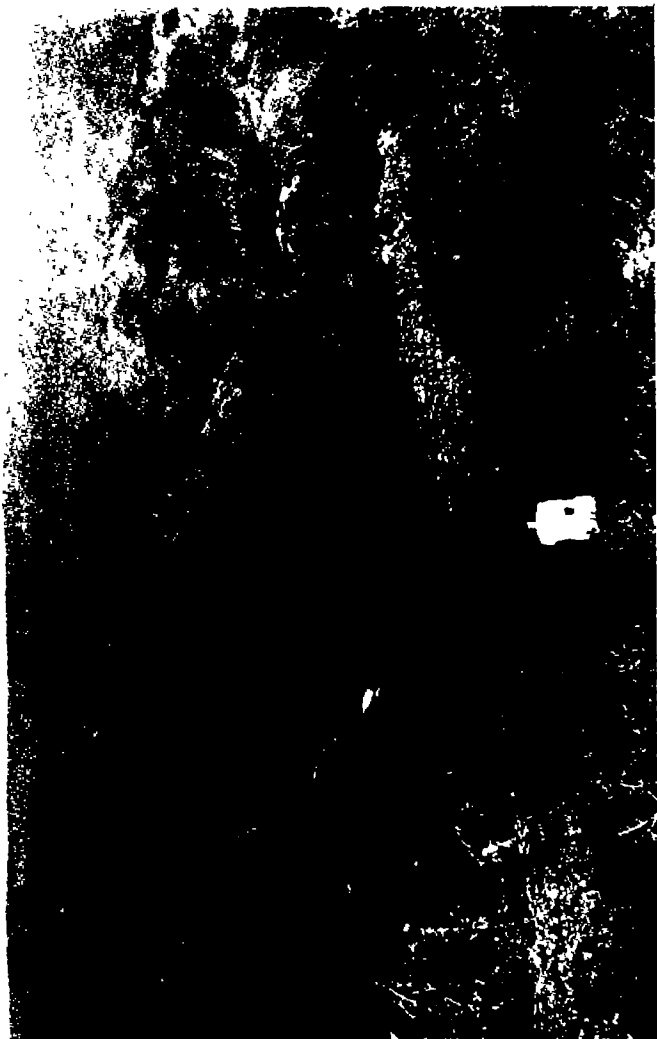
"How disgusting," was all he said. I think he sensed that we were expecting him to paint something like the flamboyant illustrated-newspaper pictures of the Anzacs which seldom failed to show their forearms bare. "You know," he once said to me, "we constantly picture Australians as tall, wiry men, whereas the average Australian—if there is one—is short and stout. Look at them next time you're in the street."

However, the original Anzacs were big men, and Lambert did not make the mistake of painting them otherwise. But nothing could have induced him to turn up the sleeves of that landing brigade. In his great picture, of all the scores of climbing men who, in the flat morning light, almost blend into the colour of the scrub, every one has his sleeves down to his wrist, and every one wears an Australian hat, though Lambert knew that they landed in the little round peaked caps which were the general wear of Australian infantry in that great battle.

"I suppose some wore hats, skipper?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said, and that was enough for him.

But in his picture of the charge at The Nek he gave the men exactly the uniform they would have worn—shirts with sleeves cut above the elbow, shorts, slacks, anything—the "Anzac uniform" in fact. He often asked me how I thought a man would fall if hit on one side and spun round; Lambert used to jerk himself forward as he imagined this charging man would, and as you see one figure falling in the centre of the picture today. It is a rather terrible work and meant to be so. Yet Lambert did not hate war so fiercely as our even more prolific war



