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A Dardanelles Death Trap.

Hill 70 Stormed and Lost -- Splendid Gallantry of Our Yeomen -- Charge Uphill Against a Killing Fire.

(By E. Ashmead-Bartlett.)

Dardanelles, Aug. 23.
(Via Alexandria, Sept. 2.)

If we have failed in the great strategic scheme of getting astride the peninsula north of Anzac by seizing the hills round Anafarta and forcing the enemy to abandon his positions before Achi Baba and on the Killid Bahr salient, it has certainly not been through want of trying. The original plan just failed, as the most carefully laid plans will go wrong in war, because a corps failed to carry out the task assigned to it—namely, to push through with a rush when the enemy was completely surprised and had only a few battalions of picked troops to oppose our divisions.

The ground at Anafarta is very close and broken and rises gradually to the hills. It is essential to advance in very open order, and the men thus speedily become separated and out of touch with their officers and comrades. It requires troops highly trained in skirmishing and self-reliance, where every man will push on to the objective of his own accord without stopping for orders or to see if his comrades are following.

The first attempt to seize the hills round Anafarta, having definitely broken down on August 10, it was not until August 21 that the Army was in a position to make a frontal attack on the Turks in this quarter. The prizes which would reward success were great and fully justified a supreme effort. All hope of effecting a surprise had now vanished, and it was obvious that the position comprised within the sector stretching from Hill 70 to Hill 112, the line chosen for our assault, could only be taken by a frontal attack and sheer hard fighting.

Feverish Trench Digging.

Meanwhile the Turks had made full use of the time afforded them, and, according to their invariable practice, had dug themselves in up to their necks. Every dawn disclosed new trenches which had been dug in the night, and it was obvious from the manner in which they searched our beaches and camps with shell fire that several fresh batteries had been brought to this front. Opposite our trenches, in the open, the Turks had also dug two lines of immense strength and carefully loopholed.

Our immediate objective on the left was the capture of Hill 70, according to the map, or "Burnt Hill" among the troops, which lies in front of the main position and which has caused us so much trouble ever since the landing. Our centre and right were to advance from the ridge in front of Chocolate Hill, or Yilghin Burnu, as it is marked on the map, and from the trenches in the plain south of it, and after capturing the Turkish trenches in the low ground in their immediate front were to converge and assault the main objective, Hill 112.

For the supreme effort troops were massed along the line Hill 70 to Hill 112, and a division of Yeomanry without their horses were held in reserve behind Lala Baba. The disposition of our forces was as follows: One brigade was ordered to attack Hill 70, another brigade to attack Hill 112, with a third in reserve, while the divisions holding the trenches in the plain to the south were to rush the trenches in their front and then wheel northwards to converge on Hill 112 from the south.

In the bombardment which preceded, the battleships and cruisers concentrated on Hills 70 and 112, supported by field guns and heavy howitzers. Once again the enemy's trenches appeared to be swallowed up in clouds of earth and smoke, but the Turks showed no sign and not a man left his position. While this bombardment lasted the enemy's guns replied furiously, concentrating their fire chiefly on and behind Chocolate Hill, which was wreathed in bursting shrapnel. Very soon the shells set fire to the ditch and scrub, which, fanned by a breeze, burnt furiously, spreading with amazing rapidity and at times blotting

out the positions in clouds of rolling smoke and flames.

The guns still thundered away at the trenches on top, but the Turkish infantry did not seem to care, many of them standing boldly up from cover in order to get a better view of the advancing lines of khaki figures. The rifle fire was deafening, and I do not think I have ever heard such a din as that produced by the ships' guns, field pieces, bursting shells, and thousands of rifles on any battlefield before. At 3.50 the two regiments made a final rush up the hill, one battalion from the west and another from the south.

Storming the Hill.

A great solid mass of khaki, with bayonets glistening amid the smoke and dust, seemed to emerge from the burnt scrub and surge towards the trenches on top. For a few minutes the artillery lengthened their fuses and shelled the reverse slopes, leaving the trench line clear. The Turks came out on top and fired furiously into the advancing lines. Some of them seemed to waver for a moment and abandon the crest, running down behind, but the majority stuck to their trenches determined to die where they stood.

Our men got high up the hill, but on the north side the battalion was brought to a standstill by machine guns and cross fire. On the south some of our men reached the top and jumped into the trenches, where they died fighting among the Turks at the point of the bayonet. In fact, at this southern angle a desperate hand-to-hand fight took place, and never have the enemy fought with greater courage and determination.

