



# Genocide Perspectives II

*Essays on Holocaust and Genocide*

*Editors*

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## 'PRECIOUS AND HONOURED GUESTS OF THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT'

**Panayiotis Diamadis**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY**

The 'Minorities Question' had been tormenting the Ottoman Empire for over a century before its collapse and formal dissolution in the years 1918 to 1920. The phrase 'Minorities Question' is ironic, because no single ethnic group constituted a majority of the population of this multicultural state at that time.

In 1908, a military coup brought to power a group known as the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP; *Ittihad ve Terrakke i Cemayeti*), nicknamed the 'Young Turks'. At a series of conferences held in the city of Thessalonike between 1909 and 1911, the CUP drew up plans to 'Turkify' their empire:<sup>1</sup>

Sooner or later the complete Ottomanization of all Turkish subjects must be effected, but it was becoming clear that this could never be achieved by persuasion, and recourse must be had to force of arms.

Hellenes had inhabited the Gallipoli Peninsula since at least the sixth century BCE. The name Gallipoli is an Anglicised version of the Hellenic name for the town of Kallipole (Good City), located on the north-eastern side of the peninsula. The region's Turkish name is Gelibolu. Despite the Ottoman Turkish conquest of 1351, eastern Thrace (of which Gallipoli is a part) was populated predominantly by Hellenes until 1914. Following the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), which were ruinous for the Ottoman Empire, a senior German military officer was assigned to restructure the Ottoman armed forces along German lines. General Liman von Sanders conducted an inspection tour of eastern Thrace, the western frontier of the Ottoman Empire, the backyard of the Imperial capital of Constantinople, in the autumn of 1913.

His chief recommendation was the 'evacuation' of all the non-Muslim population in the name of 'national security'. The existence of a 'hostile' Christian Hellenic population so close to Constantinople was deemed unacceptable. In January 1914, a series of anti-Hellenic pogroms began in eastern Thrace, with the aim of forcing the original Hellenes of the region to leave their homes permanently. Those who could pay for transport fled to Hellenic territory. Those who could not, were deported to Asia Minor. Relatively few of the latter survived to see the liberation of eastern Thrace in 1919.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, when British troops captured the town of Krithia (in the south-east of the Peninsula) in late-April 1915, they found the once bustling market town deserted.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1914, the CUP government began systematic attacks on the Hellenes of eastern Thrace, by May spreading to the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. In April 1915, they commenced deportations and massacres of Armenians and Assyrians throughout the Empire. Each of the three groups was singled out for being non-Muslim. They were persecuted and murdered. Indeed, the word 'holocaust' was first used by Winston Churchill, then Lord of the Admiralty, to describe the carnage of the Armenians, and later by US journalist, Melville Chater, in relation to the sacking of the city of Smyrna (Izmir) in September 1922.<sup>4</sup>

Over the last eight decades, the Turkish State has poured tens of millions of dollars into an efficient, systematic and widely circulated campaign proclaiming not only Turkey's innocence but its own victim status at the hands of the three ancient Christian societies of Asia Minor.

The considerable body of research by eminent genocide scholars should suffice to verify these genocides. But we also have first-hand accounts by Australian and other Allied prisoners of war from World War I, whose witnessing of events in Asia Minor verifies the allegation of the treatment meted out by the Turks. I explore their experiences in this article.

*'Precious and Honoured Guests'*

Famished and spent across the waste, beastlike you drove us on,  
And clubbed to death the stragglers by the way.  
Our sick men in the lazar huts you left to die alone,  
And you robbed the very dying as they lay.  
Naked and starved we built you roads  
And tunnelled through your hills,

And you flogged us when we fainted at our work.  
Fevered beneath the sun we toiled, wrecked by winter chills,  
Till death released us, kindlier than the Turk.  
And the tunnels we drove for you, the roads that we have made,  
Shall be highways for the armies of your foe.  
We shall mock you in our graves, that in what we did as slaves  
We helped, we too, to work your overthrow.

This stanza, from the poem 'The Roadmakers', was written at the Akroinos (Afion Karahissar) prison camps by Royal Flying Corps Flight-Lieutenant Leonard Woolley RAF.<sup>5</sup> He is referring not to the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian victims of the Christian Asia Minor Holocaust (1914–1924), but to the Ottoman Empire's treatment of its 'precious and honoured guests', the Allied prisoners of war interned in camps scattered across the Empire. At first glance, the memoirs and statements of prisoners of war seem an unlikely source of information on the Asia Minor Holocaust. Upon closer examination, however, the memoirs of the men captured by the Ottoman Army during World War I provide invaluable first-hand accounts of what they witnessed as well as of what they themselves endured.

These POWs were not members of the victim communities. They were Australian, New Zealander, British, French, Russian, Indian, Canadian and African soldiers, sailors, aviators and civilians. Some were force-marched from southern Mesopotamia and Palestine, while others were transported in sealed cattle-trucks for days on end to the camps in Asia Minor. They worked as slave labourers, in particular on the Constantinople–Baghdad railway, alongside Hellene, Armenian and Assyrian draftees of the Ottoman Army, who worked in the hope that they would cheat death for another day. At the height of construction, some 30,000 prisoners were labouring on the Tauros (Toros) and Amanus Mountains sections of the railway.<sup>6</sup> They worked in the fields, built roads, quays and railway lines in other parts of Asia Minor, laboured in stone-quarries and even in nail and cement factories.

