

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ALLIED ARMADA SAILS AWAY, THOUGH ON THE BRINK OF VICTORY

Again getting into the automobile, we rode along the shore, my host calling my attention to the mine fields, which stretched from Tchanak southward about seven miles. In this area the Germans and Turks had scattered nearly 400 mines. They told me with a good deal of gusto that the Russians had furnished a considerable number of these destructive engines. Day after day Russian destroyers sowed mines at the Black Sea entrance to the Bosphorus, hoping that they would float down stream and fulfil their appointed task. Every morning Turkish and German mine sweepers would go up, fish out these mines, and place them in the Dardanelles.

The battery at Erenkeui had also been subjected to a heavy bombardment, but it had suffered little. Unlike Dardanos, it was situated back of a hill, completely shut out from view. In order to fortify this spot, I was told, the Turks had been compelled practically to dismantle the fortifications of the inner straits---that section of the stream which extends from Tchanak to Point Nagara. This was the reason why this latter part of the Dardanelles was now practically unfortified. The guns that had been moved for this purpose were old-style Krupp pieces of the model of 1885.

South of Erenkeui, on the hills bordering the road the Germans had introduced an innovation. They had found several Krupp howitzers left over from the Bulgarian war and had installed them on concrete foundations. Each battery had four or five of these emplacements so that, as I approached them, I found several substantial bases that apparently had no guns. I was mystified further at the sight of a herd of buffaloes---I think I counted sixteen engaged in the operation---hauling one of these howitzers from one emplacement to another. This, it seems, was part of the plan of defense. As soon as the dropping shells indicated that the fleet had obtained the range, the howitzer would be moved, with the aid of buffalo-teams, to another concrete emplacement.

"We have even a better trick than that," remarked one of the officers. They called out a sergeant, and recounted his achievement. This soldier was the custodian of a contraption which, at a distance, looked like a real gun, but which, when I examined it near at hand, was apparently an elongated section of sewer pipe. Back of a hill, entirely hidden from the fleet, was placed the gun with which this sergeant had cooperated. The two were connected by telephone. When the command came to fire, the gunner in charge of the howitzer would discharge his shell, while the man in charge of the sewer pipe would burn several pounds of black powder and send forth a conspicuous cloud of inky smoke. Not unnaturally the Englishmen and Frenchmen on the ships would assume that the shells speeding in their direction came from the visible smoke cloud and would proceed to centre all their attention upon that spot. The space around this burlesque gun was pock-marked with shell holes; the sergeant in charge, I was told, had attracted more than 500 shots, while the real artillery piece still remained intact and undetected.

From Erenkeui we motored back to General Djevad's headquarters, where we had lunch. Djevad took me up to an observation post, and there before my eyes I had the beautiful blue expanse of the Aegean. I could see the entrances to the Dardanelles, Sedd-ul-Bahr and Kum Kale standing like the guardians of a gateway, with the rippling sunny waters stretching between. Far out I saw the majestic ships of England and France sailing across the entrance, and still farther away, I caught a glimpse of the island of Tenedos, behind which we knew that a still larger fleet lay concealed. Naturally this prospect brought to mind a thousand historic and legendary associations, for there is probably no single spot in the world more crowded with poetry and romance. Evidently my Turkish escort, General Djevad, felt the spell, for he took a telescope, and pointed at a bleak expanse, perhaps six miles away.

"Look at that spot," he said, handing me the glass. "Do you know what that is?"

I looked but could not identify this sandy beach.

"Those are the Plains of Troy," he said And the river that you see winding in and out," he added, "we Turks call it the Mendere, but Romer knew it as the Scamander. Back of us, only a few miles distant, is Mount Ida."

Then he turned his glass out to sea, swept the field where the British ships lay, and again asked me to look at an indicated spot. I immediately brought within view a magnificent English warship, all stripped for battle, quietly steaming along like a man walking on patrol duty.

"That," said General Djevad, "is the *Agamemnon*!"

"Shall I fire a shot at her?" he asked me.

"Yes, if you'll promise me not to hit her," I answered.

We lunched at headquarters, where we were joined by Admiral Usedom, General Mertens, and General Pomiankowsky, the Austrian Military Attaché at Constantinople. The chief note in the conversation was one of absolute confidence in the future. Whatever the diplomats and politicians in Constantinople may have thought, these men, Turks and Germans, had no expectation---at least their conversation betrayed none ---that the Allied fleets would pass their defenses. What they seemed to hope for above everything was that their enemies would make another attack.

"If we could only get a chance at the *Queen Elizabeth*!" said one eager German, referring to the greatest ship in the British navy, then lying off the entrance.

As the Rhein wine began to disappear, their eagerness for the combat increased.

