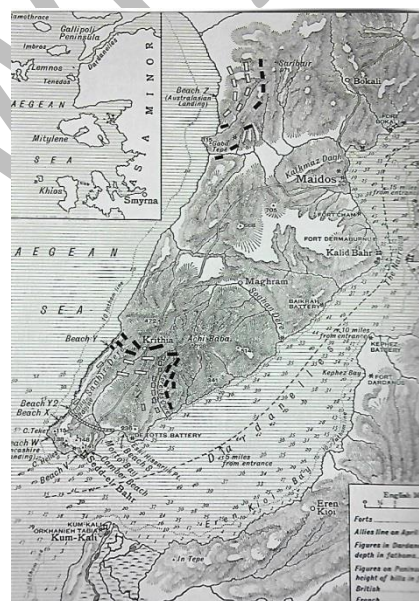


WESSEX BRANCH – WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

RND CENTENARY TOUR – GALLIPOLI 18th MAY ~ 24th MAY 2015

Our Centenary Tour Party – Martin, Judy, Marc, Nigel, Michael, Roger, Chris and myself – travelled from Dorset on Sunday 17th May with the Homeward Bound Travel Company to the Novotel Hotel at Heathrow for an overnight stay. We left the hotel at 0430 hours in a shuttle bus the following morning for Terminal Five and passed through passport, luggage and security controls into the shopping mall area. At 0635 hours we boarded a BEA Airbus 340 and took off an hour later for Istanbul, landing at Ataturk airport at 1235 hours – Turkish time. Following entry checks we were greeted by old friends Terri and Ohannes (John) Karabeytan who acted on our behalf as local Turkish agents.

Warmly welcomed John introduced us to Ihan our tour driver and we left the airport at 1330 hours for the 330-kilometre journey in an air conditioned 12-15 seater coach to Sedd-ul-Bahr. For Marc, Nigel, Michael and Roger it was their first trip to the Gallipoli peninsula. As we travelled through the outskirts of Istanbul they could not have been more surprised as were those who had been before of the new building construction and road improvements – which is ongoing – since our last visit three years ago. Ihan a superb driver, stopped at a Baklava and Sweetmeat café where we enjoyed and very tasty snack and chai before continuing our journey.



As we drove along Martin gave a briefing for the benefit of all the tour party on the Gallipoli campaign and about various points of interest – including the Gulf of Saros and Bolayir Lines. Heading down the peninsula road on the E-90, recently upgraded we passed under a new overhead bridge road complex. It is quite apparent that the Turkish authorities are upgrading the whole road system and not far from Eceabat, two road tunnels are being constructed through the hillside. A new Turkish cemetery has also been laid out a few kilometres from the town where a concentration of Turkish soldiers who died in 1915 are buried.

We arrived at the Pansiyon Panorama at Sedd-ul-Bahr at 1900 hours where Errol, his wife John and Hajidi greeted us all as very welcome friends. Assigned to our rooms, and freshened up we all enjoyed a lovely evening meal in warm sunshine on the veranda – where we ate all

our meals. The latter cooked by Hajidi whose attention to detail and presentation of the food is second to none. Suitable fed and watered we retired to our beds after a long, but pleasurable day.

We were all 'up with the lark' and after breakfast Martin gave a most interesting talk about the landings at Helles on the 25th April, 1915. Leaving the Pansiyon we drove to Morto Bay to visit the Turkish Memorial and virtual cemetery. From there our next stop was at the French Cemetery at Morto Bay. This large cemetery contains over 2,000 identified French soldiers. Within the lantern tower memorial is an ossuary containing the remains of approximately 3,000 soldiers and within the four mass graves around it are 12,000 unidentified casualties. On the memorial wall are sixteen inscribed tablets dedicated to French divisions, battalions, regiments, individual soldiers, ships including the Bouvet and the action at Zimmerman's Farm. Whilst in the cemetery Martin spoke about the deployment of French forces in the Dardanelles, at Kum Kale and the Helles sector.

Driving on towards Kilidübahir we stopped at the statue of Corporal Seyit – the man with the shell – to show how narrow the Dardanelles is at the choke points for the benefit of the new tour members. A large merchant ship passing down towards the open sea gave a graphic illustration of the vulnerability of ships to shell fire from shore batteries. Passing through Eceabat once the Greek town of Maidos, we intended to stop at the information centre on the outskirts, which now appears to be closed and run down.

