

## The Cipher # 44



The Cipher # 44 which figures so prominently on Field Post material used by the Ottoman Army in the Holy Land during First World War; was used by several units, including the 4th Army, the 2nd Army Corps as well as the 7th Infantry Division. The 4th Army originally deployed in Baghdad during peace time; their headquarters in that city were to be decommissioned on 26.08.14 soon after a State of War was declared on 02.08.14 since the High Command had immediately started to re-organize the Army structure in order to answer possible avenues of conflict from different quarters. It must be noted at this instance that no Cipher had been issued to Baghdad during this initial period and they had kept using the central cartouche type circular canceler in full Turkish issued to all Army Commands during peace times. During the same re-organization, the 2nd Army at peace time positions in Edirne was re-designated as a Regional General Command in charge of Syria and Beirut under the command of Cemal Pasha, already the Minister of the Navy, with orders to depart immediately for Damascus on 11.08.14. Even though pertinent material still eludes us; it is believed that the Cipher # 44 was initially delivered to his headquarters at the Ministry of War right before they left for that City by train. The Regional General Command in question was to retrace their steps back to Halab soon after they had arrived in Damascus since the main bulk of the Army was already deployed in and around Halab whilst the General Command was re-designated as the 4th Army on 06.09.14. Understandably they continued to use the same Cipher since all these name changes were based on political manoeuvres on the part of Enver Pasha and had no bearing on military exigencies nor on any real change in the command structure of the force in question. The first major operation that the Army undertook was the First Offensive to reach Suez Canal during the early days of 1915. Since Cemal Pasha and his head of Staff were certain of victory; a set of negative seals were prepared for locations along the Sinai where the Army was supposed to establish relay bases for an eventual operation to invest Egypt. Since the German High Command had already suggested that the war against the Allies and particularly against the British was to be over by 1918; all these seals carry a 1334 date. To please the Commander of the Army; a hilltop location overlooking the Canal where Cemal Pasha was to conduct the final push (present day Khatib al Khanou approximately 50 km east of as Suweis City) was named "Cemal Paşa Tepe'si" (Cemal Pasha Hill). But as the topography of the terrain and the amount of water in the wells along the route was not investigated properly; the Ottoman Army suffered extreme difficulties once at the theater of war and already engaged with the British. The absence of water weighing heavily on the performance of pack animals as well as on the troops; some of the provisions had to be left along the route to carry much needed water which in turn caused severe food shortages along the front. Even though heavily re-enforced with Austrian and German technical units; the 4th Army was thus left in a position to return back to their bases in Be'er Sheva and Horvot Hoga before the real heat of summer hit the desert. Their

headquarters were to remain at the Empress Maria Augusta Hospice on the Mount Of Olives in Jerusalem for about four months before Cemal Pasha decided to settle in a chalet near Aley in Lebanon for the hot months of summer when both armies refrained from fighting by tacit if unspoken agreement. According to the War Annals of the Turkish Army, a special train was always kept ready for his use as well as for the use of the Postal Department at nearby Sofar Stn. Once the fighting "season" was opened by September, the Army Command structure as well as postal functionaries came to Jerusalem again and after a relay of four months in Damascus to pacify an Arab insurrection in the province; the Army was to take the same positions in Lebanon until May 1917 when the British were already in operations south of the Holy City. Towards the end of September the same year when the German Military Mission had already persuaded Enver Pasha to create an overall command structure to co-ordinate the war effort within the Prefecture of Jerusalem; Cemal Pasha covertly threatened the Ottoman High Command with his immediate resignation. Fearful of his strong position within the ruling "Union and Progress Party"; Enver Pasha created a vastly complimentary and totally superfluous albeit autonomous General Command of Syria and Western Arabia to replace the 4th Army in order to appease his sentiments. This supposedly new entity which in all reality was nothing but the former 4th Army under a different name; lasted only for about three months and soon after the fall of Jerusalem on 09.12.17; the shining star of Cemal Pasha finally waned since most of his fighting units were now on loan to the 7th and the 8th Armies; both under the full control of the German "Falkengruppe". With Cemal Pasha recalled back from his commission by early 1918; the much reduced 4th Army was now pushed to conduct backwater operations along the Hijaz Railway in what is today the Kingdom of Jordan until news of a major British offensive against the defensive line south of Nablous and the total collapse of the Front reached them when they were at Dera' a Stn. As ordered by the "Falkengruppe" which were now their immediate commanders; they immediately started to withdraw towards the north to receive their orders to decommission when they reached Hamah Stn in Syria on 13.10.18. Thus ended the story of one of the most important and most powerful Ottoman military formations that served in the Near East during First World War. Always left short of supplies and troops by Enver Pasha who did not want this strong rival of his within the Party structure to be too successful in the eyes of the Palace as well as of the public; the 4th Army might have been much more successful if left to its own designs. One must remember that five years later when Mustafa Kemal Pasha was re-organizing the new Turkish Army for peace time duties; the much applauded Western General Command already victorious over the Greek Army in Western Anatolia, was to be designated as the 4th Army of the Young Republic.