"If the damn fools would only make a landing!" exclaimed one---I quote his exact words.

The Turkish and German officers, indeed, seemed to vie with each other in expressing their readiness for the fray. Probably a good deal of this was bravado, intended for my consumption---indeed, I had private information that their exact estimate of the situation was much less reassuring. Now, however, they declared that the war had presented no real opportunity for the German and English navies to measure swords, and for this reason the Germans at the Dardanelles welcomed this chance to try the issue.

Having visited all the important places on the Anatolian side, we took a launch and sailed over to the Gallipoli peninsula. We almost had a disastrous experience on this trip. As we approached the Gallipoli shore, our helmsman was asked if he knew the location of the minefield, and if he could steer through the channel. He said "yes" and then steered directly for the mines! Fortunately the other men noticed the mistake in time, and so we arrived safely at Kilid-ul-Bahr. The batteries here were of about the same character as those on the other side; they formed one of the main defenses of the straits. Here everything, so far as a layman could judge, was in excellent condition, barring the fact that the artillery pieces were of old design and the ammunition not at all plentiful.

The batteries showed signs of a heavy bombardment. None had been destroyed, but shell holes surrounded the fortifications. My Turkish and German escorts looked at these evidences of destruction rather seriously and they were outspoken in their admiration for the accuracy of the allied fire.

"How do they ever get the range?" This was the question they were asking each other. What made the shooting so remarkable was the fact that it came, not from Allied ships in the straits, but from ships stationed in the Aegean Sea, on the other side of the Gallipoli peninsula. The gunners had never seen their target, but, had had to fire at a distance of nearly ten miles, over high hills, and yet many of their shells had barely missed the batteries at Kilid-ul-Bahr.

When I was there, however, the place was quiet, for no fighting was going on that day. For my particular benefit the officers put one of their gun crews through a drill, so that I could obtain a perfect picture of the behaviour of the Turks in action. In their mind's eye these artillerists now saw the English ships advancing within range, all their guns pointed to destroy the followers of the Prophet. The bugleman blew his horn, and the whole company rushed to their appointed places. Some were bringing shells, others were opening the breeches, others were taking the ranges, others were straining at pulleys, and others were putting the charges into place. Everything was eagerness and activity; evidently the Germans had been excellent instructors, but

there was more to it than German military precision, for the men's faces lighted up with all that fanaticism which supplies the morale of Turkish soldiers. These gunners momentarily imagined that they were shooting once more at the infidel English, and the exercise was a congenial one. Above the shouts of all I could hear the singsong chant of the leader, intoning the prayer with which the Moslem has rushed to battle for thirteen centuries.

"Allah is great, there is but one God, and Mohammed is his Prophet!"

When I looked upon these frenzied men, and saw so plainly written in their faces their uncontrollable hatred of the unbeliever, I called to mind what the Germans had said in the morning about the wisdom of not putting Turkish and German soldiers together. I am quite sure that, had this been done, here at least the "Holy War" would have proved a success, and that the Turks would have vented their hatred of Christians on those who happened to be nearest at hand, for the moment overlooking the fact that they were allies.

I returned to Constantinople that evening, and two days afterward, on March 18th, the Allied fleet made its greatest attack. As all the world knows, that attack proved disastrous to the Allies. The outcome was the sinking of the *Bouvet*, the *Ocean*, and the *Irresistible* and the serious crippling of four other vessels. Of the sixteen ships engaged in this battle of the 18th, seven were thus put temporarily or permanently out of action. Naturally the Germans and Turks rejoiced over this victory. The police went around, and ordered each householder to display a prescribed number of flags in honour of the event. The Turkish people have so little spontaneous patriotism or enthusiasm of any kind that they would never decorate their establishments without such definite orders. As a matter of fact, neither Germans nor Turks regarded this celebration too seriously, for they were not yet persuaded that they had really won a victory. Most still believed that the Allied fleets would succeed in forcing their way through. The only question, they said, was whether the Entente was ready to sacrifice the necessary number of ships. Neither Wangenheim, nor Pallavicini believed that the disastrous experience of the 18th would end the naval attack, and for days they anxiously waited for the fleet to return. The high tension lasted for days and weeks after the repulse of the 18th. We were still momentarily expecting the renewal of the attack. But the great armada never returned.

Should it have come back? Could the Allied ships really have captured Constantinople? I am constantly asked this question. As a layman my own opinion can have little value, but I have quoted the opinions of the German generals and admirals, and of the Turks---practically all of whom, except Enver, believed that the enterprise would succeed, and I am half inclined to believe that Enver's attitude was merely a case of graveyard whistling; in what I now have to say on this point, therefore, I wish it understood that I am giving not my own views, but merely those of the officials then in Turkey who were best qualified to judge.