Lunch was taken at Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery where over 3,000 allied soldiers are buried or commemorated. Two thirds of them are unidentified and special memorials commemorate those who are known or believed to have been buried there. 180 New Zealand soldiers who have no known grave have their names inscribed on the Twelve Copse New Zealand Memorial. Moving onto Pink Farm Cemetery, where 602 casualties of the campaign are buried or commemorated. The name of the cemetery originates from the colouration of the soil in the area. Time allowed for exploration of the remains old trench systems around the cemetery. To undertake a recce for the following day's exploits we stopped by the roadside track which leads down to Gully Beach. Recent winter storms and erosion prevented us from getting to the beach. More time than was available was required to investigate a safe route to the beach and gain access to Gully Ravine. It was also noticeable that further erosion had taken place at X Beach, which is still accessible with care. At W Beach, Martin explained about the landing that had taken place there and afterwards we spent time in Lancashire Landing Cemetery. We then drove to V Beach where Martin gave a vivid description of the

landing. After a contemplative walk around the cemetery a cool beer was then consumed at the Mocamp, before visiting the refurbished Helles Memorial.

Wednesday morning dawned sunny and bright with the prospect of a very warm day. We left the Pansiyon at 0900 for a tour of ANZAC area. On the way we stopped at the Gaba Tepe Museum and then drove on up to the Lone Pine Memorial and cemetery. Martin brought to our attention the difference in the topography compared with the Helles area and that at Suvla. Well known features such as Johnston's Jolly, Courtney's and Steel's Post and Quinn's Post cemeteries were visited and details were given about the various actions fought in the area. Lunch was taken in the shade at The Nek Cemetery from where superb views of Anzac and Suvla can be observed. Nearby a memorial commemorates Sergeant Mehmet and twenty-five Turkish soldiers who fought the death on the day of the landing at Anzac. Opposite, just over the edge of the roadside can be seen the remains of a water tank hauled up the hillside from the beach by the Anzac troops. A short walk from The Nek took us to Walker's Ridge Cemetery and then a little further on, to view over a rickety fence Mule Gully, Plugge's Plateau and the Sphinx. An inevitable question was raised, how did soldiers endure the hardships and privations, let alone fight in such terrain?

We then drove on down to Shrapnel Valley Cemetery containing over 600 burials, 85 of them unidentified. Five of our tour party ascended the pathway from the cemetery to Plugge's Plateau. Our next visit was to the ANZAC commemorative area and then to Beach Cemetery. The most enjoyable day was completed by partaking of another cool beer at the Mocamp, before returning to the Pansiyon. Gathering on the veranda overlooking the Dardanelles after dinner we watched a spectacular thunder storm brew up and burst forth over the Asian side.

Thursday morning was cloudy at first but the sun broke through as we headed for Suvla. At Hill 60 Martin spoke about the actions fought there and time allowed for exploration of the area where good views of the W Hills, Chunuk Bair and Hill 971 could be seen. Outside of Lala Baba Cemetery Martin gave broad overall details of the landings at Suvla on the 6th-7th August 1915. He explained about tentative advances made amid much confusion which led to the failure to capture and consolidate the high ground. The cemetery contains 216 casualties, 53 of them unidentified. Special memorials commemorate 16 casualties known or believed to be buried there.

Nigel and Michael had photographs taken in Greenhill Cemetery by the memorial cross holding the Regimental flag of the QODY. A similar photograph was taken on the summit of

Scimitar Hill. The yeomanry sustained heavy casualties advancing across the salt lake towards Green Hill, Chocolate Hill, Hetman's Chair and Scimitar Hill in mid-August.

From Scimitar Hill we drove to the Turkish Gendarmerie Memorial. This site has been enlarged and enclosed by a wall for the 2015 centenary. Descending from there we stopped at Azmak Cemetery, the mostly northerly of the CWGC cemeteries on the peninsula. Here are



buried 1,074 casualties, 684 of them unidentified. At Azmak our party assembled before the memorial cross where a wreath was laid on behalf of the Wessex Branch and a two minute silence observed.

A short stop was made at Hill 10 and then we continued on to Suvla Point where Martin brought to our notice the landing

beaches and the importance of the Kiretch Tepe Ridge and other salient features in the area. For a break in our schedule we drove to the village of Buyuk Anafarta where we had chai and ice cream. A visit was made to the small museum and to what was once the village Turkish Baths. The building is now in a ruinous condition but nonetheless very interesting to explore.

