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Gallipoli, The First Day
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Gallipoli's First Day: a day of riddles
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Day 1 at Gallipoli on all sides—ANZAC, British and Ottoman, is a story of great bravery and suffering, of personal achievements and success on the part of the Ottoman defenders and combined failure to achieve objectives on the part of Allies. Within the story of success and failure are the stories of desperate attack, even more desperate defence, confusion, mistakes and lost opportunities. For the British and the ANZACS it is those mistakes and lost opportunities that stand out, particularly the lost opportunities to advance towards their objectives.

These opportunities for advances were made possible by the strategy of the Ottoman 5th Army commander, German General Liman von Sanders. He believed the main landings would take place much further north at the Gulf of Saros so he spread his 6 Divisions thinly at three points to cover all possibilities. The result of von Sanders' conviction was the placing of only 2 divisions at the southern end of the Peninsula around Midos and Helles, where the actual landings took place (the 9th and 19th), 2 divisions at the Gulf of Saros in the north (the 5th and 7th) and 2 Divisions on the Asian side of the Straits around Kum Kale and Besike (the 3rd and 11th).

Moreover, because von Sanders was unsure which beaches the British would use for their landings, his strategy was to have lightly manned front positions on the likely landing beaches with the main regiments placed in the rear for advance when the landing places became clear. This gave the British and ANZAC forces space and opportunity to establish themselves ashore because the strong Ottoman reserve battalions did not arrive to face the landings early enough to stop the ANZACs and British at least gaining a foothold on the Peninsula.

But having established themselves the questions about the failure of the ANZAC troops to advance more than two kilometres are still asked today.

The old questions

Gallipoli historians still debate a number of evergreen questions:

- whether or not the campaign had any chance of success especially on the first day, thereby being ill-conceived
- whether the Anzacs were landed on the wrong beach, which led to their failure to reach their objectives
- how far the failure at Gallipoli was due mainly to poor Allied leadership and organization or superior tactics and organization of the Ottoman enemy.

Most historians agree that the first day's events set the seal on the stalemate that occurred. The main factor from which all else spins is the failure of the ANZAC force and their British allies, landing 20 kilometres or so to the south at Cape Helles, to achieve their first day objectives. For the ANZACs this was Hill 971, the Third Ridge and ultimately, the hill Maltepe, dominating the shoreline of the Dardanelles to the Narrows at Kilitbahir and its plateau above.

Was Anzac Cove the wrong spot?

The debate about this question goes on today amongst historians. Different books give various points of view about whether the landings at ANZAC Cove were unintended and a mistake of landing boat navigation or whether they were the result of a late change of plans kept secret?

'Wrong spot' can mean 'the most inappropriate and unsuitable spot' or it can mean the 'the unintended or misplaced spot'. As to being the most unsuitable, tackling the steep and rough climb from Anzac Cove in the dark was a most difficult task. In the end, though, the landing itself at Anzac Cove, as difficult and confused as it was, was achieved. Moreover, given the strength of the defences of Brighton Beach, further south it was either providential or a result of good sense.

As to Anzac Cove being the 'unintended spot', we cannot be sure that there was no late change to move the landing there. No full record, original documents or official account associated with final naval or landing force orders for 24 and 25 April 1915 apparently exist, whilst for previous days they do. Various explanations, some of them difficult to accept, have been given as to this lack of documentation. For example a note in the 2nd Brigade File in National Archives in London states that the Brigade's contemporary War Diaries were mislaid on the 25 April 1915. Another explanation in circulation is that the final orders for the landing were kept on board *HMS Triumph*, the marker ship for the landing flotilla, and sank along with the ship in May 1915 to be lost forever.

The original explanation for landing at Anzac Cove is given by Charles Bean, the official Australian historian, as a sudden and mysterious northerly current drifting the landing boats off course. Most historians have now rejected this theory in the light of other evidence and it should be sunk forever and other explanations for the deviations of the tows be substituted.