## THE OVERALL PICTURE

Australian participation in World War I, in particular in the Gallipoli campaign, is regarded as the focal point of early twentieth century Australian history. Yet few of the plethora of works on the subject even mention the fact that over

4,000 Australians were taken prisoner by the Central Powers.<sup>7</sup> Of these, all but some 300 were captured by Germany. Almost 14,000 British and Indian troops were captured, as were an undetermined number of French, Russian and other Allied officers and men, all taken prisoner by the Ottoman Turkish armies on the battlefields of Thrace, the Caucasus Mountains, Sinai, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

Some 534 Commonwealth soldiers and sailors were taken prisoner during the Gallipoli/Dardanelles Campaign of 1915. Apart from those captured during the bitter fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula itself, there were the crews of the Australian submarine *A.E.2*, the British submarines *E.7*, *E.15* and *E.20* and the French submarines *Saphir*, *Turquoise* (sometimes recorded as *Joule*) and *Mariotte*, which were sunk as they attempted to break through the Ottoman defences along the Dardanelles (Hellespont).

The bulk of the Allied soldiers captured by the Ottoman Empire were from the British-held garrison town of Kut-el-Amara, 120 miles south of Baghdad on the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). After a siege that lasted 147 days, the town fell to the Ottoman Army on 29 April 1916. A total of 13,309 troops (English, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Indians, Canadians, New Zealanders, and eight Australians) were taken prisoner,<sup>8</sup> as well as 220 senior British and 200 senior Indian officers, and were transported to Constantinople and Angyra (Ankara) where they spent the rest of the war in relative comfort.

The rest — 2,592 British and 10,397 Indians — were forced to march through deserts and across mountains to the railway junction at Ras-el-Ein in northern Syria. There they boarded cattle trains which took them to the foothills of the Anti-Tauros Mountains in south-east Asia Minor, which they then crossed on foot, before boarding more trains that took them to prison and labour camps the length and breadth of Asia Minor, a journey of 1,200 miles.

By November 1918, 1,306 British and 1,790 Indians were recorded as missing and presumed dead. A handful of the missing Indians were Muslims who joined their co-religionists in the war against the British Empire. The official British Government inquiry into the treatment of British POWs in the Ottoman Empire eventually found that 1,755 British officers and men were found to have died in captivity while only 837 survived.<sup>9</sup> Of the Australian POWs in Turkish hands, some 30 percent perished compared to only nine percent of those held captive by the Germans. While in Ottoman captivity, nearly 20 percent of Australian deaths were due to causes other than wounds received in battle, compared to less than two percent amongst those captured by the Germans.<sup>10</sup>

Above all, it was the Turks' reputation for brutality to the wounded which particularly embittered the Dominion troops. 'It makes one bitter to hear how they treated our wounded left behind in our retirement', a subaltern wrote on 3 May 1915:<sup>11</sup>

Stories are rife that men known to have been only wounded were afterwards found with their own bayonets stuck into them. Others (were) horribly mutilated, and none are known to be alive in the hands of the enemy at all ... God save me from being captured that's all. ... At Suvla, in August, two British officers who had surrendered were taken back and bayoneted in cold blood.

#### THE SUBMARINERS

The *A.E.2* was one of only two Australian submarines in service in 1915. By breaching the formidable Ottoman defences of the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and entering the Propontis (Sea of Marmara) on 25 April 1915, the *A.E.2* became the first Allied vessel to do so.<sup>12</sup> While heading for the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and the Aegean Sea, off the Propontic Isles, the *A.E.2* was forced to the surface by a technical fault in the main ballast tank. Unable to submerge, and too slow to escape from approaching enemy vessels, Commander Stoker surrendered. The ship was scuttled shortly after the entire crew was safely evacuated to the German-manned Ottoman Navy torpedo boat the *Sultan Hissar*.<sup>13</sup>

The crew of the *A.E.2*, less than half of whom were Australians, was taken to Maidos (Eceabat), and then to Constantinople, where they endured what Wheat recorded as 'quarters dirty, food not fit for a pig', before being transported to the city of Akroinos (Afion Karahissar). Wheat made the following entry in his diary on 18 August 1915:<sup>14</sup>

All the Armenians are driven from the town. The principal cause of this is the Armenians are Christians and all the business of the town is carried on by them. There is a very strong feeling against the Christians in this Country. At this time, thousands of Armenians were turned out of these big towns to starve and thousands were massacred. This day we also got news of a big Russian victory in the Caucasus capturing 2,500 Turks.

At Akroinos the men built roads, breaking stones and digging with picks and shovels; at harvest-time, they worked on nearby farm crops. Aside from



infrequent aid packages delivered via the embassies of neutral countries like the Netherlands, the prisoners survived on bread and water.<sup>15</sup> In the autumn of 1915, some of the *A.E.2* crewmen were sent to labour on the Constantinople–Baghdad railway, digging a series of twelve tunnels through the Tauros and Amanus Mountain ranges<sup>16</sup> of southern Asia Minor.<sup>17</sup>

The prisoners were divided into three shifts so that the work never stopped; many, especially the weak and wounded, preferred the night shift in the tunnels because there were no fleas and, as well, they escaped the intense heat of the day. Those who refused to work in the tunnels were sent to Bozanti, a punishment camp where work was even harder and hours were longer. A number of men died here. One of my shipmates, Williams, a stoker on *A.E.2*, succumbed to this cruelty.