29. AUSTRALIAN RELICS ON THE NORTH-EASTERMOST SPUR OF BATTLESHIP HILL

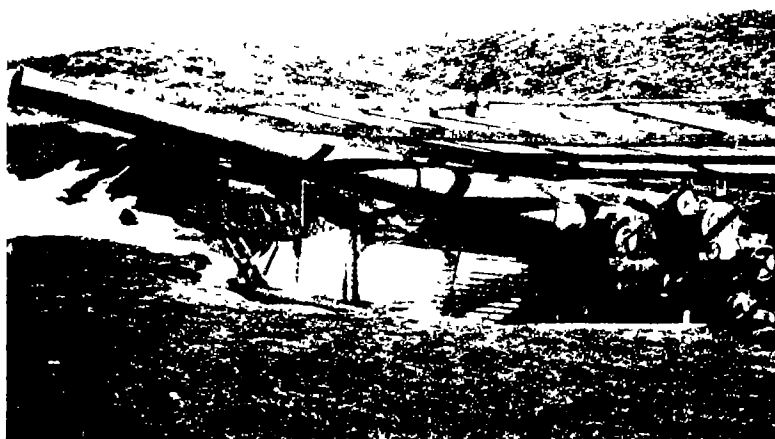
This was probably the point reached by Captain Tulloch's company on 25th April 1915

A. H. M. *photo*, G1887



30. CEMETERY ON BABY 700, AS MARKED IN 1921

Imperial War Graves Commission photo



31. TURKISH GUN PLACED ON BABY 700 AFTER THE EVACUATION

The view is northwards to Battleship Hill. It was south of this gun that traces of Major Kindon's line and of the Auckland troops were found.

A. W. M. photo, G1799

artist, Will Dyson, who once told me: "I'll never draw a line to show war except as the filthy business it is." Nothing could have induced either of these artists to swerve a hair's breadth from what he believed to be the truth—their integrity was absolute.

Lambert had been allotted a bell tent to store his materials and for a studio on the worst days, but it had to be pretty wet or snowing to keep him from the field. He carried his field-gear in a case which the Mission called "Lambert's coffin"; and, to carry it, from this morning onwards, Hughes or James kindly allotted him a pack mule from their camp, with a light horseman named Spruce, from Port Stephens in New South Wales, to look after the mule. Lambert wrote to his wife:³ "I sit perched on the edge of what you would call a precipice and wait for the sun to shine, getting in a dash now and again. My bad temper is kept under by the presence of a dinkum Australian lent by the Hughes-James camp . . . (He) accompanies me, carrying my painting gear, himself, and odd bits of salvage on a pack mule, a female of character. I ride a very ugly plug, a small draught horse which, though unspeakably plain, is useful and has a fondness for the mule. The mule breaks away every fifteen minutes or so when we camp for painting, and the Dinkum shows the stuff he is made of by sliding down the side of the precipice and catching her, tethering her by some special stunt which he says will make her feel as happy as a Jew on the hobs of Hell. Then he climbs laboriously back to me, and by the time he reaches the summit she is off again; quite a good circus for a grey day. If the weather serves we move on, after mungaree, to The Nek, and I swat at painting leaves and small pebbles into the sketch of The Nek."

Since his first holiday in the Australian country as a boy, Lambert, when opportunity occurred, had never ceased to play at being bushman, at which his quick

³ *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, p. 104.

intelligence made him tolerably expert. The same propensity caused him to dramatise his situations. Something he had heard or read led him to believe that there should still be a few stray wolves among these hills, and it would have given him even more pleasure to use the revolver, which he still carried, on a wolf than on a jackal. It happened that on the evening of February 18th, after returning from Tulloch's tracks, I went out by myself on to the ridges behind our camp in my eagerness to get at least a preliminary answer to some of the problems of Scrubby Knoll, the main summit there, the goal of most of the searches described in the next chapter. As I was wandering through the scrub up the Third Ridge (Gun Ridge), towards that summit, I heard some kind of report, and a bullet buzzed through the air near enough for me to hear it and wonder at its sound, rather like that of a bumble-bee. I thought somebody must be out shooting with an old Martini Henry rifle, when almost at once the felt hat and puggaree and eager face of Lambert appeared bobbing up and down as he hurried through the bushes.

