



BCMh BATTLEFIELD TOUR 26-30 September 2008 GALLIPOLI¹

by Andy Grainger

This year, for the first time, the BCMh took to the air for its annual Battlefield Tour. We benefited enormously from the hard work and professional backing of Isobel Swan and her colleagues at Holts Tours and of Simon Jones who had led a tour to the area only the week before. A record number, I think, of 27 members and guests eventually rendezvoused at the Hotel Truva in Canakkale in the evening of 26 September.

Nevertheless, such were the number and variety of administrative hurdles that sprang up before we landed in Turkey that your editor, for one, began to think that he had a greater chance of surviving in a Gallipoli trench than a six week tour in the travel industry. But he nevertheless clung to the hope that everything would come good once we got onto the ground and such indeed proved to be case – in complete contrast to the fortunes of those who landed on the Peninsula in 1915.

Stands	
Troy	Dianne Smith
Campaign Overview	Laurie Milner
Dardanos Battery & Naval Operations	Michael Orr
Lancashire Landing (W Beach)	Laurie Milner
Cape Helles & River Clyde (V Beach)	Graham Dunlop
The French	Michael Orr
The landings at ANZAC	Simon Jones
The Nek, Quinn's Post, Lone Pine	Mike Hibberd
Battles of Krithia	Andy Grainger
Landings at Suvla	Graham Dunlop
Scimitar Hill, Green Hill	Stuart Sampson
Chunuk Bair and Kemal Atatürk	Simon Jones
The Evacuation	Graham Dunlop, Laurie Milner
Medical Aspects	Dr Jane Orr
Ernest Raymond	Barbara Taylor
Cartography	John Peaty

This trip had a number of features that marked it out from our usual tour. Firstly, apart from the essential excursion to Troy, we were studying a single campaign, complete in itself. We had done this for the Waterloo campaign back in 1996 but at Gallipoli many of us were unfamiliar with either the campaign or the ground or both. Thus those of us who volunteered to give stands had to research not only a particular battle but also the context. This is because the area is so small that actions in one area will impact on another and, indeed, were often designed to do so. I think that the combination of researching a new campaign, the tight focus

¹ <http://www.gallipoli-association.org/> is the website of the Gallipoli Association.



on it and the visits to the battlefields themselves were the reasons that the trip made such a powerful impression upon many of us.

My initial reading of the campaign also indicated that the location of the campaign had a powerful effect upon many of the participants – or at least those who wrote about it. Many of them had had a classical education and apart from their descriptions of the natural glories of the sun setting over the Greek islands there are inevitable references to the battlefields upon which the classical heroes had fought – almost within line of sight. Indeed, their names lived on in the fleet – HMSs Agamemnon, Euryalus and Theseus all served and sank in the waters off Gallipoli. The writer A P Herbert, the future publisher Douglas Jerrold and many others wrote memorable works about the campaign, either as memoir, novel or, inevitably, a mixture of the two.

The literary element to the campaign does not end there. At W Beach (named Lancashire Landing after the invasion) Barbara Taylor talked to us about Ernest Raymond (1888-1974)², a novelist as popular as Kipling then or J K Rowling now who wrote the famous novel *Tell England – A Study of a Generation*³ about three schoolboys who served as young officers in the Great War. Raymond served on Gallipoli, mostly near Lancashire Landing, as a chaplain with 42nd East Lancashire Division and the experience marked his life – as it did so many others.

One of the reasons that we had chosen to make the trip to Gallipoli at this time was because of reports that the battlefields were becoming scarred by development to an extent that would make them difficult to recognise in a few years. This is a factor particularly remarked upon by Nigel Steel and documented by comparison photographs taken in 1915 / 1987 / 1998⁴. Clearly, the peninsula now is very different in some respects from the thinly populated terrain of 1915 but the key features of nearly all of the battlefields that we visited were easy to identify and particularly so compared to many that we have visited in Europe.

