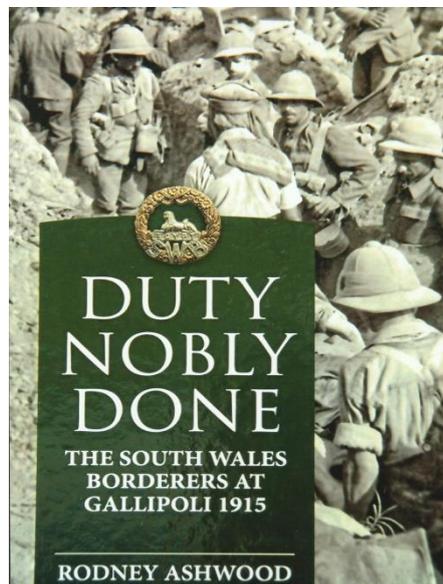


BOOK REVIEW

Duty Nobly Done – The South Wales Borderers at Gallipoli 1915 by Rodney Ashwood.
Published by Helion & Company Limited 2017. ISBN 975 1 911512 17 2 Price £29-95

This is a first class book about the 2nd and 4th Battalions, The South Wales Borderers who fought and sacrificed many of their lives in the Gallipoli campaign during the First World War. The author was commissioned into the Welch Regiment and on retirement from the Army became the curator of the regimental museum. In this book he has used archival material, documents, letters and records held by the museum at Brecon and in particular the diaries of Lieutenant (later Captain) Ernest Laman, Quartermaster of the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers.

It is a thoughtful and well laid out book chronologically progressing through the Gallipoli campaign. Beginning with an explanation about the Order of Battle, composition of infantry battalions, administration, staff branches and brigades of the Army, which is particularly helpful for readers who have not served in the military.



The opening chapter gives an explanation of the events which led to war and the reasons why Turkey entered the conflict on the side of Germany. A comprehensive history about and formation of the two battalions supported by Lieutenant Laman's diary gradually draws the reader into the Gallipoli theatre of war. Although the book is primarily about the 2nd and 4th Battalions of the South Wales Borderers, which the author makes clear he includes relevant material and details about other units and services who, fought in the campaign and of their participation and valuable contribution so readily given.

General Sir Ian Hamilton's battle plan and the landing on the 25th April, 1915 are vividly described. One company of the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers, 87th Brigade 29th Division, landed at Y Beach, whilst the remainder of the battalion landed at S Beach. This is followed by the Allies attempt to capture Krithia (Alçitepe) and the three subsequent battles all of which failed to achieve their primary objective at a high cost in lives for both sides. Despite these setbacks General Hamilton considered he had no alternative but to continue offensive action against the Turks. The bloody and bitterly fought action at Gully Ravine, often at close quarters added to the horrendous and rising cost in lives. Extracts from Lieutenant Laman's diaries used by the author give a day-to-day account of the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers action there.

The 4th Battalion, South Wales Borderers arrived at Gallipoli in July 1915, part of the 40th Brigade, 13th Division and were deployed at Anzac where they participated in the August offensive begun on the 6th. Lieutenant-General Sir W.R. Birdwood, General-Officer-Commanding the Australian & New Zealand Army Corps, had submitted in May a plan to General Hamilton to break out of the Anzac sector to get round behind the Turkish position and occupy the heights of Sari Bair. This breakthrough would allow the Allies to advance across the peninsula, occupy Midos (now Ecebat) and ultimately control the narrows of the Dardanelles. The author makes use of Lieutenant John Mellisop's papers which give detailed descriptions of the 4th Battalion, South Wales Borders at Gallipoli.

General Hamilton's depleted force was augmented by the arrival of three divisions which landed at Suvla Bay on the 6th August and were to advance quickly and secure the heights dominating the plain and bay to assist the breakout from Anzac. The 29th Division was tasked to launch a diversionary attack from the Cape Helles sector to draw Turkish forces away from Anzac and Suvla. The 4th Battalion, South Wales Borderers were part of the 'Left Covering Force' successfully achieved their objective, Damakjelik Bair. However, the Allies goal of capturing Sari Bair ridge was not accomplished and the campaign stagnated into a virtual stalemate, though the fighting continued as each side fought to take or regain lost ground.

The rising concern about the Gallipoli campaign in London led to the replacement of General Hamilton in October by General Sir Charles Monroe as commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force who wasted no time in assessing the situation and recommended to Lord Kitchener and the War Cabinet evacuation of the peninsula. This did not mean the troops could relax as each side continued to launch attacks against each other. As summer faded into autumn, the conditions for the troops on the ground rapidly deteriorated. Dysentery was rife, unburied bodies, sniper fire, shelling, poor food, lack of water and clothing affected their efficiency and health. In December, one of the worst recorded storms, struck the peninsula and caused many deaths.

The War Office gave their consent to evacuate Suvla and Anzac which was successfully achieved between the 18th and 20th December. At the end of the month approval was given for the evacuation of Helles and by the 9th January 1916, the last Allied troops left the peninsula.

Towards the end of the book the author explains to the reader about the history of the Regimental lineage since 1689. There are four appendices, listing the Officers of the 2nd and 4th Battalions, South Wales Borderers who served at Gallipoli, South Wales Borderers Officers on

the Staff of the 40th Brigade, Officers and Soldiers of both battalions who were killed or died of wounds and their place of burial or commemoration.

The authors in depth research and the supporting material he make use of in this book gives a fascinating account of the day-to-day lives of the troops at Gallipoli, and is a memorable tribute to those men of the 2nd and 4th Battalions, South Wales Borders, whose sacrifice was a 'Duty Nobly Done'.

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