"By God, skipper," he said, "did you see that chap? Wolf or something—I didn't get him, he cleared off through the scrub: I think he lost a bit of fur though! Damn good job I didn't get you either, now I come to think of it—what?"

Back in camp he set about devising a wolf or jackal trap on the lines of the traps for wild dogs and dingoes which he had learnt to make in his bush days. He constructed a second one later. A year afterwards, back in Australia, we heard from Hughes that Lambert's trap was still there—and still virgin.

Lambert worked like an assiduous student, and the rest of us also were occupied by night as well as by day. Buchanan and Rogers had their maps to check and trace; Wilkins his negatives to develop; Balfour supplies to order as well as the collections to list and pack. Almost

every day he led a party of six or eight British helpers to search systematically the ground already examined for the purposes of history. Their duty was to bring back everything that might be useful for the memorial collection. It was a rule that this party should never work over ground which I had still to examine; they searched for particular articles in special places—remains of bomb-screens and other signs of trench warfare at Quinn's Post where bombing had never ceased during the campaign; shrapnel pellets in the bed of Shrapnel Valley; fragments of battleships' shells on Battleship Hill. Sometimes, if the find was likely to be heavy, the limber was taken. The British soldiers generally enjoyed this work; and when, on about our fifth day, there arrived a relief party of six men, both parties asked to remain with us, which the 28th Division most kindly permitted. We had work for them, and our camp would have grown to about twenty-five members had it not been for illness. Unfortunately Howe, who had not been well throughout our travels, had to leave us after sticking it out till he had done his job, and several of the 28th Division men sickened with malaria contracted at Salonica and had to be sent back. Hughes with his Australian section, however, was keenly interested in our investigations, and often helped us by coming with us and by lending us some of his men.

Naturally these fellow-countrymen were the most interested in our searches; but, apart from that, the outlook of the "colonials" increased their helpfulness to a degree that impressed us all. Whereas the British orderly or groom would do faithfully what you told him, the Australian could be trusted, almost without instructions, to turn up with the right equipment for himself, you, and the horses, and not infrequently with suggestions for the day's work, whether it was that of Hughes seeking for graves or of Lambert making sketches. Lambert noted that his light horseman-muleteer, Spruce, "says he has always had a leaning towards art and beauty, and he

thinks that Port Stephens is the most beautiful place in the world. When I told him that he would never be as good a painter as a mule-catcher, he replied that a man doesn't value the gifts that are handed to him at birth."⁴

After our second day's search (February 18th) a splendid piece of news was waiting for us. The 28th Division at Chanak had sent a copy of a telegram received from G.H.Q., Constantinople, saying that Major Zeki Bey of the Ottoman General Staff would leave there in the s.s. *Maryland* next day to meet me. General Milne directed that "although a certain formality is to be observed, everything possible is to be done to make this officer's visit pleasant and comfortable". The 28th Division was to make arrangements for his accommodation and transport. To my delight the message concluded: "Tell Bean Major Zeki Bey has maps"—that meant, of course, the large scale Turkish historical maps which Crawford and Cameron so admired.

It was indeed a wonderful advantage that these loyal British friends had secured for us. At that time the outside world knew almost literally nothing of the Turkish side of the campaign, and seemed, indeed, unlikely ever to hear much. I had scores of questions to which I was anxious to obtain even the most general answer. And now general information, at least, should be obtainable; from a staff officer we could hardly expect much detail. It was therefore with much interest that I arranged to ride to Kilid Bahr on the evening of the 19th in order to bring back our visitor next day. General Croker of the 28th Division had most kindly offered to put me up at Chanak, but I was so eager to get quickly back to our task that I refused. Meanwhile we filled the evening of the 18th and morning of the 19th with two important searches towards Scrubby Knoll.

⁴ *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, p. 112.