

# SEMAPHORE

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## GALLIPOLI AS A JOINT MARITIME CAMPAIGN

The 1915 Gallipoli campaign holds a unique fascination for Australians. The story of the first Anzacs and their selfless sacrifice on a distant shore has assumed myth-like status. Ninety years later Gallipoli still provides a well-thumbed guide to our national identity and the supposedly innate qualities of Australian military personnel. In the words of an earlier historian: 'Volunteer forces, largely officered by amateur soldiers...demonstrated the effects of pioneering, of country life, of sport and of democratic freedom'.<sup>1</sup>

Today's Australian Defence Force (ADF) still finds value in the Anzac tradition, but the wider tendency towards uncritical glorification of the people and events of the campaign hides some significant deficiencies. More considered studies, such as those by Eric Andrews and Jeffery Grey, have pointed to fundamental weaknesses in a variety of areas including doctrine, training, logistics and strategy.<sup>2</sup> Hence the popular perception of the first Anzacs as inspired amateurs and uniformed larrikins only serves to detract from the very real, very necessary, and thoroughly professional improvements that were thereafter introduced into the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

To its credit, the Anzac legend has forged an emotional bond between the Australian military and the public which other nations might envy, but its conceptual limitations mean that the ongoing tendency to link 'Anzac' with a uniquely Australian approach to warfare must be treated with caution. If, as Michael Evans has suggested, a way of warfare should be seen as 'a military operational manifestation of a society's values and deepest beliefs about how it should defend itself',<sup>3</sup> then in terms of future security planning much of the legend has outlived its usefulness. The complexity of modern warfare has long since outpaced the concept of creating a soldier by simply putting a rifle in the hands of a bushman.

An aspect of the Gallipoli campaign that clearly demands better understanding is the part played by maritime forces. The campaign was conducted on both a joint and a combined basis, and at its peak directly involved more than 250 French and British warships. In addition to the troops of the AIF Australia had a naval presence, with the submarine HMAS AE2 taking an active and important role at the outset of the campaign, and the later commitment of the RAN Bridging Train in support of engineering operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The campaign was first planned as a purely naval effort, but the failure by the combined fleet to force a passage through Turkey's Dardanelles defences in March 1915 required a reassessment of this strategy. The Allies still considered that their warships would have to penetrate

into the Sea of Marmara and bombard Constantinople in order to compel Turkey to surrender. To enable this to be accomplished, their next plan was to secure the Gallipoli peninsula through amphibious assault. Success ashore would then allow the minefields to be cleared without interference from Turkish shore emplacements and field artillery, and permit the passage of the fleet to Constantinople.



*Troops landing at Anzac Cove, covered by the light cruiser HMS Bacchante (AWM G00905)*

Only because of allied naval supremacy could this expedition be contemplated, and after the landings the navies focussed on the direct support of troops ashore and ensuring that the flow of reinforcements and stores exceeded that of the enemy. Sea-based forces mounted a complex and continuing series of operations which involved not only the obvious tasks of fire support and the ferrying of troops and supplies, but also interdiction at sea and ashore, naval air support, and blockade enforcement.

While seldom recalled today, the level of Army and Navy cooperation eventually attained at Gallipoli was far ahead of anything contemplated before the war. Continuously tailored to meet developing circumstances, the inherent flexibility of the fleet ensured that support for the troops never faltered during the eight months of the campaign.

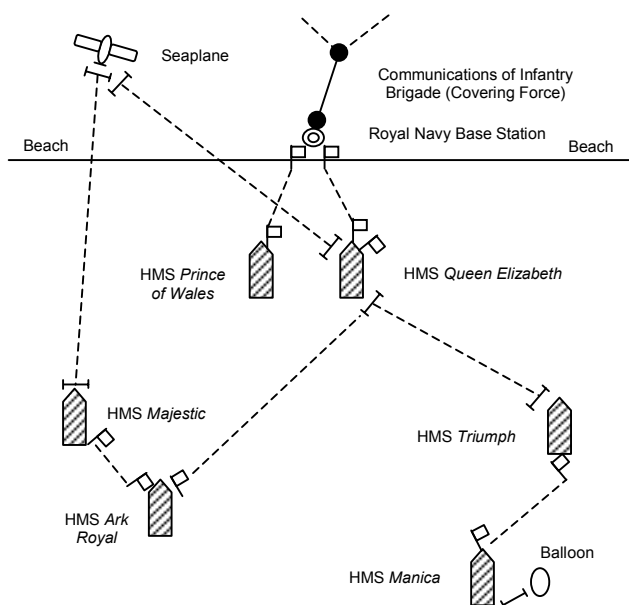
Like many aspects of military operations during World War I the combatants at Gallipoli encountered a novel situation. New and unproven technologies proliferated. Planning for the close integration of land, sea and air assets in the littoral had not been undertaken before, and original solutions even included the first steps



