

Speech on Gallipoli

Imagine being 1 of 4000 men preparing to land on enemy territory on the 25th April 1915, in a pitch-black atmosphere unable to make the smallest of noises. This operation is to attempt to wipe out the Turkish military and obtain the Dardanelles Strait for the British navy.

You are woken at 1 am to gather into groups by 1:30 am, however you are to do this in complete silence. The slightest noise sounds 10 times louder because of the tension. “The noise of the pinnaces being filled, in the stillness of the night, was enough to make the whole world vibrate”, (Lieutenant Charles Fortescue).

You are dressed very lightly to help with troop identification making you freeze to the bone, both from the cold and from absolute terror of what lies ahead. There is no way to help blood flow as you are tightly packed with your battalion and must remain silent. Every square inch is stacked with ammunition and necessary resources. You nervously wait and listen for Admiral Thursby’s command at 3:30 am - there it is.

As you and the first wave pull away, there are silent cheers coming from the sailors on the battleships. Nobody knows exactly how far you have to row or motor towards the landing beach segment of the Gallipoli Peninsula, those tense 40 minutes feel like a “lifetime”. The atmosphere had a surreal sense of tranquillity with some of your mates sharing jokes, others saying a silent prayer. There is no way to shield yourself if Turkish fire begins, and if that were to happen, the entire first wave could be wiped out.

Everyone prays that the Turks don't see you, but an unknown Lieutenant Colonel Sefik Aker surveys the sea from the Northern side of ANZAC cove, looking for any movement in the still night. He sees a large number of ships in the distance and informs the Turkish battalion commander of the sighting. The ANZACS aren't currently seen as a threat as the landing position is predicted and Turkish troops begin to hold their line. You experience variant levels of enemy fire with an extremely bright light coming from the north which is a sign that you have been spotted. The Turkish fire was coming from every single direction up the mountainous terrain like a "monster fire-work display".

At around 5:10 am, the Turks began the constant and rapid fire of shrapnel. You listen to the shouts from officers saying, "make a landing where you can, lads, and hold on". There are different responses to the fire, some men laughing and joking and for many others it was a nervous time with an unknown future. The boats soon couldn't travel any further to shore and you and your fellow soldiers are in waist deep freezing water. As 1500 men of the first wave struggled ashore, Turkish bullets became too persistent for men to dodge and they were falling all around. The incoming bullets aren't the only problem you are facing, the rocky sea floor is littered with the dead bodies of your troop. Some had drowned, most got slaughtered as they didn't stand a chance from the rapid fire from above. The second wave get called in at about 8 am which makes the Turkish fire heavier and dangerously loud. "The noise was awful, I'd never heard thunder like it", (Baker), "Shrapnel bullets striking the water with a noise like the popping of corks". You notice a boat of about 16 men get hit and killed by a single shrapnel shell. All men that could survive the bullets and shrapnel are now ashore and more resources and transport are beginning to arrive.

You and the rest of the ANZACS begin to push further inland against the Turks and are able to push them into the third ridge. "We advanced in the cool of the morning through thick undergrowth, heavy with dew and fragrant with the perfume of wild flowers", (Captain Andrew Came). You look around at the scenery and wonder, was a thin piece of beach below a crumbling cliff the most suitable base to land? Higher commands frustratingly let it be known when all are ashore that Anzac Cove was not the correct place to land, due to high sea currents and invisible land. You keep fighting this bloody, brutal war until a stalemate occurs and you're evacuated on the 19th December, 1915. You hear statistics on your way to fight on the Western Front saying that Gallipoli had cost Australia 26,111 casualties with 8,141 deaths. You are completely heartbroken, you lost some of your closest mates during this battle, you witnessed horrendous scenes that you will never share with anyone and it didn't even end in an Australian victory. How does life continue after war? The only thing you can look forward to is the thought of one day soon seeing your family back on home soil.