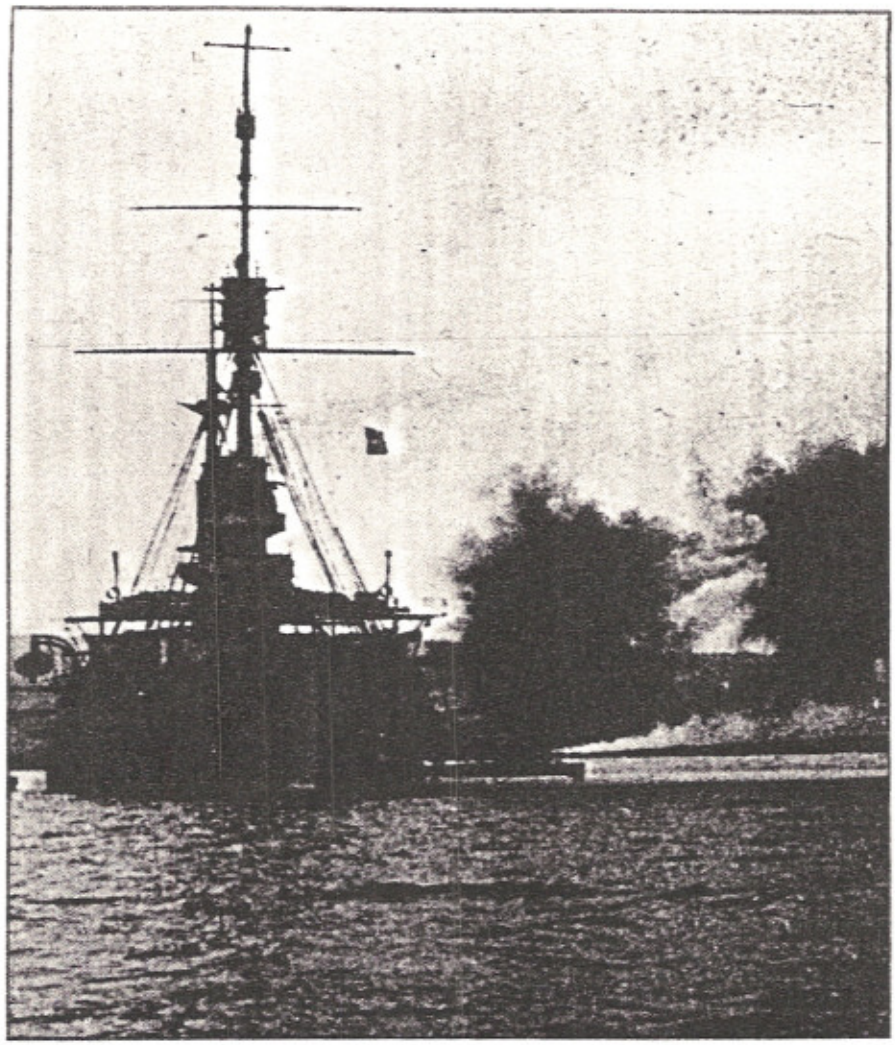
VF- Suvla Bay

The Suvla landings is one of missed opportunities and poor leadership. *Don Scharman. Below and right:* Artillery great and small. A pre-dreadnought shells major targets: a field gun lesser ones

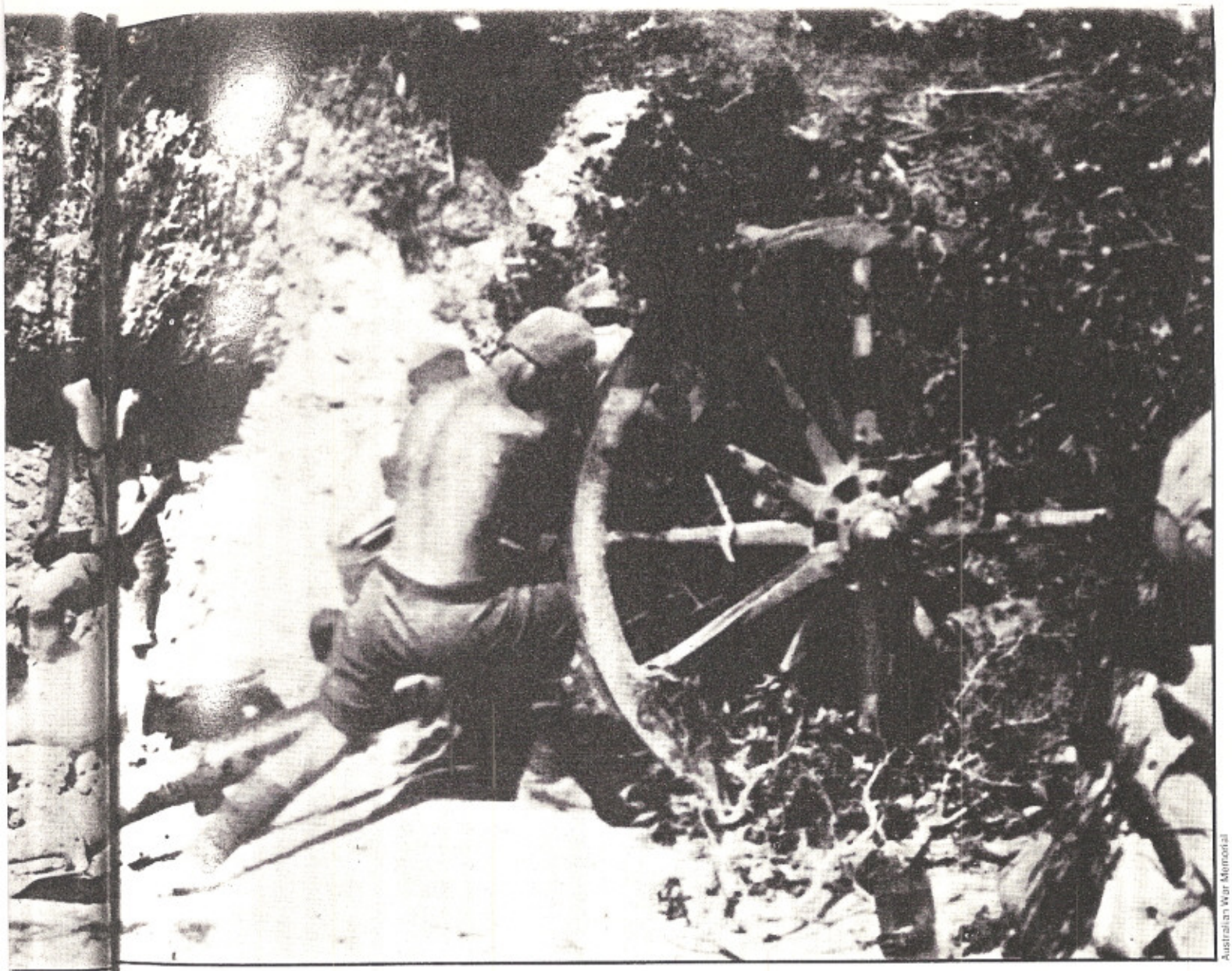


SUVLA BAY

From the time of the April landings and up until mid-July, British forces in Gallipoli had concentrated their main offensive efforts against the heights of Achi Baba in the Helles area at the southern tip of the peninsula. This mode of proceeding had produced infinitesimal success at the cost of huge casualties. Even while these attacks were taking place, however, General Hamilton received word that the attitude of the British government towards his efforts was becoming increasingly sympathetic. By the end of June that sympathy took tangible form in the promise of some five new divisions, three of which ought to reach him by the end of July. He was also promised increased naval and *matériel* support. For a commander who had accustomed himself to manipulating slender resources this was almost an embarrassment of riches. Concretely, it appeared to allow him that choice of offensive area that would remove the campaign from the immobilising restrictions associated with confined geographical position, artillery and the

Ref
D
522.5
.M39
1984
Vol. 4

The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopedia of WWI



Australian War Memorial

protected machine gun. On the other hand, prudence dictated that fresh troops should not be engaged in an area far removed from veteran support, and that the special facilities of the Royal Navy be utilised to the full. Manpower is not all in war.

