

## A study in the limitations of command : General Sir William Birdwood and the A.I.F., 1914-1918

**Author:**

Millar, John Dermot

**Publication Date:**

1993

**DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/18057>

**License:**

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>

Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/38742> in <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au> on 2024-04-29

A study in the limitations of command:  
General Sir William Birdwood and the A.I.F., 1914-1918

Prepared and submitted by  
JOHN DERMOT MILLAR  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
University of New South Wales  
31 January 1993

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of advanced learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dermot Millar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Dermot Millar  
31 January 1993

## ABSTRACT

Military command is the single most important factor in the conduct of warfare. To understand war and military success and failure, historians need to explore command structures and the relationships between commanders. In World War I, a new level of higher command had emerged: the corps commander. Between 1914 and 1918, the role of corps commanders and the demands placed upon them constantly changed as experience brought illumination and insight. Yet the men who occupied these positions were sometimes unable to cope with the changing circumstances and the many significant limitations which were imposed upon them. Of the World War I corps commanders, William Birdwood was one of the longest serving. From the time of his appointment in December 1914 until May 1918, Birdwood acquired an experience of corps command which was perhaps more diverse than his contemporaries during this time. He is, then, an ideal subject for a prolonged assessment of this level of command.

This thesis has two principal objectives. The first is to identify and assess those factors which limited Birdwood's capacity and ability to command. The second is to explore the institutional constraints placed on corps commanders during the 1914-1918 war.

Surprisingly, this is a comparatively barren area of research. Because very few officers spent much time as corps commanders on their way to higher command appointments and because the role of the corps commanders in military planning and in the conduct of operations was not immediately apparent, their role has been practically ignored. Historians have tended to concentrate on the Army and divisional levels creating a deficient view of higher military command in World War I. However, corps commanders could and did play an important part in planning operations and in military affairs generally. Birdwood's experiences at Gallipoli and in France reflect some of the changes to command structures that were prompted by the successes and failures of operations directed at the corps level. In as much as these two theatres of war were vastly different and Birdwood was confronted with dissimilar problems, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about the evolution of higher military command after 1914.

Using a wide range of primary and secondary sources located in Australian and British archives, this thesis traces Birdwood's career as a corps commander at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. It also examines his tenure as G.O.C. of the A.I.F.



## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

Introduction 1

Chapter One 11

Chapter Two 45

Chapter Three 68

Chapter Four 81

Chapter Five 92

Chapter Six 98

Chapter Seven 119

Chapter Eight 140

Chapter Nine 165

Chapter Ten 175

Epilogue 193

Conclusion 197

Bibliography 204

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Australian War Memorial which awarded me grants in 1990 and 1991 enabling me to undertake research at archives in the United Kingdom. In particular, my thanks to Peter Stanley, Head of the Historical Research Section at the AWM for his continued interest in the project, and Ian Smith, Curator of Information Services for his help with research materials.

My thanks to Lady Derham, daughter of General Sir C.B.B.White, who allowed me access to her father's papers; Warren Perry, MBE; Sir Robert Rhodes James; Dr Tom Frame; Professor Peter Dennis and Elizabeth Greenhalgh; my wife, Christine; and Professor Trevor Wilson of the University of Adelaide who read and commented on the manuscript in its entirety.

I am particularly grateful to my thesis supervisor, Dr Robin Prior of the University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, who has been a source of valuable and trenchant criticism.

## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Aide-de-Camp
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGGS	Brigadier-General, General Staff
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
CRA	Commander, Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander, Royal Engineers
CSO	Chief Staff Officer
DMO	Director Military Operations
DMS	Director of Medical Services
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HE	High Explosive
HQ	Headquarters
HMS	His Majesty's Ship
MEF	Mediterranean Expeditionary Force
MGGS	Major-General, General Staff
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NZEF	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
PRO	Public Record Office
RA	Royal Artillery
RE	Royal Engineers
RN	Royal Navy
VC	Victoria Cross
WO	War Office

## INTRODUCTION

### I

Of all the things that William Riddell Birdwood was and the many things that he achieved in his life he will be remembered and judged chiefly for his performance as a corps commander between December 1914 and May 1918. In attributing to Birdwood his proper place in military history, it is first necessary to determine those factors which limited his capacity to discharge his duties. At times, these limitations severely constrained Birdwood's freedom of action, circumscribed his authority and stifled his abundant initiative. Their nature is diverse. Birdwood was limited by command administrative structures, by social mores and customs, and by his own background and experiences as an Indian Army officer. Their cumulative effect on his performance was profound.

Birdwood was a man of his time who carried with him a colonial background that hampered more than it helped in his later military career. He was born in India on 13 September 1865 at Kirkee, Poona, the son of Herbert Birdwood, then Under-Secretary to the Government of Bombay, and Edith, daughter of Surgeon-Major E.H.Impey of the Bombay Horse Artillery and also Postmaster-General of Bombay.<sup>1</sup>

He left India for England at an early age to undertake his education at a public school, Clifton College, Bristol. This was also the *alma mater* of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France from December 1915 until the war ended, and of Charles Bean, the Australian official historian of World War 1.

By his own admission, Birdwood was a poor student keeping "a steady place near the bottom" of his form.<sup>2</sup> He was, however, an enthusiastic sportsman and a keen member of the school cadet corps which led him to a commission as a lieutenant in the Prince Regent's Royal Ayr and Wigtown Militia, later the 4th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers. During his service with the Militia from 1883 to 1884, it "occurred" to Birdwood to sit for the Sandhurst entrance examination. He passed although "very low down in the list".<sup>3</sup> A Sandhurst contemporary was Douglas Haig, four years older than Birdwood and the oldest cadet, while Birdwood was one of the youngest.

---

<sup>1</sup> W.R.Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1941), 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 28

In 1885, a Russian war scare with the Afghans led the War Office to issue orders for the first fifty of the Sandhurst 'junior' cadets to be commissioned and posted to a regiment. Accordingly, Birdwood was commissioned and gazetted to the XII Lancers and ordered to embark for India to join his regiment at Bangalore. The following year he was posted to the XI Bengal Lancers stationed in Central India.

Promoted to the rank of captain in 1893, Birdwood was made adjutant of the Viceroy's Body Guard. At this time, he married Jenny Bromhead, daughter of Colonel Sir Benjamin Bromhead.