We began on Friday, the final day of our tour of the peninsula at the Turkish 57th Infantry Regiment Memorial. The regiment fought the Australians here on the 25th April and Lieutenant-Colonel Mustafa Kemal inspired his Turkish troops to defend their homeland and fight to the death. On the 19th May the Turks counter-attacked in large numbers and sustained 10,000 casualties. Whilst we explored the area Martin and Judy laid a wreath behind Quinn's Post Cemetery in remembrance of Martin's great-uncle Frederick Willoughby who was killed nearby aged 15 years on the 6th May. He has no known grave and his name inscribed on the Helles Memorial. Gathering in the cemetery we all took time to admire the commanding view down towards Anzac. From Quinn's Post we drove the Nuri Yamut Memorial on Gully Spur, close to the old Turkish front line. Lieutenant-General Nuri Yamut commanded the Gelibolu II Corps and erected the memorial commemorating 10,000 Turkish soldiers, who died in and on Gully Ravine between the 26th June and 12th July, 1915.

We walked across the top of Fusilier Bluff and past Gurkha Bluff. A short halt at the top of Y Ravine was made to observe the spectacular views. Continuing on around field boundary's we entered the wooded area at the top of Gully Spur. However, more time was required to find a safe entrance for our party to descend down Gully Ravine. The morning was very hot and

discretion was wise in the circumstances but it conveyed to everyone what they could expect when exploring the ravine.

Lunch was taken at Redoubt Cemetery under the shade of the Duckworth oak tree before walking around the cemetery to view the graves. The cemetery named after a series of small forts erected by the Turks contains 2,027 burials, 1,339 of them unidentified. Special memorials commemorate those who are known or believed to be buried in the cemetery. A brief stopover was made at Twelve Copse for Nigel to take a photograph of a grave on behalf of a colleague whose relative is buried there.

At Skew Bridge Cemetery Martin spoke about the deployment of RND and crosses were placed on the graves of Colonel F.W. Luard RM, Portsmouth Battalion, RND and Lieutenant-Colonel J.A.C. Quilter, Grenadier Guards, Commanding Officer of the Hood Battalion. The cemetery contains 607 casualties of which 351 are unidentified. Friday had been a hot, busy day and to relax a beer or two was consumed at the Mocamp where we reflected upon our successful tour of the peninsula.

After Saturday's morning breakfast we loaded our suitcases on to the coach ready for a 9 o'clock departure for Istanbul. We bid farewell to our wonderful hosts Errol, his wife, John and Hajidi with a heartfelt expression of thanks. Ihan made good progress, stopping once for a comfort stop before we reached the outskirts of Istanbul and encountered heavy Saturday afternoon traffic. Having previously arranged to pick up Terri and John on the waterfront in Istanbul we arrived at the Hotel Zeugma and checked in at 1515 hours. There was enough free time available to explore the area around the hotel and visit some of the historic sights. Evening dinner had been booked for us by Terri and John at the La Vita E Bella Restaurante, where everyone enjoyed the food. An expression of thanks was given to Terri and John for making arrangements for us in Turkey and to Martin and Judy for organising a splendid tour. Bidding farewell to Terri and John at the end of the evening a quiet stroll to the Blue Mosque was enjoyed by our party.

On Sunday morning there was time for another for a walk around the area before Ihan drove us to the airport at 1100 hours. We all thanked him for his driving skills and enthusiasm. He often joined us in our visits to the cemeteries and places of interest where we stopped on the peninsula. Passing efficiently through Ataturk airport we boarded a BEA 340 Airbus for the flight to Heathrow, taking off at 1430 hours – Turkish time. We landed at Heathrow at 1550 hours – UK time – and were on our way to Dorset an hour later. Three of our tour party

alighted at pre-arranged drop-off points and the remainder arrived at Wareham by 1930 hours and dispersed to their homes.

The centenary tour was an outstanding success and thoroughly enjoyed by all of our party. For the new comers any pre-conceived ideas brought with them were quickly revised as they absorbed the realities and environment of the Gallipoli peninsula.



One hundred years have now passed since the landing in April 1915 and nature has done its very best to cover over the scarred and torn battlegrounds. It is increasing difficult to explore some areas due to the dense undergrowth. The tree cover is beginning to obscure the outline of some ridges and erosion is gradually changing the

landscape. However, there is still much to see and experience on the peninsula. It is of course most important to always remember the sacrifice of so many whether friend or foe, known or unknown who fought in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaign. Our Wessex Branch RND Centenary Tour bears witness to our continuing commitment that they will not be forgotten.

Roger G. Coleman