Such was not the case with Troy, admittedly, where Dianne Smith explained the engrossing background to the 'discovery' of the city by the appalling conman Heinrich Schliemann in the interests of fantasy, fame and cash. I suspect that many of us were surprised to discover that he had taken US citizenship for reasons of expediency at some point in his life – he certainly destroyed Troy in his attempt to save it. But, several missed turnings later, we arrived at the Dardanos battery,⁵ gazing down upon the sparkling blue waters of the Dardanelles laid out before us like a map, or rather chart. There Laurie Milner gave a brief overview of the campaign and Michael Orr explained the bombardments and manoeuvrings of the allied fleets in early 1915, culminating in the great and ultimately unsuccessful onslaught on the 18th March. Little more than three miles across at the widest point it was relatively

²<http://www.bookrags.com/biography/ernest-raymond-dlb/> carries a brief note about a man and an *oeuvre* which is now deeply unfashionable but whose books ran to many editions into the 1960's and later.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tell_England is good entry about the book which most of us had not read but helps us to appreciate the film which we watched on the coach.

⁴ Nigel Steel, *Gallipoli*, Battleground Europe series, London 1998

⁵ Readers will, of course, be aware that Dardanos was the ancestor of Priam, last king of Troy.



straightforward to superimpose the images of lines of dreadnoughts in our minds' eyes steaming towards the point on which we were standing, even if they were in black and white.

As so often in the next few days, one was minded of a force of 20th century armour and firepower trying to do something that Nelson would have recognised albeit that whilst jolly tars were still our men, Tyneside steel were our ships one hundred years later.

We then crossed the straits by ferry and drove down to Cape Helles and W Beach, named Lancashire landing a few days after the desperate assault by 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. There is certainly more scrub today and the dense barbed wire entanglements are gone but the profile of the left hand headland is instantly recognisable against the famous photograph of the 1st Essex landing, unopposed, in mid-morning. At first light about 800 men from the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers tried to storm ashore from rowing boats, through thick wire – some of it laid underwater – with very little fire support into a shooting gallery of a beach about 400 yards wide with headlands at each end. Rifle and machine gun fire caused around 400 casualties to the Lancashires as well as 63 out of 80 sailors – or did it? Research seems to indicate that the beach was defended by about a company, without machine guns; the establishment in the Turkish Army being only four guns per Regiment and often fewer in practice. One Lancashire officer noticed a gap in the wire on the left, diverted his company, stormed the headland without much trouble and so the beach was secured from aimed fire by 7.15am. On coming under fire many men had jumped into the water from the boats and drowned under the weight of their kit and several witnesses reported the water red with blood as the troops huddled in the water unable to get through the wire. To us it seems a clear lesson in the power of modern weapons and an indicator of the Turkish fighting spirit which had been assessed as very low. But at the time the desperate courage of the Lancashires' feat of arms may well have encouraged commanders in the view that pluck and the bayonet were still adequate to take fortified objectives in modern war.

From Lancashire landing we drove to Cape Helles and the low Hills, 114 and 138, just inland which proved such an obstacle to the attackers – not least because they did not always appear on their maps. By modern standards the defences were modest – trenches, some with overhead cover with very obvious barbed wire entanglements in front. But intelligence was lacking, the necessity for adequate target acquisition, fireplanning and support unappreciated and the troops entirely lacking the weapons, equipment and techniques for dealing with these defences. But on reaching the memorial at Cape Helles I do not think that many of us appreciated until that moment that we could look across the entire battlefield from that point. The British objective for the first day (never reached) was the hill of Achi Baba about six miles inland. The British never advanced more than four and so, apart from small areas of dead ground, their entire combat and administrative area – containing surely over 100,000 men at times with their guns, equipment, stores, animals and transport was overlooked by the Turks.

Only digging, camouflage, deception – and the Turkish shortage of both artillery and ammunition – can surely have enabled the operation to be continued.