Able-Seaman Wheat was later transferred to the town of Bor, near Nigde in south-eastern Kappadokia, where he 'was quartered in a Greek College quite free from vermin', quite an achievement for an Ottoman POW camp, which were renowned as disease-ridden.<sup>18</sup>

Wheat attempted escape four times. Following his third recapture, he was locked for some days in a room infested with mice. He was then amongst a group of prisoners moved to Gelebek, only 35 miles from the Mediterranean coast. 'Of all the different camps I have been in, Gelebek was by far the worst, both for work, food and fever.' D.J. van Bommel, the Netherlands inspector of POW camps, wrote in 1918: 'The South Taurus region (where Gelebek was located) is the least good of the whole (Baghdad Railway) line.' Escape, however, was never far from Wheat's mind. 'I made friends with some Greeks and Armenians and got all the information I could.'<sup>19</sup> On 29 April 1918, Wheat and two others again attempted to escape. This time their punishment was to be thrown into a hole in the ground with eight other men.<sup>20</sup>

There were eleven of us in this awful place swarming with lice and fleas. It was sweltering hot, and that, combined with the awful smell from this filthy pit was unbearable. We used to strip to the waist to enable us better to keep off attacks from vermin. Sometimes I think it was only a horrible dream but when I think it over, I know it actually happened. We endured this for fourteen days.

Herbert Brown was also on the *A.E.2*, as a stoker. Of his time at Akroinos, Brown wrote: 'For two months we worked from 6:45 a.m. until 5:45 p.m. on

bread and water alone.' At harvest-time, he remained in the camp to repair reaping machinery; ironically enough, it was Australian-made!<sup>21</sup> Brown was one of some 400 Allied POWs who laboured at Belemedik, a railway building camp 900 kilometres southeast of Constantinople, in the north Taurus Mountains; a 'model' camp owing to the presence of German and Swiss military and civilian personnel. Although the prisoners were treated reasonably well, by Ottoman standards, prisoners' deaths continued.

Brown later recorded that 'up to this date (4 August 1916), two sailors and three soldiers have died and been buried'. The chief stoker of the *A.E.2*, Chief Petty Officer Charles Barcoe, Len New, Gilbert (*A.E.2*) and Bill Knaggs (*A.E.2*) all died in Belemedik and neighbouring camps in the Taurus Mountains. 'Several Russians have died here and were buried with the English and French in the Christians' graveyard at Belemedik. ... they estimated that over the last six months (April to October 1916) there have been 800 deaths of all nationalities...'<sup>22</sup>

#### PRISONERS FROM GALLIPOLI

Corporal George Ernest Kitchin Kerr, 14th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, arrived on Gallipoli at the end of May 1915. His younger brother, 20-year-old Hedley (serving with the 6th Battalion), took part in the initial ANZAC landings on 25 April. He was last seen alive about one kilometre inland, heading in the direction of Lone Pine. Initially he was officially listed as 'wounded'. His remains have never been found and his name appears on the Unknown Soldier's Memorial at Lone Pine. In May 1916, an AIF Court of Inquiry concluded that he must have been killed in action. In the light of George Kerr's account of his own capture and of many similar experiences, it is quite possible that Hedley Kerr was captured and then killed. We will probably never know.<sup>23</sup>

In an assault on Hill 971 on 8 August 1915, a group of thirteen Australians of the 14th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force became cut off from the main body of the ANZAC offensive and were trapped behind enemy lines. Lieutenant Luscombe, the senior officer, decided to surrender rather than fight on with a group of wounded men in a hopeless situation. The result of his decision was not exactly what he expected: Luscombe was shot in the armpit while he threw his pistol away before another bullet grazed his head and knocked him unconscious; according to Kerr, Private Calcutt was



bayoneted to death.<sup>24</sup> Private O'Connor protested and was bashed over the head with a large rock until he lost consciousness due to a fractured skull. One of the group managed to escape back to Allied lines.

Kerr was lying wounded in the right arm and left thigh. A Turkish soldier walked over to Kerr, looked him over, went to a nearby pine tree and broke off a branch. Throwing it to Kerr, the Turk said in broken French: 'If you do not use this, I'm going to have to shoot you.' The bashing of the prisoners continued until the approach of a German officer. Kerr had little doubt that they would all have been killed had it not been for the appearance of the German.<sup>25</sup> The prisoners were removed to a dressing station where Private Warnes died of his wounds.

The Australian prisoners were then taken to Constantinople, firstly to the Harbiye Hospital and then to the Tash Kishla Army Barracks Hospital. Three Australian prisoners, who had been recovering in Harbiye Hospital (Corporal Hodson, Private Hennessey and Private Kelly), died at the army hospital. Kerr wrote in his diary about the death of Hodson: 'We were under what they called reciprocal treatment. Our impression was that it was too much trouble for them to clean his wounds (two in the groin) and that they killed him.'<sup>26</sup>

On 20 November, George Kerr and a group of other prisoners were taken to Chrysoupolis (Scutari/Uskudar) to board a train for Dorylaion (Eski Shehir), 335 miles south-east of Constantinople. There, according to Kerr, the Roman Catholic and Protestant prisoners were separated: the former went to Akroinos (Afion Karahissar), the latter to Angyra (Ankara). A neighbourhood of empty houses of murdered Armenians formed the Lower Camp, while an Armenian church and the surrounding houses formed the Upper Camp. As Kerr later recorded:<sup>27</sup>

Earlier in 1915, scores of Armenians had been murdered or driven out of the town (Afion Karahissar) by Turkish troops in the name of 'ethnic cleansing', and the grounds of the prison camp were reputedly sown with the remains of some of these victims.