The disorientation and confusion, which Lieutenant-Colonel Price Weir and all the troops had experienced, was mainly due to the first wave of Anzacs not being landed in their intended formation and in the dark rather than at the wrong spot. Recent evidence points to there being two deviations by the tows each probably of 22.5 degrees to the north made by the naval officers in charge of them on the way in to shore from the battleships. In the dark, the lines of landing tows had concertinaed together from 150 yards apart to around 50 yards, then the 9th Battalion's tows had crossed behind the 10th's to land north of the 10th instead of south. All rowing boats had then landed haphazardly north and south of Ariburnu knoll instead of on a broad front as intended.

There had to be a motive for the change of direction and an explanation for deviation. One speculation, not accepted by all historians, is that a late change of plan to relocate the landing further north to Anzac Cove took place and was kept secret. Changes to plans were made frequently and sometimes at the last minute. For example, the Signals Record shows that landing time for the British landings at Cape Helles was changed from 6.00 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. and at Y Beach from 5.30 a.m. to 5.00 a.m.

Any last minute changes to the Anzac landing would not be unusual either. Some changes had been discussed earlier. The final stations taken up by the battleships and destroyers to land the troops, which Bean shows in a sketch in his diary and in the *Official History* were in correct formation but due west of a position that favoured Anzac Cove, not Brighton Beach.

The aerial reconnaissance obtained from 13 April and the 18th April showed Brighton Beach, (called initially Z Beach) was wide open to Turkish light and heavy artillery, was well entrenched with a sizeable force and had barbed wire entanglements in the water and on the beach. Being much more heavily defended it was a very bad spot to land thousands of men with heavy packs safely. Anzac Cove beach was completely sheltered from direct artillery fire and was only lightly defended with no more than 100 to 200 troops. The steep land and narrowness of the beach at Anzac Cove had prompted the Turks to discount it as a likely landing spot, and had made no elaborate arrangements for its defence.

The reason for the landing in the dark was to spring a surprise on the Ottoman defenders and secrecy was paramount. This would explain why few participants in the landing were aware of any changes. Those ignorant of any change of plan,

would naturally assume the different geography of Anzac Cove meant that they had been landed at the wrong spot.

The ANZAC commander, General Birdwood was to be contradictory in his statements about the final plans thereby further adding to riddles surrounding the landing. Birdwood told General Hamilton: 'I had purposely not intended to land at the spot we arrived at because from which I had seen of it, the country looked extraordinarily difficult' (PRO CAB45/233 Dardanelles Commission Papers). But then in a letter to George Pearce, Australian Defence Minister, he baldly states that the landing in Anzac Cove was his idea (AWM 38/606/249. 39).

But the most important point, as some military historians have pointed out, is that overall is that if the tows had stayed in their intended formation and not become involved in deviation movements they would have landed correctly spaced and in the intended order instead of haphazardly bunched around Ariburnu knoll, which turned out to be the main cause for the confusion and not Anzac Cove itself, which afforded some advantages.

Failure due to lost opportunities: the big one

Turkish documents have recently provided more accurate accounts of incomplete explanations of Day 1 events. A case in point is the controversy around the actions of Colonel E.G. Sinclair-MacLagan, the 3rd Brigade and Covering Force commander and his superior, Major-General W. Throsby Bridges, commander of the 1st Australian Division, in diverting the 2nd Brigade after their landing from their planned push for the heights at Hill 971 on the ANZAC's left flank in order to reinforce the right flank. (See: *The landing at ANZAC*, Journal of the Australian War Memorial No 22. April 1993 pp.24-34)

Charles Bean in his Official History of Australia in the Great War supports the decision to do this on the basis that MacLagan and then Bridges are convinced there was a strong threat to the ANZAC force in this area on the southern flank probably as early as 6 a.m. The reason given is the large numbers of Ottoman reserve troops arriving. Until recently there has been no collaborating account of this large Ottoman troop arrival before 7.30 a.m. at the earliest from any other source except Bean. That's three hours after the covering force lands.