In his talk about the French operations on the right flank of the invasion Michael Orr explained that serious consideration had been given to the idea of landing on the Asiatic side due to the threat of Turkish artillery fire. After diversionary landings which were withdrawn



after a couple of days this idea was set aside since the forces available were not sufficient. And fortunately the Turkish artillery posed only a harassing rather than a decisive threat.

On our second day we visited V Beach including its cemetery and lunched at a new café located on the shore near the point where the River Clyde beached. There has been some new development there behind the fort at Sedd-el-Bahr but it is still a remarkably evocative place, much smaller than the impression given by photographs. Courtesy of Laurie Milner we were able to watch scenes from a DVD of *'Tell England'* on the bus back to the hotel. This incorporated scenes of the River Clyde landing made with the very active co-operation of the Royal Navy at a live firing range on Malta. Again the Turks were shown mowing down the attackers with machine gun fire and again it seems as though very few indeed were available to them.

In contrast to W Beach, however, there was no flank for the Munster and Dublin Fusiliers to turn at Sedd-el-Bahr and the surviving troops were pinned down all the day on the beach. Only during the night could they reposition themselves and take the hills behind the fort.

Like any commander of troops landed from the sea Hunter-Weston, the commander of *'the incomparable'* 29th Division was keen to press on inland. But the follow-up landings were much delayed since losses of troops, sailors and boats were far higher than expected. After about 48 hours the few remaining Turkish defenders broke contact and retired to a position on rising ground before the village of Krithia (now Alcitepe). Only four days after the landings did 29th Div advance up to the Krithia position. From my stand at 12 Tree Copse, the furthest point reached by the British, one could see that the ground was shaped rather like a molar with the attackers trying to advance up the roots (the coastal spurs) as well as the gullies in the centre on a front of about 3,000 yards. It all looked incredibly narrow for a divisional attack. The shortage of draft animals meant that most of the guns could neither be moved far from the beaches nor provided with much ammunition. Every case of rifle ammunition and pint of water had to be manpacked forward so that the troops, who had already been labouring on the beaches, were exhausted from the start.

Gallipoli was the campaign where modern Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) was invented. We heard that the ships could not deliver the necessary plunging fire into the ground between the coastal spurs although they had observers stationed in crows' nests and later tethered balloons. On the other hand they could fire over open sights at the Turkish counterattacks coming down the spurs and the effectiveness of their fire in those circumstances might be compared with Close Air Support strikes supporting outnumbered US infantry units in Vietnam. Later on, the RNAS provided observation but as the campaign developed the threat of U-boats obliged the ships to keep moving which reduced their accuracy. Michael Orr had reminded us that we tend to think of the Royal Navy in the Great War in terms of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow and the Dover Patrol in the English Channel. In fact there was no shortage of action off Gallipoli for all the elements of the Senior Service - the ships, the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Marines and the recently formed Royal Naval Division.

After visiting V Beach we embarked upon a small boat from Sedd-el-Bahr to ANZAC cove, a distance of about fifteen miles and a voyage which took about five hours. This afforded glimpses of all the landing beaches including the diversionary landings at Morto Bay and X and Y beaches. One did not have to be qualified in tactics to see where an invader might land



since, apart from these locations, the entire coastline is formed of cliffs. A little later in the tour Dr Jane Orr talked to us about the medical arrangements for the assault for which no

planning had been made on security grounds. Thousands of casualties would have been taken off shore in boats like ours (with rather less effective engines or latrines) which then spent many hours trying to find a big ship to relieve them of their suffering cargo.

We landed at Gaba Tepe somewhat later than planned and had only a brief look at ANZAC cove where the famous beach was destroyed long ago by the construction of a coast road. My memories of that visit are of the contrast between the impossible mountain terrain to which the defenders clung almost by their fingernails and the tiny cemeteries near the beach. We stood listening to the waves and looking at the evening sun as it coloured the water and grass in soft tones of turquoise and emerald. There are certainly worse spots on this earth for a final resting place.