Two months later (18 January 1916), Kerr was transferred to Bozanti, a labour camp high in the north Taurus (Toros) region). The POWs were housed on the upper floor of a two-storey building.<sup>28</sup>

Underneath us on the floor of the room, were huddled, in all kinds of rags, about sixty miserable creatures who, we afterwards discovered, were Greeks

and Armenians employed on the tunnel. They were crouched about the fires made in old mess dishes and in that dull light, looked the lowest human beings I had ever set eyes on. ... their fires, which gave forth horrible smoke and poisoned the air with their fumes. Some of the Turks on the opposite side objected to this and made one of the party put out its fire.

After a short stay here, he was transferred to Belemelik, where he spent the rest of the war. On 5 February 1916, George Kerr was made responsible for the camp stores and wages at Belemelik, a position he kept until his release on 15 November 1918.

Private Daniel Bartholomew Creedon of the 9th Battalion, AIF, was captured on Gallipoli on 28 June 1915. In early October of that year, as he wrote in his diary, Creedon arrived in the Angyra (Ankara) region on his way to 'Khangeri' (Cankiri). After breakfast 'in an old Monastery', Creedon and about 200 other prisoners began the four-day march. They spent the night in Astova, 'a fair-sized town built up in a mountain. ... Some of us were put in a church — I was in the church — others in stables and others in private houses.' Creedon wrote in his diary on 2 February 1916: 'The people say the Turks killed ... (1 million) Armenians.'<sup>29</sup> He died in Angora (Ankara) on 27 February 1917, aged 23 years. Without a known grave, Daniel Creedon is today commemorated on Memorial 49, in the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, Iraq.

#### PRISONER FROM SINAI

Lieutenant James Brown was serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps when he was captured at Katia, 25 miles east of the Suez Canal in the Sinai Peninsula, in April 1916. He was part of a group of POWs (22 officers and about 100 men) marched to a prison camp at Bir el-Abd, then to Bir el-Mazar and then to El-Arish where an Armenian medical officer was in charge. In mid-May, some ten days after their arrival at El-Arish, a Turkish doctor came to take over command. 'A couple of days afterwards, the Armenian said to me: "Today I mentioned to the Turkish doctor that you were not receiving either pay or rations, and asked him what was to be done about it. He merely replied without showing the least concern: 'Let him starve'."<sup>30</sup>

From El-Arish, Brown was sent to Damascus, to Aleppo, to Kulek (near Tarsus), to Bozanti, and finally to Akroinos (Afion Karahissar). Most of this journey was covered by rail. In the 'prison camp',<sup>31</sup>

nearly all the houses were two-storeyed and were more imposing than any private buildings we had yet passed in Afion. They were then empty but had been occupied by Armenians before their deportation or massacre and were visible evidence of their financial standing.

The persecutions of the Empire's Christians were not restricted to deportations and massacres. Mass removal and transfer of young women and children to Muslim households was widespread and occurred throughout Asia Minor right up to the completion of the 'Exchange of Greek-Turkish Populations' in 1924. As Brown mentioned in his memoirs, many Turkish officers he encountered had Armenian concubines.<sup>32</sup>

On 19 September 1916, the first group of prisoners from Kut arrived in Akroinos; 116 went straight into the hospital. There were 230 others of whom 100 were sick.<sup>33</sup>

An atmosphere of solemnity pervaded the camps. The officers' hardships had been severe on occasions. They had lived under conditions revolting to civilised men and had sometimes been forced to sustain life with unsavoury food and unwholesome water. But their imaginations had only pictured such depths of prolonged misery as their rank and file was enduring in the alien refugees who had been hounded from their homes by the Turkish authorities and harried from place to place. The knowledge that their own men, whom the Turks had spoken of as honoured guests, had been starved, ill-treated and neglected, and were now human derelicts, was agonising to high-spirited officers who cursed their own inability to help, except with some of their substance. It brought the humiliation of imprisonment into the boldest relief.

Within a week, 20 POWs were dead. Within two weeks, the death toll reached 42. Within two months, about 100 had died. Nursing care was practically unknown.<sup>34</sup>

If the sick could not help themselves, they were helpless indeed. Food was brought, but no attempt was made to feed them. If they were too weak to eat it without help, they were left to the mercy or perhaps the vengeance of Allah.

Camp life was harsh. Prisoners were bastinadoed for minor offences. New clothes were sent for them from England and from Australia, but the Camp Commandant, Bimbashi Muslim (also known as Mazloun Bey),<sup>35</sup>

withheld them until the POWs handed over their old clothes. These were then sold in the marketplace. Disease was rampant and medicine inadequate. The sick were housed in an abandoned Islamic school, which had no windows or doors for shelter from the mountain winds.

#### AN ANGLICAN MINISTER

Reverend John F. MacClean was detained by the Ottoman authorities, along with Reverend Wigram of the Crimean Memorial Church, in Constantinople on 29 August 1917. Initially sent to Angyra (Ankara), the two Anglican clergymen eventually arrived at Ivora (Corum), a centre in western Pontos. They were permitted to return to Constantinople in June 1918, at which time MacClean wrote a report to London on his experiences, including his meetings with British and Commonwealth POWs he met.<sup>36</sup>

This is a town (Mutasarifik) of some 30,000 inhabitants ... At one time there was a considerable Armenian population there, now there are none, and I saw their houses all being pulled down and the timber from there being used to heat the ovens of the military bakers.