All this became immediately apparent when Hamilton and his planners sat down to determine how to fit the new forces into fresh offensive plans. At Helles it had been proved time and again that, as in France, flesh and blood was unequal to capturing prepared modern defences without overwhelming artillery support. At the same time, Anzac, that small toehold on the side of the peninsula, appeared to be unable to accommodate the men already there, let alone vast new forces. In fact the extra men offered to him presented real problems to the British Commander-in-Chief, for he already had his plan in mind, and that plan involved the capture of the heights of Sari Bair Ridge that dominated the peninsula, and the capture of that prominence involved striking out from the Anzac Cove position, with all the manpower restrictions this choice involved. A reconnaissance in late May had revealed that the ridges to the north of the Anzac beachhead leading from near the sea towards the heights would require heavy fighting, and might indeed be impossible, to clear. On the other hand, an attack from the sea coast through the valleys between these heights, if unobserved for a short time, might lead directly if more precipitately onto the main heights of Sari Bair further inland. These heights themselves, Battleship Hill, Chunuk Bair, Hill Q, and Koja Chemen Tepe, were obviously thought by the Turks to be inaccessible and were, consequently, lightly held or not defended at all. It was thought that the use of darkness might enable troops to capture positions at the seaward end of the outlying ridges and thus provide cover for attacking forces which would then advance up the valleys and then, still using the cover of the night, climb to their objectives. Once on high ground they would take advantage, in the south, of a long ridge called Rhododendron Spur that led from a peak called Table Top to the crest of Chunuk Bair, and, at the far north of the positions, of the Abdul Rahman Spur that led to Koja Chemen Tepe. The capture of these high points on Sari Bair, and even of Chunuk Bair alone, would not only turn the Turkish position that faced the Anzac beachhead but would enable British forces to overlook the waters of the straits below and thus threaten to cut off the whole Turkish force on the tip of the peninsula.

It is important to grasp the fact that it was here, in this concept of a night attack on Sari Bair, launched from the Anzac beachhead, that Hamilton and his planning staff visualised a victory. This was the focus, and all other attack plans – including those that were subsequently developed at Helles, at Anzac over old ground and even that at Suvla Bay – were conceived of as ancillary and secondary to this preoccupation. The tortured cliff hangers at Anzac, with a leaven of new men, were to have their chance to strike out, to liberate themselves and even to win the campaign. It was on this presupposition that Hamil-

Looking back, it is clear that the additional plan to land two divisions at Suvla, to the north of the Sari Bair operations, complemented it and ought to have been integral to it. But, although its importance was dimly felt during the planning stages, this importance was not sufficiently recognised. This was shown by the absence of liaison arrangements between the Sari Bair and Suvla operations and in the feckless way that those in command at Suvla were appraised of their function. It is difficult not to conclude that the area was originally considered as a place where the time and energies of two divisions of men could be taken up. This being the case, it is best to look hard at the possibility of victory at Sari Bair considered on its own, bearing in mind that supporting operations might help to divert or disconcert the Turks, and thus only obliquely contribute to the success of the main effort. It is absolutely certain that the main attack was required to bear in its own thrust the possibility of final success.

Disease and enervation

It was ultimately decided that about 20,000 reinforcements to support this attack should be landed at Anzac Cove in great secrecy. These green troops would necessarily be held inactive for one to three days prior to the attack and then launched through unfamiliar country towards objectives that could only be dimly appreciated by map study. The veterans at Anzac, on the face of it, appeared to be a better bet, but among these soldiers there was hardly a man whom disease and the enervation induced by their almost unbelievable habitat had not weakened. Consequently the estimation of six- to eight-hour marches needed to reach their high objectives did not argue strongly for such men's success when one considers that heavy fighting might well be required on the way. Another point to be noted is the fact that while the route along the Rhododendron Spur had been reconnoitred carefully, that to the north advancing along the valley towards Koja Chemen Tepe was imperfectly known, to say the least of it, and the danger of alarming the Turks was considered too great for an attempt to be made to supply that knowledge, in July or August, by scouting. Despite all this one may well think that to make a success of such an attack was not beyond the powers of intelligent men. This may be so, but it is necessary to emphasise that this work was to be accomplished in a tight six- to eight-hour schedule – in the dark. It is true that the least anticipated danger was heavy Turkish resistance, and this, coupled with surprise if it could be obtained, would be a great asset.

Before describing the ancillary plans it is necessary to mention the command arrangements. General Hamilton at once appreciated that intricate planning schedules required strong alert commanders, and he asked that either General Byng or General Rawlinson be sent from France for Suvla. Lord Kitchener refused this request. Instead of one of these stalwarts, Hamilton got General Sir Frederick Stopford to command the newly formed IX Corps which was to land at Suvla. It may well be that it was this decision that led to Suvla being somewhat neglected in Hamilton's overall attack preparations. Neither as a war leader nor as a fighting soldier. Given strong supervision, Stopford might have qualified for the judgement of 'adequate'. He did not get the required surveillance. Furthermore, although he arrived on July 11 from England, he was not told of the Suvla plan in any detail until July 22, because, he was informed, it was still secret. The overall command of the corps at Anzac, reinforced by the 13th Division, 29th Indian Infantry Brigade and a brigade from 10th Division, devolved naturally on General Birdwood. The Sari Bair assault was to be directed by his subordinate, General Godley, who up to that time had led the New Zealand Division. Birdwood and Godley knew more about their plans than Stopford did. Godley, however, did not prove to be a strong commander. He was wedded to his base headquarters, and no commander in France ever conducted a battle with such monumental ignorance of its actual progress as Godley managed to build up through sheer physical immobility. The two divisional commanders under Stopford were Generals Hammersley and Mahon. Neither was brilliant. The fact is that, with a good plan and mediocre commanders, Hamilton did not recognise these elements for what they were. The extra care, attention to problems and informed enthusiasm, based on knowledge of detail, that ought to have supported these men was not forthcoming from the Commander-in-Chief. He was the only one who could have made his leaders not just his enthusiastic friends but rather a 'band of brothers' geared to a common purpose. This leadership was not in him.

Too much secrecy

Rather than indulge in useless judgements concerning what might have been it is wise to be at once clear that the Commander-in-Chief and he alone had the power to strike the proper balance between secrecy and information sharing needed to secure the integrated success of his operation. He chose to emphasise secrecy and thereby lost. It is quite possible that Sir Ian's quick mind never understood or allowed for the more laborious processes that pass for clear thinking in the minds of lesser mortals, and it is also possible that he never really appreciated how vital it was that specific plans be made to cover the physical communications gap between his island headquarters and his operational commanders at the scene of conflict. Nevertheless, when command failure occurs, no recorder of war dare lay it to the charge of subordinate figures.

Liman von Sanders, the Turkish commander, in contrast, gave clear explicit orders to subordinates at crisis moments in action. When his important lieutenants doubted or questioned the possibility of success he summarily dismissed them from their commands. A little iron in the soul of Sir Ian Hamilton might have been better for his men than was his gentlemanly conduct to his officers. Courtesy and decisiveness need not be contradictory characteristics, but over-scrupulousness and decisiveness are in opposition. After all, Hamilton had to back his own star to win. To do this he must follow his own accurate surmise that his forces would be lightly opposed in the area he had selected for his main attack, and must bear it con-

Above left: The man who allowed the chance of greatness to escape him – Hamilton with members of his staff. *Above:* General Birdwood, commander of ANZAC, takes a break from his labours. *Below:* Turkish prisoners. The Turks fought doggedly against superior numbers and conceded little.

Imperial War Museum

stantly in mind that this advantage would diminish with the passage of every second of time. This must have been obvious to a man of his intelligence. It was he who must ensure that this transitory advantage would not be wasted. The first 24 hours would be crucial.

