

CHAPTER XVII

ENVER AS THE MAN WHO DEMONSTRATED "THE VULNERABILITY OF THE BRITISH FLEET" ---OLD-FASHIONED DEFENSES OF THE DARDANELLES

When the situation had reached this exciting stage, Enver asked me to visit the Dardanelles. He still insisted that the fortifications were impregnable and he could not understand, he said, the panic which was then raging in Constantinople. He had visited the Dardanelles himself, had inspected every gun and every emplacement, and he was entirely confident that his soldiers could hold off the Allied fleet indefinitely. He had taken Talaat down, and by doing so he had considerably eased that statesman's fears. It was Enver's conviction that, if I should visit the fortifications, I would be persuaded that the fleets could never get through, and that I would thus be able to give such assurances to the people that the prevailing excitement would subside. I disregarded certain natural doubts as to whether an ambassador should expose himself to the dangers of such a situation---the ships were bombarding nearly every day---and promptly accepted Enver's invitation.

On the morning of the 15th, we left Constantinople on the *Yuruk*. Enver himself accompanied us as far as Panderma, an Asiatic town on the Sea of Marmora. The party included several other notables: Ibrahim Bey, the Minister of Justice; Husni Pasha, the general who had commanded the army which had deposed Abdul Hamid in the Young Turk revolution; and Senator Cheriff Djafer Pasha, an Arab and a direct descendant of the Prophet. A particularly congenial companion was Fuad Pasha, an old field marshal, who had led an adventurous career; despite his age, he had an immense capacity for enjoyment, was a huge feeder and a capacious drinker, and had as many stories to tell of exile, battle, and hair breadth escapes as Othello. All of these men were much older than Enver, and all of them were descended from far more distinguished ancestors, yet they treated this stripling with the utmost deference.

Enver seemed particularly glad of this opportunity to discuss the situation. Immediately after breakfast, he took me aside, and together we went up to the deck.

The day was a beautiful sunny one, and the sky in the Marmora was that deep blue which we find only in this part of the world. What most impressed me was the intense quiet, the almost desolate inactivity of these silent waters. Our ship was almost the only one in sight, and this inland sea, which in ordinary times was one of the world's greatest commercial highways, was now practically a primeval waste. The whole scene was merely a reflection of the great triumph which German diplomacy had accomplished in the Near East. For nearly six months not a Russian merchant ship had passed through the straits. All the commerce of Rumania and Bulgaria, which had normally found its way to Europe across this inland sea, had long since disappeared. The ultimate significance of all this desolation was that Russia was blockaded and completely isolated from her allies. How much that one fact has meant in the history of the world for the last three years! And now England and France were seeking to overcome this disadvantage; to link up their own military resources with those of their great eastern ally, and to restore to the Dardanelles and the Marmora the thousands of ships that meant Russia's existence as a military and economic, and even, as subsequent events have shown, as a political power. We were approaching the scene of one of the great crises of the war.

Would England and her allies succeed in this enterprise? Would their ships at the Dardanelles smash the fortifications, break through, and again make Russia a permanent force in the war? That was the main subject which Enver and I discussed, as for nearly three hours we walked up and down the deck. Enver again referred to the "silly panic" that had seized nearly all classes in the capital. "Even though Bulgaria and Greece both turn against us," he said, "we shall defend Constantinople to the end. We have plenty of guns, plenty of ammunition, and we have these on terra firma, whereas the English and French batteries are floating ones. And the natural advantages of the straits are so great that the warships can make little progress against them. I do not care what other people may think. I have studied this problem more thoroughly than any of them, and I feel that I am right. As long as I am at the head of the War Department, we shall not give up. Indeed, I do not know just what these English and French battleships are driving at. Suppose that they rush the Dardanelles, get into the Marmora and reach Constantinople; what good will that do them? They can bombard and destroy the city, I admit; but they cannot capture it, as they have only a few troops to land. Unless they do bring a large army,

they will really be caught in a trap. They can perhaps stay here for two or three weeks until their food and supplies are all exhausted and then they will have to go back---rush the straits again, and again run the risk of annihilation. In the meantime, we would have repaired the forts, brought in troops, and made ourselves ready for them. It seems to me to be a very foolish enterprise."

I have already told how Enver had taken Napoleon as his model, and in this Dardanelles expedition he now apparently saw a Napoleonic opportunity. As we were pacing the deck he stopped a moment, looked at me earnestly, and said:

"I shall go down in history as the man who demonstrated the vulnerability of England and her fleet. I shall show that her navy is not invincible. I was in England a few years before the war and discussed England's position with many of her leading men, such as Asquith, Churchill, Haldane. I told them that their course was wrong. Winston Churchill declared that England could defend herself with her navy alone, and that she needed no large army. I told Churchill that no great empire could last that did not have both an army and a navy. I found that Churchill's opinion was the one that prevailed everywhere in England. There was only one man I met who agreed with me, that was Lord Roberts. Well, Churchill has now sent his fleet down here---perhaps to show me that his navy can do all that he said it could do. Now we'll see."