#### PRISONERS FROM KUT-EL-AMARA

Following his capture at Kut, British Major General Sir C.J. Mellis arrived in Afion Karahissar on 29 June 1916 and stayed five days before proceeding to Angora (Ankara). On his journey to Akroinos (Afion Karahissar), he and his party came across about 40 British prisoners in Hasan Beyli in the Taurus Mountains. Hunger, disease and exposure to the summer sun ravaged them.

It was found that many of the weakest were thrown off the carts (they were travelling on) to die, and fortunate it was that the officer's party was following, for weary and sick men were picked up at intervals along the road, both by them and by Germans of the Motor Transport Service.

He refused to leave them until transport was provided for them across the mountain range. After much wrangling, vehicles were made available.<sup>37</sup>

Another Kut prisoner, Captain E.H. Keeling, later recorded the following:<sup>38</sup>

By the roadside we passed three corpses of Armenians who had evidently been murdered. They probably belonged to a large party that we had seen marched out of Islahiyah on the previous day (17 June 1916). According to the evidence collected by Lord Bryce's committee, vast and incredibly foul concentration camps were formed in 1915 at these railheads, where Armenian exiles were detained for months and died by thousands of hunger, exposure and epidemics.

Keeling was more definite on the Armenian massacres: 'The Armenians were killed on account of orders from Constantinople. This was also the opinion of all my fellow prisoners at Kastamouni.'

Corporal P.W. Long, also a Kut prisoner, later recorded that, upon arrival in Mosul:<sup>39</sup>

We were formed into two ranks to await the coming of the Commandant. As fast as the sick men dropped to the ground, they were kicked to their feet again, so that before the Commandant arrived we were all hanging on to each other to give support to the sick. As we stood thus, a party of ill-clad women crossed the square on their way out from one of the side rooms. These, I learned later, were Armenian exiles who had survived the atrocities of the march from Mardin, Sivas, Ourfa, and other ravaged towns.

Later on, during an overnight stop at the Assyrian town of Sakho (Zakho, Iraq), on the river Kharbour in northern Mesopotamia, Long recorded:<sup>40</sup>

The Chaoush (Sergeant) told me that we were making for the town of Jezerieh-ibn-Oman, where we should probably be put to work of some kind. He was very enthusiastic about the place and painted a word picture of it in very glowing colours. He told me also of the many Armenians that had been killed there, saying that the horse he rode had belonged to one of them, one whom he himself had dispatched, signifying the method of dispatch by drawing a dirty finger across his throat!

Of his passage through northern Syria, Long wrote about passing through 'villages that were empty but (that) showed signs of recent occupation. These we were told, were once the homes of some unfortunate Armenians'. After



two escape attempts and many trials and tribulations across northern Syria and southern Asia Minor, Long was released from captivity following the Armistice.

Harold Armstrong was also a Kut prisoner. Released from captivity in November 1918, he remained in Constantinople with the British occupation forces until 1923, returning to Turkey in 1927 as a delegate on the Commission for the Assessment of War Damage. He published a travelogue of his trip through Syria and Asia Minor in 1930, titled *Turkey and Syria Reborn*.<sup>11</sup> On his tour, he repeatedly came across Armenian and Assyrian 'refugees from Turkey who lived in utter poverty' at places like Zahle, the Armenian monastery at Ghazir, and the village of Kirik Han (near the top of the Bailan Pass).

Beyond the bridge (over the Orentes river, outside Jisr), the road ran across a plain and up into the steep, low hills of the Jebel Wartani, and there we halted. By the roadside a chain-gang of men were digging a trench, guarded by some Arab ruffians with rifles, who urged the chain-gang on with blows from sticks. The guards were the same type of brutes that I had seen driving the Armenians during the deportations and our prisoners from Kut up to Mosul.

Later on, as he was crossing the Tauros Mountains by rail, Armstrong wrote:<sup>12</sup>

I came this way as a prisoner-of-war in 1916. Then the tunnels were not built. We had been marched on foot from Baghdad to Tarsus, and then up the Cydnus River along the Conqueror's Way into the Cilician Gates over the mountains, and the road was then crowded with Armenians being driven down into the Syrian desert, to deportation and massacres.

The British commissioner continued his travels through Asia Minor, assessing 'the claims of Allied subjects for damages suffered in the war'.<sup>13</sup> From Adana, he went to Mersine (Mersina), north through Kappadokia, passing 'dead villages' all along the way. As he recorded in his travelogue, 'There had been many Christians in this area before the deportations, but now the whole land was nearly empty.'<sup>14</sup> 'Climbing up further, I came to the quarter [of Angyra/Ankara] that was burning when I was last there in 1916. It was the old Christian quarter. It had not been rebuilt, but lay a black scar on the steep hillside.'<sup>15</sup> He reported seeing similar scenes across Asia Minor.

## PRISONERS FROM MESOPOTAMIA

Captain Thomas W. White of the Australian Flying Corps was captured at Aziziyeh, north of Kut-el-Amara, when he was forced to land his plane behind enemy lines. This was in early April 1916, shortly before the fall of that outpost. He was marched 100 miles to Baghdad, where he was joined by the POWs from Kut. The march continued on to Mosul and then to Aleppo in Syria. During their stay in Mosul, Enver Pasha himself, the Ottoman minister of war, addressed the prisoners of war. While they were in Turkish hands, they were told, they would be treated as 'Precious and Honoured Guests of the Ottoman Government'.<sup>46</sup>

In his memoirs, *Guests of the Unspeakable*, White wrote:<sup>47</sup>

It is probable that our lives were plotted against. We had incurred the bitter enmity of the Mosul Commandant and had been threatened by him because we had told him what we thought of his inhuman methods, and we found on arrival at Aleppo that we were totally unexpected.

