

CHAPTER IX

"FARTHEST IN"

OUR searches on Scrubby Knoll and the fingers of the Third Ridge leading to it were aimed at answering another question relating to the Landing: how far did parts of the covering brigade penetrate inland?

The thrust in that direction was made at the same time as Tulloch was thrusting northwards, mainly by somewhat similar bodies of the 9th and 10th Battalions. The 11th Battalion, as already stated, was to seize Battleship Hill, on the northern flank; but it was also to establish itself on the northern part of the Third Ridge, whose long curved watershed left the main range at Chunuk Bair and swept southwards and then south-westwards enclosing the First and Second Ridges, to end in Gaba Tepe promontory. The right of the 11th was to rest on Scrubby Knoll, the most prominent hump in the northern part of the Third Ridge. The 10th (South Australia) would occupy the central part of the ridge, from there southwards. The 9th (Queensland) would capture the southern part, from another hump (Anderson Knoll) to and including the strongly fortified cape of Gaba Tepe itself.

What part, if any, of the Third Ridge had been reached in either of these sectors was in doubt. It was certain that in the central sector some parties had reached one or other of its spurs, beyond Lone Pine or Johnston's Jolly. These parties had been met on the Second Ridge by Major (afterwards Major-General and Senator) C. H.

Brand, then brigade-major of the covering force, who urged them to "keep going"—which indeed was their orders. A little later they had been sighted high up on a spur of the Third Ridge; and when the commander of the covering force, Colonel MacLagan, decided that it would be impossible for his troops to reach and hold the Third Ridge that day, and that the bulk of them should dig in where they then were, on the Second Ridge, he also decided to let these foremost parties stay out in front for the time being, as a screen for the troops digging the main line. Shortly afterwards it was reported that the advanced line was being driven in. Whatever position it had occupied lay far beyond the Anzac line from that morning onwards.

Not till three years after that event had I, to my knowledge, met any member of those advanced troops, and so had an opportunity of ascertaining where they had been and what had happened there. The officer whom I then met, Lieut.-Colonel N. M. Loutit, had in the meantime risen to command a battalion at the age of twenty-four years; but at the time of the Landing he had been just twenty-one, a platoon commander of the 10th Battalion. Before the war he was an engineer student. He told me that while the crowd of troops was assembling on Plugge's Plateau, he had hurried on with some of his men, chasing a party of Turks through the depths of Shrapnel Valley, and then climbing the Second Ridge near the nick at Wire Gully. Clambering up the steep hillside they were joined by Major Brand whom MacLagan had sent to do what he could in keeping track of and co-ordinating the forward troops. As they reached the edge of the 400 Plateau they saw several of the Turkish field-guns, which airmen had reported to be emplaced in a fold of this plateau. The guns were about 300 yards south-east of them on that scrubby expanse. Turks were hurrying up mule teams to the battery and, despite snap shooting from Loutit's party, guns, mules and men

quickly disappeared into some hollow which evidently divided the northern and southern halves of the plateau.

It was the first duty of the 10th Battalion, on its way to its sector of the Third Ridge, to capture the reported battery or batteries on this plateau, and Loutit headed for this valley, afterwards named Owen's Gully, striking it some way down its course, but found there only a small camp of deserted tents. Small eastern lamps were still burning inside them, and Loutit's men began ransacking them for small articles. He had to drag his troops away and then press on down the valley. Lieutenant J. L. Haig of the 10th and a few men of the 9th, 10th and 11th joined and went on with him, thirty-two all told.

