

CEZZAR AHMED PASHA

The Fortress That Stopped Napoleon



Joylino+

CEZZAR AHMED PASHA

The Fortress That Stopped Napoleon

A messenger made his way through Acre's narrow streets, holding a letter tightly. The sea breeze tugged at his clothes, and seagulls flew over the fortress. The letter came from a commander whose name was known in many countries: Napoleon Bonaparte.

Cezzar Ahmed Pasha took the letter. Napoleon wrote that he was coming to Acre. He reminded the Pasha of his past victories and urged him to reach an agreement. There was a clear threat between the lines, too. But the commander of the city that received this letter was not a man who would easily be frightened into retreat. Ahmed Pasha looked up from the paper. Before him stood a fortress to protect, and the people who lived inside it.



Ahmed Pasha's life had begun in Bosnia. As a young man, he had travelled to different places and taken on duties in Egypt. He had gained experience through difficult struggles and eventually become one of the Ottoman Empire's powerful governors. He had made Acre his base and lived there for years.

Now he was old. His beard was streaked with grey, but he knew very well how to defend a fortress. People knew him as a stern ruler who demanded obedience. He expected every task he gave to be done and tried to make sure nothing was missed in the preparations. Now he faced a young, successful general who was very sure of himself. Ahmed Pasha's years of experience would be put to the test on Acre's walls.



The letter brought to Cezzar Ahmed Pasha bore Napoleon's signature:

To Cezzar Pasha,

Since entering Egypt, I have told you several times that I do not wish to fight you. Yet you have not answered my offers, and you have sent soldiers against me.

Gaza, Ramla and Jaffa are now mine. In a few days, I shall march on Acre.

Why should I take a few years from the life of an old man I do not know? What do a few more scraps of land matter beside the countries I have conquered?

Be my friend again. I can do you as much good as harm. Send your reply with a man authorised to speak for you. If he comes under a white flag, he will be received safely.

I await your reply before setting out for Acre.

Bonaparte — Jaffa, 9 March 1799

The Pasha finished reading and laid the letter on the table. Napoleon offered friendship while announcing that he would come with his army. Ahmed Pasha's decision had not changed: he would defend Acre.



Ahmed Pasha told his commanders his decision plainly: “This is our answer to Napoleon: we will not surrender Acre. It is our duty to defend this fortress. Just because he has taken other cities does not mean we will open our gates. If he comes with his army, he will find us at our posts.”

Then he asked about the preparations on the walls. Which sections needed repairs? Where would the cannons be placed? Where would the soldiers stand guard? The commanders answered one by one. Soon, hammers rang out in the fortress. Supplies were carried in, and guard posts were checked. The Pasha’s decision showed in everyone’s work: Acre was preparing to defend itself.



In March, the French army arrived outside Acre. Tents went up, and cannons were put in position. Napoleon hoped to take the city quickly. But the first attacks showed that its defences would not be easy to break through.

The roar of cannons spread across the sea. Pieces of stone broke away, and dust rose into the air. The defenders held their positions. When the French soldiers tried to reach the walls, the ditch ahead of them and fire from the fortress stopped their advance. They had to retreat. As the dust over Acre settled, its gates were still closed. Ahmed Pasha's soldiers would go on defending the city in the days to come.



The heavy cannons coming by sea were an important part of Napoleon's plan. He hoped to use them to knock down Acre's walls. But some of the ships carrying them were captured at sea. The cannons never reached the army surrounding the city.

What was more, some of the captured cannons were now used to defend Acre. The weapons Napoleon had been waiting for to destroy the walls were now facing his own soldiers! Supplies and help were also reaching the fortress by sea. Ahmed Pasha and the defenders used this support to keep resisting. Napoleon's task had become much harder than he had expected.



A day passed. Then a week, then more weeks... Napoleon attacked again, and Acre held firm again. Gaps in the walls were repaired, and defensive positions were strengthened. By day, cannon fire rang through the city. Between attacks, there was the sound of hammers at work.

A stonemason put down his tool and looked at a damaged wall. The soldier beside him was looking at the same place. "It's fallen down again," said the soldier. The mason picked up a stone. "Then we'll build it again." Ahmed Pasha's defence continued with that same determination. Recovering after every attack, handing a task to a friend when tired, getting ready for the next day... Acre's resistance grew stronger, day by day.



In May, the French managed to make a breach in part of the walls. A breach was a large opening in the stonework. Napoleon's soldiers thought they could push through it and take the city. Here, at last, was the chance they had been waiting for over many weeks.

But once they passed through the opening, they met a new obstacle: the defenders had built a second wall behind the ruined section. Damage to the first wall did not mean Acre would surrender! Ahmed Pasha's forces and the officers organising the defence had prepared for this possibility. The attack was stopped here, too. Just when Napoleon's army thought victory was close, it was driven back once more.



Ottoman troops also reached Acre by sea to help. The defenders grew stronger. Meanwhile, Napoleon was losing men in the long siege, and illness was spreading through his army. Each new attack left his soldiers a little more tired.

Still, he kept trying to take Acre. But he could not break the fortress's resistance. Led by Cezzar Ahmed Pasha, the defenders used the help that arrived and the lines of defence they had prepared to hold the city. At last, Napoleon saw that continuing the siege would not bring the result he wanted. Towards the end of May, the retreat began. The army that had hoped to capture Acre and march on was turning back without taking the fortress.



Acre had not fallen. Napoleon's plan to advance through the city had been stopped. Holding back such a successful commander was a great victory for the defenders. Cezzar Ahmed Pasha's name became even more famous alongside that of Acre.

Over time, two sayings describing Napoleon's disappointment at this failure were attributed to him: **“Fate made me an old man's plaything.”** And **“If I had not been stopped at Acre, I would have conquered the whole East.”**

No one could know whether Napoleon really could have conquered the whole East. But one fact was clear: he had wanted to take Acre, and he had failed. The defence led by old Ahmed Pasha had blocked the great general's path.



When the siege ended, there was much to do in Acre. The fighting had damaged the city, and people on both sides had lost their lives. The walls needed repairs, the wounded needed care, and daily life had to begin again. News of the victory reached Istanbul, and rewards were sent to those who had served well in the defence.

One morning, the fortress gates opened for people bringing food into the city. Cart wheels rolled over the stones, and everyday sounds filled the streets once more. The gate Ahmed Pasha had defended was no longer waiting for an army's attack.

Napoleon had arrived full of arrogance and pride. His defeat by Cezzar Ahmed Pasha was a slap in the face he would never forget. He had failed to take Acre. The city still stood tall.