The other elements of the plan may be briefly described. The main assault on Sari Bair was timed for darkness on the night of August 6/7. In the afternoon a strong holding attack was to be put in at Helles, and another 'forlorn' at 1730 hours by the Australians under General Walker on the strong Lone Pine position at Anzac. Later on, while the ridges towards Sari Bair were being stealthily approached by 10,000 men in the darkness, 13,000 men under General Hammersley (11th Division) were to land south of Nibrunesi Point, and advance as far as the W Hills by daybreak. By first light on August 7 it was also essential that the Sari Bair attack should have captured Chunuk Bair in order that attacks from Australian positions at the Nek, Pope's and Quinns should have support from forces moving against the Turkish rear. Meanwhile the 10th Division would land in Suvla Bay and advance along Kiretch Tepe towards Ejelmer Bay while the 11th Division captured Tekke Tepe on Anafarta Ridge. British forces would then hold the centre of the Turks' geographical position opposite Suvla, and, incidentally, stand ready to turn the whole of the Turkish dispositions around Sari Bair.

A natural amphitheatre

The one support plan that might have succeeded was the one at Suvla. This was a new geographical area for the British at Gallipoli. The chosen battleground was a natural amphitheatre about four miles square and bounded on the west by the sea. To the north it was overlooked by the Kiretch Tepe which skirted the edge of the Gulf of Xeros. Eastwards, the land sloped slowly upward through broken scrub towards Anafarta Ridge with the high point, Tekke Tepe, in its centre. In the south and south-east were the foothills of the Sari Bair range that effectively sealed off the area. The seacoast on the west was indented by Suvla Bay, which was about two miles wide at its mouth, between Suvla Point in the north and Nibrunesi Point in the south, whence the coast stretched away south-east of Anzac Cove. Due east of Suvla Bay and Nibrunesi Point was a great salt lagoon that was, in August 1915, dry and could be marched on. Except for a few small hills, lonely outposts of the surrounding high ground, the centre of the Suvla amphitheatre was flat and existence there was hot, and literally without cover, from either the sun or the Turks on the heights. Near the seacoast were two hills known as Lala Baba at the south of the salt lagoon, and another, Hill 10, slightly to the north of it. To the south-east Chocolate, Green, Scimitar, and the W Hills led towards the rising land beyond. Unfortunately it was not known that four feet under most of this arid soil there was fresh water. For purely geographical reasons, to say nothing of military ones, such a land was marked out as a transit area leading to the hills. As a stopping point for large numbers of men it could be a natural trap.

In this connection fate stepped in before the troops got ashore. For from the begin-

nature of the opposition he might encounter and began asking awkward questions about Turkish dispositions that GHQ did not answer. They could not since they had not got proper Intelligence. Therefore Stopford asked to have the force due to land at Nibrunesi Point divided, part to land in Suvla Bay on the first landings. This was reluctantly agreed to by Hamilton and the navy (who were worried about grounding). More important, Stopford's instructions were rewritten. The imperious command to swiftly take the W Hills, to move along Kiretch Tepe, and eventually to take Tekke Tepe was dropped. The main emphasis now fell on the consolidation of the landing area as a base for the northern operations, and the priority requiring a quick push to take the other objectives became secondary. This was ironic because Hamilton's hunch that the Anafarta Ridge and the Turkish outposts on the Suvla plain were lightly defended proved to be true. In the event there were only about 1,500 Turks, together with a few guns, available to prevent the capture of the original objectives by upwards of 20,000 men in the first day of battle. The fact is that Hamilton seems to have been so mesmerised by the Anzac offensive that he not only committed this grave error of judgement when he revised Stopford's instructions, but he also failed to note the growing danger warnings in Stopford's communications, which indicated that the chief mood of IX Corps had become one of caution. This was bad enough but it concealed a far graver problem. General Stopford, immersed in these problems to which he had been so recently introduced, had come to think of himself as a commander with independent objectives rather than a co-commander charged with executing a linked portion of a complicated overall plan. It is not uncommon for details to supplant priority conceptions in the minds of executants in any walk of life. At such junctures it is the task of leadership to recall subordinates to their corporate duty. Stopford received no such a call to sanity before the attack went in.

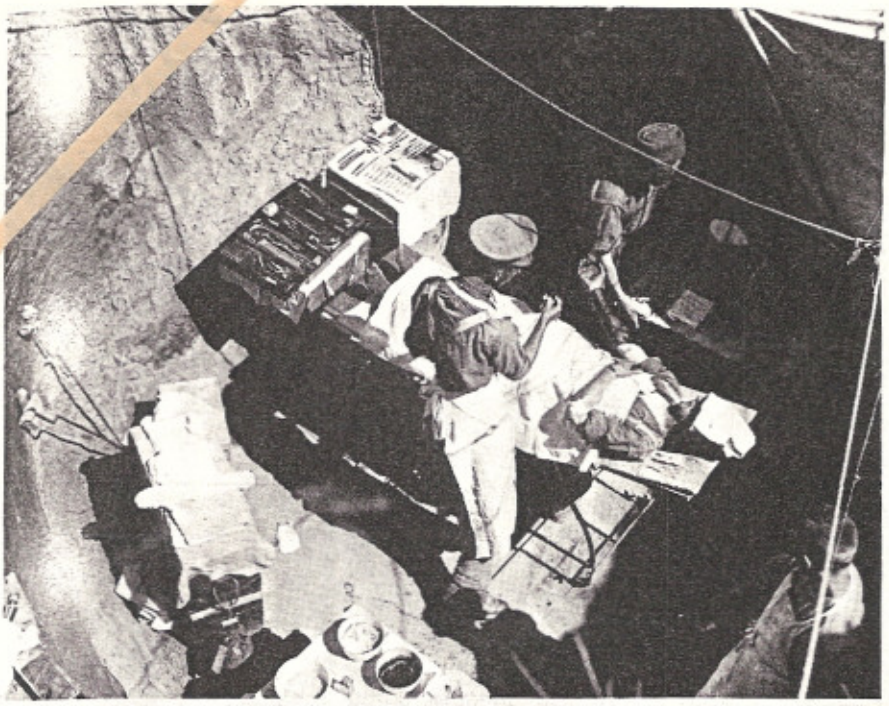
The morale of the troops who were to carry out the whole offensive was not uni- division, lately arrived at the Aegean island centres from England, had read in their newspapers at home about the spring offensive and the resulting casualties at Gallipoli. To increase this apprehensive state of mind was added the flow of rumour back from the front lines, and the inefficiency that they observed all around them at their reception camps. These vignettes did not combine to frame a buoyant picture. On the Anzac position itself spirits were not exuberant. The miracle is that the troops kept some sense of humour in the face of their hardships at that rough place. Generally, the prevailing mood seems to have been uncertainty. This was not surprising considering the fact that even the officers who were to lead the men into action personally were only enlightened as to the particulars of the planning at the last possible moment; those for the Sari Bair push on August 2, and those for Suvla on the afternoon of the day of battle. Under these circumstances the confidence born of the intimate understanding of a good plan was conspicuous by its absence.

Mustafa Kemal claimed to have divined the approach the British would make, and informed his immediate superior, Essad Pasha, the corps commander opposite Anzac, of this. Since Kemal did not predict that the attack would be by night, the nature of the difficult country, sloping down as it did from Sari Bair north-east to Suvla Bay, persuaded Essad to ignore the warning. Actually, General Liman von Sanders' position was not an enviable one. He could not be strong everywhere, and sea-power conferred on his foes the ability to select new attack areas. It was therefore mandatory to keep a sizeable force on the Asian side of the straits. Of the 95,000 men on the Gallipoli Peninsula, he distributed about 40,000 to keep the Helles position stable. Another 30,000 were detailed to hold at Anzac and to prevent a landing between the separated British front lines, between Helles and Anzac. The remainder of his force was deployed to protect Bulair at the neck of the peninsula – an obvious danger point. For the rest he depended upon the swift deploy-

An Irish sniper tempts his opposite number

ment of forces from one area to another to meet unforeseen emergencies. Although, as we have seen, the British plan involved movement over most difficult terrain, it was nevertheless superbly calculated to upset Sanders considerably, involving as it did both concealment and taking advantage of positions already in existence. Even more important for Hamilton was the fact that he had brilliantly chosen the most weakly held part of the peninsula as the assault area. The Turks knew an attack was coming, but they were not sure where, and the reinforcement of Anzac by some 20,000 men, carried out over the nights of August 3, 4 and 5, was not appreciated by Sanders for the strong movement that it was. A fierce Turkish attack on Lean's Trench, half a mile south of Lone Pine at Anzac the day before the British offensive started, was beaten off and did not relate

The bivouac area on the beach at Lala Baba, where heavy casualties were incurred as a result of fire from Turkish 6-inch guns



An 'operating theatre' in a dug-out. Hospitalisation was impossible anywhere on the peninsula

to any Turkish penetration of their opponent's designs. The initiative lay with General Hamilton.

