

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FIGHT AT THE CRATER

SOON after I met him—probably after dinner on the first evening—Zeki Bey asked me if I knew of an officer of ours who had been killed fighting in one of the mine craters at German Officers' Trench. "He was a fine looking, handsome young man," he said.

I told him that I did not personally know the officer, but I was sure I knew whom he meant. We had made, on July 12th, a raid on a crater there by way of a demonstration to keep the Turks at Anzac busy while the British made their last big attack at Cape Helles. Our infantry did not believe that this crater was as close to German Officers' Trench as the engineers who blew it believed it to be; the commanders thought that, if captured, it might be held by us as a forward position—probably as a bombing post from which to pester the garrison of German Officers'. When volunteers were called for, a newly-arrived officer of the 7th Battalion, Lieutenant N. J. Greig, offered to lead the attempt; and at 8.15 on a bright morning with eleven other volunteers he rushed the crater, in which was a Turkish guard who scrambled out, leaving three killed. Greig and his men were now, of course, lost to sight from the Australian trench; but another party of Australians, who were ready to clear the tunnel leading to the crater, presently heard Greig's voice calling for reinforcements. Half a dozen brave men of the 6th immediately climbed out but charged in the wrong direction—towards the Turkish trench—and were shot back, partly by one of their own side's machine-guns, turned on

them in error from Russell's Top. Very soon afterwards most of Greig's men came back, all wounded; he had ordered them to retreat. The last of them said that, when he left, Greig was standing at the tunnel mouth, bleeding from the head, holding back the Turks with his revolver while his men got away. Greig himself did not appear.

Other demonstrations had been made by the Australians on the same day, ranging from the showing of bayonets over the parapet to sorties by infantry and light horsemen into valleys in front of the trenches on the southern flank, these sorties always bringing deadly shell- and rifle-fire in return.

The story of Greig's raid, told from the Turkish side, begins at a slightly earlier date when this crater was blown. "Sometime after you had begun to attack the northern end of our front trench with your mines," Zeki Bey said, "we heard the sound of picks at work underground near the centre also." Zeki Bey had already obtained the advice of some German experts—the Turks not being skilled at mining. This time he himself decided that the only useful action he could take was to dig towards the sound of our picks in the hope of opening a vent through which the explosion might more or less harmlessly direct its force; and to hold his front line with as few men as possible and depend more upon the supports. At the time of the Mission's visit the support trench at the centre of German Officers' ran within two or three yards of the front line—but possibly this support trench was dug after the incident here referred to.

At all events, on the night of July 4th our engineers exploded 150 lb. of ammonal in a tunnel just in front of the centre of German Officers' Trench. Our miners, as soon as they heard the Turks digging, had themselves quickly tunnelled ahead in a slightly different direction. Zeki Bey's precaution by causing this haste had probably averted an explosion directly beneath his front trench.

"All the communication trenches were filled with

dust," he said, "and all the men were crouching in their shelters. If you had attacked immediately after that explosion we should probably have lost the trench.<sup>1</sup> A great crater was formed." (It was not great by comparison with those we sometimes saw in France, but about the size of an average bedroom.) "The front part of the trench bordering on it was wholly blown away. The trench had been lightly garrisoned—only fifteen men in that position. Five of these were not seen again.

"We filled up the great gap in the trench wall, where it looked into the crater, with a grid of barbed wire. But I knew that this was not the end of your men's activities, and so [apparently on July 8th] I set about exploring the crater, taking a soldier with me. There were a lot of stones in it, and after pulling these away I came upon two wires leading straight back towards the 'English' lines. They led into a mass of sandbags which I found to be closing the mouth of a tunnel, the bags being packed up from its bottom to its roof. I and the soldier drew the bags away, one by one.

"As we did so, some noise the other side made us think that a sentry with a bayonet was there" (which was indeed the case). "We took away bags until we had made a crevice and could see through. By then no one was in the tunnel. The tunnel led away from us. I wondered what to do. At first I thought, 'I'll blow this place in'; so I had six or seven sticks of explosive brought. But it was the sort of explosive that is used in blowing up railways, and this had failed before in similar tasks; accordingly I decided not to blow the place. I went out again with a man and we pulled the bags away and made an opening. I told the man to go through, and he did so. There was a tunnel leading about ten feet ahead of us. It led no farther in that direction, but then turned at right-angles to the left.