Enver had told me, in our talk on the deck of the *Yuruk*, that he had "plenty of guns---plenty of ammunition." But this statement was not true. A glimpse at the map will show why Turkey was not receiving munitions from Germany or Austria at that time. The fact was that Turkey was just as completely isolated from her allies then as was Russia. There were two railroad lines leading from Constantinople to Germany. One went by way of Bulgaria and Serbia. Bulgaria was then not an ally; even though she had winked at the passage of guns and shells, this line could not have been used, since Serbia, which controlled the vital link extending from Nish to Belgrade, was still intact. The other railroad line went through Rumania, by way of, Bucharest. This route was independent of Serbia, and, had the Rumanian Government consented, it would have formed a clear route from the Krupps to the Dardanelles. The fact that munitions could be sent with the connivance of the Rumanian Government perhaps accounts for the suspicion that guns and shells were going by that route. Day after day the French and British ministers protested at Bucharest against this alleged violation of neutrality, only to be met with angry denials that the Germans were using this line. There is no doubt now that the Rumanian Government was perfectly honourable in making these denials. It is not unlikely that the Germans themselves started all these stories, merely to fool the Allied fleet into the belief that their supplies were inexhaustible.

Let us suppose that the Allies had returned, say on the morning of the nineteenth, what would have happened? The one overwhelming fact is that the fortifications were very short of ammunition. They had almost reached the limit of their resisting power when the British fleet passed out on the afternoon of the 18th. I had secured permission for Mr. George A. Schreiner, the well-known American correspondent of the Associated Press, to visit the Dardanelles on this occasion. On the night of the 18th, this correspondent discussed the situation with

General Mertens, who was the chief technical officer at the straits. General Mertens admitted that the outlook was very discouraging for the defense.

"We expect that the British will come back early tomorrow morning," he said, "and if they do, we may be able to hold out for a few hours."

General Mertens did not declare in so many words that the ammunition was practically exhausted, but Mr. Schreiner discovered that such was the case. The fact was that Fort Hamidié, the most powerful defense on the Asiatic side, had just seventeen armour-piercing shells left, while at Kilid-ul-Bahr, which was the main defense on the European side, there were precisely ten.

"I should advise you to get up at six o'clock tomorrow morning," said General Mertens, "and take to the Anatolian hills. That's what we are going to do."

The troops at all the fortifications had their orders to man the guns until the last shell had been fired and then to abandon the forts.

Once these defenses became helpless, the problem of the Allied fleet would have been a simple one. The only bar to their progress would have been the minefield, which stretched from a point about two miles north of Erenkeui to Kilid-ul-Bahr. But the Allied fleet had plenty of mine-sweepers, which could have made a channel in a few hours. North of Tchanak, as I have already explained, there were a few guns, but they were of the 1878 model, and could not discharge projectiles that could pierce modern armour plate. North of Point Nagara there were only two batteries, and both dated from 1835! Thus, once having silenced the outer straits, there was nothing to bar the passage to Constantinople except the German and Turkish warships. The *Goeben* was the only first-class fighting ship in either fleet, and it would not have lasted long against the *Queen Elizabeth*. The disproportion in the strength of the opposing fleets, indeed, was so enormous that it is doubtful whether there would ever have been an engagement.

Thus the Allied fleet would have appeared before Constantinople on the morning of the twentieth. What would have happened then? We have heard much discussion as to whether this purely naval attack was justified. Enver, in his conversation with me, had laid much stress on the absurdity of sending a fleet to Constantinople, supported by no adequate landing force, and much of the criticism since passed upon the Dardanelles expedition has centred on that point. Yet it is my opinion that this exclusively naval attack was justified. I base this judgment purely upon the political situation which then existed in Turkey. Under ordinary circumstances such an enterprise would probably have been a foolish one, but the political conditions in Constantinople then were not ordinary. There was no solidly established government in Turkey at that time. A political committee, not exceeding forty members, headed by Talaat, Enver, and Djemal, controlled the Central Government, but their authority throughout the empire was exceedingly tenuous. As a matter of fact, the whole Ottoman state, on that eighteenth day of March, 1915, when the Allied fleet abandoned the attack, was on the brink of dissolution. All over Turkey ambitious chieftains had arisen, who were momentarily expecting its fall, and who were looking for the opportunity to seize their parts of the inheritance. As previously described, Djemal had already organized practically an independent government in Syria. In Smyrna Rahmi Bey, the Governor-General, had often disregarded the authorities at the capital. In Adrianople Hadji Adil, one of the most courageous Turks of the time, was believed to be plotting to set up his own government. Arabia had already become practically an independent nation. Among the subject races the spirit of revolt was rapidly spreading. The Greeks and the Armenians would also have welcomed an opportunity to strengthen the hands of the Allies. The existing financial and industrial conditions seemed to make revolution inevitable. Many farmers went on strike; they had no seeds and would not accept them as a free gift from the Government because, they said, as soon as their crops should be garnered the armies, would immediately requisition them. As for Constantinople, the populace there and the best elements among the Turks, far from opposing the arrival of the Allied fleet, would have welcomed it with joy. The Turks themselves were praying that the British and French would take their city, for this would relieve them of the controlling gang, emancipate them from the hated Germans, bring about peace, and end their miseries.