British deception perceived

The offensive opened, as planned, with an attack at Helles. An artillery barrage of less than overwhelming proportions heralded the attack by three brigades of VIII Corps over a front of one mile with the infantry assaults commencing at 1550 hours on the afternoon of August 6, with follow-up operations on the morning of August 7. No significant gains of territory were made. Some 7,500 Turks were killed. British casualties were nearly 3,500. This figure was some 500 short of the estimated maximum acceptable casualty figure allowed by the planners for a successful holding operation. But unfortunately it failed to rivet the attention of the Turks. At daybreak on August 7 Sanders ordered his Helles reserve forces to march north-east to help hold the line facing the Anzac and Suvla attacks.

In the face of such casualties the temptation of the commentator is to castigate British folly. A more difficult but ultimately more sensible reaction is to praise Liman von Sanders. Faced with reports emanating from the roar of battle in different areas he calmly allowed them to sort themselves out, and when they had done so he acted with deadly decisiveness. In the night (August 6/7) before he had ordered the Helles reserves to Anzac-Suvla, he directed that three battalions leave the Bulair Isthmus for the new front. By 0700 hours the next morning he felt sure enough of his appreciation to order two divisions to leave Bulair and march the 30 miles towards the sound of the guns. Meanwhile he did his best to give some small reinforcement to Major Willmer's small force on Anafarta Ridge. Thus, within 16 hours of the attack, Sanders had made his decisive moves. In retrospect they have the inestimable value of having been the right ones.

Meanwhile, the second offensive of August 6 went in at Lone Pine at 1730 hours that afternoon. When General Birdwood asked Walker to assault the Lone Pine position the latter attempted to avoid this responsibility. When, however, he saw no help for it and the authorities held that this attack must be a part of the general scheme, he laid his plans with exemplary thoroughness. It was obvious to him that a head-on assault over 100 yards of fire-swept ground would simply lead to exorbitant casualties. To mitigate this evil two tunnels were dug across no man's land from which the leading assault forces were to dash at the Turks' trenches immediately the barrage was lifted. Some last-minute explosives were also fired in no man's land to give some cover to those troops who would be forced to start from their own trenches. The plan was partially successful. It would have been more helpful had the Australians known that the Turkish trenches were protected overhead by baulks of timber. The attack forces under heavy fire literally clawed their way down through the timbers into the trenches and there began the intimate, man to man and bloody fighting that gave that successful assault its proud but hellish reputation. For the way to victory was over the corpses of friend and foe alike in a confined space, and when they got to the rear of the position the troops found that exploitation was prevented by a feature of natural geography they could not observe from their own lines known to history as the Cup. The Turks held the final communication trenches to the area of slaughter and so the assault ended. The Australians won no less than seven VCs.

Between them the Australians and the Turks suffered over 10,000 casualties. The great question is did this well planned but very costly attack assist in the great design? That it caused Turkish troop movements in the Anzac area is unlikely.

Imperial War Museum

Above: Landing under fire in Suvla Bay. *Below:* Rest for fatigue parties in Suvla Bay. The landings here were exploited far too slowly

What is more possible is that the strength of this attack contributed to the concentration on the Anzac-Suvla front that grew in Sanders' mind during the night of August 6/7. It is often confidently asserted that this attack was within an ace of complete breakthrough. In this context, and considering the broken nature of the country, it is legitimate to ask breakthrough to what, and with what? One of the most attractive pictures painted of the Gallipoli campaign is of suddenly demoralised Turks streaming in undisciplined confusion back to Constantinople. The only evidence in favour of such an argument is that Sanders clearly discouraged pessimism ruthlessly. This, surely, was only his job, and not evidence that demoralisation was only a hair's breadth away. This is an important point in considering the operation as a whole, for it is generally confidently assumed that once the British were on the heights of Sari Bair all would have been won. It is true that the danger of being cut off might have induced a strong sense of insecurity in the Turks, but the idea that they would not fight tenaciously and firmly in a defensive posture and on the reverse slopes of hills is neither obvious nor complimentary to those stalwart Turks who for four months had fought British and Dominion troops to a standstill.