They hurried on to where the gully debouched into the green flat of Legge Valley, with its sandy creek, scattered olive-trees, a few more tents behind Lone Pine, and a small stockyard with some horses, but no other sign of the battery. Accordingly Haig and Loutit made for their objective, the Third Ridge, whose spurs formed the far side of the valley. They climbed first a small hill, and then a higher ridge. The battle had ceased except for odd rifle shots coming from every direction, evidently from individual Turks scattered in the scrubby hillsides. Like all the rest the ridge they were now mounting was covered with scrub, and from its crest they looked over a gully to a similar ridge 400 yards away. On it were Turks in large numbers, who opened heavy fire; and the Australians after passing slightly over the crest of their ridge had to fling themselves down and shoot from behind bushes; the opposing fire was much too hot to allow them to dig. Looking back, Loutit could see, over both his right shoulder and his left, Australians "cruising about" in the scrub on the 400 Plateau in rear of Legge Valley. Brand had told him that he would send other parties up to him but none arrived; as has already been stated, the orders had been changed, but Loutit knew nothing of this, and sent back to a party which he saw to his right

rear, asking it to come up. It turned out to be a platoon under Captain J. F. Ryder of the 9th, who duly brought his men across and into line on Loutit's right.

The Turkish fire, however, was finding one after another of the Australians. The Turks had worked round to the north; and thence from 400 yards away, they were firing down the length of the Australians' line. Ryder, after summoning reinforcements by sending back a sergeant on one of the horses found in the valley, decided to withdraw. He sent a message to Loutit and then fell back with his men towards his former position on the 400 Plateau. Loutit had "dashed hard work" to prevent his men from taking the same direction, but managed to withdraw them, by alternate sections each covering the other, from spur to spur until they reached a "small mound" just on the Turkish side of the creek. The Turks quickly followed them to the ridge that Loutit had just left, and as the enemy carried with them a machine-gun the fire was very hot. During the next retirement the pursuers reached the abandoned position before the Australians got to cover and for a moment the situation was tenses still.

But Loutit was now in touch with a few of his own side opposite the mouth of Wire Gully. The adjutant of the 11th, Captain J. H. Peck, had received Ryder's message and hurried down that gully with a few men to help them. Here at 10 o'clock exactly (as he himself noted) Peck was wounded; but they managed, in one long stage, to cross the flat and climb Wire Gully; and near the top of this at 11 o'clock Loutit posted himself with seven men on one side, Haig with another seven on the other, with three advanced sentry groups farther down the valley—these posts together serving during the next few days, with other troops added, as the "battle outposts" that played a famous part in the fighting there. Their precise position was an uncertainty which the Mission had also, if possible, to solve.

Loutit told me that "the water of the Dardanelles was clearly seen" from his farthest point; and he had thought, for that reason, that "they must be a very long way in". They had advanced "very fast". Much the same report had been made by many of the advanced parties that day, and it represented the genuine impression of many of the survivors. Yet before I returned to Gallipoli inquiry into many cases had made me certain that the distance actually traversed in that wild country was usually far less than the troops thought. On the other hand a leader of Loutit's type would be minutely accurate in his statements.

When, on the Mission's arrival, I told Hughes that we should be searching the Third Ridge for traces of these parties, he told me that he had already had it searched but his men had found no trace of Australians on the ridge itself. They had, however, found a few pieces of Australian kit on one of its spurs which lay at the back of our camp.

Now, assuming that Loutit and Haig after coming into Legge Valley had hurried along it for a hundred yards or two southwards, as they probably did when looking for the guns and camps, and had then turned eastwards to climb the Third Ridge, the part of it that faced them would be a spur about a mile long running down from the southern shoulder of Scrubby Knoll to a point just at the back of our camp. Its top would be reached by climbing first over the lower folds of a shorter spur, and then about 200 feet up its own scrub-covered side. It was up this spur that I was searching on the evening of February 18th when Lambert shot at his "wolf" and (according to the good yarn that he afterwards told), narrowly missed his leader. Next morning with Wilkins, James and Buchanan, ten days later with Balfour and half a dozen men, and finally with Wilkins on March 6th, the day before we left Anzac, I searched that spur as well as part of those near it.