Ottoman battlefield messages and signals, recently come to light, indicate that Sinclair-MacLagan's covering force, with a strength of around 3500 troops were only faced by three or four hundred Ottoman troops giving him a nine or ten superiority in numbers for up to four hours after the landing. This creates a lost opportunity for the Covering Force to advance to their objectives (Hill 971 and the Third Ridge) against thin opposition from a vastly outnumbered enemy. The decision to dig in on the 2nd Ridge at that point in time caused the stalling of the advance and the failure to reach the Third Ridge and Hill 971. Moreover

Sinclair-MacLagan's critics claim this decision caused the ultimate stalemate as it gave the Ottoman reserves time to march from their locations kilometers in the rear and deploy strongly on the 3rd Ridge to the east and on Chunuk Bair and Battleship Hill to the north and turn the ANZAC advance into defence.

Sinclair-MacLagan's decision to divert the 2nd Brigade to the south, probably from some time between 6.00 and 7.00 a.m., is a pivotal moment in the ANZAC landing when the ANZAC advance and tactical attack was turned into a tactical defence.

Other missed chances

But documents are showing that this lost opportunity was not the only one on that first day. Although held up, now according to documents, by a couple of hundred retreating troops on hill Baby 700 en route to Chunuk Bair and Hill 971, the other routes up to the objective were open to the ANZACs within the first three hours. The Ottoman units of platoon strength to the north of ANZAC Cove, North Beach and the first ridge had also retreated after acquiring losses. This was the case on Russell's Top in front of the Australian 11th Infantry Battalion men of the first wave and their soon-to-arrive reinforcements, where the retreating Ottoman defenders numbered only around ten to twenty at the most. This numerical and moral advantage was not pushed to any decisive position.

Farther north on the lower slopes, too, at Fisherman's Hut, the Ottoman 27th Regiment outpost was held by a small number of men albeit likely with a machine gun (although some Turkish sources question the existence of a machine gun). But this could have been overrun by a sheer and determined ANZAC numbers and a route opened up to the heights. Then again later, after the arrival on the battlefield of the Ottoman 57th Regiment reserve, the regiment's 2nd Battalion reinforced the Fisherman's Hut area but took serious losses, lost communication and retreated inland up the gullies and slopes towards Chunuk Bair. Again, they were not pursued and the moment passed.

A third missed opportunity for an ANZAC advance occurred just after 11.30 a.m. when 19th Divisional commander, Mustafa Kemal, leading the defence of the ANZAC sector, was told in error by a staff officer that an enemy landing had taken place at Kum Tepe to the south, between Kaba Tepe and Cape Helles. This prompted Kemal to take two of his divisional regiments, the 72nd and 77th, south to meet the non-existent landing, leaving the hard pressed 57th to deal with the ANZACs alone. It kept Kemal and two regiments away from the enemy for four hours or more, an absence that was not exploited by the ANZAC leaders.

The maps

A number of Gallipoli historians have commented on the inadequacy of the maps given to British and ANZAC commanders, which were intended to assist them in directing operations. These maps, all similar, were based on earlier Ottoman maps obtained pre-war. The intelligence gained about the Ottoman force's disposition in the Anzac sector was overwritten on them. Knowledge of the enemy's positions and strengths was generally not the problem except, importantly, in the case of MacLagan's understanding from maps that had been overwritten with mistaken information about a force of 700 Ottoman troops in a camp to the north east of Kaba Tepe—a possible explanation for his belief that an attack from that direction on his Covering Force was imminent and for his decision to divert the 2nd Brigade to that area.

However, it is the missing features of the terrain, the smallness of scale, mistakes in contours, and other missing information that made life difficult for the commanders. Generally these maps did not show anywhere near sufficient detail to be of real use and were seriously inaccurate. For example, on the ANZAC maps no indication was given of the existence of the Razor Edge, which joins Plugge's Plateau to Russell's Top and a major obstacle. This feature makes Plugge's effectively a dead-end, something not discovered until the covering force was gathering and re-forming on Plugge's. Bean also mentions one error that slowed the initial advance from the beach.

Other inaccuracies included essential factors such as problematic scales and distances between features. Some historians have dismissed these shortcomings as being trivial and the maps being of sufficient use when daylight came. It needs to be stated though that much of the crucial decisions of direction, especially by officers gathering disparate groups of men together, had to be made early and were made in the dark or poor light. Maps are difficult enough to use in those conditions, let alone if they are inaccurate.

