

The Landing at Gallipoli

It was 1:00am when we climbed down the rope ladders into the rowboats. The large navy ships had taken us this far but now steamboats would tow us the rest of the way. We were all young blokes from Western Australia and this would be the first time Australians would fight under the Australian flag. Officially, we belonged to the 11th battalion. We would be in the first wave and our job was to establish a beachhead for the rest of the fellas.

The steamboats chugged along through the darkness; the only sound we could hear was the engine and the splosh of water against the sides of the boats. No one spoke, each man was alone in his thoughts. Little did we know that Turkish sentries had already spotted the boats and they were ready for us.

At 4:30am the steamboats stopped and we rowed the rest of the way. We immediately came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire. We rowed hard, two men to an oar. Bullets pinged off the boat and I could hear a number of men groan and cry out.

Within reach of the shore, we leapt into the water and charged up the beach. Something was wrong. It was meant to be a wide beach with just low hills in front of us but what we found was very different. Instead before us was a steep cliff that came almost to the water's edge. Only later on would we find out we had landed too far north.

Under more heavy fire, we started to climb the cliff. We used our bayonets to dig into the soil and grabbed onto the thorny gorse bushes to pull ourselves up. We soon discovered that the landing was a mess and that soldiers from lots of different units were all jumbled up together. The orders we received were all mixed up. One minute we needed to go left, the next minute go right. All we knew was that we had to keep going straight up.



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After what felt like a lifetime, we reached the top of the cliffs. The sun began to rise and we saw more reinforcements landing far below us. We would spend the rest of the day digging for cover. We ate when we could and learnt very quickly that our opponents were some of the bravest soldiers in the world.

That evening, we received the following order from our commanding officer:

'Dig yourselves right in and stick it out ... dig, dig, dig until you are safe.'

We also heard that we had lost more than 2000 men that day. With heavy hearts we tried to catch a wink of sleep for who knew how long we would remain in this hellish place.