Over the next few months, hundreds more Allied POWs arrived at Akroinos (Afion Karahissar). White wrote that the British officers were later moved to a group of buildings near the city's railway station, while the French and Russians were given empty Armenian houses in the town itself.<sup>48</sup> White recorded that the prisoners' 'exercise yard' was the graveyard of the Armenian church. Many died at Akroinos of various causes and were buried in the Armenian cemetery.

One soldier thus described his experiences: On arrival at Afion Karahissar I went into hospital. There I saw many weakly men knocked about by the Turkish orderlies simply because they were too weak to attend to themselves. I saw this happen to a QMS who died within a few days of the beating. I saw about half a dozen men receive an injection from a Turkish doctor. This was done about 9 p.m. and in every case the man was dead next morning. We nicknamed one of the Turkish doctors 'The Butcher' from his habit of lancing abscesses with a sharpened half of a pair of scissors.

By convincing the chief Turkish doctor that he was ill and was in need of hospitalisation and recuperation, White got himself transferred to the Haidar Pasha Barracks Hospital on the Asian shore of Constantinople, then to the

Gumush Suyu Hospital on the European side of the city and finally to the Armenian Theological School at Psomatia. Here, together with other Australian and English POWs, he set about planning an escape. With the help of some Constantinople Hellenes and former Russian POWs who were freed when Russia sued for peace in March 1918, Captain Alan Bott RFC and White escaped together from their Turkish guards on 24 August.

Captain Yeats-Brown was one of two aviators (he was Australian, his co-pilot British) who arrived at Basra in southern Mesopotamia in July 1915. Their mission was to alternately photograph and bomb Ottoman positions and lines of communication. As they were landing, on 13 November 1915, near Nimrod's Tomb in Mesopotamia where they were to cut a telegraph line, the plane was damaged and unable to take off. The two aviators were marched to Baghdad and then transported to Mosul. Between Samara and Mosul, they encountered a Turkish squadron heading to Kut-el-Amara. Several of their officers spoke French, as did Yeats-Brown.<sup>49</sup>

He made my scalp creep, telling us of atrocities. The Armenians had been massacring Turks in Eastern Anatolia, he said: they had intrigued with Russia: they had revolted at Van: their subjugation was as necessary to modern Turkey as the coercion of Red Indians had been necessary to make America. The Armenians were a threat to the heart of the Empire: the order had gone forth from Constantinople: 'Yak, Var, Oldur' — Burn, Kill, Destroy: they would be wiped out, he said, blowing on his hands.

The prisoners marched by day and rested by night, sleeping 'in mud huts amongst rats, and once on a despoiled Christian altar'. On the road to the Syrian city of Aleppo, the group passed the village of Tel-Armin, 'a village of dead Armenians'. The settlement

was ugly, with its bloated carcasses of bullocks (the other corpses had been buried) and its plangent dogs with phosphorescent eyes, but I had already imagined worse things. I was not horrified by it, but when my best friend fell ill I lost my nerve. ... the Armenian deportations had left a trail of typhus in these parts, and I feared for him.<sup>50</sup>

Yeats-Brown and his fellow POWs eventually reached Akroinos (Afion Karahissar), where they were initially held in the Armenian Church (the Upper camp), before being moved into a group of selected houses in the

town itself. Unlike rank-and-file prisoners of war, captured officers spent most of their internment in camps with very little to do. Few officers were used as slave labourers. Despite the filth, the disease, the hunger and the general depravation they endured, officers in some camps such as those at Kastamone (Kastamouni), Changri (Cankiri) and Kadoi (Gedis), arranged football matches, organised musical ensembles and lectures, and even put on theatrical performances.

Even during a period of 'strafing', when dozens of prisoners would be locked into a building designed for half that number for days on end, they would still find the strength to sing, to taunt their guards, and to attempt escape. As Francis Yeats-Brown wrote: 'As we were being treated like Armenians, they (the Turkish guards) could not understand why we did not behave like Armenians.'<sup>51</sup> After much manoeuvring, he managed to get himself transferred to a hospital in Constantinople, then to 'the dismantled Armenian Patriarchate' in the suburb of Psomatia. Russian prisoners were held in a row of houses across the road.<sup>52</sup>

After one failed escape attempt, Francis Yeats-Brown succeeded on 15 September 1918. He was being hidden by Hellenic families and attempting to arrange passage on a ship out of Constantinople (alternately disguised as a Hungarian mechanic and as a Frenchwoman — 'Miss Josephine'), when the Ottoman Empire surrendered. 'The captivities of the Jews and migrations of the Middle Ages were small affairs compared to the terrible uprooting of the peoples of the Near East', the Australian aviator wrote at the end of his memoirs.<sup>53</sup>

#### AN OFFICER OF THE GERMAN ARMY

The most damning evidence for a state-orchestrated campaign of deportation and massacre against the Empire's Christian populations comes from officials of the Ottoman Government itself. Rafael de Nogales was born in Caracas, Venezuela, educated in Germany, and lived for a time in Egypt, where he learned Arabic and Turkish. His language skills (he was fluent in English, German, Arabic and Turkish, in addition to his native Spanish) earned him a place on General von der Goltz's staff in Turkey.