It remains difficult, though, in light of the other problems encountered, to conclude how far the poor maps contributed to the failure in achieving the first day objectives. As author Peter Williams has stated in relation to military map making nearly one hundred years ago: "Generals have more often than not gone to war without adequate maps" (*The Battle of Anzac Ridge*, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus, Australia, 2006 p.57). Covering Force commander Sinclair-MacLagan used one of these maps and based his understanding of the battlefield on them. However, given the other factors influencing his decision-making, even if he'd had no map at all, it is likely he would have made the same decisions.

Ottoman Artillery supremacy

Little attention has been given nor weight placed on the fact that the Ottomans had artillery supremacy throughout the first day and this had a major

impact on the outcomes. For most of the first day the Ottoman defenders were able to bombard the ANZAC positions from various batteries without fear of reply from the Allied side. Moreover, the intensity of the bombardments was greater than has been generally appreciated and contributed massively to the ANZAC failure to reach their objectives.

This inequitable situation was caused by various factors leading to problems getting the ANZAC artillery ashore. It also led to a situation where the majority of the 5000 casualties suffered on the first day were caused by incessant Ottoman artillery. ANZAC troops were pinned down for most of the day taking shelter or being hit by a rain of shrapnel, a situation that sapped the strength and the morale of many.

Ottoman artillery started up as soon as the landing place was determined. It came from the promontory of Kaba Tepe, where a well concealed battery of two pairs of Mantelli field guns sent shrapnel shells over towards the boats of the second wave of the covering force and the main force following later as they approached Anzac Cove. Men and boats were rained in shrapnel. However, once the cover of Anzac Cove was reached behind Hell Spit, the shells were less effective. Later the Kaba Tepe battery turned its attention to the 400 Plateau south of the 2nd Ridge when the ANZACS began to dig in there. Even though the *HMS Triumph* and *HMS Bacchante* returned fire from the sea and silenced the Kaba Tepe battery from time to time, it was so well concealed that it would open up again regularly.

The 19th Division had 6 artillery batteries, which Mustafa Kemal deployed one by one as soon as he could on the first day from around 10.00. The first ANZAC artillery piece, that of the Indian Mountain battery, was not deployed until early afternoon. It soon came under return fire and was withdrawn. It opened up again at 17.45 further back on MacLagan's Ridge.

The tardy landing of the Australian artillery has been the cause of other riddles. Various explanations have been given: landing boats to be used for landing artillery were needed to evacuate the wounded, some reluctance by Generals Birdwood and Bridges to land artillery until better positions could be found for them or in case an evacuation was decided upon (at 15.45 Birdwood signaled Admiral Thursby to stop sending field artillery). Only 12 of 60 guns available were landed over the next two days.

The navy could only supply limited artillery support on Day 1. They were restricted to positions they could see because of the flat trajectories of naval guns. If there was a hill in the way of an Ottoman battery naval guns could not reach it. Battleship Hill was one exception, along with another couple of spots, being in line of site of the naval guns and Ottoman troops coming down to attack Baby 700 were seriously mauled by the navy's heavy guns.

But the Ottoman artillery advantage was massively clear. Heavy guns targeted transport ships offshore delaying and disrupting the force landing, causing some ships to retire. Later they turned their explosive shelling into the routes by which troops were coming to the front line. Field and mountain guns meanwhile concentrated on the ANZAC front line. It is estimated that over 40 artillery pieces (in about eleven batteries) fired on the ANZAC force during the first day. This compares with only three batteries landed by the ANZAC by the end of day one, the Indian mountain battery at 1000 a.m., in the evening a second battery with another field gun, which reportedly fired up 62 shells towards Kaba Tepe.

Endnote

The failure to attain the ultimate objective of Hill 971 on the first day and then Maltepe can therefore be put down to more and differing reasons than the simple explanation of landing at Anzac Cove. These include initial flawed planning and insufficient troop numbers, the landing in darkness, the slowness in getting artillery ashore, insufficient artillery and inferior artillery numbers to the enemy, inaccurate maps, the underestimation of the Ottomans' capacity for defence and general fighting ability and determination of Ottoman troops, the presence of good Ottoman commanders, the difficulties of the terrain, the capacity of the Ottomans to use it to their advantage, and the vagaries of battle and command.