While on leave in England in 1899, war was declared on the Boers in South Africa. Birdwood was selected for service in Natal with Lord Dundonald's Mounted Brigade as a Staff Officer. The following year, Lord Kitchener succeeded to the command of the British Army in South Africa. Selected as Kitchener's Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Birdwood was to serve with him for the next nine years. He was later to describe Kitchener as the "greatest influence on my life".<sup>4</sup> At war's end in South Africa, Kitchener was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. Birdwood was appointed his Assistant Military Secretary and Persian Interpreter. In 1905, he was appointed to the position of Military Secretary, a position he held until 1909 when Kitchener left India. He spent the following years as the commander of the Kohat Independent Brigade in Northern India until April 1912 when he was promoted to the rank of Major-General and appointed Quartermaster-General in India.

There was a deep affection between Birdwood and Kitchener. Birdwood noted in his diary, on hearing of Kitchener's death in June 1916, that "...I think he was fonder of me than almost anyone".<sup>5</sup> He told Senator George Pearce, the Australian Minister for Defence, that he felt he had "lost the best friend I had in the world ...".<sup>6</sup> Travers notes that in the 1890s and early 1900s, it was essential for the career of a young officer to have a senior protector who would look after the interests of his protege.<sup>7</sup> Kitchener filled this role for Birdwood. There is nothing sinister in this. It was a fact of Victorian and Edwardian military life.

Another fact of this life was the part played by the influence of both friends and enemies, either of whom could make or break a career.<sup>8</sup> Travers

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>5</sup> Birdwood diary, 6 June 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>6</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 27 June 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 11.

points out that it is "noticeable that a confusing variety of influences made themselves felt. These ranged from personal, regimental and arm rivalries, to the question of whom one was or was not with at Staff College...".<sup>9</sup> Birdwood claimed that he did not go to the Staff College because he doubted his capacity to pass in.<sup>10</sup> But only four places a year were allocated to officers of the Indian Army at the Staff College, Camberley. Those who were successful in their application for entry, sacrificed a great deal in terms of pay. Birdwood was dependent on his to survive.<sup>11</sup> It is open to question as to whether the training at the Staff College was adequate or otherwise, and it is debatable as to whether attendance there was worthwhile. For some, graduation was essential for further advancement, these usually being officers without private resources. They were the exception.<sup>12</sup> However, by the time Haig attended in 1896, a Staff College qualification was becoming to be recognised as a worthwhile attribute for a young officer.<sup>13</sup> By the outbreak of war in 1914, the British Army had come to accept the fact that Staff College training was obligatory for high command or senior staff appointments.<sup>14</sup>

Birdwood was castigated, according to Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet, by Haig and most of his fellow generals on the Western Front, for not being a member of the "Aldershot Ring". This differentiated those who had been at the Staff College and had achieved high command in the British Army as opposed to the Indian Army.<sup>15</sup> Birdwood, of course, was not unaware of these feelings and he told the Australian Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, in February 1917 :

... I have been frequently told that there is a great deal of jealousy against me at the War Office on account of the position I hold with the Australian troops - also, they never look very favourably upon the Indian Army officer, and especially nowadays upon one who was one of Lord Kitchener's closest friends ...<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 159.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1977), 159-160.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard J. De Groot, *Douglas Haig, 1861-1928* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 47.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 306.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol.1 (London: Collins, 1970), 298.

<sup>16</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 14 February 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/33.

Regardless of this, Birdwood had attained the rank of major-general by the age of forty six in 1911. Promoted to full general in 1917, he was only fifty two, comparatively young for such a high rank.

## II

This is the study of a First World War general and the limitations imposed on him in his role as a corps commander. Most historians of the First World War have neglected the role played by the corps commander, little work having been done to discover the part played by these senior officers. General Sir Aylmer Haldane, serving as a divisional commander in 1916 in France, noted wryly in his diary : "What Corps commanders do all day ... I cannot imagine".<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, an unfair comment albeit by a serving officer. However, to understand the role of a corps commander, and indeed, the limitations imposed on him by the position, it is necessary first to define the duties expected of him.

A corps commander's principal function was one of liaison between the Army, the entity responsible for drawing up the plan of attack, and the division, the entity responsible for carrying out the plan of attack. A corps commander would usually have two or more divisions under his control and it was his job to

co-ordinate the actions and plans of these divisions in battle, to supply direction to them, and to interpret the wishes of the Army commander. The corps was an important level of command, for all the field artillery outside divisional control, along with some of the heavy artillery supporting the attacking divisions, was under corps control.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, a corps commander controlled engineering, medical and supply units, administration and so on, frequently totalling in excess of 150,000 men.

As will be illustrated in this work, the corps commander's level of responsibility could vary depending on the theatre of operations. For instance, the command exercised by General Birdwood at Gallipoli was far different from the command he exercised on the Western Front. At Gallipoli, Birdwood tended to operate an isolated command because of his

---

<sup>17</sup> Haldane diary, October 1916, quoted in Travers, *The Killing Ground* , 109

<sup>18</sup> Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 20.

geographical distance from GHQ, and the remoteness of his superior commander, General Sir Ian Hamilton, who tended not to interfere with the Anzac operations on a day-to-day basis. In contrast with this situation, Birdwood was one of more than twenty corps commanders on the Western Front, each of whom was directly accountable to his Army commander for the performance of his corps.

Orders issued by GHQ were usually written in the most general of terms. Haig and his staff have been criticised for seeing themselves as "master planners", issuing generalised instructions without first seeing whether their execution was possible.<sup>19</sup> This situation led to problems in the field itself. At the same time, it made GHQ, as an operational entity, irrelevant.<sup>20</sup> The problem was exacerbated by the various Armies issuing similar types of vague orders to their corps. It is only when reading corps orders, that specific instructions appear to be mentioned. Further, "[t]he ability to solve problems through discussion seemed to disappear, and so the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele proceeded with a momentum largely of their own".<sup>21</sup>

### III

This work is restricted to Birdwood's career from December 1914, when he took command of the Australian and New Zealand contingents then training in Egypt for service on the Western Front, until May 1918, when he relinquished command of the Australian Corps to take over the Fifth Army. During his tenure as a corps commander, Birdwood built a reputation among his troops as being a soldier's soldier, prepared to accept the same hardships and conditions as the private soldier. At Gallipoli and in France, he was a regular visitor to the trenches, a place where it was not common for generals to be. Birdwood was happiest with his men, sharing their experiences rather than being involved with the tactical aspects of the job. Indeed, he had no pretensions to being a tactician, leaving the detailed work to his chief of staff. It must be said that Birdwood had a gift for selecting able subordinates who were capable of carrying out his wishes regarding operational tactics.