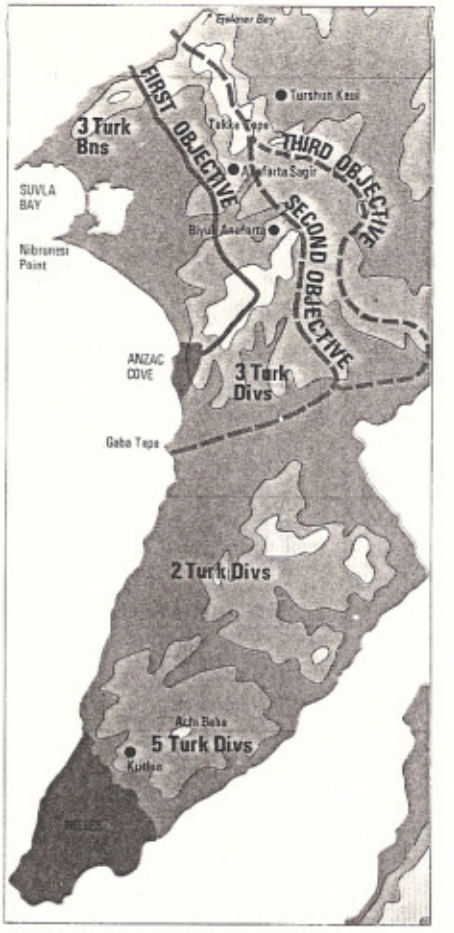
Night march from Anzac

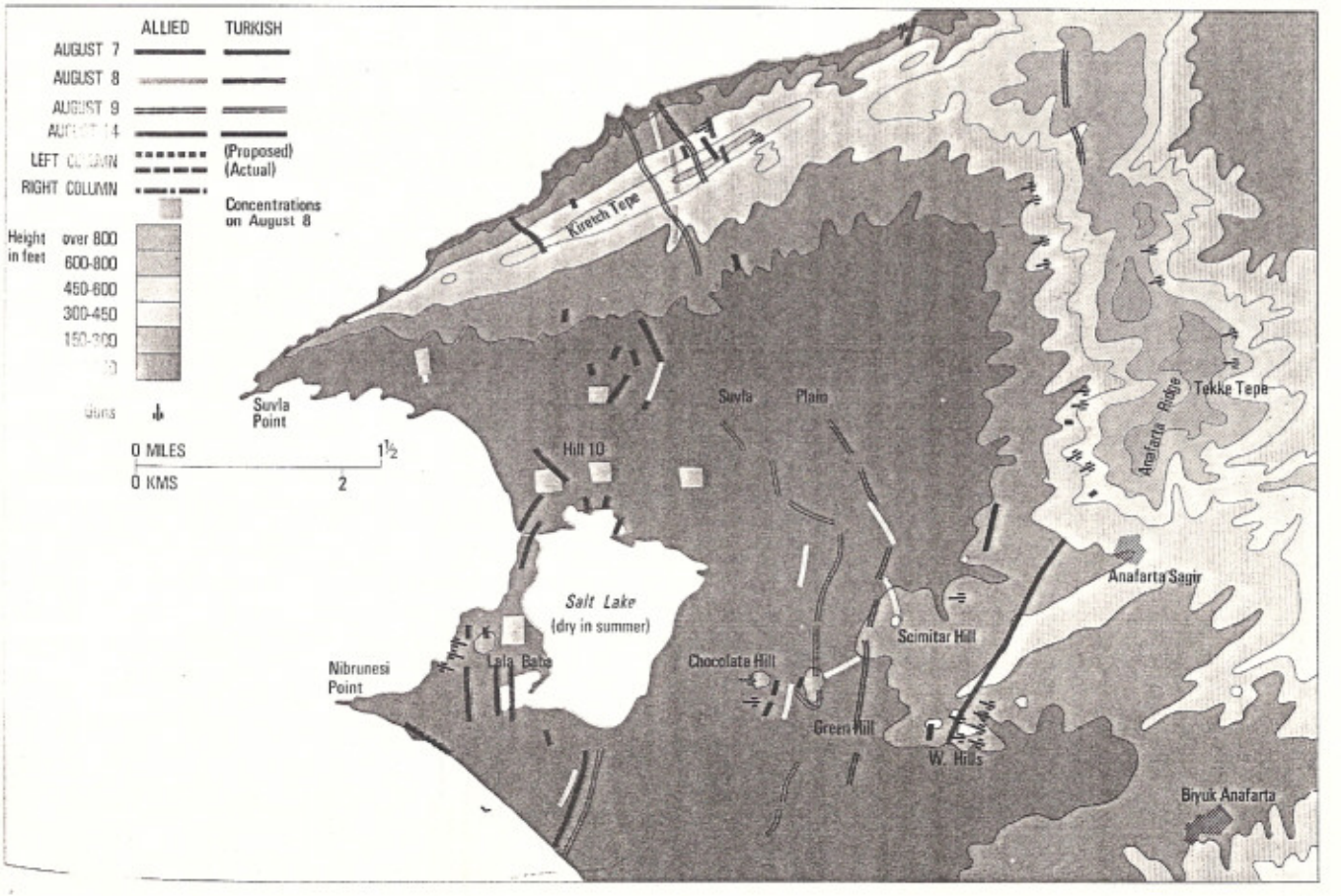
But the main issue was to be joined at Sari Bair, and at about 2230 hours the vanguard of some 10,000 troops quietly began to move off to the north along the beach from the Anzac position. Immediately north were the first two fingers of high ground that sloped towards the sea from Chunuk Bair in an almost east-west direction. North of that were Bauchop's Hill and Damakjelik Hill, which together covered the entrance to Aghyl Dere, the selected route to Koja Chemen Tepe and Hill Q. By 0130 hours on August 7, all of these high points had been taken, and Table Top itself had been captured shortly after midnight. The road to Chunuk Bair was open. Unfortunately the force sent up Sazli Beit Dere got lost and only arrived on Table Top to greet the new dawn. On their left the troops advancing up Chailak Dere did better, climbing up to and passing over Table Top and on to the Rhododendron Spur by 0230 hours. As the day dawned these forces were 1,000 yards short of the summit of Chunuk Bair. There General Johnston halted them to wait for the Sazli

Right: The landings at Suvla Bay and the major diversionary attack on Sari Bair. Poor support doomed the attacks to failure

Imperial War Museum

77 Div
Hill 60
Abdul Rahman Spur
Bauchops Hill
Koja Chemen Tepe
Chailak Dere
The Farm
Hill O
Table Top
Chunuk Bair
Sazli Beit Dere
Battleship Hill
Nek
Pope's
Baby 700
Ari Burnu
Anzac Cove
Quinn's


Turshun Kaui
3 Turk Bns
FIRST OBJECTIVE
THIRD OBJECTIVE
SECOND OBJECTIVE
SUVLA BAY
Nibrunesi Point
ANZAC COVE
3 Turk Divs
Gaba Tepe
2 Turk Divs
5 Turk Divs


ALLIED
TURKISH
AUGUST 7
AUGUST 8
AUGUST 9
(Proposed)
(Actual)
RIGHT COLUMN
Concentrations on August 8
Height in feet
over 800
600-800
450-600
300-450
0 MILES
1½
0 KMS
2
Kiretch Tepe
Suvla Point
Suvla Plain
Hill 10
Tekke Tepe
Anafarta Ridge
Anafarta Sagir
Salt Lake
(dry in summer)
Scimitar Hill
Nibrunesi Point
Lala Baba
Chocolate Hill
Green Hill
W. Hills
Biyuk Anafarta

liberate and fatal disregard of the letter and spirit of his instructions and the consequences were of corresponding magnitude. When two hours later he pushed on again towards the summit, the troops came under fire from Turkish troops who were coming into the position in increasing numbers. Johnston once more stopped his men and fed them. Finally Johnston was ordered to attack the summit at 1030 hours after a naval bombardment. It was too late. What would have been a brisk fight at 0700 hours was an attack against a determined position at 1030 hours. The machine guns chattered, the attack wavered and melted and everyone waited for nightfall. This was the decisive moment on Chunuk Bair despite the wavering fortunes of the next few days.

The left assault column was much less successful. By 0200 hours it had just reached the entrance to Aghyl Dere, when it ought to have been at its rendezvous on Abdul Rahman Spur and at the foot of Hill Q. Consequently, not only was this force well short of its objective at daylight but the situation was so confused that it would likely take the next day to sort out the whereabouts of the various British units, let alone find and assault positions of the Turks. Only one battalion of Gurkhas seemed in a favourable position to attack – at the foot of Hill Q.

As the inevitable consequence of these objectives not being taken the attacks at the old Anzac positions of the Nek, Pope's and Quinn's, which went in soon after dawn on August 7, were sharply repulsed when denied the envisioned flank support from Chunuk Bair. They suffered nearly 600 casualties.

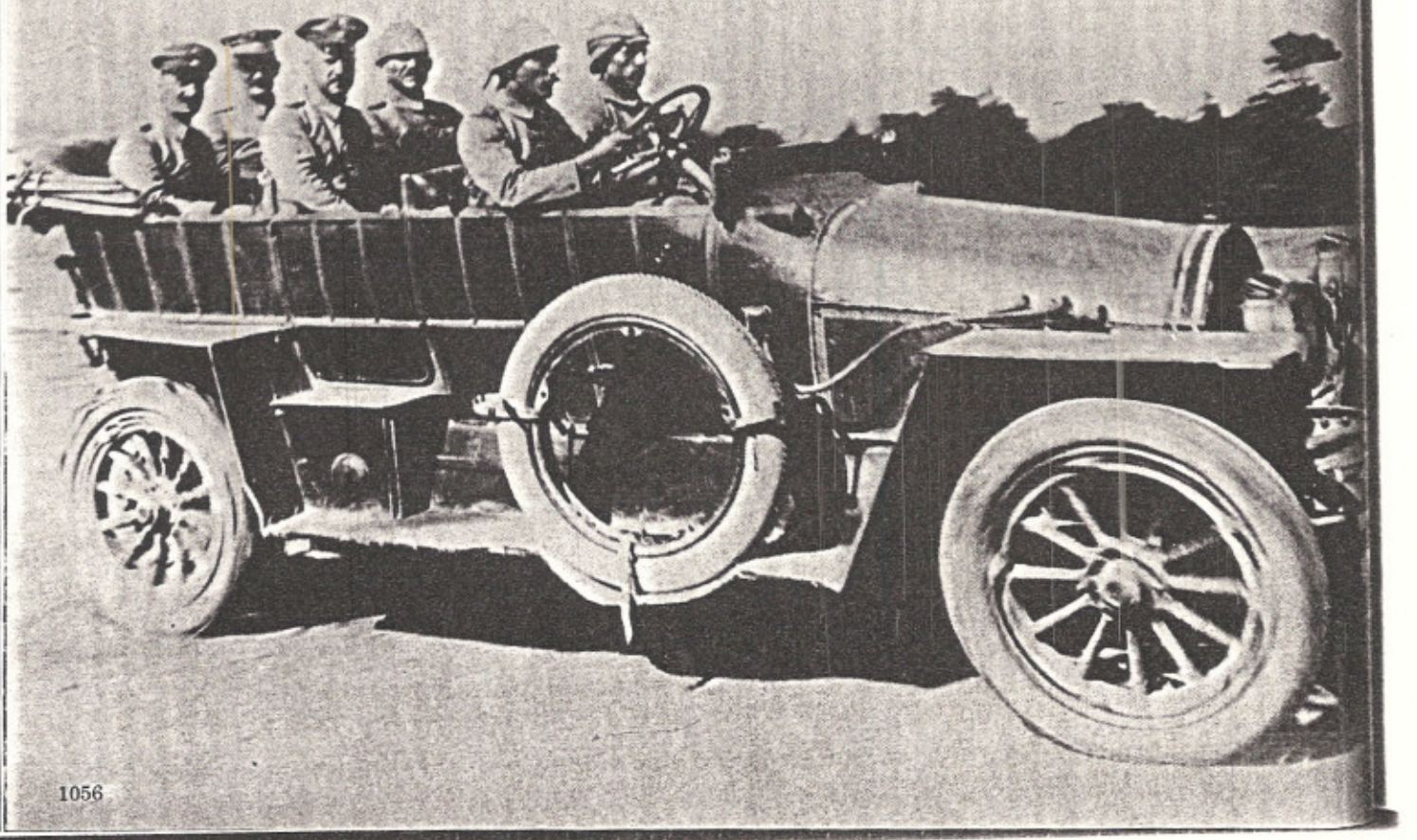
While these momentous events were taking place in the desperate dark below Chunuk Bair, the Royal Navy was depositing its human and merchandise cargo to the north and south of Nibrunesi Point. By mid morning, most of IX Corps was ashore. One intelligently led battalion of Manchesters fanned out and established itself on Kiretch Tepe. Lala Baba, to the west of the salt lagoon, was taken. There was nothing between IX Corps and the certain turning of the whole Anzac position by the capture of Anafarta Ridge, nothing except 1,500 Turks, and yet it was not until evening on August 7 that Chocolate Hill had been acquired. General Stopford stayed on his sloop HMS *Jonquil*, which was not equipped or staffed to handle military messages. General Hammersley sought to sort out men and materials on shore, the Turks kept up a desultory fire on the green troops, and no one knew what was going on. During the long hours of consolidation on the beach no one looked in an intrepid way in the direction of the Turks. The navy had not mitigated the evil effects of a night landing of new troops by mixing up their delivery somewhat. Furthermore, as the day advanced and the hot sun beat down on this confused rabble of an army, the sailors were appalled to discover that the troops were not going forward to get the water in the hills but expected the navy to quench their thirst – and the navy had left behind four lighters at Imbros. Meanwhile the bulk of the 10th Division was landed hard under Suvla Point. All day that vast army quivered beside the hot sea in the hot sun, thirsty, annoyingly shelled, leaderless and helpless. On the next day this situation was allowed to repeat itself.