Enver seemed to regard his naval expedition as a personal challenge from Mr. Churchill to himself---almost like a continuation of their argument in London.

"You, too, should have a large army," said Enver, referring to the United States.

"I do not believe," he went on, "that England is trying to force the Dardanelles because Russia has asked her to. When I was in England I discussed with Churchill the possibility of a general war. He asked me what Turkey would do in such a case, and said that, if we took Germany's side, the British fleet would force the Dardanelles and capture Constantinople. Churchill is not trying to help Russia---he is carrying out the threat made to me at that time."

Enver spoke with the utmost determination and conviction; he said that nearly all the damage inflicted on the outside forts had been repaired, and that the Turks had methods of defense the existence of which the enemy little suspected. He showed great bitterness against the English; he accused them of attempting to bribe Turkish officials and even said that they had instigated attempts upon his own life. On the other hand, he displayed no particular friendliness toward the Germans. Wangenheim's overbearing manners had caused him much irritation, and the Turks, he said, got on none too well with the German officers.

"The Turks and Germans," he added, "care nothing for each other. We are with them because it is our interest to be with them; they are with us because that is their interest. Germany will back Turkey just so long as that helps Germany; Turkey will back Germany just so long as that helps Turkey."

Enver seemed much impressed at the close of our interview with the intimate personal relations which we had established with each other. He apparently believed that he, the great Enver, the Napoleon of the Turkish Revolution, had unbended in discussing his nation's affairs with a mere ambassador.

"You know," he said, "that there is no one in Germany with whom the Emperor talks as intimately as I have talked with you to-day."

We reached Panderma about two o'clock. Here Enver and his auto were put ashore and our party started again, our boat arriving at Gallipoli late in the afternoon. We anchored in the harbour and spent the night on board. All the evening we could hear the guns bombarding the fortifications, but these reminders of war and death did not affect the spirits of my Turkish hosts. The occasion was for them a great lark; they had spent several months in hard, exacting work, and now they behaved like boys suddenly let out for a vacation. They cracked jokes, told stories, sang the queerest kinds of songs, and played childish pranks upon one another. The venerable Fuad, despite his nearly ninety years, developed great qualities as an entertainer, and the fact that his associates made him the butt of most of their horse-play apparently only added to his enjoyment of the occasion. The amusement reached its height when one of his friends surreptitiously poured him a glass of eau-de-cologne. The

old gentleman looked at the new drink a moment and then diluted it with water. I was told that the proper way of testing raki, the popular Turkish tippie, is by mixing it with water; if it turns white under this treatment, it is the real thing and may be safely drunk. Apparently water has the same effect upon eau-de-cologne, for the contents of Fuad's glass, after this test, turned white. The old gentleman, therefore, poured the whole thing down his throat without a grimace----much to the hilarious entertainment of his tormentors.

In the morning we started again. We now had fairly arrived in the Dardanelles, and from Gallipoli we had a sail of nearly twenty-five miles to Tchanak Kale. For the most part this section of the strait is uninteresting and, from a military point of view, it is unimportant. The stream is about two miles wide, both sides are low-lying and marshy, and only a few scrambling villages show any signs of life. I was told that there were a few ancient fortifications, their rusty guns pointing toward the Marmora, the emplacements having been erected there in the early part of the nineteenth century for the purpose of preventing hostile ships entering from the north. These fortifications, however, were so inconspicuous that I could not see them; my hosts informed me that they had no fighting power, and that, indeed, there was nothing in the northern part of the straits, from Point Nagara to the Marmora, that could offer resistance to any modern fleet. The chief interest which I found in this part of the Dardanelles was purely historic and legendary. The ancient town of Lampsacus appeared in the modern Lapsaki, just across from Gallipoli, and Nagara Point is the site of the ancient Abydos, from which village Leander used to swim nightly across the Hellespont to Hero---a feat which was repeated about one hundred years ago by Lord Byron. Here also Xerxes crossed from Asia to Greece on a bridge of boats, embarking on that famous expedition which was to make him master of mankind. The spirit of Xerxes, I thought, as I passed the scene of his exploit, is still quite active in the world! The Germans and Turks had found a less romantic use for this, the narrowest part of the Dardanelles, for here they had stretched a cable and anti-submarine barrage of mines and nets---a device, which, as I shall describe, did not keep the English and French underwater boats out of the Marmora and the Bosphorus. It was not until we rounded this historic point of Nagara that the dull monotony of flat shores gave place to a more diversified landscape. On the European side the cliffs now began to descend precipitously to the water, reminding me of our own Palisades along the Hudson, and I obtained glimpses of the hills and mountain ridges that afterward proved such tragical stumbling blocks to the valiant Allied armies. The configuration of the land south of Nagara, with its many hills and ridges, made it plain why the military engineers had selected this stretch of the Dardanelles as the section best adapted to defense. Our boat was now approaching what was perhaps the most commanding point in the whole strait---the city Tchanak, or, to give it its modern European name, Dardanelles. In normal times this was a thriving port of 16,000 people, its houses built of wood, the headquarters of a considerable trade in wool and other products, and for centuries it had been an important military station. Now, excepting for the soldiers, it was deserted, the large civilian population having been moved into Anatolia. The British fleet, we were told, had bombarded this city; yet this statement seemed hardly probable, for I saw only a single house that had been hit, evidently by a stray shell which had been aimed at the near-by fortifications.