Birdwood has also been criticised for not being more fully involved with the bigger issues of his command, but there is little evidence to suggest

---

<sup>19</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



that he was not a competent soldier. The future Australian Corps commander, Sir John Monash, was most impressed after his first meeting with the corps commander. He informed his wife that

He is quite a small, thin man, nothing striking or soldierly about him, speaks with a stammer and has a rather nervy, unquiet manner, but there is no mistaking his perfectly wonderful grasp of the whole business of soldiering. He seems perfect in every detail of technical knowledge, and always goes straight to the root of every matter. He talks a good deal, but every word he says is worth listening to, and his knowledge of the inside working of every department from the shoeing of a horse, the treatment of the sick, the repair of a broken waggon, the ranging of a battery, or the drill of a platoon, is simply astonishing. I have been around with him for hours and heard him talking to privates, buglers, drivers, gunners, colonels, signallers and generals and everytime he has left the man with a better knowledge of his business than he had before. He appeals to me most thoroughly, and I think the Australasian Army Corps is most fortunate that Kitchener chose Birdwood as their Corps Commander.<sup>22</sup>

Nine years later, with the experiences of war behind them, Monash was still full of praise for Birdwood. In an address to the Beefsteak Club, Melbourne in 1926, Monash lauded Birdwood for his qualities of leadership.<sup>23</sup> Having served under him at Gallipoli and in France, Monash was in a position to assess Birdwood's abilities. Pointing out that Birdwood had, and made, no claim to high technical knowledge, Monash praised him for his ability to deal with those who served under him:

He habitually left the details of his military operations to a highly qualified staff, whose devoted services he knew so well how to mobilize. But he was a master of the art of inspiring men to persevere, to show fortitude under privations and suffering, and to render willing service under the most distressful conditions. The tenacious hold of the Gallipoli positions by Australians and New Zealanders is a historic tribute to his personal influence over his men.<sup>24</sup>

In short, Birdwood was a leader.

---

<sup>22</sup> Monash to wife, 13 February 1915, Monash Papers, MS1884/4/127/938.

<sup>23</sup> Sir John Monash, "Leadership in War", an address to the Beefsteak Club, Melbourne, 30 March 1926, Monash Papers, MS1884/4/209/1487.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## IV

One of the debates surrounding Birdwood concerns his relationship with C.B.B.White, his chief of staff from September 1915 until the end of the war. White, a professional Australian soldier, was undoubtedly of great assistance to Birdwood who was never slow to praise his subordinate. (The probable cause of White's celebrity in Australia is discussed more fully in Chapter Six.) No-one would have been better able to judge Birdwood as a man or as a soldier than White. In April 1916, White wrote to his wife that his "little General" was

[a]lways bright and happy, always decisive, never oppressed by "great thoughts" and always full of energy I am sure he loves each day. Without any fear of responsibility and with a sort of fatalism that what he does will go well his mind never seems distressed with vague imaginings. Physically fit and active always in spite of eating very little he ever seems well and clear minded, and he has the excellent habit of doing things at once. Where I ponder and want time to think he gets a short hand [sic] writer and dictates the thing off his mind for better or worse! Not that I am painting him as a heaven born genius. He has nothing like the brains of Bridges [the Australian force commander mortally wounded at Gallipoli] but he has a great many qualities and they all conduce to a peaceful frame of mind still leaving him efficient. And he has a beautiful clear and honest nature - without any warps.<sup>25</sup>

To balance this estimation of Birdwood by White, another had been made by General Sir Ian Hamilton the previous year. Asked by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, for an assessment of Birdwood, Hamilton replied :

You asked me yesterday what sort of a fellow was Birdwood. I replied a very charming fellow, which was true. But I feel I ought to have given you more insight to guide you in your dealings with a man I have known well for many years.

Birdwood has had a brilliant staff career ... He is tactful and quick but not strong. He was Military Secretary to Lord Kitchener both in South Africa and in India.

His weak point for a big war command is that with all his brilliant service he has never commanded anything in war; that he has never ever commanded anything in peace except, for less than two years, a brigade.

---

<sup>25</sup> White to wife, 18 April 1916, White Papers in possession of Lady Derham, Melbourne.

His strong point for your business [the Gallipoli operation] is that he will not quarrel with anyone, not at any price.<sup>26</sup>

The day after this letter was written, the Gallipoli command was discussed by the War Council in London.<sup>27</sup> On the following day, the 4 March, Churchill told Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, that he considered a soldier of high rank should be appointed to the command.<sup>28</sup> Judging by the timing, it is possible that Hamilton had heard that he was in contention for the post of GOC of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. Therefore, he had decided to stack the odds more in his own favour. Against this, of course, is the fact that Birdwood was a newly promoted lieutenant-general while Hamilton was one of the most senior generals in the British Army.

Birdwood has been described by Geoffrey Serle, as a "mediocre battle commander,[who] never drew up plans for operations himself ...".<sup>29</sup> This fact appears to be very typical of any corps commander and should not be a cause of derision. Evidence does not support what must surely be Serle's assertion that a corps commander who did not draw up his own plans was unworthy of his command. He further asserts that had White not been his chief of staff, Birdwood would have floundered and been found wanting.<sup>30</sup> The evidence available does not support such an assertion. Serle's rhetorical query : "Could he [Birdwood] have put up any sort of show without him [White]?" must be answered in the affirmative. It was Birdwood's duty to consult frequently with White as his Chief of Staff. Had he not done so, because White did not give advice worth listening to, Birdwood would have been obligated to sack him and find another chief of staff.

## V

The objective of this thesis is to illustrate the limitations imposed on Birdwood as a corps commander at Gallipoli, on the Western Front, and as administrator of the A.I.F. It will be shown that limitations were imposed on him in a variety of ways.

---

<sup>26</sup> Hamilton to Churchill, 2 March 1915, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S.Churchill,vol.3, Companion Documents* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 607. (Hereafter C.V.3 ).

<sup>27</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 3 March 1915, in *ibid*, 614-615 .

<sup>28</sup> Churchill to Kitchener, 4 March 1915, in *ibid*, 629.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Serle, *John Monash* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982), 319.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

The foremost were those imposed by the higher command on Birdwood as a corps commander. It was the higher command which set the tasks for the operations being undertaken. It was the commander-in-chief who nominated the field of battle, the Army commander who nominated which corps would fight where on that field of battle by which time the corps commander was limited in other respects. (In the same way, the commander-in-chief was limited in what he could do by the prevailing political forces at the time. It should be said, that all commanders were limited in some way by external factors).

