



**Conference on Military Mapping  
British Cartographic Society's and Defence Surveyors' Association  
Royal Naval College at Greenwich  
Saturday 5th June 2004**

**Report by Mike Taylor**

The overall intention of this Conference was to put the mapping effort relating to D-Day into some perspective. This entailed starting from the mapping effort related to Gallipoli right up to the high-tech mapping and imaging effort for Iraq. The Gallipoli paper was interesting in identifying a whole raft of studies of the peninsula going way back to 1840. These included two reports on the Turkish defences from 1908 and 1909, a Naval Intelligence Division plan for forcing the Dardanelles of 1906 and an Anglo-Greek plan to attack the area of 1914. From the point of view of cartographers, the two main problems seem to have been first that corporate memory was insufficient to ensure this mass of material was located and disseminated and second a bad choice regarding the depiction of contours on the maps produced that had the effect of flattening out and making the terrain appear less rugged than was the case. Overall, they seemed unimpressed by Hamilton's pleas of ignorance.

There was an interesting presentation on physical modelling of terrain, and it appears that over 1,000 three-dimensional models were made for WWI, mostly at 1:20,000 scale. About 100 of these have survived in a collection now being conserved by one of the MoD mapping and intelligence branches and to be held at Sandhurst. John Peaty showed some of them at last year's summer conference. The range of models for WWII was far greater and ranged from 1:500 for assault landings to 1:100,000 for strategic planning. Some were so detailed that oblique photos of the models were used rather than of the terrain itself.

Rather more arcane, but equally fascinating, was a look at the development of the map symbols eventually used universally for map overlays. RAF Benson was the station where a lot of the photo-recce material was scrutinised and they developed a system of marking-up the photos that were transferred to associated maps, eventually known as Benson maps (1:25,000) and Baby Bensons (1:12,500). These symbols were integrated with other systems where compatible to produce a universal system applied to the Martian mapping effort for D-Day. This title seems to have less to do with the red planet than the fact that the word was the next code name picked out of the WO hat.

There was an interesting essay on the development of "chartmaps", essentially the marriage of traditional naval charts and military maps. The proposer of this paper said that he took the real beginnings of this to be about 1943, although other, much earlier, examples were given, not excluding some from the Gallipoli campaign.

The provision made for the Iraq operation was positively breathtaking in its complexity and scope. Traditional mapping techniques were allied to high-tech satellite technology, computer graphics and imaging and multi-layered data stacks to produce an information-rich environment. Interestingly in relation to the seeming inability to win the peace, a lot of effort was put into mapping for non-military and post-conflict purposes. This section of the conference was given some depth and personal interest by a presentation on the work of (HMS?) Roebuck, a survey vessel due for scrapping but which was sent to the Gulf and did



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amazing work on charting not only the Gulf and the inshore waters but also the river approaches to Basra and beyond.

Overall, a very worthwhile and interesting conference. A wider audience than primarily mapping professionals would have benefited, as would perhaps the mapping professionals have benefited from an end-user point of view. The overall organisation of the conference was not as slick as some of the individual presentations. No less than eleven papers and a closing Q&A session were squeezed in over a period of just over four hours, excluding lunch and administrative session, by the simple expedient of limiting each paper to a scant twenty minutes, but most of the speakers rose to the occasion and a lot of headline information was packed into the day. Had I been a mapping professional myself, I am not sure I would have got as much out of the event, but I came away with the desire to know more, and that is surely the mark of any good conference of this kind.

Keywords: Mapping Gallipoli