



# A walk in the shadows of history

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During the initial stages of the 2013 Operation Paladin deployment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Israel, the idea to have a small contingent of officers go to Turkey and attend the Anzac Day services on the Gallipoli peninsula was formed.

Captain Chris Iodice took the planning lead and made contact through appropriate channels, getting our party onto the official guest register, which would allow us to attend the service in uniform.

Five of us were fortunate enough to travel to Turkey to see for ourselves the battlefields where our military heritage and the birthplace of our national identity 98 years ago.

We met at Istanbul on 23 April, some coming at the end of a period of leave while others came straight from their observation post on the Golan Heights, and had our first experiences of Turkish hospitality.

Now all together, we departed at 0900 the next day to drive four hours south to Canakkale. The drive was a mix of contrasts, from the city of Istanbul where the traffic chaos exceeded our expectations, to the countryside with its beautiful rolling farmland reminiscent of the Hunter Valley or Shepparton districts in Australia. The big difference however was the view to the east, which took in the Sea of Marmara, the vast body of water that is fed by the Dardanelles and is the lifeblood of the Black Sea. The volume of shipping travelling through the sea was staggering, more reminiscent of a two-lane highway than a shipping lane.

Just after lunch we arrived at the little township of Kilitbahir where we were to take a car ferry across to the historic Canakkale. The area is significant to both the decision to proceed with the landings of 25 April 1915 and to the Turkish people in their quest for independence during the twilight of the Ottoman Empire. Sailing the straights it is difficult to comprehend the decision by the British and French navies to force the Dardanelles with a naval force alone. Measuring just some 1500m across with shallows throughout the area, the Allied naval vessels were bottlenecked in an excellent killing ground and suffered accordingly, marking 18 March 1915 as a day to remember for the Turkish people.

For us, we sailed across peacefully and arrived at our hotel with a couple of hours to spare before we were to meet the military band, a mixture of Australian and New Zealand Navy personnel, who were to be our transport across to Anzac Cove.

Showered, shaved and dressed for a long night at the memorial site, we boarded the buses with the band. We then re-boarded the car ferry, disembarking this time a little further north at a town called Maydos and commenced our drive over the ridge that bisects the peninsula and towards our brush with history.

Security was evident everywhere with the roads leading to the site closed for the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> and a heavy overt presence of Turkish Gendarmerie.

Arriving at the site itself was surreal. As we approached the entrance to the commemorative area we encountered a very long line of those who were coming to attend the service with local tour groups, as members of Australia-based Gallipoli tours or on individual pilgrimages. However, as part of the official party, we drove through security, escorted the whole way by Turkish police, and dismounted just west of the original landing site.

As we stood taking in the area, the ground and the atmosphere, we were fortunate to bump into Brigadier Don Roach, the ADF representative who would be advising on the official 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations. Brigadier Roach showed us through the site and through the western security entrance to where we would sleep for the night. The walk took around 10 minutes and, thinking back on it, the realisation of just how small the area was and how many men on both sides lived here for nine months, is staggering.

Overwatching everything we did from the time we passed through the eastern security gate to the time we would leave the cove the next afternoon was that most famous of features – the Sphinx. It towered over the entire area like a beacon, and gazing up at this iconic feature brought home the reality of where we were.

The organisation of the site today was outstanding. For an area with no electricity, plumbing or running water, we wanted for nothing. Lighting, hot food, entertainment – it was all there. The official program ran non-stop overnight from 2000hr until the dawn service at 0530, and showcased the history of the campaign, the area and the organisations that have supported the preservation of both the site and the history that is embodied within the ground on which we now stood.

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