The command structure itself could impose severe limitations on a commander. This was illustrated in several ways during Birdwood's command of the Australians at Gallipoli and on the Western Front: for example, Birdwood's relationships with Hamilton at Gallipoli, Gough on the Somme battlefield and Plumer during the 3rd Battle of Ypres.

He was limited by the resources available to undertake the task delegated to him. Depending on what he had been given, this could mean success or failure. Events could overtake him even when the resources available would normally be adequate to complete an operation successfully.

Technology was another area where a commander could be limited. His ability or otherwise to adapt his methods to accommodate new technology could lead to failure.

The most severe limitations imposed on any commander were those inherent in their character or training. These could manifest themselves in a variety of ways: lack of experience, lack of technical knowledge, lack of confidence, personality traits, or a general unsuitability for the job. While some were permanent limitations, others could be overcome.

This thesis will examine the way Birdwood fitted into his role as a corps commander, whether he was successful, and whether he could overcome the many limitations imposed on him. To enable these judgments to be made, I will examine in detail the two major periods in Birdwood's command: his participation in the Gallipoli campaign and his time as a corps commander on the Western Front, specifically the Somme operations of 1916, and Bullecourt and the 3rd Battle of Ypres in 1917.

## VI

One problem encountered in writing First World War military history is that the literature available consists generally of works about the

high command or the soldiers in the trenches. Works concerning commanders at division, corps and even army level, are rare. Few illuminate the most pressing problems of command tending to concentrate on personalities and achievements. They fail to pursue with any vigour the reasons for success or failure on the battlefield. This thesis will show that it is necessary to use a wide range of sources to produce a work of substance in the field of operational military history.

As this thesis demonstrates, no serious work concerning Australian participation in the First World War can be undertaken without research in the operational files held at the Australian War Memorial. As my Bibliography testifies, many of these files have been consulted with the object of establishing Birdwood's role in the operations outlined during the course of the work.

Birdwood's papers held at the Australian War Memorial for 1914-1918 reflect his huge correspondence during this time. The Gallipoli campaign is heavily represented by a large number of letters written to his wife and many others from Anzac Cove. Unfortunately, the holdings from 1916 onwards are comparatively slight. France being so close to England, home leave was easily available and the need to write did not often arise. It makes the task of assessing Birdwood's attitudes and thoughts at this time more difficult. The bulk of his correspondence for this period is of an official nature.

Many secondary sources have been consulted. As postulated earlier in this Introduction, few have been found illuminating on the subject under discussion. This is not surprising given that only a small number exist which examine the role of commanders on an operational level. An objective of this thesis is to add to the small body of work which exists concerning the problems of command in general, and of corps command in particular.

## CHAPTER ONE

### I

In November 1914, Major-General Sir William Birdwood was appointed to the command of the Australian and New Zealand force then en route to Egypt for training prior to leaving for the Western Front.<sup>1</sup> On 18 November, Birdwood had received a telegram from Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War:

I should very much like to obtain your services. I think Egypt would be the first step where I propose to land and train Australian and New Zealand contingents which you could look after. Let me know if there would be any chance of getting you by formal application.<sup>2</sup>

Because he was still serving in India as Secretary in the Army Department, Birdwood required the permission of the Commander-in-Chief of India, Sir Beauchamp Duff, to assume an active command. Duff was hesitant to allow Birdwood permission to leave India. In early August, Kitchener had cabled Duff to the effect that officers were badly needed in England and, in particular, Birdwood's services would be most welcome. Duff had taken this to mean that Kitchener wanted Birdwood in the War Office. This he would not consider. However, when assured that Birdwood was required for a command in the field, permission was granted. Accordingly, Birdwood was able to wire back to the War Office asking for further details.<sup>3</sup> In reply, Kitchener cabled that he had been nominated to command the Australian and New Zealand contingents. Birdwood was to have the status of corps commander and the temporary rank of Lieutenant-General.<sup>4</sup>

It was only in late November 1914 that the Australian Cabinet had agreed to Birdwood's appointment as commander of the force. However, the Government found it "very satisfactory".<sup>5</sup> There is no available evidence to suggest that the Australian or New Zealand Governments

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 238-239.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-239.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister to Australian High Commissioner, London, 25 November 1914, AWM 4/1/1/4, Page 198.

were consulted by the British Government prior to Birdwood's appointment.

It was with "pride and pleasure" that Birdwood took up his new command.<sup>6</sup> He and his staff embarked for Egypt in the P & O liner, *S.S. Persia* on 12 December 1914<sup>7</sup> and landed at Suez on the 21st travelling on to Cairo the same day<sup>8</sup>. Birdwood's staff consisted of Brigadier-General H.B. Walker as Brigadier-General, General Staff; Colonel R.A. Carruthers, Deputy-Adjutant and Quartermaster-General; Lieutenant-Colonel A. Skeen, General Staff Officer, 1st Grade; Major W.B. Lesslie, Assistant-Adjutant and Quartermaster-General; Major M. Hancock, Lesslie's deputy; and Captain C.M. Wagstaff, General Staff Officer, 2nd-Grade. As his Aide-de-Camp, Birdwood chose Captain B.W. Onslow, and Commanding Royal Engineers, Colonel Joly de Lotbiniere.<sup>9</sup>

Birdwood's first job on his arrival at Cairo was to organise the Australian and New Zealand units into a single army corps.<sup>10</sup> He wrote to Kitchener on Christmas Day 1914 that he was delighted and happy to be with troops again. His command was exactly what he liked, "not tied up with any regulations or red tape and capable of anything".<sup>11</sup> He liked both divisional commanders, Major-General William Bridges, commander of the Australian Division, and Major-General Alex Godley of the New Zealand contingent, but went on to add that "some of the senior officers will be difficult ...".<sup>12</sup> He found the men lacking in discipline and told Kitchener that because of troubles in Cairo, he had put the city out of bounds for NCOs and men.<sup>13</sup> Birdwood also informed Kitchener that the men were backward in training and had not been drilled in "...bayonet fighting, no digging, very little musketry ... Their artillery too is very indifferent [but] the material is excellent ...".<sup>14</sup> Birdwood, however, stressed that he was not grouching at all. Indeed, he felt "the very luckiest fellow in the whole world at getting such a chance and such a command and you know how grateful I am to you ...".<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 239.

<sup>7</sup> Entry, A.I.F. Administration Staff War Diary, 12 December 1914, AWM 4/1/28/1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 December 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 December 1914.

<sup>10</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Vol.1, *The Story of Anzac* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981), 117.