I shall not describe those searches with the minuteness with which I have followed our investigation of the traces of Tulloch's company. The reader will now be familiar with our methods and interested chiefly in their results. These seemed definite. Over the southern end of that spur (which, Zeki Bey told us, was called Adana Bair—that is, Adana Ridge) the Turks, at some time during the campaign, had cut a very deep, wide communication trench, through which probably their mule train with supplies, and certainly their relieving infantry, could pass unseen and, except for the dust they raised, unsuspected. Near this spur, which of course was not there on the day of the Landing, we found, in the scrub along the summit of the spur, Australian cartridges, some of them opened by the Turks, and a mess-tin. Several hundred yards farther north, along another section of its crest, were similar traces, including an Australian puttee, and close behind them an Australian tunic; and on the ridge to our rear of it (called by Zeki Bey Fondaluk Sirt, "Brown Hill") Balfour found an Australian cap, exactly between the point where the tunic was found and the mouth of Wire Gully. Men lying where we saw the first traces above-mentioned would look across a valley to the Third Ridge itself, exactly 400 yards away; farther north the spur came rather closer to it. And along the part of the crest where we found the more northern traces there were also a line of spent Turkish cartridges or clips and the remains of a few Turks. These almost certainly marked the place at which, after the disappearance of whatever Australians had fought there, the Turks had reached the crest and lain for a time firing at someone (probably the retiring Australians) on the next ridge towards Anzac. There seemed very little doubt that the traces we had found were those of Loutit's and Ryder's men. Loutit's retirement would be across the lower ends of the successive spurs—the little open knoll opposite the

mouth of Wire Gully was one of them, and near it Balfour had found the cap.

But there was one great difficulty in accepting this solution. From the positions where these relics were found the Dardanelles could not be seen. The Third Ridge was higher than the spur, Adana Bair, and shut out all view beyond. Farther north Adana Bair rose more steeply, with a marked shoulder; and it was not until we had climbed 300 yards along this, and almost reached a second and final shoulder leading to Scrubby Knoll, that a sharp dip in the Third Ridge suddenly opened to us a view of the Straits about Kilia Liman. From farther north, on Scrubby Knoll itself, the Narrows, of course, lay wide open.

Despite this fact, I felt sure that we had found Loutit's and Ryder's positions, and there must be some explanation, as yet unknown to us.

After returning to Australia I wrote to Loutit, sending him a sun-print from the Turkish map, telling him our difficulty, and asking him to trace his course on the map as well as he could remember it. His answer cleared all doubt. He said that from the position of his men he had not been able to see over the Third Ridge. So, taking two companions, he had gone farther up the ridge, just as we had done except that he kept just behind the crest until, where it rose towards Scrubby Knoll, he obtained a clear view of the Straits. On this prominent height, however, the three Australians were immediately seen by the Turks and were heavily fired on. In a few moments one of them was hit. Loutit and the unwounded man¹ carried him back to their party. On the map that I sent him, which I refer to as I write, Loutit marked the position of his line and Ryder's exactly where we had found the two groups of cartridges and other relics; and the red ink line showing his retirement runs across the foot of successive ridges, including the small knoll and the slope where

¹ Pte (afterwards Lieut) R. O. Fordham, killed two years later in France.

Balfour found the Australian cap. Up the ridge north of it (Fondaluk Sirt) we found where a line of Turks had lain shooting, probably at Leer's men on Mortar Ridge. These Turks would have come over Scrubby Knoll, north of Loutit, just as he described. And my diary says that in the valley there, Usun Dere (Long Valley) near the remains of a Turkish camp, Balfour and I "found some of our kit evidently taken with unfired cartridges in it; for in it were many empty clips; and one fired cartridge, and one not fired, were not far away. These possibly mean that some man got into the Usun Dere—possibly one of the men who lost themselves."²