Back at Anzac on the 8th it yet appeared possible to keep some benefits for the offensive. Under the command of Major Allanson, the Gurkhas at the foot of Hill Q were still anxious to attack and as they moved up the Hill they were joined by a company of the Warwicks then in command of Lieutenant William Slim, the future Field-Marshal. But they were held some 300 feet from the top. Further to their right the agreed key to the whole position, Chunuk Bair, was early on swept by naval gunfire, and the New Zealanders and British troops there, led by Colonel Malone, advanced over the top and began to dig in on the reverse side. But the position was exposed to fire from Turkish forces on Battleship Hill and Hill Q, to which difficulty was added the truly crucial one that it proved to be impossible to get reinforcements through during daylight. Consequently repeated Turkish attacks on this diminishing band forced them back on to their own side of the crest. There they held out all day against artillery fire and infantry attacks with casualties up to 90% in some units until darkness cloaked their agony and brought blessed relief.

Turks fanatically determined

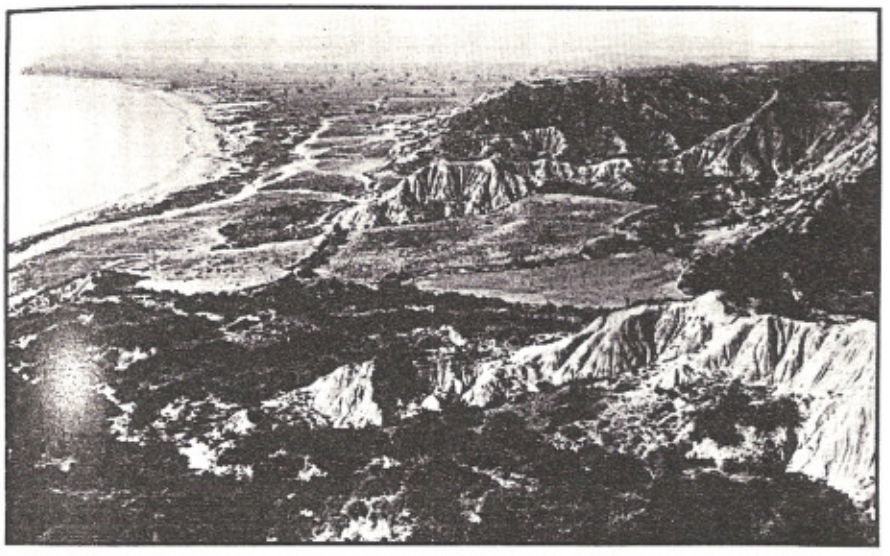
It was a hard day for the Turks as well. From the moment that their reliefs had been thrown in at Chunuk Bair on the morning of August 7, they had realised the importance of the position and their high casualties testified to the quality of their determination to maintain the crest; but they had been shaken by the desperate experience. Nevertheless, the Turkish grip on Chunuk Bair held firm. Further north, Australian and British forces attempting to work up to Koja Chemen Tepe to support their comrades on Sari Bair were prevented by a combination of the intricacies of the Aghyl Dere terrain and carefully sited machine guns.

In planning for the morning of August 9 it was decided by General Godley that



Chunuk Bair should be again assaulted. Unfortunately it was subsequently decided by G[illegible]ral Baldwin, in consultation with John[illegible] on *the end of Rhododendron Spur,* to a[illegible] the Bair by coming at it from 'the [illegible]m', off and below the Spur to the north – a position that could be reached only after some marching through the still imperfectly understood maze of Aghyl Dere. This movement took all night and as the troops came straggling into 'the Farm' early on August 9 they were at once stopped short. The Turkish line on Chunuk Bair held and Allanson's slightly reinforced attempt to take Hill Q succeeded – only to be blasted back off the Hill by artillery fire that did not appear to be Turkish. Again Turks commanded the heights. Furthermore, the balance of power *on the ridge had shifted to the Turks. After* the initial thrust, on the night of the original assault, the firm grip of overall leadership was absent from the Sari Bair attacks. Nothing else could have redeemed the time that had relentlessly slipped away, and had now obviously run out.

On August 8 at Suvla, Stopford stayed aboard his ship. Hammersley was busy planning a massive advance towards the Anafarta Ridge for the morning of the 9th. On the 8th, however, General Headquarters began to bestir itself. Captain Aspinall arrived and found to his horror that the Anafarta Ridge was still Turkish. Agitated, he sent a message to Hamilton that never reached its destination. It was 1800 hours when the Commander-in-Chief finally arrived. He had been delayed for *six hours because of a breakdown in a* transport vessel, and it never seems to have occurred to him to commandeer another one. This comic opera nonsense actually decided the Suvla campaign. For when he had arrived on the scene Hamilton was immediately alive to the possibilities of swift action as well as the dangers of delay, for he appreciated that no Turkish attack meant no Turkish troops – for the moment. After listening to Stopford's excuses on *Jonquil,* Hamilton dashed across to Hammersley on shore just in time to force a night advance which, in Hammersley's hands, proved too ill-organised and just too late. By then Kemal had been given command at Suvla-Anzac by Sanders, and he gave orders for the two divisions newly arrived from Bulair to attack. In the early light they caught Hammersley's forces in the open and drove them headlong back to their starting positions. It was 0600 hours on the morning of August 9, 1915. Sir Ian Hamilton had lost his chance to become a great general.