Djevad Pasha, the Turkish Commander-in-Chief at the Dardanelles, met us and escorted our party to headquarters. Djevad was a man of culture and of pleasing and cordial manners; as he spoke excellent German I had no need of an interpreter. I was much impressed by the deference with which the German officers treated him; that he was the Commander-in-Chief in this theatre of war, and that the generals of the Kaiser were his subordinates, was made plainly apparent. As we passed into his office, Djevad stopped in front of a piece of a torpedo, mounted in the middle of the hall, evidently as a souvenir.

"There is the great criminal!" he said, calling my attention to the relic.

About this time the newspapers were hailing the exploit of an English submarine, which had sailed from England to the Dardanelles, passed under the mine field, and torpedoed the Turkish warship *Mesudié*.

"That's the torpedo that did it!" said Djevad. "You'll see the wreck of the ship when you go down."

The first fortification I visited was that of Anadolu Hamidié (that is, Asiatic Hamidié) located on the water's edge just outside of Tchanak. My first impression was that I was in Germany. The officers were practically all Germans and everywhere Germans were building buttresses with sacks of sand and in other ways strengthening the emplacements. Here German, not Turkish, was the language heard on every side. Colonel Wehrle, who conducted me over these batteries, took the greatest delight in showing them. He had the simple pride of the

artist in his work, and told me of the happiness that had come into his days when Germany had at last found herself at war. All his life, he said, he had spent in military practices, and, like most Germans, he had become tired of manoeuvres, sham battles, and other forms of mimic hostilities. Yet he was approaching fifty, he had become a colonel, and he was fearful that his career would close without actual military experience---and then the splendid thing had happened and here he was, fighting a real English enemy, firing real guns and shells! There was nothing brutal about Wehrle's manners; he was a "*gemütlich*" gentleman from Baden, and thoroughly likable; yet he was all aglow with the spirit of "*Der Tag*." His attitude was simply that of a man who had spent his lifetime learning a trade and who now rejoiced at the chance of exercising it. But he furnished an illuminating light on the German military character and the forces that had really caused the war.

Feeling myself so completely in German country, I asked Colonel Wehrle why there were so few Turks on this side of the strait. "You won't ask me that question this afternoon," he said, smiling, "when you go over to the other side."