As can be expected; the use of Cipher # 44 was not as widespread as # 46 since it was mainly used for Army matters and did not act as a processing center for absconded units as in the case of the latter. One must also note that only the dated canceler of the Cipher # 44 was used whilst the negative seal undoubtedly prepared per mandate, was never reported nor seen to date.

To sum up these most tortuous travels of Cipher # 44, we can resume the following; When the "Syria and Western Arabia General Command" fell into disfavour by early 1918 and was re-designated as the 4th Army; our cipher changed hands and was transferred to the 7th Infantry Division in defensive positions at and about Khablah approximately twenty five km north east of Yafo whilst the Army deployed along the Hijaz Railway in Trans Jordan was given Cipher # 79 instead. The Overall Command of "Falkengruppe" trying desperately to dupe the British about the almost non-existent troop numbers of the Ottoman Army; decided once again to jumble Cipher Numbers by late August when the much depleted 2nd Army Corps from the Russian Front came to Damascus and was re-organized as much as possible to

serve along the Hijaz Railway. At this instance, the 2nd Army Corps was given the Cipher # 44 whilst their own # 77 was taken over by the "Falkengruppe" who transferred their original # 92 to the 4th Army. The 7th Infantry Division on the other hand, was to receive the # 79 from the latter. The life span of our Cipher # 44 was to end when the 2nd Army Corps headquarters had to surrender to the British at Lubban Stn in present day Jordan.

One last note should be taken into consideration at this instance where the Cipher now in the hands of the British; was used posthumously on the latest batch of letters and other postal material captured at Nablous and Nazerat, to create "interesting souvenirs" by philatelically minded members of the British Army.

In order to identify where the cipher might have been used; I have included a list of locations where the units were deployed during the period in question as ascertained from "The Turkish War During First World War The IV Volume Parts 1 & 2 The Sinai-Palestine Front" published by the Turkish General Staff in 1979.

Best Regards, Osman Levend

die Falkengruppe / Pasha I

(to co-ordinate the 6. & the 7. Armies as of 15.07.17)

(to co-ordinate the 7. & the 8. Armies as of 02.10.17)

(to co-ordinate the 4., the 7. & the 8. Armies as of 01.03.18)

15.07.17 Istanbul (War Ministry) 02.10.17 Jerusalem (Grand New Hotel) 17.11.17 Nablous

09.12.17 Nazerat 20.09.18 Damascus 29.09.18 Ba`albek 03.10.18 Homs Stn 06.10.18 Halab

24.10.18 Adana 04.11.18 || (decommissioned)

4. Army'

02.08.14 Baghdad 26.08.14 || (became the Iraq Regional General Command)

2. Army

02.08.14 Edirne 11.08.14 || (became the "Syria & Beirut Regional General Command")

Syria & Beirut Regional General Command (previously the 2. Army)