At the time of the Mission's visit we had no word of any party's having been so close as Loutit's to Scrubby Knoll. But some years after the story of those events had been published in the Australian Official History I received a letter from a distinguished citizen-soldier in South Australia, Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Blackburn,³ who afterwards, as Brigadier, commanded the Australian force which, in the Second World War, had to be left to its fate in Java, where eventually he was captured by the Japanese. In 1916 as a lieutenant he won the Victoria Cross at Pozières, but at the Landing had been a private and scout of the 10th Battalion. His letter stated that with a fellow scout, Lance-Corporal P. de Q. Robin, he had been sent from the Second Ridge to reconnoitre the Third. Going very fast they reached it where its top was wide and level, just north of Scrubby Knoll, and, finding few signs of Turks yet there, they circled southwards round the knoll. At that moment, however, numbers of Turks began to appear in a valley east of the Third Ridge. They therefore moved back over Third Ridge south of the

² The alternative would be that the Turks had carried the equipment to this place, which is unlikely. As to what lonely man was there and what was his end, there is no gleam of evidence.

³ An Adelaide solicitor, and brother to Sir C. Bickerton Blackburn, physician, Chancellor of the University of Sydney.

knoll, noting, as they did so, a line of Australians—presumably Loutit's and Ryder's—south-west of them.

So these two men came closer even than their three comrades of the 10th, closer, so far as we know, than any other soldiers of the Allies, to the objective of the Gallipoli Expedition. The Straits were about three miles away. There was, however, at least one other party which had gone inland very fast and far—and had to come back, if anything, faster. This was a handful of the 9th Battalion under Captain (now Major-General) E. C. P. Plant, a young regular officer, formerly A.D.C. to General Bridges. Plant, whom I remember having seen on the Beach after his return, could only tell us that he had gone "a hell of a distance", until he looked over open country. My impression was that he said that at his farthest point he looked out on the Kilid Bahr Plateau; but he could not be sure that they had seen any part of the Straits. The place he had been intended to reach would lie somewhere on the southern portion of the Third Ridge, between its second hump, Anderson Knoll, and Gaba Tepe. I now assumed that if he had directly looked out on the water of the Straits he would never have forgotten the sight; and therefore we expected that any traces of his party would be found, if at all, where the Third Ridge afforded a view over the open country to Kilid Bahr but no sight of the water of the Narrows.

We found (to quote my diary) that on the crest of Third Ridge, "anywhere from about fifty yards south of Anderson Knoll for about 500-600 yards, a man not quite getting over the skyline would have this view; and on the southern shoulder of the knoll he cannot see the Dardanelles even when he is on the crest. You cannot see over green fields anywhere except from this section of Gun Ridge." It was from the direction of these flats that, between 9 and 10 a.m. a column of Turks, a battalion or two with guns, reached just this section of Gun Ridge and began marching steadily northwards up the track

along its crest, the first large body of Turks to be seen by the Anzacs. Possibly it was the danger of being cut off by some of these troops that necessitated the speed of Plant's retreat.

At all events the lie of the ground seemed to agree with that described to me by Plant, so far as I could remember his words. But here we could find hardly a trace of Australians to confirm our conjecture that this was the place he had reached. This was not surprising, considering that his party was small and had to retire almost at once. That Australians in numbers, first of the 9th Battalion and then of the 2nd Brigade had reached the next ridge in rear, Pine Ridge (an advanced spur of the Second Ridge), I knew well; and the ample evidence of this will be described later. But all that we found of Australian gear on or near this part of Third Ridge was a single spent Australian cartridge case found by Balfour a little farther down the crest. Much stronger evidence was the discovery of several clips from Turkish cartridges fired near the top of the ridge *but on the Turkish side of it*. Judging from their position I noted, "They may have been fired at someone either a little south of the knoll or 600-700 yards south of it."

I appreciated that even Australian cartridges might have been fired since the Evacuation, by some Turk with an Australian rifle, or even by one of our light horsemen during their recent visit, shooting at a hare. The balance of probability, however, was that these articles were left there at the time when there was known reason for their presence there; and, as I have said before, it was remarkable how regularly such traces were found where our troops were known to have fought, and how rarely, if at all, where they had not. Balancing the evidence I concluded that Plant had probably reached Gun Ridge at this point.