

Tactical perspective on Gallipoli horrors

Harvey Broadbent

The Landing at Anzac, 1915

By Chris Roberts

Big Sky Publishing, 192pp, \$19.99

THE Gallipoli industry moves inexorably towards its centenary, another year passes and another book or two about the campaign emerges. And so to be worth reading, any new book recounting or investigating the Gallipoli campaign should reveal fresh findings.

This book claims to do so and to a certain extent it is a fair claim. Chris Roberts uses a Turkish source that has only been touched on previously, and he brings a fresh military specialist's interpretation to the landing.

This book is part of the Army History Unit's *Campaign Series*, which is now up to 12 titles. These works provide analysis of pivotal battles involving the Australian Army. Although essentially designed to assist the development of army command skills, the series has managed, by accident or design, to bridge the gap between military specialisation and military history.

Roberts has continued this process with this detailed account and analysis of the first day of the Gallipoli campaign. A history graduate, Roberts has a pedigree befitting his role as an interpreter of events, including 35 years in the Australian Army, operational service with 3 SAS Squadron in South Vietnam, graduation from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, the Army Staff College and the US Armed Forces Staff College.

This book could only have been written by an author with such a background, someone with a grasp of the planning, strategic, tactical and operational elements that led to the Anzacs' failure to achieve their objectives on that fateful first day. Its great strength lies in a narrative that dissects the military events that sparked the Anzac legend and the myths surrounding Gallipoli through their tactical elements. In this sense it is a welcome addition to other recent Gallipoli analyses such as Robin Prior's *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* and Edward Erickson's *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*.

poor appreciation and total ignorance of the capability of the Ottoman 5th Army.

He is critical of some of the senior Australian commanders: Colonel Ewen Sinclair-MacLagan, commander of the covering force, for turning the initial successful landing from offence to defence, and AIF commander Major-General William Bridges for failing to take a firm grip on the battle. Roberts contrasts this with the aggression and concentration displayed by their Turkish counterparts.

The book's main conclusion, that "neither side could claim victory", provides yet another good military history conference theme. Specialists and partisan Gallipoli followers alike will debate, argue passionately even, about this assessment. Some may propound that Roberts is splitting hairs in maintaining that failure to advance beyond 2km in eight months then evacuating is not a defeat. Others may agree that holding their line for eight months was a victory of sorts.

Here again the book's strength — its dealing with complexities — will inform opinion and force the reader to consider the atrocious difficulties the troops and commanders faced. To name a few: the poor preparation and resources, the shortcomings of commanders who had what Roberts calls a lack of "situational awareness", and the determination of a competent enemy.

Whatever one's conviction, it is hard to disagree with the author's conclusion that "the Anzac plan was poorly executed". This book explains well how this occurred.

Generously illustrated with colour and black and white photographs, explanatory maps and diagrams, *The Landing at Anzac, 1915* is an attractive production. One particularly pleasing element is the separate pages in plate form, some relating the background of Allied and Turkish commanders and summarising their contribution to the first day's events, others the stark details of the hardware of war such as the artillery pieces used.

The latter, while of interest to the military history aficionado, points to one element that the book does not address: the effect of such weapons on the human body and their role in the obscene loss of life and limb. Due probably to it being a property of the Army's *Campaign*

Sultan Campaign.

Roberts, who retired with the rank of brigadier, tackles the debates of military historians about the reasons for failure down the line from the top: Lord Kitchener and General Sir Ian Hamilton, via corps commanders such as Lieutenant-General Birdwood, to brigade commanders. In doing so he clarifies the complexities of operating battle command, thus sharing the blame.

The reader, however, is left with the strong impression that though Roberts is reluctant to be unequivocal about blame because of the complexities, the campaign was a disastrously flawed idea from the outset. His accounts of the Turkish defence, which cite superior commander and officer performance, attest to

the obscene loss of life and limb. Due probably to it being a progeny of the Army's *Campaign Series*, the book does not deal with the misery and horrendous experience of war and particularly Gallipoli. Its character remains firmly analytical of strategy and the tactics employed leading to the failure of the military aims. Earlier books, however, have covered this aspect comprehensively and Roberts can justifiably concentrate on adding his military expertise and perspective to the Gallipoli canon.

Harvey Broadbent is the author of two books on the Gallipoli campaign and director of the Gallipoli Centenary Research Project at Macquarie University in Sydney.

**Australian soldiers
attack Turkish trenches
at Lone Pine in 1915**