"I told the man to go round the corner. He did so,

---

<sup>1</sup> Why no attempt was made to do this is told in *Vol. II*, p. 330.



45. THE SCENE OF GRIGGS FIGHT

Zeki Bey standing near the blown-in gallery and the mine crater  
which broke into German Officers' Trench

*A W M photo, G.1924*



46. THE SAME GROUND SEEN FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION

The Anzac trenches ran along the horizon

*A W M photo G.1933*



47. THE TURKS IN JOHNSTON'S JOLLY  
This photograph from General Kannengieser's set's *Gallipoli* shows the 125th Regiment in what Zeki Bey called our most comfortable trenches. It evidently shows a visit by the staff the regimental mufti' (chaplain) bearded and gowned, is on the right



48. TURKS AT LONE PINE  
The picture from Kannengieser's *Gallipoli* was probably taken during or soon after the fight.

and a sergeant with him, I staying at the corner. There were steps leading down to a deeper tunnel, and at the bottom a light could be seen flickering, and someone was there. Then someone from below fired a revolver shot, which hit against the wall at the end of the gallery, where the turn in it was. I afterwards picked up this bullet," Zeki Bey added with a twinkle in his eyes, "and sent it to Kemal and Essad as the first shot fired in underground warfare here.<sup>2</sup>

"When that shot occurred the Turkish soldier came running back, trembling. Then there was some shooting on both sides, with rifles. I accordingly had a parapet of sandbags made a little around the elbow<sup>3</sup> and had the tunnel tamped up. I stationed a sentry behind this tamping in the tunnel, and another farther back in the crater where the tunnel opened into it, with a third man immediately upon his right. A corporal had charge of the three. I gave the most advanced sentry my revolver. An Australian sentry was farther down the tunnel.

"Later, voices were heard coming from behind your sentry. I said: 'The Australians are certainly up to something, not sitting down waiting,' so I had a German expert sent up. He listened with me in the crater, just south of the tunnel mouth, and said, 'Digging is going on two or three metres from here.' We wondered what to do. Measures ought to be taken at once, but we had begun mining later than you, and we knew that the moment we started counter-measures you would blow. We didn't start.

"A few days later there was an explosion. I was in the trenches and was thrown down. I ran along and found

---

<sup>2</sup> It appears likely that it was fired by the well-known Australian leader, Lieutenant-Colonel "Pompey" Elliott—who had rushed into the mine-gallery on hearing that Turks were there, and himself stood on guard and fired. For the Australian side of the story, see *Vol. II*, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably by throwing or pushing the bags round the corner. Farther along the tunnel the Australians made a barrier at the same time in the same way.

that your people had exploded a mine. The sentry behind the tamping was not found at all; the sentry at the mouth of the tunnel had been blown back over the parapets of our front trench and killed; the sentry on the right of the tunnel mouth was killed. The tunnel was still there from the crater to the bend, but the bend of it had been blown in and a new crater had been made just beyond the bend, beyond where our sandbags had been.

"I still said, 'The Australians won't remain inactive.' So we again cleared away the stones and clods where the elbow had fallen in, until we could see through a crevice between the stones. I myself looked through; and there was a soldier, an Australian, crouching on one knee against the forward edge of the crater<sup>4</sup> with his rifle in one hand on one knee, brushing the earth off the bolt quietly with the other hand, and looking intently over his left shoulder up at me. Perhaps he had heard something.

"My revolver I had lent to our sentry, and it had been lost with him in the explosion. I ran for another. 'I can shoot that man,' I thought. Then I reflected: 'What's the use of shooting him? We will wait for this evening and capture him.' We needed prisoners.

"I intended to send over about midnight a few soldiers from the old crater and capture the man. They tried it, jumping out of the big crater, just south of the tunnel mouth, two or three of them; but immediately the first who jumped out was shot and badly wounded. The others ducked back crouching into their crater and stayed there. Later the sentry told me that the hole where the [Australian] sentry was had been shut<sup>5</sup> and a wire entanglement put in the crater. That was all we could see—not a soldier was then in the crater. A few days later

---

<sup>4</sup> That is, to Zeki Bey's left front.

<sup>5</sup> Probably this means that the Australian end of the tunnel had again been tamped up, which is correct.

our sentries must have been talking—they couldn't keep quiet—and a bomb was thrown at them from your wire and a sentry slightly injured.