<sup>11</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 25 December 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL138.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

## II

At this time, war on the Western Front had reached dead- lock. In a paper prepared by Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the War Council, it was suggested that Germany could best be struck through her allies, particularly Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Hankey suggested that if Greece and Bulgaria were to co-operate, it should be possible to capture the Turkish capital, Constantinople. Not only would Turkish armed resistance be destroyed, but communication with the Black Sea would be re-opened, thus allowing Russian grain ships out and thereby reducing the price of wheat.<sup>17</sup> Another paper prepared by David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and a member of the War Council, suggested that the time had come to realise that the Western Front was impregnable. Therefore, the government should look to new operations to achieve its ends.<sup>18</sup> His suggestions were to attack Austria from Salonika or from a Dalmatian port, and to land troops on the Syrian coast thus severing Turkey's line of communication to Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately after the submission of these papers, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, received a telegram from the British Ambassador in Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan, relaying a message from the Russian government to the effect that the Russians were in need of relief in the Caucasus. They requested that a demonstration be made against the Turks in some way.<sup>20</sup> This cry for help appealed to Kitchener who consulted Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, as to what type of demonstration could be arranged.<sup>21</sup> He told Churchill that a demonstration in the Dardanelles might stop reinforcements going east.<sup>22</sup> A landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula could not be made as troops were not available, but a naval demonstration might have some effect.<sup>23</sup> Churchill was extremely enthusiastic with this idea and with the results that could follow seizure of the Dardanelles and of Constantinople: "... nothing but new facts and

---

<sup>16</sup> Hankey to War Council, 28 December 1914, quoted in *C.V.3*, 341.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>18</sup> Lloyd George to War Council, 31 December 1914, quoted in *ibid.*, 350-356.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

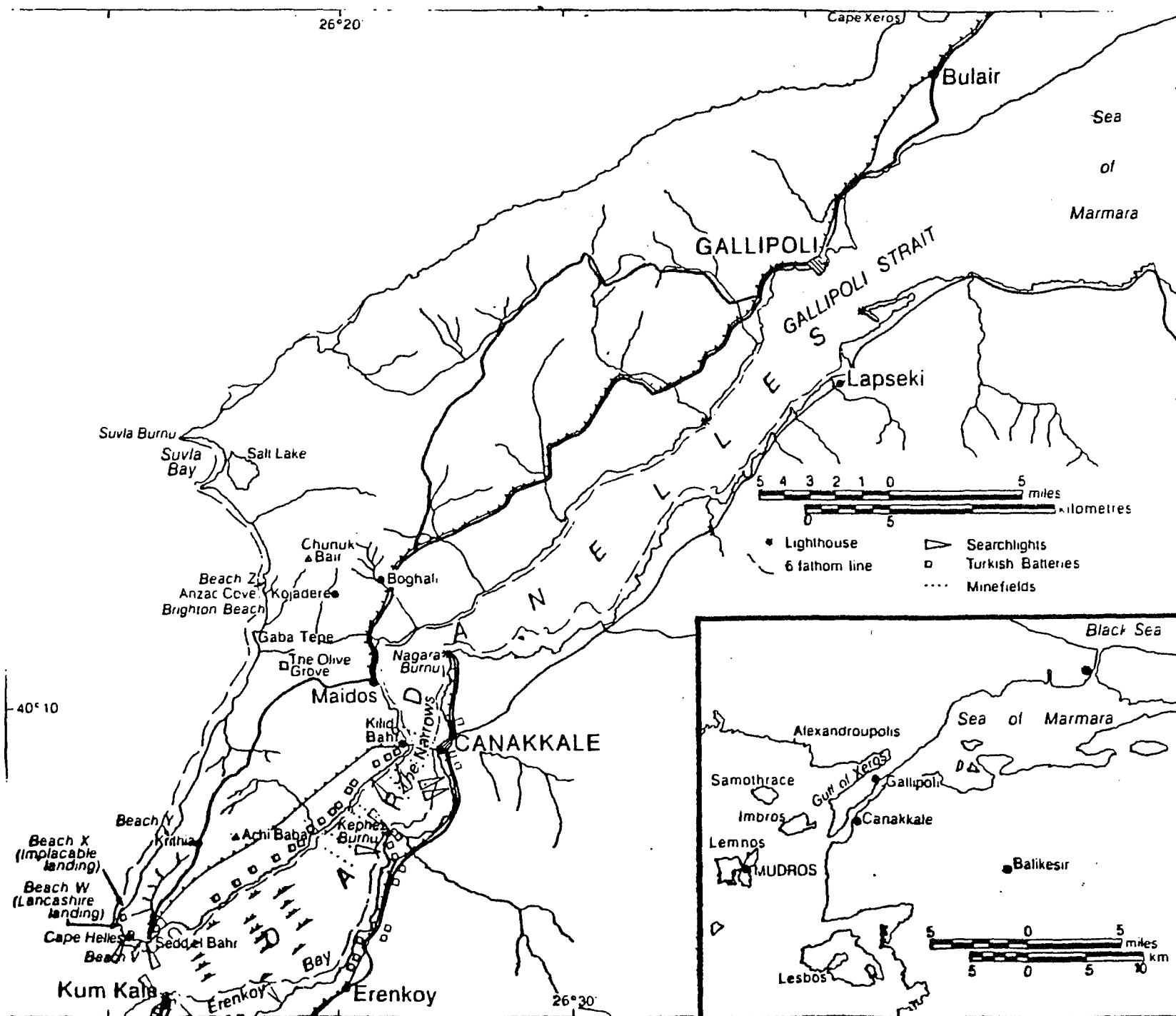
<sup>20</sup> Buchanan to Grey, 1 January 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 360.

<sup>21</sup> Kitchener to Churchill, 2 January 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 360-361.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*





*The Dardanelles and the Gallipoli peninsula, showing the sea attack on the Narrows on March 18, 1915.*

reasons, the merit of which might convince me would turn me from pressing it forward".<sup>24</sup>

At a meeting of the War Council on 13 January, Churchill said that he and Vice-Admiral Carden, Commander-in-Chief in the Eastern Mediterranean, had discussed, by telegram, the possibilities of a naval attack on the Dardanelles.<sup>25</sup> Carden thought it unwise to rush the Dardanelles, preferring to destroy the forts guarding the Straits one by one.<sup>26</sup> He proposed to concentrate his fire on the entrance forts and then to proceed to the inner forts, attacking them from the Straits and from the seaward side of the Peninsula.<sup>27</sup> The Council was in favour of trying the plan. It resolved that the Admiralty should prepare to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula by mounting a naval expedition in February 1915, with Constantinople as its objective.<sup>28</sup>

### III

A naval bombardment of the forts guarding the Straits began on 19 February, but proved to be indecisive. Lord Kitchener, acting on his own initiative, cabled to Sir John Maxwell, Commander-in-Chief, Egypt, on 20 February:

The bombardment of the Dardanelles is proceeding, during the first day one fort has been silenced, another severely damaged. In order to assist Navy a force is being concentrated in Lemnos Island to give co-operation and to occupy any captured forts. At present 2,000 Marines in the Island, to be followed about 13 March by 8,000 more.