For a few minutes it looked as if the hill was won, for our men were swarming all over it just below the crest and had actually occupied a section of the trench line on the south, but then the Turkish battery behind Hill 112 began to pour salvos of shrapnel into our tanks at a range of only 1,200 yards, which simply swept whole lines away and forced the survivors to retire further down the slopes to some feeble cover. Here they hung on for a few minutes, but the attack had spent its force and came back to the trenches they had so recently left.

The Attack Had Failed.

The attack had failed. Once more Hill 70 was left to the Turks, the wounded and the dead. Meanwhile the fighting had been just as severe on the right, for the troops of a division rushed from their trenches and stormed the first Turkish line under a fearful fire over ground without a particle of cover, the advance of the brigade from the ridge in front of Yilghin Burnu being held up until the

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right had accomplished its first task. Unfortunately it was found impossible to storm the second Turkish line in the flat, a deadly loopholed trench with overhead cover.

Unable to clear the Turks from the open our infantry wheeled to the north, according to the previous plan, to form for an assault on Hill 112, while a brigade advanced from the ridge in front of Yilghin Burnu, or, rather, they were driven off it to the south side by the terrible fire which had broken out, having been ignited by the bursting shells. The flames swept in a solid bank surmounted by rolling clouds of black smoke right across the hill, and the heat was terrific. A division wheeling towards the same objective were caught at short range by the enemy's second trench on their flank in the open plain, and it became obvious that it would be impossible to proceed with the advance on Hill 112 unless the trench line was taken. Throughout the afternoon the fighting in this quarter was intense and the rifle fire tremendous, but we could not gain another yard of ground.

Hill 70 Again.

Meanwhile orders were issued for another attack on Hill 70 by a battalion which had hitherto been held in reserve and a mounted division in reserve behind Lala Baba. This splendid body of troops, in action for the first time and led by men bearing some of the best-known names in England, moved out from under cover and proceeded to cross the Salt Lake in open order.

No sooner did they appear than the enemy concentrated a heavy shrapnel fire on the advancing lines, fully exposed as they were in the open. But the men, moving as if on parade, pressed steadily on, losing many, but never wavering, and formed up behind the infantry brigade in front of Hill 70.

It was now six o'clock, and once more the crest was furiously bombarded by every available gun, while the Turkish batteries concentrated on our trenches. The scene was majestic but awful, for the light was now rapidly waning and the whole horizon almost blotted out with enormous clouds of smoke and flames, as the trees, scrub, homesteads, and the very ground were set on fire. From different points, while the noise of the guns and the incessant roar from thousands of rifles rendered the scene a perfect inferno.

A little after six a battalion went forward and seized the southern slopes of the hill and began to dig themselves in preparatory to a further advance against the top. At this point the shell fire began to tell on the Turks, for many of them could be seen streaming from the northern knoll of the hill down the trench line, either because it had become untenable or they were preparing to meet the advance of our men.

Unstoppable Yeomanry.

For about an hour there was no change in the situation, and then the Yeomanry again moved forward in a solid mass, forming up under the lower western and northern slopes. It was now almost dark, and the attack seemed to hang fire, when suddenly the Yeomanry leapt to their feet and as a single man charged right up the hill. They were met by a withering fire which rose to a crescendo as they neared the northern crest, but nothing could stop them.

They charged at amazing speed without a single halt from the bottom to the top, losing many men and many of their chosen leaders, including gallant Sir John Milbanke. It was a stirring sight watched by thousands at the ever-gathering gloom. One moment they were below the crest, the next on top. A moment after many had disappeared inside the Turkish trenches, bayoneting all the defenders who had not fled in time, while others never stopped at the trench line but dashed in pursuit down the reverse slopes.

From a thousand lips a shout went up that Hill 70 was won. But night was now rapidly falling, the figures became blurred, then lost all shape, and finally disappeared from view. The battlefield had disappeared completely, and as one left Chocolate Hill one looked back on a vista of rolling clouds of smoke and huge fires from the midst of which the incessant roar of the rifle fire never for a moment ceased.

This was ominous, for although Hill 70 was in our hands, the question arose could we hold it throughout the night in the face of determined counter-attacks? In fact, all through the night the battle raged incessantly, but when morning broke Hill 70 was no longer in our possession.

Apparently the Turks were never driven off a knoll on the northern crest, from which they sniped at us with machine guns and artillery fire, while those of the Yeomanry who had dashed down the reverse slopes in pursuit were counter-attacked and lost heavily, and had been obliged to retire. In the night it was decided it would be impossible to hold the hill in daylight, and the order was given for the troops to withdraw to their original positions.

Nothing, however, will lessen the glory of that final charge of England's yeomen. It was ended this great fight. However, the troops at Anzac achieved some successes, the Australian infantry finally driving the enemy from Hill 60, while our whole line was linked up with a trench line instead of isolated posts.

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