"Things remained like this for a few days. Then, one day about noon, some projectiles fell on both flanks of my post—not on the front line but about the second line. The soldiers crouched down in the trenches and did not look over. Kemal noticed this and complained to me. I held an inquiry and found that some had been wounded by the shells.

"I had sent a messenger to find if anything of importance was occurring. At the end of some minutes he returned with the answer. The commander of the 2nd Company, who was at the northern end of the post—he was not my most reliable officer—brought back word that there was nothing doing in the trenches.

"Just then the chief of Essad Pasha's staff got on the telephone to me direct. He said: 'Zeki Bey, the enemy is getting into your trenches. What are going to do?'

"The headquarters of Essad [commanding the Corps in the Ari Burnu zone] were just north of Kemal Yere [Scrubby Knoll]; they were at the top of the reverse slope, near the mountain-gun battery, and he had an observation post there from which he could look down on a great part of the front line; and his chief-of-staff could see from there what was happening.

"I went straight up to the line, and as soon as I reached the second trench I found that bombs were being thrown by my men over into the crater. I came straight on to the front line to see what was doing—to the point where the grid of wire was. At the same time the lieutenant commanding the left front-line company, a brave young fellow, who had saved the situation by getting his men at once to fire down their own front line from the southern end of it, caught my arm and said: 'Don't go there, Zeki Bey. It is dangerous there; they have been exchanging shots.' But I went on to the grid.



"A number of my soldiers were at the wire, looking into the crater. At the wire several soldiers of both sides were lying dead. One of your men had laid his rifle and bayonet up against the wire. Your men were apparently getting back, away from the crater. But in the crater was a well dressed young officer, a very fine, handsome man. He had retreated into the tunnel mouth. I called out: 'Don't kill this man—we want to take him!' The men said, 'He will not allow himself to be taken.'

"There was the officer, revolver in hand, against the earth at the far end of the crater, by the tunnel. Then he dropped. He had been hit by a bomb and had both legs broken. I afterwards found that he would not have been able to get back through the tunnel—it wasn't open. My men afterwards were not agreed as to where yours attacked from; some said from the trenches, others from the mouth of the tunnel. Six or seven were dead; one was found in the next crater farther north. Twelve or fifteen rifles were found. None of your men were prisoners—all there were dead. Immediately after this fight there was great quietude in the Australian trenches, no bombs being thrown; probably your men thought their comrades had been captured."

Zeki Bey said to me more than once: "I would have liked to take that officer prisoner; he was a very brave man." He had him buried in the valley behind the lines with more ceremony and care than the Turks usually devoted to their dead opponents.

Zeki Bey told me that he did not think that the demonstration made that day had the effect that our leaders intended. The defeat of the raid on the crater, he said, "did much to cheer up the Turks. We had been getting very anxious for some time—we didn't know what you intended to do. To me it seemed that all your machine-guns were beginning to point at my post, and we expected an attack there. On the day of the attack on our crater bayonets were seen opposite our left flank and

on Kirmezi Sirt [Johnston's Jolly], and it was reported that the 'English' were going to make an attack. Afterwards we were able to say the 'English' had made an attempt and had failed—and the fact had considerable influence. Great importance was attributed to this little success by our higher command. I asked why. They said, 'You don't know, but it is important.' Probably our troops in the south had not been having a good time" (Zeki Bey told me in other talks that the strain on the Turkish divisions at Helles at that time was great, and their losses very high) "and probably it was desired to report a success to the newspapers. The young officer [of the left company] who beat the attack was given a medal—the 'Gemish Imtias' medal for courage; it is an important decoration, usually given to older officers."

I told Zeki Bey that, strangely enough, we too, at that time, had been expecting to be attacked. Reports from spies and from prisoners told of preparations; but, above all, it was the time of the Turkish Ramadan fast, and it was expected that the Turkish command would take advantage of the religious devotion of that celebration for some military end. Zeki Bey laughed when I told him.

"We were rather anxious at that time, too," he said, "because so much time was spent by us in visiting our friends in other units when we should have been working. At the feast of El Bairam I went to call on the good old commander of my regiment, Ahuni Bey, at Edirna Sirt [Mortar Ridge]. He told me he had a letter from his home—his children were asking how long this war would last, and whether 'Father' would be with them for the feast, as he had been the year before; they all told him how dreary it was without him. Within two hours of his telling me this, the poor fellow lay dead, killed by a shell from one of your howitzers. It may have been one of your older howitzers—your 6-inch howitzers shot very well indeed, but they may not then have arrived."