You should warn a force of approximately 30,000 of Australians and New Zealand contingent under Birdwood to prepare for this service. We shall send troopships from here to convey these troops to Lemnos, which should arrive Alexandria about March 9th. You should, however, communicate through Navy with Admiral Carden, commander at the Dardanelles, as he may require a considerable force before that date and in order that you may send him what he most requires.

You should not therefore wait till the transports arrive from here, but should take up any transports you can obtain and despatch units to Lemnos immediately ...<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Winston S.Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* , vol.2 (London: Odham Press, 1949), 545.

<sup>25</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 13 January 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 409.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>29</sup> Kitchener to Maxwell, 20 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

Kitchener considered that three divisions were ample to secure the passage of the Dardanelles after the fall of the forts was ensured by the navy.<sup>30</sup> He considered the army's part in the forcing of the Dardanelles to be a minor one.<sup>31</sup>

On 24 February on the British Prime Minister's advice, Kitchener instructed Birdwood to consult with Admiral Carden "as to the nature of combined Naval and Military operations to be undertaken in connection with forcing of Dardanelles ...".<sup>32</sup> Kitchener instructed Birdwood to find out what he could about the size and composition of the Turkish garrison and whether Carden felt that troops would be required to capture the forts. If so:

... whether a landing force to take forts ... will be required of the troops, and generally what is the projected employment of the troops; will the Bulair lines\* have to be held and will any military operations in the Asiatic side be necessary or advisable ? <sup>33</sup>

Carden informed Birdwood that he had been directed by Churchill to make preparations for landing an advance party of 10,000 men should it be found necessary.<sup>34</sup> He continued:

... at present my instructions go no further. If such a force is sent I would propose landing it at Seddelbahr [sic] with the object of occupying the Gallipoli peninsula as far east as the line Suandere River-Chana Ovasi. The garrison of the peninsula is about 40,000 men. If the troops are sent they must be prepared to undertake all land transport and staffing of base at Seddelbahr. They should bring all available horse boats with them. Prior to landing on the peninsula the troops would have to live in their transports.<sup>35</sup>

Kitchener felt that Birdwood's personal consultation with Carden was essential and that the operation itself was to be effected mainly by naval means.<sup>36</sup> The result of the Fleet entering the Sea of Marmora would, it was

---

<sup>30</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 19 February 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 532.

<sup>31</sup> Kitchener to Maxwell, 27 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

<sup>32</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 24 February 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 561.

\* The Bulair lines were a system of fortifications constructed by the British, French and Turks at the time of the Crimean War and situated at the northern end of the Gallipoli Peninsula which separated it from the Turkish mainland.

<sup>33</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 24 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

<sup>34</sup> Churchill to Carden, 24 February 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 550.

<sup>35</sup> Carden to Birdwood, 23 February 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 549.

<sup>36</sup> Kitchener to Maxwell, 24 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

hoped, be sufficient to make the Turkish position on the Peninsula untenable and enable an allied force to occupy it if necessary; "... to land with 10,000 men in face of 40,000 Turks while Naval operations are still incomplete seems extremely hazardous".<sup>37</sup> Kitchener added, that there would be no objection to an armed force securing hold of forts and territory gained by naval fire, preventing their re-occupation by the Turks so long as this could be carried out without compromising troops landed for the purpose.<sup>38</sup> Birdwood was to inform Kitchener directly whether he considered the naval operation in forcing the straits would succeed.<sup>39</sup>

In Egypt, General Maxwell who had been communicating with Carden, felt that any further progress was unlikely to be made unless the Army took the initiative.<sup>40</sup> He understood that the Turks numbered about 40,000 troops west of Hellespont and 30,000 east of it and these could probably be concentrated on either side very quickly.<sup>41</sup> He added:

At first glance an obvious place for disembarkation of a force seems to be Zeros Bay, but I understand the Gallipoli Peninsula is heavily fortified and prepared for defence everywhere, and is practically a fort, advance against which from any quarter without heavy guns would seem hazardous.

Is there possibility of a landing at Bessika Bay and an advance up the Asiatic side having a definite effect on the defences of the Gallipoli Peninsula? If so, in view of the strength of the garrisons and defences of the European side, this course may be worthy of consideration, especially as I understand the garrisons and land defences on the Asiatic side are weaker than those on the European.<sup>42</sup>

In reply to this, Kitchener emphasised that the military operation was subsidiary to the naval operation and cabled to Maxwell :

The project is that the Navy with gunfire should silence the guns and destroy the forts. It is not intended to land parties on the Gallipoli Peninsula except under cover of the Naval guns to help in total demolition when ships get to close quarters.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Maxwell to Kitchener, 24 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kitchener to Maxwell, 24 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

The War Council met in London on 24 February. Churchill argued that the Dardanelles expedition must be carried through to its conclusion.<sup>44</sup> Kitchener and the other members agreed. The only dissenter, Lloyd George, argued that the Dardanelles bombardment committed the Government to a campaign in the Near East but not necessarily to the Dardanelles, and that the Army should not be expected to "pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the Navy".<sup>45</sup> The British official historian, Aspinall-Oglander, notes that now "the Government found themselves committed, by force of circumstances rather than by choice, to the possibility of extensive military operations in the Dardanelles".<sup>46</sup> But, it is clear that they were committed to no more than a naval operation at this time.

On 25 February, the navy resumed its attack on the forts. Another bombardment the next day included a landing by a few marines which took the Turks by surprise. The marines entered several of the forts and found that seventy percent of the guns were still in a serviceable condition.<sup>47</sup> Another landing party blew up six guns at Sedd-el-Bahr on 27 February.<sup>48</sup>

Kitchener re-affirmed that the forcing of the Dardanelles was primarily a naval operation. He told Birdwood that the task of his troops was limited to minor operations such as the final destruction of the forts' batteries after the navy had completed its bombardment.<sup>49</sup> He should not commit his troops to any action without both aerial reconnaissance and the assurance of naval covering fire. He could, of course, "apply for and obtain any additional forces from your Corps in Egypt that you may require up to the total of its strength".<sup>50</sup> Kitchener anticipated that once the Narrows in the Dardanelles were close to being overcome, the Turks would probably evacuate the peninsula. This would allow the British to hold it with a small force at the Bulair lines and prevent the Turks from regaining it in the future. He instructed Birdwood to note positions at which artillery could be landed in order to dominate the east side of the peninsula and thus protect shipping passing through the channel from attack from the Asiatic side.<sup>51</sup> Further :

---

44 Meeting of the War Council, 24 February 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 557.

45 Ibid., 558.

46 C.F.Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.1(London: Heinemann, 1929), 76.

47 Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 187.

