

Strange Bedfellows at Ziza

Australian Curriculum, Year 9 – ACDSEH095

It sounds an odd question but do you know when the Turks were defending the ANZACS rather than fighting them in World War 1?

On September 28, 1918, 6,000 despondent Turks retreating from Arabia arrived at the village of Ziza, south of Amman, now the capital of Jordan. They were being harassed by a Bedouin Arab tribe called the Beni Sakr, which intimidated and circled them like vultures waiting to collect the booty, as they were wont to do. A bizarre situation occurred as the official World War 1 historian of Middle Eastern Campaign, H.S. Gullett records,

“Soon after daylight, a resourceful young pilot dropped a message into the Turkish camp, telling the commander that Amman with all the water to the north was held by Chaytor, that resistance was useless and that if he did not surrender his force, he would be heavily bombed from the air that evening.”¹



Not receiving a reply, two squadrons of the 5th Light Horse Regiment from Queensland were sent to investigate. They discovered that while he was willing to surrender to a British force strong enough to defend his disarmed men against the Arabs, he could not risk doing so to a handful of Light Horsemen.² Lieutenant Colonel Cameron, their cluey leader, took two Arab chiefs hostage in the centre of the Australian group, put the Turks around them and ordered the Turks to hold their arms and protect themselves (thus protecting the Australians who were outnumbered eight to one), and told the Arabs that if they attacked, their chiefs would immediately be shot! Thus the Turks and Australians, who had fought one another for 4 years, spent the night happily together until reinforcements arrived in the morning and they were escorted safely away from the disapproving Arabs into the custody of the Allied forces.

Endnotes:

1. Gullett, H., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol VII, Sinai and Palestine*. Angus and Robertson, 1923, 724
2. Ibid, 725

Picture:

1. Captured Turks at Ziza, Australian War Memorial
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P01350.015>