During his service in the Sultan's armed forces, he was present at the siege of Van (a major city in western Armenia), an uneven struggle that pitted the city's Armenian and Assyrian inhabitants against Ottoman troops backed by Kurdish and other Muslim irregulars which lasted for 25 days.<sup>54</sup>

April 21 (1915). ... In spite of the lively firing that swept the streets, I succeeded at last, without serious accident, in approaching the Beledie reis of the town, who was directing the orgy (of murder); whereupon I ordered him to stop the massacre. He astounded me by replying that he was doing nothing more than carry out an unequivocal order emanating from the Governor-General of the province ... to exterminate all Armenian males of twelve years of age and over.

His memoir contains numerous such references to events in the Armenian and Assyrian genocides, events which he witnessed personally. Later, while in Mosul in Kurdistan in May 1916, he wrote:<sup>55</sup>

Among the several officers who were so courteous as to accompany me to the outskirts of Mosul was an Aide to the Military Commander at that fort, who, as he said good-bye, whispered in my ear that 'a certain group of English officers' (those I had seen in Mosul!) had also set out for Aleppo that morning, but that the probabilities were that they would 'never reach their destination'. When I asked why not, he answered with a wink, 'Because there's a squadron of Circassian volunteers posted on the road with directions to see that they don't arrive!'

de Nogales raced ahead and about an hour later caught up with the group of about 300 Indian soldiers and British non-commissioned officers. They had been captured at Kut-el-Amara in southern Mesopotamia and had been marching ever since. Hunger, disease and exhaustion ravaged them and during the eighteen-day march across the desert from Mosul to Aleppo, 80 per cent of them had perished. That night, de Nogales noticed that a Circassian officer had joined the group; no one knew where he was from, nor why he was there:

So after supper I called him to one side and said significantly: 'They know all about this in the German consulate. The Consul has your names, so that in case the English officers are assassinated on the road, he will denounce you all and have you severely punished; because if any such crime were committed, the British government would certainly hold him also responsible.' At breakfast-time, Tasim informed me with a grin that the Circassian had disappeared.

Two of the men whose lives de Nogales saved that night were Thomas White and Francis Yeats-Brown.<sup>56</sup>



## CONCLUSION

This is only a small selection from the large volume of original material, in archives around the world, on the experiences of Allied prisoners of war in the Ottoman Empire. To scholars of the Asia Minor Holocaust, they provide invaluable eyewitness accounts of events already well known to members of the victim communities but largely unknown to a wider society.

We have here eyewitness accounts from individuals who did not belong to the principal victim communities, written during or immediately after World War I and (as far as we can tell) without having consulted Hellenic, Armenian or Assyrian sources on the Asia Minor Holocaust. They corroborate the accounts of victims who were the original Christian populations of Asia Minor.

Furthermore, we have the testimony of Rafael de Nogales, a Roman Catholic Venezuelan by birth and a German officer in the Ottoman Army. His account is perhaps the most damning of all.

Today, a small group of Turkish and American authors, well-funded by the Turkish state, dismiss Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian<sup>57</sup> accounts of the genocides suffered by their peoples as 'Armenian Allegations'<sup>58</sup> and 'Pontus Propaganda'.<sup>59</sup> Such accounts by non-combatants, by 'outsiders', such as those referred to in this essay, cannot be dismissed so casually.

## ENDNOTES

1. The Salonika Congress: The Young Turks and Their Programme, *The Times*, 3 October 1911, 3. At a second congress in 1911, again held in Thessalonike, chaired by Talaat Pasha, Dr Behaeddin Sakir stated: 'The nations that remain from the old times in our empire are akin to foreign and harmful weeds that must be uprooted.'
2. K.A. Vakalopoulos (1999), *Diagmoi kai Genoktonies tou Thrakikou Ellenismou* (Deportations and Genocides of Thracian Hellenism), Herodotos, Thessalonike, 229–323.
3. G. Kerr (1997), *Lost ANZACS: The Story of Two Brothers*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 74.
4. M. Chater (1925), 'History's Greatest Trek', *National Geographic*, 533–83.
5. C.L. Woolley (1921), *From Kastamuni to Kedos: being a record of experiences of prisoners of war in Turkey, 1916–1918*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, iv.
6. F. & E. Brenchley (2001), *Stoker's Submarine*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 158.
7. B. Gammage (1975), *The Story of Gallipoli*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 283.
8. 2,680 British and 10,486 Indian officers and men. E.W. Sandes (1919), *In Kut and Captivity*, Murray, London, 258–61.
9. M. Moynihan (1978), *Black Bread and Barbed Wire: Prisoners in the First World War*, L. Cooper, London, 159.
10. J. Robertson (1990), *The Tragedy and Glory of Gallipoli: ANZAC and Empire*, Hamly, Australia, 222.
11. R.R. James (1965), *Gallipoli*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 176–77.
12. It also decided the fate of the Allied campaign to capture the strategic waterway. The heavy casualties sustained by the Allies during the initial landings on the Peninsula had the High Command on the brink of abandoning the entire enterprise. The signal from Commander Stoker convinced them to push on.
13. The final resting place of the A.E.2 would remain unknown until an Australian expedition rediscovered the wreck in early July 1997. F. & E. Brenchley, 'Undersea Hero's Sighting Awakens Ghosts of Gallipoli', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1997, 1 & 11.
14. J.H. Wheat, *Diary*, Australian War Memorial Archives, Australian War Memorial Record Centre, Canberra, File No. 3DRL/2965.
15. Adam-Smith, Patsy (1997), *Prisoners-of-War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, 25–26.
16. The Taurus (Toros) Mountains section of the Constantinople–Baghdad Railway was the World War I counterpart of the infamous Burma Railway of World War II. Some 90,000 Asian forced labourers and 15,000 Allied prisoners of war died during the construction of the 415 kilometre rail link between Burma and Thailand, killed by disease, malnutrition and the brutality of the guards. We do not know how many died during construction of this final section of the Constantinople–Baghdad Railway, but it certainly ran into the thousands. N. Labi, 'Traveller's Advisory: Bangkok', *Time*, 23 September 1916, 6; and I. McKinnon, 'Kwai and Mighty', *Sun-Herald*, 5 December 1999, 106–07.