48 Ibid.

49 Kitchener to Birdwood, 27 February 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

I anticipate that the gradual overpowering of the batteries by Naval fire will exert great moral effect on the Turk, and the more gradual and certain the Naval operation, the greater will the effect be produced. The Admiral is arranging for a ship to watch Bulair, and it might be well to induce enemy believe landings are under consideration at this point, threatening his retreat out of the Peninsula ... I should like to have from you, as soon as you can get into touch with local information, an appreciation of what will be likely to happen in Constantinople, and whether you consider that more than 64,000 troops will be required for operations at Constantinople after the channel has been forced...<sup>52</sup>

On 2 March, Birdwood made a personal reconnaissance of the entrance to the Dardanelles with Admiral Carden from aboard HMS *Irresistable*. He reported to Kitchener that it was impossible to establish the number of Turkish troops on either side of the Dardanelles with any precision, but he estimated their strength to be in the vicinity of 40,000.<sup>53</sup> He also told Kitchener that Carden had received instructions from the Admiralty that the operation was an entirely naval one and that he intended to effect the forcing of the Dardanelles if possible. But Birdwood noted that should the Navy not be able to silence the guns, the alternative would appear to be for either the Navy to ignore the damage done to the forts and guns or to co-operate with the Army to destroy them.<sup>54</sup> He added:

As my force cannot be ready to disembark at Dardanelles before March 18th at earliest it would depend on the urgency of the operation as to whether there is time to wait for the latter alternative. If assistance of troops is required my proposals, with which Admiral agrees, are that Navy should make strong demonstration accompanied by available transports with troops not required for immediate disembarkation against the Bulair Lines, from about 16th. Admiral will probably also demonstrate off Smyrna. I would then land a strong force at Helles Point [sic] to work northwards up to a point from which the main batteries on the European side of the Narrows could be taken in reverse and concealed batteries elsewhere dealt with. I understand that this line which forms a magnificent holding position has been very heavily entrenched across the peninsula, and is supported by guns and howitzers. I fear it may be necessary after this line has been taken to transfer a good part of my force to the Asiatic side to deal with ground in rear of Chanak and adjoining batteries in vicinity of which we have information that there are guns, but if this ground

---

52 Ibid.

53 Birdwood to Kitchener, 2 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/56.

54 Ibid.

can be satisfactorily dealt with from European side it will be done. Action indicated will of course depend on progress made by Navy up to eighteenth but in any case my troops will all be moving in the right direction. It will probably be necessary to keep a strong force entrenched covering position from Kephez Bay to Nagara on Asiatic side to protect the Narrows. Having secured the line across the Narrows there may not be much further opposition until we reach Bulair Lines which I understand has been considerably strengthened and is held in force, but with the co-operation which the Navy could give from both sides I do not anticipate much difficulty there, if indeed the enemy hold it at all. If not held Gallipoli would seem a good place to concentrate my force for further action leaving behind force to hold Bulair Lines and if necessary the covering position Asiatic side as already mentioned. I will wire again regarding further action but it seems impossible to obtain any local experienced information here, as no communication from or to the mainland is possible, such as comes from Athens ...<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, Birdwood was contemplating the possible need for more intensive operations than was Kitchener who still regarded the operation as a naval one. He rejected Birdwood's advice as to the course which should be followed, and believed that the navy would probably have accomplished the forcing of the Straits by the 20th.<sup>56</sup> He told Birdwood that by the 18th, it would be possible to concentrate at Lemnos, the Australians, the New Zealanders, one division of French troops and 10,000 troops of the Naval Brigade.<sup>57</sup> He went on :

Unless the Navy are convinced that they cannot silence the guns in the Straits without military co-operation on a large scale, in which case further orders will be issued, there is no intention of using the troops enumerated above to take the Gallipoli peninsula. In such a case even more troops might be required to force the Turkish positions, and you might have to wait for further reinforcements from here.<sup>58</sup>

Kitchener told Birdwood that it was impossible to foretell what would happen to Turkey once the Straits had been forced by the navy. He believed that it would probably be necessary to leave a holding force at the Bulair

---

55 Ibid.

56 Kitchener to Birdwood, 4 March 1915, quoted in *C.V.3* , 632.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 633.

Lines as the Turks were expected to desert the Peninsula.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, he said,

... the concentration of the troops at the entrance to the Dardanelles is not so much for operations on the Gallipoli peninsula as for operations subsequently to be undertaken in the neighbourhood of Constantinople.<sup>60</sup>

Birdwood had reported confidentially to Kitchener that he was extremely worried by the navy's lack of progress and with the hazards of the enterprise.<sup>61</sup> He found Carden to be over-confident and lacking in ideas or initiative. When Kitchener told him on 4 March of Carden's expectations of forcing the Straits and forbidding him to undertake any military operation without further orders, Birdwood replied sharply that despite Carden's sanguine attitude he did not believe the navy had the ability to force the passage unaided by the army. In any event, Birdwood realised his movements depended on the navy's progress.<sup>62</sup> As local military commander, Birdwood's opinions could not be lightly discarded and Kitchener was finally persuaded that an army would likely be required to finish what the navy had started.<sup>63</sup>

Having only the vaguest notion of the Turkish force opposing him, it was perhaps foolish of Birdwood to attempt a definitive plan of attack at this stage without further local knowledge. Clearly, his plans were unrealistic and haphazard, although he had recognized the fact that the navy was unlikely to succeed in its objective and that the army would be required to step in and carry out the operation. But his ideas to carry this out could not have strengthened Kitchener's confidence that he should rely more on Birdwood's advice.

On 4 March, Birdwood told Kitchener :

I anticipate that if required to land by the Navy, in taking concealed guns or howitzers it would not in any way be possible to restrict movements to minor operations, as any guns are sure to be in strong position, abounding everywhere and being covered by strongly entrenched Infantry who in places would doubtless be able to command coast fort guns which might have been reduced by Navy.

---

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Robert Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* (London: B.T.Batsford, 1965), 46.

