

Topic 1: Into battle

Work Sheet 1B: Into Battle at Gallipoli

Source 1 – Account of Signaller Ellis Silas who went ashore at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915



AWM P02801.001

Signaller Ellis Silas

In the distance one can just discern the Dardanelles opening up – the thunder of the guns is much clearer – the weather this morning is beautiful; what will it be tonight? I have eaten well. I can now see fire from the guns. I wonder which of the men round me has been chosen by Death. I do not feel the least fear, only a sincere hope that I may not fail at the critical moment.

5.30 pm. We are approaching the battlefield, well under the fire of the enemy – it is difficult to realise that every burst of flame, every spurt of water, means Death or worse ... We have been told of the impossible task before us, of probable annihilation; yet we are eager to get to it; we joke with each other about getting cold feet, but deep down in our hearts we know when we get to it we will not be found wanting ... I don't think I can carry my kit – I can scarcely stand with the weight of it. We are descending on to the destroyer *Ribble* which is along side us. Noise of the guns simply frightful. Colour of the sea beautiful. We are packed very tightly on the destroyer.

n n n

It was relief to get ashore; we are packed so tightly in the boats and moreover so heavily laden with our kit that, had a shot hit the boat, we should have no chance of saving ourselves – it was awful the feeling of utter helplessness. Meanwhile the Turks pelted us hot and fast. In jumping ashore I fell over, my kit was so heavy; I couldn't get up without help – fortunately the water was shallow at this point, otherwise ... It was a magnificent spectacle to see those thousands of men rushing through the hail of Death as though it was some big game – these chaps don't seem to know what fear means.

Constant exposure to heavy fire during his time at Gallipoli caused Silas to suffer from neurasthenia, otherwise known as shell shock. On 17 May 1915, he was put aboard the hospital ship *Galeka* and eventually admitted to No 1 AGH (Australian General Hospital) in Egypt with neurasthenia and enteric fever. Silas was sent to convalesce in England and was discharged from the AIF as medically unfit on 17 August 1916. Silas' experience of Gallipoli, recorded in his diary and sketchbook, were published in 1916 as *Crusading at Anzac A.D.1915*. In the foreword to the book he wrote:

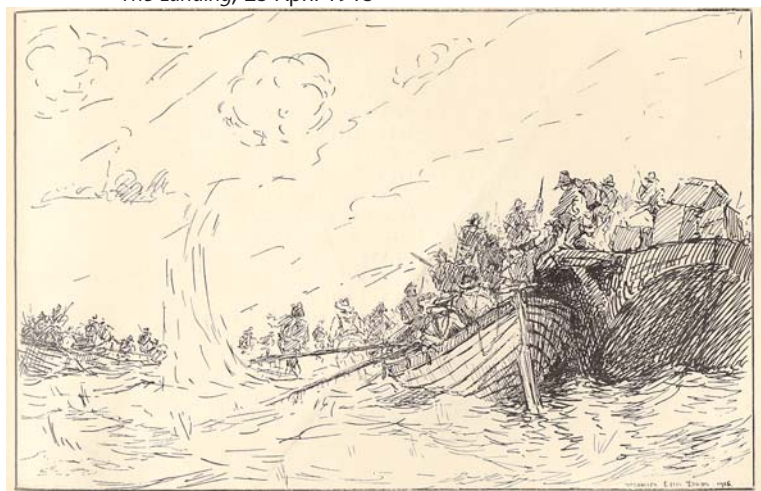
In this work I have not touched upon the big historical facts, but have endeavoured to portray War as the soldier sees it, shorn of all its pomp and circumstance; the War that means cold and hunger, heat and thirst, the ravages of fever; the War that brings a hail of lead that tears the flesh and rends the limb, and makes of men, heroes.

n n n

The beach is littered with wounded, some of them frightful spectacles; perchance myself I may at any moment be even as they are ... The noise now is Hell ... Now some of the chaps are getting it – groans and screams everywhere, calls for ammunition and stretcher bearers, though how the latter are going to carry stretchers along such precipitous and sandy slopes beats me. Now commencing to take some of the dead out of the trenches; this is horrible; I wonder how long I can stand it.

www.anzac.gov.au/1landing/s_diary1915april.html/

The Landing, 25 April 1915



The collection of the State Library of NSW

Source 2 – Roll Call at Gallipoli



AWM ART02436

Silas was the only participant in the Gallipoli landing to produce paintings from his personal experiences. This oil painting is called 'Roll Call'. According to Silas, the roll call after a battle was '... always a most heart-breaking incident. Name after name would be called; the reply a deep silence ...' Silas executed this painting in London in about 1920 on commission for the Australian War Records Section. It hangs today in the Gallipoli Gallery in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Source 3 – Account of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915 by Private Roy Howard Denning



Private Roy Howard Denning. This photo was taken at the end of the war in 1918. *Reproduced with the permission of Lorna Lancaster.*

Private Roy Howard Denning landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. He was wounded on 16 June and sent to Malta to recuperate, where he wrote to his mother describing his experiences at the landing. In October 1918, because he was an original Anzac, Private Roy Denning received the so-called 'Anzac leave' home to Australia, and he was on the high seas when war ended on 11 November. Roy Denning had attended the Yass District School as a boy but he did not return there after the war. The town, however, for commemorative purposes, claimed him as one of their own and his name is on the Yass Honour Roll at the Soldiers' Memorial Hall and on the Yass District School Honour Roll.