17. Adam-Smith, 20–21.
18. Wheat, 55.
19. Ibid., 60.
20. Adam-Smith, 24.
21. Ibid., 25.
22. Ibid., 25–26.
23. Kerr, 75.
24. Another Australian POW, R.T.A. MacDonald, reported that Calcutt had died of septicaemia at Bozanti on 18 December 1916, aged 20 years. The Australian Red Cross informed Calcutt's family that he had indeed died as a prisoner of war. Calcutt today lies in grave XXI. U. 2. in the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, Iraq.
25. Kerr, 96–99.
26. Ibid., 104.
27. Ibid., 116.
28. Ibid., 142.
29. D.B. Creedon, *Diary*, 1 DRL 223, Australian War Memorial File 12/1/86, Australian War Memorial Record Centre, Canberra.
30. J. Brown (1940), *Turkish Days and Ways*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 95.
31. Ibid., 165.
32. Ibid., 176. Abductions and forced marriage of young Christian Assyrian girls to Muslim men continues to be recorded to this day in south-east Turkey and northern Iraq.
33. Ibid., 195–96.
34. Ibid., 199.
35. Bimbashi was not a name but a military rank.
36. J.F. MacClean, Colonial Office File CO693/8.
37. T.W. White (1928), *Guests of the Unspeakable*, Little Hills Press, 166–67.
38. E.H. Keeling (1924), *Adventures in Turkey and Russia*, John Murray, London, 40.
39. P.W. Long (1938), *Other Ranks Of Kut*, Williams and Norgate Ltd, London, 79.
40. Ibid., 97.
41. H. Armstrong (1930), *Turkey and Syria Reborn*, John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd, London, 27–113.
42. Ibid., 149.
43. Ibid., 135.
44. Ibid., 158.
45. Ibid., 201.
46. White, 175.
47. Ibid., 172.
48. Ibid.
49. F. Yeats-Brown (1932), *Golden Horn*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 127.
50. Ibid., 145.
51. Ibid., 160.
52. Ibid., 204–05.
53. Ibid., 280–81.
54. R. de Nogales (1926), *Four Years Beneath The Crescent*, Scribner, London, 60.

55. *Ibid.*, 261–63.

56. *Ibid.*

57. The Turkish authorities, whether Ottoman or Republican, have never accepted the existence of an Assyrian identity. During the time of the Ottoman Empire, Assyrians were recorded as being part of the Armenian *millet*. To this day the Assyrians are called 'Turco-semites', 'Semitic Turks' or 'Christian Arabs' because their language belongs to the Semitic group.

58. 'Armenian Allegations: Myth and Reality' (1986), A Handbook of Facts and Documents, Assembly of Turkish American Associations, Washington, D.C.

59. 'Setting the Record Straight On Pontus Propaganda Against Turkey' (April 1999), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara.

## UNDERSTANDING GENOCIDAL KILLING IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Eric Markusen and Damir Mirkovic<sup>1</sup>

This is not a war. This is a horror that has no name.  
It is a black hole in the spectrum of all reasoned thought.  
— Zlatko Dizdarevic (1993)<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

From 1991 through most of 1995, people around the world were horrified, baffled and disgusted by the images of war and atrocities projected from the area which had been Yugoslavia. Television news programs, daily newspapers and magazines showed cities reduced to rubble, innocent civilians lying on side-walks in pools of blood, emaciated prisoners in concentration camps, and the gaunt faces of women who had been subjected to repeated rapes. During the conflict, hundreds of thousands of people were killed and maimed, and millions displaced from their homes.<sup>3</sup> In only a few short years, Yugoslavia went from a peaceful, multi-ethnic nation, described by a popular travel guide as 'one of the sunniest and by far the most relaxed of all the Eastern European lands',<sup>4</sup> into a dismembered region racked by a civil war that rapidly degenerated into reciprocal atrocities and genocidal killing.

Why did such barbarity occur there? What can explain the outbreak of genocide? How is it possible that neighbours who had lived in peace for decades could become capable of burning each other's homes, raping each other's wives and daughters, and slaughtering each other?

We suggest an approach to answering these questions by applying findings from the emerging field of genocide studies to the Yugoslav case. We are writing primarily for two audiences: experts on international law who may not be familiar with recent work in genocide studies, and genocide scholars concerned with the Yugoslav case. We acknowledge the incomplete and preliminary nature of our analysis, but hope that it will stimulate further efforts to understand the genocidal character of the conflict.