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Pasha, Esat

By [Mesut Uyar](#)

Bülkat, *Mehmet Esat* (Ferik Esat Paşa, Mehmet Esat Pasha)
Ottoman General
Born 18 October 1862 in Janina (Yanya), Ottoman Empire
Died 02 November 1952 in Istanbul, Turkey

Esat Pasha played a key role during the Gallipoli campaign and achieved renown as a trainer, military intellectual and the defender of Janina.

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1. Early Life

Mehmet Esat Bülkat (1862-1952) was born in Janina (Yanya) on 18 October 1862. He graduated at the top of his class from the Imperial Military Academy in Istanbul in 1887 and continued his military education at the General Staff College, graduating in 1890. He was then selected for on-the-job training in [Germany](#) and spent four years in different Alsatian and Prussian units and headquarters in Strasbourg and Berlin.

Esat returned to the [Ottoman Empire](#) in 1894 and was initially assigned to the General Staff intelligence division. However, he did not like working at the General Staff and preferred a transfer to a less prestigious position, accepting a professorship at the Imperial Military Academy in 1895. He

soon became the academic dean and remained in this position, except for a brief interval, until 1906. He became known as the “teacher of the teachers” and had as his students many who would become high and medium ranking officers during the First World War.

Esat served as the chief of staff of the 1st [Infantry](#) Division during the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897. He was promoted to major general in 1901 and lieutenant general in 1906. One year later, he was assigned as the acting commander of the Third Field Army in Salonika. There was a widespread political conspiracy by young officers against the [Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of the Turks \(1842-1918\)](#). Under the leadership of [Committee of Union and Progress](#) they were planning to stage a coup or a rebellion. Esat Pasha remained aloof from the government effort to combat and prosecute partisan officers, most of whom were his previous students. He was dismissed from duty and placed under surveillance one year later. Although the conspirators successfully carried out their much anticipated rebellion and forced the Sultan to accept their demands Esat Pasha did not benefit from this. After the successful Young Turk Revolution, Esat was treated as a functionary of the old regime and demoted to the rank of brigadier general. After two years of idiosyncratic staff jobs, he was assigned to be the commanding general of the 5th Division in Gallipoli in December 1910 and then the commanding general of the II Army Corps in Tekirdağ (Rodosto) three months later. He barely spent a year in this position before being assigned to his hometown, Janina, as the commanding general of the 23rd Division. Because of these multiple assignments, Esat was very knowledgeable about Gallipoli and its surrounding areas.

2. Balkan Wars

After the mobilization decree of 1912, Esat Pasha was assigned to be the commanding general of the newly activated independent Janina Army Corps. He was tasked with defending Janina province at all costs. Esat made strategic use of his limited forces and resources and devised an active defense plan that played off of Janina’s geography. He held back the Greek Epirus Army for three months with constant counter attacks before retreating toward Janina’s fortifications. Though relief forces were not forthcoming and unrest within the local population was growing, he withstood Greek attacks for three more months behind the fortifications of Janina. He surrendered on 6 March 1913 and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Greeks.

3. First World War

Esat Pasha returned from captivity in December 1913. Not only did he receive credit for his defense of Janina but also avoided the large-scale army purge. He was then assigned to be the commanding general of the III Army Corps. He established an extensive training program and dealt with most of the problems born out of the [Balkan Wars](#). The corps’ main duty was to reinforce the Gallipoli Peninsula and Asian coastline against a possible enemy landing. Previously the Fortified Zone Command which was now in charge of the defence of the Strait had been the sole guardian of the

Peninsula. Esat Pasha dealt with them diplomatically and achieved remarkable harmony but this lasted only a few months.

[Otto Liman von Sanders \(1855-1929\)](#), the Fifth Army Commander was tasked with carrying out the land defense of the Dardanelles region on 26 March 1915. In direct opposition to other Ottoman officers Esat worked well with Liman von Sanders and in fact became a buffer between him and his subordinates. Unfortunately, Esat's command failed miserably during the initial Allied landings on 25 April. As the commander in charge of the northern sector of the Gallipoli Peninsula he played an important role in carrying out the defence throughout the campaign. Nevertheless, [Ismail Enver Pasha \(1881-1922\)](#) did not assign him to active combat command positions after the termination of the Gallipoli campaign. Instead, he was assigned to be the commanding general of the First Army in Istanbul on 5 November 1915 and performed largely protocol duties such as being the general in charge of official visits and training cohorts of recruits for other field armies. In February he became the commanding general of the Fifth Army, essentially a territorial defense force. On 22 June 1918 he was assigned to be the Third Army commander on the Caucasus front and briefly took part in operations before the end of war.

During the armistice period (1918-1922) Esat was assigned to be the inspector-general of the Second Army and military schools. However, the position existed only on paper and he retired from the military on 22 November 1919. He briefly served as marine minister under [Salih Hulusi Pasha \(1864-1939\)](#), whose cabinet was forced to resign after the Allied occupation of Istanbul on 2 April 1920.

4. Last Years

Esat did not reenter politics after his retirement. Instead, he worked on an unpublished memoir which provides, in addition to detailed personal insights and thoughts, a number of documents that provide a rare insider look inside an Ottoman army corps. He died on 2 November 1952.

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