Imperial War Museum

Left, Li[illegible] von Sanders and the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin set off towards the front. Sander[illegible] [illegible]usiveness was a key factor in the Turkish success. *Top:* The rugged and arid terrain lookin[illegible] [illegible]h from Sari Bair toward Kiretch Tepe, the scene of the abortive ANZAC attack. *Above:* A famil[illegible] [illegible]cene at Gallipoli: stretcher cases on the way back through a communication trench

Terrible plight

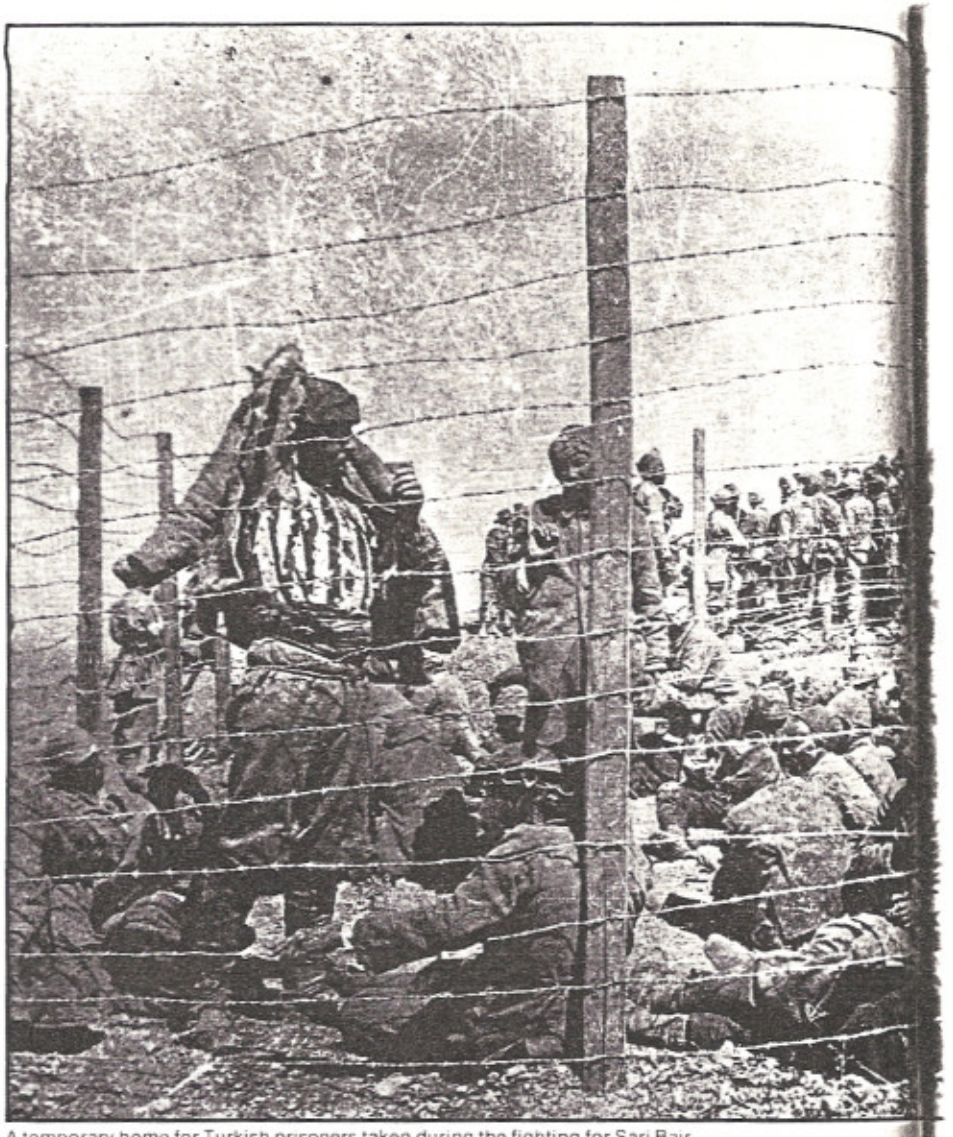
It remained for Kemal to give the *coup de grâce* on the heights of Sari Bair as well. At the time it did not by any means look like a predictable success. When he arrived at the heights just before dawn on August 10, he was greeted by men who, much like their foes, appeared to have been fought to a standstill. With some six battalions including all the immediate reserves in the area he determined to launch a frontal attack along Chunuk Bair and Rhododendron Ridge and finally down the hill against 'the Farm'. It was against all the chances of war in 1915, in the teeth of the possibilities of the machine gun and British artillery concentration. Nevertheless, he had divined the moment for action with a sense of genius. He launched his impetuous attack. His opponents could not withstand the sudden shock and despite heavy casualties the Turks pressed forward with the bayonet. They captured the lesser heights below Chunuk Bair known as the Pinnacle before they were stopped at the apex of Rhododendron Ridge by determined machine gun resistance. Pouring down the valley they cleared 'the Farm' of Baldwin's force. It was between 1000 to 1200 hours that the exhausted remnants of Kemal's force climbed back up the heights: exhausted but victorious. Nearly everyone on the ridge and a high proportion of men at 'the Farm' were killed, and Turkish losses appear to have been correspondingly high. It is true that for a time the British reoccupied 'the Farm' that afternoon but that position was so overlooked from the Pinnacle that it proved too perilous to keep. As 'the Farm' was abandoned so the Hill Q position became redundant. Allanson's and Slim's survivors still holding there slowly fell back into the now comforting folds of Aghyl Dere. Twelve thousand Dominion and British troops had become casualties, and the attack on Sari Bair was over. Sir Ian commented in his diary that night that this effort 'leaves us with a fine gain of ground though minus the vital crests. Next time we will get them.' There was to be no next time.

The sad task of removing the casualties was complete by the 13th. From the front to the dock at Anzac the roadways were choked with dusty, thirsty, desperate and

incapacitated human beings. They filled the hospitals at base, in Egypt and Malta, and finally the *Aquitania* and two other liners carried the residue directly to England. Altogether some 22,000 sick and wounded were brought off from Anzac, sometimes in a state that made the dead seem fortunate. Of the latter many still lie, forgotten by officialdom, in some recess of the Aghyl Dere or on the outskirts of 'the Farm'. The hospital planning had not kept pace with the demands of disease and fighting. It had been the same at the Crimea years before.

When looking back at military campaigns without responsibility for the results, it is not difficult to apportion praise or blame, but when it comes to operations that seem to have failed by a very narrow margin the task of picking the decisive factors is not easy. As already indicated, the first cause was the quality of the Turkish troops and that of their leaders. That they were aided by good fortune ought not to detract from their accomplishment. It has also been indicated that the scheme for capturing Chunuk Bair from Anzac was asking a good deal from a combination of troops that were either green or exhausted. This was especially the case when those troops were incompletely briefed and working from, and in, a confined space, and challenged with terrain that defied uniform scheduled movement. Neither should the sheer physical strain of fighting up steep ascents be minimised. It seems fair to suggest that if the heights could not have been seized and firmly held during the first 24 hours, then the chances of success were minimal. For as soon as the first thrust was stopped the problem was to pass reinforcements rapidly to decisive points. This was made difficult by a number of factors that do not seem to have been thought out completely. First there was the imperfect knowledge of the forward area by possible support troops, and the fact that Turkish reactions and the nature of the ground made such movement incredibly difficult. Even if traffic direction had been swiftly and successfully imposed, the number of men available to pass to the front was limited by the Anzac bottleneck, which was in itself a poor reception and launching pad. This is all best illustrated by Major Allanson's pathetic request for food and drink for his Gurkhas on Hill Q after two days of fighting and separation. He was told that there was plenty back at base if he would only send the men down to get it! Therefore, taking all these circumstances into account, the assault on Sari Bair turns out to have been a curiously 'one-shot' affair, and that its desperate nature was imposed by geography.

This was true, but the way to turn the position was not to rely entirely on the power of small groups of determined men to hold exposed positions without support. The extra men to do this work were already ashore at Suvla on the morning of August 7 and had they captured Anafarta Ridge and swept south towards Sari Bair, then lightly held British and Dominion positions on the latter heights would have become tenable. The weakness, in short, was that the two plans were only weakly linked and not clearly marked by priorities. The two most serious weaknesses in war, failure to establish and maintain overall strategic priorities and failure to exploit chances, were in fatal confluence here. It was tragic, for Hamilton had put his extra men in the only place where they could act to obtain a clear decision, and they did not know what to do in the circumstances in which they found themselves.