No one understood this better than Talaat. He was taking no chances on making an expeditious retreat, in case the Allied fleet appeared before the city. For several months the Turkish leaders had been casting envious

glances at a Minerva automobile that had been reposing in the Belgian legation ever since Turkey's declaration of war. Talaat finally obtained possession of the coveted prize. He had obtained somewhere another automobile, which he had loaded with extra tires, gasolene, and all the other essentials of a protracted journey. This was evidently intended to accompany the more pretentious machine as a kind of "mother ship." Talaat stationed these automobiles on the Asiatic side of the city with chauffeurs constantly at hand. Everything was prepared to leave for the interior of Asia Minor at a moment's notice.

But the great Allied armada never returned to the attack.

About a week after this momentous defeat, I happened to drop in at the German Embassy. Wangenheim had a distinguished visitor whom he asked me to meet. I went into his private office and there was Von der Goltz Pasha, recently returned from Belgium, where he had served as governor. I must admit that, meeting Goltz thus informally, I had difficulty in reconciling his personality with all the stories that were then coming out of Belgium. That morning this mild-mannered, spectacled gentleman seemed sufficiently quiet and harmless. Nor did he look his age---he was then about seventy-four; his hair was only streaked with gray, and his face was almost unwrinkled; I should not have taken him for more than sixty-five. The austerity and brusqueness and ponderous dignity which are assumed by most highly-placed Germans were not apparent. His voice was deep, musical, and pleasing, and his manners were altogether friendly and ingratiating. The only evidence of pomp in his bearing was his uniform; he was dressed as a field marshal, his chest blazing with decorations and gold braid. Von der Goltz explained and half apologized for his regalia by saying that he had just returned from an audience with the Sultan. He had come to Constantinople to present his majesty a medal from the Kaiser, and was taking back to Berlin a similar mark of consideration from the Sultan to the Kaiser, besides an imperial present of 10,000 cigarettes.

The three of us sat there for some time, drinking coffee, eating German cakes, and smoking German cigars. I did not do much of the talking, but the conversation of Von der Goltz and Wangenheim, seemed to me to shed much light upon the German mind, and especially on the trustworthiness of German military reports. The aspect of the Dardanelles fight that interested them most at that time was England's complete frankness in publishing her losses. That the British Government should issue an official statement, saying that three ships had been sunk and that four others had been badly damaged, struck them as most remarkable. In this announcement I merely saw a manifestation of the usual British desire to make public the worst---the policy which we Americans also believe to be the best in war times. But no such obvious explanation could satisfy these wise and solemn Teutons. No, England had some deep purpose in telling the truth so unblushingly; what could it be?

"Es ist ausserordentlich!" (It is extraordinary) said Von der Goltz, referring to England's public acknowledgment of defeat.

"Es ist unerhört!" (It is unheard of) declared the equally astonished Wangenheim.

These master diplomatists canvassed one explanation after another, and finally reached a conclusion that satisfied the higher strategy. England, they agreed, really had had no enthusiasm for this attack, because, in the event of success, she would have had to hand Constantinople over to Russia---something which England really did not intend to do. By publishing the losses, England showed Russia the enormous difficulties of the task; she had demonstrated, indeed, that the enterprise was impossible. After such losses, England intended Russia to understand that she had made a sincere attempt to gain this great prize of war and expected her not to insist on further sacrifices.

The sequel to this great episode in the war came in the winter of 1915-16. By this time Bulgaria had joined the Central Powers, Serbia had been overwhelmed, and the Germans had obtained a complete, unobstructed railroad line from Constantinople to Austria and Germany. Huge Krupp guns now began to come over this line---all destined for the Dardanelles. Sixteen great batteries, of the latest model, were emplaced near the entrance, completely controlling Sedd-ul-Bahr. The Germans lent the Turks 500,000,000 marks, much of which was spent defending this indispensable highway. The thinly fortified straits through which I passed in March, 1915, is now as impregably fortified as Heligoland. It is doubtful if all the fleets in the world could force the Dardanelles to-day.