We returned next day when, unfortunately, it was raining hard and the view of Suvla Bay from Chunuk Bair was almost obscured by low cloud. Mike Hibberd guided us along the ridges via famous names of which we had read but not seen - Lone Pine, Quinn's Post, Baby 700 and so to The Nek where he talked about the charge of the Australian Light Horse, the subject of the famous film 'Gallipoli'.⁶ Even when you have seen these posts it is difficult to imagine how thousands of men accommodated themselves in such a tiny area, most of which was near vertical cliff. Because the Turkish trenches were so close – the other side of a razorback ridge often only 10 or 20 yards across on the summit – my impression was that they could not be defended frontally but only from the other posts firing in defilade.

We had been looking forward to our visit to Chunuk Bair, highest point on the battlefield with commanding views all around. It was here that on 8/9 August Mustafa Kemal led the decisive counterattack that drove a mixed force of New Zealanders, British and Gurkhas off the summit and effectively ended Allied hopes of a victorious end to the campaign. Unfortunately low cloud concealed much of the view apart from the gigantic statue of Kemal and some souvenir stalls looking even shabbier than the troops he commanded.

Gallipoli is surely unique as a battlefield in that it is visited in large numbers by the citizens of both sides (except perhaps the Germans). The battle forms part of the Turkish National Curriculum and in recent years a rash of Turkish memorials has sprung up to complement the Commonwealth ones. There were several moments on the tour when BCMH and Turkish guides were addressing their respective audiences simultaneously at the same stand. We might therefore expect there to be a good deal of Turkish material about the battle so that we can discern something of the view from the other side of the hill; certainly the Turkish authorities did co-operate with our own official historians in the 1930's. But I understand, perhaps incorrectly, that nothing significant has been published since then. There seem to be several reasons for this:

- 1) The Turkish archives on the campaign are still closed.
- 2)

⁶ There is a useful website about the film, its themes and criticism of its historical inaccuracies (apparently unintentional). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallipoli_\(1981_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallipoli_(1981_film))



- 3) All Turkish records composed before 1924 are written in Ottoman script which very few people today can read although a few scholars are starting to learn it.
- 4) It is immediately apparent to any visitor to Turkey that a cult has grown up around Mustafa Kemal or Atatürk – Father of the Nation. Discussion as to his role in the
- 5) battle is therefore extremely difficult, if not impossible at present particularly for the Turks themselves.
- 6) The Turkish language is unfamiliar to many Western scholars and so study of any Turkish secondary material is limited.

John Peaty and I discovered an example of the Atatürk legend in action at the Turkish Army Museum in Istanbul. The displays concerning the First World War and the Independence War that followed concern only those campaigns in which Kemal participated – apart from one about “The Armenian Issue (with documents)”. There is virtually nothing on the campaigns in the Caucasus, Palestine or Mesopotamia apart from a small case about the siege of Kut. A computer graphic of the Gallipoli campaign illustrates the Canakkale campaign in three phases:

- 1) The Turks repel a gigantic allied naval assault on 18th March (there is only one),
- 2) The ANZACs land on 25th April (no mention of the British or French landings),
- 3) Atatürk arrives, his eyes become burning laser beams, the ANZACs are vapourised and the campaign ends.

This is a relatively modern display and will leave anyone with even a cursory acquaintance of the campaign with questions as to the character of Turkish scholarship at National Museum level. That such scholarship is extensive is not in doubt since copies of the Proceedings of many Conferences are available at the bookstall but they are all in Turkish and we did not feel bold enough to buy one for future perusal.

John and I formed the view that our knowledge of the Turkish side was almost entirely dependent on the material that they had provided 70 years ago so that the full story of the campaign is far from complete. To jump ahead slightly and given the observation from Chunuk Bair, Laurie Milner asked how the Turks could possibly have been taken by surprise by the evacuation despite the extensive deception measures. We will not know the answer until the Turkish records are opened.