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towards force networking, as illustrated in the fire support plan for the landings at Gaba Tepe:



*Fire support plan for the initial ANZAC landings at Gaba Tepe on 25 April 1915. (AWM 2S 367/26)*

Without common and well-understood doctrine, however, such innovations meant that allied forces had to not only learn new techniques, but also overcome unexpected problems. For example, the use of gunnery spotters in naval balloons and aircraft promised highly accurate and responsive fire to commanders ashore. However, the geography of the peninsula posed difficulties. Often only the outer edges of a Turkish position were exposed to direct fire, and as the campaign wore on, ever deeper and more elaborate fortifications made the low angle fire of naval guns less effective. Communications between the different elements were also poor with the problems compounded by lack of joint training, equipment shortages, unreliable aircraft, and the delicate nature of existing wireless sets.

Due to the slow production of guns, spares and particularly shells, and with troops on the Western Front receiving priority for equipment, the Dardanelles expedition was always seriously lacking in artillery, placing greater reliance on the guns of battleships and cruisers. Practical experience led to improved methods and greatly increased the power of ships to find and target the enemy ashore. Even when naval gunfire could not penetrate Turkish trenches, it suppressed their fire, lowered their troops' morale, disrupted resupply, and kept their heavy guns engaged. A battleship's 15-inch shrapnel shell contained 15,000 bullets, and after the devastating fire they received during their early counter-attacks the Turks made no further attempts to attack by daylight over ground that was in direct view of the covering naval force. The battleships were also instrumental in preventing the Turkish Navy from supporting their own troops. Using aerial spotting to fire over the peninsula, just one or two salvos were generally all that was necessary to induce enemy warships to withdraw.

As in every amphibious operation, control of the sea remained critical throughout the campaign, allowing the

allied force to use the sea for its own purposes, while preventing the Turkish force doing the same. Everything came and went by sea; the men, mules, guns and ammunition, the wire and timber supports for the construction of fortifications and trenches and of course the water and provisions. Most importantly, because it could rely on sea control the allied command always retained the option of evacuating the force.

Simultaneously, Allied sea power acted to disrupt Turkish communications and hamstring their efforts to dislodge the Allies. There was no railway to Gallipoli and the nearest station was 50 miles from the northern end of the isthmus. Allied battleships and monitors shelled the main road and single access bridge to disrupt Turkish transport arrangements, while naval aircraft demonstrated their reach by attacking the enemy's railhead. Meanwhile the exploits of Allied submarines - a classic case of sea denial and one of the few undisputed successes of the campaign - practically stopped sea communications between Constantinople and Gallipoli. By July 1915 the Turks had abandoned the sea route for the transport of troops, while by the end of December only one large steamer was left operating in the Sea of Marmara. The lack of alternative routes forced the Turks to bring almost everything into Gallipoli by land at night; troops on foot and supplies by camels and ox carts. Farther afield allied destroyers maintained patrols to prevent contraband reaching Turkey through Greek or Bulgarian ports. Other warships escorted friendly transports, hunted for enemy submarines in the lower Aegean and blocked the passage into the Sea of Crete. Rather than taking place on a small Turkish peninsula, from the joint perspective the campaign is better understood by looking at the entire Eastern Mediterranean.

The lasting legacy of Gallipoli should not be seen in terms of the slaughter in the trenches. Though ultimately a failure, the campaign provided a wealth of shared experience. Joint operations techniques and procedures, ranging from improved command and control through to common terminology were learned the hard way in 1915. But the campaign paved the way for the succession of amphibious assaults that brought victory in 1945. The lessons of both success and failure in the campaign informed the development of amphibious tactics and equipment between the wars. The fundamentals of modern maritime power projection were established. 'We are far from being beaten', wrote the naval commander, Admiral John de Roebeck, after the evacuation, '...in fact we have learned a great deal and will know what to do in the future'.<sup>4</sup>

1 A. Grenfell Price, *Australia Comes of Age*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1945, p. 76.

2 See E. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993 & J. Grey, *The Australian Army*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001.

3 M. Evans, 'Strategic Culture and the Australian way of warfare: Perspectives', in D. Stevens & J. Reeve (Eds), *Southern Trident: Strategy, History, and the rise of Australian Naval Power*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001, p. 90.

4 Letter, de Roebeck to General Birdwood, 3 February 1916, AWM 3DRL 3376, Item 8 A.