A temporary home for Turkish prisoners taken during the fighting for Sari Bair

At Suvla the *denouement* continued. Hamilton was not a man given to despondency and the sense of urgency he had directed towards Stopford when the situation was promising, before August 9, was not directed towards making him move in a much more difficult situation. The prospects looked good to the Commander-in-Chief because of the arrival of the 53rd and 54th Divisions, but the generals on the spot demurred. On the 14th a preliminary movement intended to advance protection for an attack on the following day with the fresh troops was badly shot up, so that Hamilton acquiesced in the cancellation of the offensive for the moment. Stopford, surprisingly, used the occasion to push General Mahon's forces along the Kiretch Tepe, but this move had no deeply serious intentions behind it and Turkish forces held it easily after the original momentum ceased. On this day, when Mahon's offensive was on (an attack of which Hamilton was not appraised) the Commander-in-Chief relieved Stopford. Kitchener encouraged this move and sent out Lieutenant-General Julian Byng from France to command IX Corps.

In the meantime, this unhappy command fell to General de Lisle who up to that point had commanded the 29th Division at Helles. The first report of the new commander at Suvla detailing the difficulties in the way of a broad offensive against the Anafarta Ridge, even with the promised supporting troops from Egypt and Helles, at last convinced Sir Ian that without large-scale support of perhaps 100,000 men, he could not hope to carry the offensive, and that he had in fact failed. The home government, long fed on optimistic reports, was at last given the truth. Nevertheless plans went forward for an attack on the W Hills and Scimitar Hill on August 21, while Hill 60 at the south of the Suvla position was to be assaulted by troops at Anzac. The British 2nd Mounted Division had arrived and suffered very heavily in the assault on Scimitar Hill, as did the 11th Division and the remnants of the veteran 29th Division. IX Corps, in fact, lost 5,300 men out of 14,300 committed. It was not so different on Hill 60, where a combined British, Australian and New Zealand attack made hardly any progress.

Australian War Memorial

Exposed, short of ammunition and good guns and facing a rapidly increasing foe, the troops at neither Suvla nor Anzac were capable of decisive operations. Since the August offensive began, some 40,000 British troops had become casualties, including sick and wounded.

Brave efforts of submarines

It is important to remember that, during the period of the offensive in August, intrepid submariners of the Royal Navy, defying mines and defensive nets, penetrated regularly into the Sea of Marmara. They sank some shipping, but the words of Sir Julian Corbett, the official Naval Historian, must stand. 'All that we can affirm is that neither their activity nor any other of the subsidiary operations availed to prevent the enemy bringing up their reserves to the critical zone.'

Meanwhile, the decisions that were to determine the future of the Gallipoli operations had begun to be taken elsewhere. Nothing in the whole campaign is more remarkable than the way in which Kitchener supported his subordinate until the whole depth of the implications of the latter's failure struck home, and even then he was slow to abandon his appointee. Indeed, the decline in Kitchener's own reputation was not unconnected with Hamilton's nemesis. Churchill has claimed that the cause of Hamilton's failure was too little support from home, and that this support was generally sent too late. With regard to the quality of men and materials sent out there is something in this criticism, but with regard to quantity, not much. The fact is that Kitchener did nearly everything that could be done for Hamilton short of making the Dardanelles attack the first priority of the British government – superior even to France. While one may be tempted to agree that this was a sound course from a military and perhaps long run political viewpoint it was not possible to proceed strongly in that direction considering the political climate in London at the time. In the field it had become necessary for superb leadership to make good the lack of training in combined or special operations that characterised the British armed forces, and circumstances had made it impossible to achieve this. Thus Hamilton's failure to provide this had sunk his own credit, and events beyond his control now influenced his future and the future of the campaign at the Dardanelles.

French forces had had no serious part in the August offensive and they were likely unimpressed with what they saw. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Joffre persuaded Kitchener that the time had come for a further attempt on the Western Front that autumn. This situation, however, was complicated by the fact that French politicians, as distinct from the French High Command, were not keen on an autumn slaughter at home. Their opportunity for manoeuvre was provided by the fact that Bulgaria, her confidence in Allied success at Gallipoli evaporated, now made signs as if to join the Central Powers, and Greece trembled for her safety. Consequently the French, who were not anxious to be directly connected with British failure in the present Gallipoli operations, began to talk of landing six divisions on the Asiatic shore of the straits under the command of General Sarrail, whom Joffre had dismissed earlier in the year from a home army command, but who was of political importance for a number of reasons. The French were probably not serious about these proposed operations. Nevertheless, the fact that they were being discussed provided the opportunity for Kitchener, during the month of September, to encourage Hamilton with the promise of vast support. This daydream was ended when Bulgaria mobilised, then Greece asked for Franco-British support in her north-east and plans were concerted to send Franco-British forces to Salonika, instead of Gallipoli. Without pronouncing on the value of supporting the Greek request politically, two thoughts do emerge. The first is that this new situation was the direct result of not winning at Gallipoli, and, second, that the Salonika concept menaced the whole principle of concentration of force at the Straits.

However, the Salonika decisions meant that another front was about to open, and it meant, therefore, that British ministers could not much longer delay establishing priorities for their military activity. Churchill's chagrin was really caused by the fact that from his viewpoint they had already chosen the wrong one. In the meantime the Western Front's priority never looked like crumbling seriously.

Amid these alarums and excursions in high places was introduced the growing feeling that Hamilton was no good as a Commander-in-Chief. Along with the August failure, this growing conviction, together with the machinations of grand strategy, combined to seal his doom. Also, Commodore Roger Keyes, this time with Admiral Wemyss' backing, was busy organising another assault on the political fortresses in favour of a purely naval breakthrough. Whether his calculations were correct or not will always excite debate, but certainly he had seen enough to have no further confidence in the grand projects of the generals. However, Keyes did not have as his purpose the undermining of Hamilton. That work was first and foremost the result of Hamilton's own lack of success. It soon received added powerful moral assistance. First of all, when he got home Stopford was concerned to defend himself, and his *Report*, which Hamilton never saw, did nothing to increase Kitchener's confidence in the latter. Mahon, Maxwell from Egypt and Birdwood from Anzac added their bits. Keith Murdoch, a well-known Australian journalist, had been allowed to look around at Anzac. When he got to London he gained access to Lloyd George, who acted swiftly to let him tell his lurid story of the incompetence of the generals to Grey, Bonar Law, Balfour, Churchill, F. E. Smith and Hankey. Asquith was not hard to convince. He had had his fill of unsuccessful generals. Also, a member of Hamilton's staff, Guy Dawney, went to London, without Hamilton's knowledge, to 'tell the truth'. He did so and it did not convey the same cheerful picture as that contained in Hamilton's letters and despatches.

Thus the pressure on Kitchener mounted. On October 2 he warned Hamilton that unofficial reports from the Dardanelles were not ringing with confidence, and perhaps some staff changes at Gallipoli GHQ were necessary, and hinted darkly that the Chief-of-Staff, Braithwaite, might be expendable. Hamilton stood firm in his own responsibility. Nine days later he was asked by the Dardanelles Committee to report on the possibility of evacuation. He estimated that half the men and all their equipment would perish and he said this not as a solid assessment but because 'evacuation to me was unthinkable'. On the 14th Lloyd George had the opposition to Hamilton organised, threatened resignation along with Bonar Law, and so Kitchener emerged from that meeting charged with the task of firing Hamilton.

Sir Ian Hamilton's successor was General Sir Charles Munro, from France. He was no Gallipoli enthusiast.

Further Reading

Aspinall-Oglander, C. F., *Gallipoli* (Heinemann 1932)

Corbett, Sir Julian, *Naval Operations Volume III* (Longmans 1923)

Churchill, W. S., *The World Crisis* (Butterworth 1923)

Hamilton, Sir Ian, *Gallipoli Diary* (Arnold 1920)

James, R. R., *Gallipoli* (Batsford 1965)

Moorhead, A., *Gallipoli* (New York: Harper 1956)

[For Don Schurman's biography, see page 715.]