11.08.14 Edirne \_\_.08.14 Damascus 06.09.14 || (became the 4. Army")

4. Army" (the former Syria & Beirut Regional General Command)

06.09.14 Damascus 14.12.14 Jerusalem (Grand New Hotel) 17.01.15 Qezi`ot 19.01.15 al Ibn

26.01.15 Bi`r Gifgafah 28.01.15 Khatmiah 31.01.15 Khatib al Khanou 05.02.15 Bi`r Gifgafah

07.02.15 al Ibn 09.02.15 Qezi`ot 11.02.15 Horvot Hoga 15.02.15 Jerusalem \_\_.06.15 Sofar

Stn \_\_.09.15 Jerusalem (Empress Maria Augusta Hospice) 23.09.16 Damascus 02.02.17 Sofar

Stn 01.05.17 Jerusalem (Empress Maria Augusta Hospice) 26.09.17 ||

(became the Syria & Western Arabia General Command)

Syria & Western Arabia General Command (previously the 4." Army)

26.09.17 Jerusalem (Empress Maria Augusta Hospice) \_\_.12.17 Damascus 04.02.18 Halab

\_\_.02.18 Salt 01.03.18 || (became the 4. Army")

4. Army"" (the former Syria & Western Arabia General Command)

01.03.18 Salt 26.03.18 Marqah 02.05.18 Suwailih 21.09.18 Salt 23.09.18 Marqah 25.09.18

Dera`a Stn 28.09.18 Homs Stn 11.10.18 Hamah Stn 13.10.18 || (decommissioned)

2. Army Corps

02.08.14 Edirne 13.05.16 Istanbul (Selimiye Kışlası) 30.06.16 Ceylan Pınar 10.07.16  
Diyarbakır 23.07.16 Palu 03.08.16 Uğur Ova 06.08.16 Ekin Yolu 10.08.16 Sancak 25.08.16  
Doğan Kaya 01.09.16 Sarı Dibek 05.11.16 Palu \_\_.01.17 Lice 29.09.17 Silvan \_\_.02.18  
Diyarbakır \_\_.02.18 Ceylan Pınar Stn \_\_.02.18 Halab \_\_.03.18 Damascus 19.09.18 Lubban  
Stn 25.09.18 || (surrendered)

#### 7. Infantry Division

02.08.14 Tekirdağ 08.04.15 Ak Baş 23.04.15 Gelibolu 28.04.15 Çiftlik 04.05.15 Behramlı  
19.06.15 Şar Köy 23.06.15 Eski Hisar 15.05.16 Maraş 28.05.16 Malatya 08.06.16 Elazığ  
19.06.16 Bingöl 22.06.16 Çavuşlar 03.08.16 Er Alanı 07.08.16 Ara Konak 09.08.16 Yukarı  
Ara Konak 21.08.16 Er Alanı 29.08.16 Mutluca 03.09.16 Seren 27.09.16 Yaygın \_\_.12.16  
Genç 04.01.17 Silvan 27.01.17 Diyarbakır 12.02.17 Siverek 15.02.17 Dip Hisar 01.04.17  
Akça Kale Stn 03.04.17 al Muslimiyah Stn 07.04.17 Damascus 29.04.17 Jerusalem 20.05.17  
Horvot Gemama 25.05.17 Hazerim 19.06.17 Gazzah 01.10.17 Erez 26.10.17 Gazzah 05.11.17  
Yad Mordekhay 09.11.17 Ashdod 13.11.17 Ramla 20.11.17 Mishmeret 25.11.17 Katra Bridge  
03.12.17 Ramat Aviv 22.12.17 Mishmeret 18.01.18 Khablah 21.09.18 Toubas 24.09.18  
Faroun 25.09.18 || (dispersed)