For an hour or more I struggled on, slipping every now and again right down the side where the earth was very loose, making my already wet and heavy clothes still heavier with the mud that clung to them. I found it very slow work, my pack and rifle and shovel etc. catching every few minutes in the thick scrub, I had at times hard work to extricate myself I seemed to have handles sticking all over me, but what we accomplished that day we ourselves marvel at now. In spite of the dirty and in some cases ragged uniform covering tired bodies the men were cheerful and laughed at their plight, some jokingly saying 'Oh, if only my girl could see me now.'

All day long the fire of the big guns was terrific, the crack of rifles incessant. All day stretcher bearers carried away the wounded down rugged paths hastily cut by the pioneers and men struggled up the same paths carrying ammunition. The food that fed the only weapons that prevented us being overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy. I was very thirsty, but dare not drink, not knowing when I would get a fresh supply of water, eating I never thought of until the long day was drawing to a close.

I had given up hope of finding my company at the firing line and was prepared to spend the night in the bed of a dry creek running down from the ridge, where with several of the reserves we endeavoured to keep ourselves warm by squeezing up close together.

About 8pm or perhaps later, it came on to rain, although not heavy it added to the darkness and misery of the already miserable state of affairs, particularly in the case of the wounded. Men struggled through the wet scrub, groping their way and slipping down every few steps, but only to struggle on again without a murmur. All night I sat half dozing and half wondering what the cost of this ceaseless fire would mean to our men, and not being an old warrior, I could not imagine so much ammunition being expended at random.

www.anzacsite.gov.au/5environment/homefront.html

Source 4 – A Turkish account

As the tows [barges bringing the soldiers ashore] approached the cove, Lieutenant Colonel Sefik Aker of the Turkish 27th Regiment was looking out to sea from the Ari Burnu headland at the northern end of Anzac Cove. Later he described the scene:

At 2 a.m. the moon was still shining. The patrols on duty from my reserve platoon were Idris from Biga and Cennil from Gallipoli. They reported having sighted many enemy ships in the open sea. I got up and looked through my binoculars. I saw, straight in front of us but rather a long way off, a large number of ships the size of which could not be distinguished. It was not clear whether or not they were moving.

I reported immediately to the battalion commander, Major Izmet, first by telephone, then by written report. He said to me: 'There is no cause for alarm. At most, the landing will be at Gaba Tepe' – and told me to continue watching these ships. I went to a new observation point and kept watching. This time I saw them as a great mass which, I decided, seemed to be moving straight towards us. In the customary manner, I went to the phone to inform divisional headquarters. That was about 2.30 a.m. I got through to the second in command, Lieutenant Nori, and told him of it. He replied, 'Hold the line. I will inform the Chief of Staff.' He came back a little later and said, 'How many of these ships are warships and how many transports?' I replied, 'It is impossible to distinguish them in the dark but the quantity of ships is very large'. With that the conversation closed.

A little while later, the moon sank below the horizon and the ships became invisible in the dark. The reserve platoon was alerted and ordered to stand by. I watched and waited.

That same dawn allowed Colonel Aker and his men to see the tows clearly for the first time. In his words:

In a little while, the sound of gunfire broke out. I saw a machine gun firing from a small boat in front of Ari Burnu. Some of the shots were passing over us. I immediately ordered the platoon to occupy the trenches on the high ridge which dominated Ari Burnu and sent only two sections under Sergeant Ahmed to the trenches on the central ridge overlooking the beach. At the same time, I wrote a report to the battalion commander stating that the enemy was about to begin landing and I was going to a position on the far side with a reserve platoon. I ordered the withdrawal by telephone and set off immediately. On the way, we came under fire from the ships.

Aker was severely wounded in the thigh during this action and his command passed to Muharrem, the senior sergeant.

Questions

Sources 1 and 3

- Study the eyewitness accounts of Signaller Silas and Private Denning in *Sources 1* and *3* and consider what evidence each provides about the following conditions and experiences of the soldiers on the day they went into battle at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

- the terrain and weather conditions

- their thoughts as they prepare to go into battle

- the difficulties they face during the day

- the effect on them of the noise, sight of dead soldiers

- personal experiences of fear, thirst, hunger

- relations with their mates, humour.

- What are the main similarities between these two accounts?

- Compare the photographs of Silas and Denning that were taken after the war. Can you come to any conclusions about the effect that World War I had on these two men?

Source 2

Make a careful study of this oil painting and the information about it provided in the caption.

- What event is being portrayed in this painting?

- How would you describe the feelings of the soldiers who are lined up?

- How would the soldiers be standing for roll call in non-combat conditions?

- What is depicted in the shadows in the foreground of this painting?

- What impression of the fighting at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 is created by this painting?

Source 4

- What is the military rank of the Turkish soldier in *Source 4*?

- How is his account different from the accounts of the Australian soldiers? Can you suggest reasons why it is different?

- What evidence in this account suggests that the Turks were well prepared for the Allied invasion on 25 April 1915?

- What opinion can you form about the Turkish soldier from his account of the events of 25 April 1915?