From a very wet ANZAC and a picnic consumed on the bus we drove to Chocolate and Green Hills overlooking Suvla Bay. Again, these are very evocative spots as the ground is virtually unchanged since 1915. Here Graham Dunlop talked about the naval landings in general whilst Stuart Sampson zoomed in on a particular unit - the Berkshire Yeomanry and the attack on Scimitar Hill. The naval techniques were, in some ways, much more advanced than the April landings since purpose built armoured landing craft known as Beetles were available. But too little reconnaissance of the beaches had been done – on the not unreasonable grounds that the Turks might sense that a landing was afoot. The result was that many of the landing troops disembarked at the wrong place. This was particularly disastrous since the troops were entirely inexperienced New Army troops from GOC to private and the entire Corps did



nothing for two days. By the time they did, the Turks had reinforced and the front stalemated again.

We concluded our tour on Chocolate Hill with discussions about the Evacuations – a masterpiece of staff work, the medical aspects and cartography.

Inevitably there was much discussion on the trip about why it was that the expedition went so disastrously wrong. The main reason appears to lie in the intelligence assessment. Right from the start it was assumed that the Turkish Army would not fight; even that the appearance of a submarine in the Sea of Marmara flying the Union Flag would bring about a capitulation.

In fact, there was some justification for such a view. The Turkish Army had not performed well in the Balkan Wars and neither did it do so when the British landed in Basra in November 1914. The Turkish attack on the Suez Canal in February 1915 was also beaten off relatively easily. Politically the country was split between the supporters of the ‘Young Turk’ faction that wished to reform the country, others who wished to support Germany against the Allies; yet others who recognised that the country was far too poor to mobilise for a war against major European powers.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that the Turkish coast gunners on the Dardanelles and their supporting infantry detachments did fight from the start as the allied activity escalated. Maybe an assault as powerful as that actually launched on 25 April 1915 would have been devastatingly successful six months earlier – but the whole point was that such a powerful assault was not then seen as necessary.

The Dardanelles offered one of the greatest strategic opportunities of the war but early in the war Britain was not capable of launching a major amphibious operation in addition to its main effort on the Western Front. The desire to do so led to the protracted wishful thinking about the nature of the Turkish opposition that was the main factor in the ultimate failure of the campaign.

Works consulted

Carver, Field Marshal Lord (2004) *The National Army Museum Book of the Turkish Front 1914-1918*, Pan Grand Strategy

Haythornthwaite, Philip (1991) *Gallipoli 1915, Frontal assault on Turkey*, Osprey – useful summary and coloured maps.

Hickey, Michael (1998) *Gallipoli*, John Murray – a very readable modern account.

Rudenno, Victor (2008) *Gallipoli, Attack from the Sea*, Yale UP – excellent and comprehensive coverage of all the naval aspects from both sides.

Rhodes-James, R (1965) *Gallipoli*, Pan Grand Strategy – I found this magisterial work still to offer the best overall account despite its age.

Steel, Nigel (1999) *Gallipoli*, Battleground Europe, Leo Cooper - good photos and coverage of the ground.

Steel, N & Hart, P (2002) *Defeat at Gallipoli*, Pan – concentrates on personal accounts within good coverage of the campaign.



The author of this article retains the copyright of the material. No part of this article may be reproduced or distributed in any form other than for private use without the express permission of the author. Permission may be sought via the [BCMh Newsletter Editor](#)

Page 8 / 8

Commemoration

Gallipoli is a haunting place. To read more about its commemoration I refer readers to Chris Pugsley's article in *Mars & Clio No. 21*, Spring 2008.

I conclude with the poignant words that Kemal addressed in 1934 to the first Australians, New Zealanders and British to visit the Gallipoli battlefields, which was later inscribed on a monolith at Ari Burnu Cemetery (ANZAC Beach): Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives... you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehments where they lie side by side here in this country of ours... You the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. Having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.

—*Mustafa Kemal*

Mars & Clio 24
Spring 2009