I asked Zeki Bey whether they had suffered much from our trench mortars, especially the four Japanese ones. They were the only modern ones we possessed and they threw a flat bomb attached to a metal stick—it contained high explosive and burst with a savage, dry crack and black smoke.

“Yes,” he said. “‘Black Cats’ we called them. One day one burst in the air over the heads of some reserves assembled in the valley behind my post, and killed or wounded eighty men. Later we found that if we covered our trenches with head-cover these bombs were not dangerous to the men there; a few inches of log cover would render you safe against them. That is why we roofed in those trenches which were most exposed to them. The wood was mainly brought from Constantinople. Later this cover caused terrible trouble.<sup>6</sup> Kirmezi Sirt [Johnston’s Jolly] was the worst place for these bombs, though generally that post contained our most comfortable trenches. If you were watchful you could hear the faint report of the mortar and then see the bomb high in the air.

“About that time an old howitzer of ours used to enfilade your trenches opposite my post, dropping its shells on them from up north near Koja Chemen Tepe [Hill 971].<sup>7</sup> We noticed that, when these bombardments were on, your men kept low and didn’t fire and we were able to look over the parapet and move about. It was one of these shells falling in No-man’s-land in front of my post that disclosed to us that you were digging an underground line there. We saw the shell go in and, later, the earth being shovelled out from below—so we knew that there must be a hidden line there.”

Zeki Bey told me that at this time the strain upon his

---

<sup>6</sup> By causing howitzer shells to explode in the trenches on penetrating the roof—as told in the next chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Zeki Bey told us at another time that the position of this howitzer was at Su Yatagha (the Watercourse) near Chunuk Bair. So far as he knew it was a 21-cm. (8-inch) mortar.

battalion in German Officers' Trench was very great. Our mine craters and the underground galleries leading to them had brought us close enough to his trenches for bombing, and the constant fear of being undermined was shaking his men. They had been a very long time in the line but could not get relief from outside. "The 1st and 2nd Companies had to relieve each other, and so did the 3rd and 4th," he said. "The reserves were on the shelves and in the shelters, behind Merkez Tepe. At first the companies relieved each other weekly; later, when the bombs became bad, every forty-eight hours; latterly, every twenty-four hours. Towards the end of our time, in July, even these reserves came under the fire of your catapults.

"At Bomba Sirt [Quinn's] the losses through bombs were so great that at one time our command thought of giving up the post. We had to keep our trenches crowded—we were aware of the grave disadvantage of this, but our men were ignorant, however brave, and could not fight singly. Also they always tended to observe and fire only straight ahead; it was difficult to get them to do otherwise. The two battalions of our regiment at Bomba Sirt sometimes had to relieve each other more frequently than once a week, because incidents occurred which caused great damage. For example, on some days you threw a multitude of bombs, and when you did that the losses were always high. We debated giving up Bomba Sirt and withdrawing the line to Edirna Sirt [Mortar Ridge]; but we decided against it because, if we held on, we might be able with artillery (if that arrived) to drive you back.

"We could see your periscopes, but our soldiers in the line did not have them because they brought bombs.<sup>8</sup> Our soldiers kept watch through loopholes. These were under the logs of the head-cover and were made by leaving spaces between ammunition-boxes filled with earth. We found that some loopholes were dangerous—your men shot into

---

<sup>8</sup> Zeki Bey probably meant trench-mortar bombs.

them; so we forbade our soldiers to watch through those ones—others were safe. Sometimes the loopholes would get covered with earth by day, so we used to clear the front of them by night, getting out of the trenches to do so. With these methods we found our losses smaller than in using periscopes. Later we copied the periscope-rifle used by your troops, but found them of no great help to us.”

I can recall as if it were yesterday Zeki Bey's quizzical expression as he said: “A constant wonder to me were the signs of the digging done by your troops. I used to watch those heaps and heaps of earth always accumulating and extending, everywhere heaps and more heaps”; and his laugh as he added: “I used to say to myself, ‘What *are* they about?’ I said, ‘These Australians will tunnel to Constantinople!’ ”