The location of Anadolu Hamidié seemed ideal. It stands right at the water's edge, and consists---or it did then---of ten guns, every one completely sweeping the Dardanelles. Walking upon the parapet, I had a clear view of the strait, and Kum Kale, at the entrance, about fifteen miles away, stood out conspicuously. No warship could enter these waters without immediately coming within complete sight of her gunners. Yet the fortress itself, to an unprofessional eye like my own, was not particularly impressive. The parapet and traverses were merely mounds of earth, and stand to-day practically as they were finished by their French constructors in 1837. There is a general belief that the Germans had completely modernized the Dardanelles defenses, but this was not true at that time. The guns defending Fort Anadolu Hamidié were more than thirty years old, all being the Krupp model of 1885, and the rusted exteriors of some of them gave evidences of their age. Their extreme range was only about nine miles, while the range of the battleships opposing them was about ten miles, and that of the *Queen Elizabeth* was not far from eleven. The figures which I have given for Anadolu Hamidié apply also to practically all the guns at the other effective fortifications. So far as the advantage of range was concerned, therefore., the Allied fleet had a decided superiority, the *Queen Elizabeth* alone having them all practically at her mercy. Nor did the fortifications contain very considerable supplies of ammunition. At that time the European and American papers were printing stories that train loads of shells and guns were coming by way of Rumania from Germany to the Dardanelles. From facts which I learned on this trip and subsequently I am convinced that these reports were pure fiction. A small number of "red heads"---that is, non-armour-piercing projectiles useful only for fighting landing parties---had been brought from Adrianople and were reposing in Hamidié at the time of my visit, but these were small in quantity and of no value in fighting ships. I lay this stress upon Hamidié because this was the most important fortification in the Dardanelles. Throughout the whole bombardment it attracted more of the Allied fire than any other position, and it inflicted at least 60 percent of all the damage that was done to the attacking ships. It was Anadolu Hamidié which, in the great bombardment of March 18th, sank the *Bouvet*, the French battleship, and which in the course of the whole attack disabled several other units. All its officers were Germans and eighty-five per cent. of the men on duty came from the crews of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*. Getting into the automobile, we sped along the military road to Dardanos, passing on the way the wreck of the *Mesudié*. The Dardanos battery was as completely Turkish as the Hamidié was German. The guns at Dardanos were somewhat more modern than those at Hamidié---they were the Krupp model of 1905. Here also was stationed the only new battery which the Germans had established up to the time of my visit; it consisted of several guns which they had taken from the German and Turkish warships then lying in the Bosphorus. A few days before our inspection the Allied fleet had entered the Bay of Erenkeui and had submitted Dardanos to a terrific bombardment, the evidences of which I saw on every hand. The land for nearly half a mile about seemed to have been completely churned up; it looked like photographs I had seen of the battlefields in France. The strange thing was that, despite all this punishment, the batteries themselves remained intact; not a single gun, my guides told me, had been destroyed.

"After the war is over," said General Mertens, "we are going to establish a big tourist resort here, build a hotel, and sell relics to you Americans. We shall not have to do much excavating to find them---the British fleet is doing that for us now."

This sounded like a passing joke, yet the statement was literally true. Dardanos, where this emplacement is located, was one of the famous cities of the ancient world; in Homeric times it was part of the principality of Priam. Fragments of capitals and columns are still visible. And the shells from the Allied fleet were now

ploughing up many relics which had been buried for thousands of years. One of my friends picked up a water jug which had perhaps been used in the days of Troy. The effectiveness of modern gunfire in excavating these evidences of a long lost civilization was striking---though unfortunately the relics did not always come to the surface intact.

The Turkish generals were extremely proud of the fight which this Dardanos battery had made against the British ships. They would lead me to the guns that had done particularly good service and pat them affectionately. For my benefit Djevad called out Lieutenant Hassan, the Turkish officer who had defended this position. He was a little fellow, with jetblack hair, black eyes, extremely modest and almost shrinking in the presence of these great generals. Djevad patted Hassan on both cheeks, while another high Turkish officer stroked his hair; one would have thought that he was a faithful dog who had just performed some meritorious service.

"It is men like you of whom great heroes are made," said General Djevad. He asked Hassan to describe the attack and the way it had been met. The embarrassed lieutenant quietly told his story, though he was moved almost to tears by the appreciation of his exalted chiefs.

"There is a great future for you in the army," said General Djevad, as we parted from this hero.

Poor Hassan's "future" came two days afterward when the Allied fleet made its greatest attack. One of the shells struck his dugout, which caved in, killing the young man. Yet his behaviour on the day I visited his battery showed that he regarded the praise of his general as sufficient compensation for all that he had suffered or all that he might suffer.

I was much puzzled by the fact that the Allied fleet, despite its large expenditures of ammunition, had not been able to hit this Dardanos emplacement. I naturally thought at first that such a failure indicated poor marksmanship, but my German guides said that this was not the case. All this misfire merely illustrated once more the familiar fact that a rapidly manoeuvring battleship is under a great disadvantage in shooting at a fixed fortification. But there was another point involved in the Dardanos battery. My hosts called my attention to its location; it was perched on the top of the hill, in full view of the ships, forming itself a part of the skyline. Dardanos was merely five steel turrets, each armed with a gun, approached by a winding trench.

That," they said, "is the most difficult thing in the world to hit. It is so distinct that it looks easy, but the whole thing is an illusion."

I do not understand completely the optics of the situation; but it seems that the skyline creates a kind of mirage, so that it is practically impossible to hit anything at that point, except by accident. The gunner might get what was apparently a perfect sight, yet his shell would go wild. The record of Dardanos had been little short of marvellous. Up to March 18th, the ships had fired at it about 4,000 shells. One turret had been hit by a splinter, which had also scratched the paint, another had been hit and slightly bent in, and another had been hit near the base and a piece about the size of a man's hand had been knocked out. But not a single gun had been even slightly damaged. Eight men had been killed, including Lieutenant Hassan, and about forty had been wounded. That was the extent of the destruction.

"It was the optical illusion that saved Dardanos," one of the Germans remarked.