62 Ibid., 46-47.

63 Ibid., 47.



... I shall certainly try to dominate Eastern side from Gallipoli Peninsula as I am particularly anxious to avoid placing troops on Asiatic side if this could be avoided, as not only do I realise fully the danger of placing a more or less isolated force there, but from personal observations I know the country is big and difficult and even a whole division would soon lose itself ; so you can rely on my avoiding it if possible.

... it is impossible to say what troops may be in vicinity of Constantinople when Dardanelles have been forced. I cannot help thinking once the Fleet arrives before Constantinople the threat of bombardment would cause collapse of opposition there. I am not in a position to know if this would result in laying down of arms by Turkish Armies.

I have at present no information to guide me in advising as to operations after the Gallipoli Peninsula has been taken nor have I yet got map of the country.<sup>64</sup>

He followed this up on 5 March in his next letter to Kitchener by emphasizing that the forts taken so far were those which were easily visible to the fleet and "ships could stand off and shoot from any-where...".<sup>65</sup> He reported that the weather was bad and that this would delay operations, settled weather being absolutely essential for the landing of troops because "... landing sites are small and indifferent, so we cannot risk a small force only being got ashore and cut off by weather".<sup>66</sup> Birdwood continued:

Carden would, I think, have liked to see troops landed at Bulair lines but I am averse to this for the following reasons. Firstly, it would in no way enable us to carry out my role of assisting Navy if necessary. Secondly, conformation of coast necessitates landing Northern side of lines which have been constructed expressly to meet force from this direction. Thirdly, if troops work North to South and Navy South to North from opposite ends of the Peninsula, no cooperation is possible beyond what ships could give me from West, while advancing together from the South we can fully help each other. Fourthly, my rear would always be open to attack from any forces coming down from Thrace.

Coast of Bessika Bay has also been fully entrenched and organised for defence. Also a crossing of Mandere River and adjacent marshes would form very difficult operation, while right flank of an Army advancing from there would be much exposed. For above reasons I consider cautious advance from Helles Point to be best line of action.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 4 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/56.

<sup>65</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 5 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/57.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

By now, Admiral Carden had reported to the Admiralty that he estimated that fourteen days of fine weather would allow the fleet to reach the Marmora.<sup>68</sup> Churchill was of the opinion that no more troops than those already there would be necessary to assist in forcing the straits.<sup>69</sup> He informed Kitchener that he was now of the opinion that a definite date should be fixed for the army's concentration "so that the arrival of troops can be timed to fit in with the normal fruition of the naval operation".<sup>70</sup> He suggested to Kitchener that "for the proper co-ordination of naval and military policy, we fix in our own minds the 20th March as the date on which 40,000 British troops will certainly be available for land operations on Turkish soil".<sup>71</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Birdwood and Kitchener had different views regarding the use of a military force on the Peninsula. Birdwood clearly saw that the navy were not going to be able to achieve its objectives of silencing the forts and forcing the Straits. Kitchener believed the opposite to be the case.

#### IV

Birdwood had now returned to Cairo. In a cable to Kitchener, he reiterated his consideration that Carden's forecast over-stated his ability to force the Dardanelles unaided.<sup>72</sup> Birdwood realised that his movements depended on the navy's progress but he had "no intention of wishing to rush blindly into Gallipoli Peninsula". However, "if, as I anticipate, military cooperation will be needed, I should propose making the line Khilidbahr-Gabatepe [sic] my first and definite objective, which when attained should enable the Fleet to get through to the Sea of Marmora. Bombardment from both sides should then reduce the Bulair lines en route when my role for the time being would have been accomplished".<sup>73</sup>

Birdwood estimated that his contingent to be concentrated at Lemnos by 18 March was to be smaller than previously thought owing to his having to leave behind his three mounted brigades. They were unsuitable for any of

---

<sup>68</sup> Carden to Churchill, 4 March 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 625.

<sup>69</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations : Gallipoli*, Vol.1, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Churchill to Kitchener, 4 March 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 5 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/57.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the first phases of the operation on the Gallipoli Peninsula.<sup>74</sup> His force would therefore consist of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, of 28,500 troops with 52 guns; the Marine Division of 11,500 troops with 6 guns; and the French contingent of about 16,000 men with 40 guns.<sup>75</sup> The force thus totalled some 55,500 men with 98 guns. If two mounted brigades were included later, a total of 58,500 men; "[t]he remaining Light Horse Brigade, viz. the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade is not yet fit to take the field".<sup>76</sup>

On 10 March Birdwood wrote to Kitchener that he still felt the army would have to help the navy through. The best way of their doing so was to land a force at Helles Point and try to proceed northwards.<sup>77</sup> He had already planned in detail the whole of his landing arrangements: boats, piers, lighters, the order in which troops would be landed, "I quite realise that I shall probably be vigorously opposed on landing, though I have hopes that by making a really strong and vigorous feint at Bulair Lines that I may be able to pin down a large number of troops there".<sup>78</sup> He went on:

I hope to be able to get ashore a whole Infantry Brigade and the Native Mountain Batteries under the cliffs round Cape Helles by 10 a.m. to shove them on at once to secure Morto Bay for the immediate landing of a complete Division- and then if I can manage shove on and secure the position through Achi Baba hill the same day ...

But to effect this object I also see - and with regret - that we may have to occupy some of the Asiatic side...

On the Gallipoli side there is no liberty of manoeuvre. There is no getting out of that and I quite realise the consequent great objections to it, but as I say it is essential. Being as restricted the number of troops who can be used on such a front must be strictly limited, and my idea would be to land there the Australian Division and perhaps Marine Division in support.

This would leave me my mixed New Zealand and Australian Division with its two mounted Brigades and the Frenchmen who would be available for the Asiatic side. Of course I know all the objections to splitting up a force in this way, with a huge waterway like the Dardanelles between them, but to attain a particular object it may be essential ...

---

<sup>74</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 6 March 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 10 March 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL12.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

My idea would be to hold the Gallipoli peninsula up to the Narrows for only such time till the fleet was through and then at once to transfer this force to the Bulair Lines ...<sup>79</sup>

This communication reveals that Birdwood's enthusiasm for action had got the better of him. He still did not know the extent of the opposing force and he did not have a map of the areas that he intended to secure. Nor did he have the number of troops which would have been necessary to carry out an operation of this magnitude. Clearly, Birdwood was overcome with the thought of being in command of an invading force. He had abandoned the prudence that Kitchener would have expected of an officer in his position.

Birdwood noted that he liked d'Amade, the commander of the French contingent, and assumed that the Frenchman was junior in rank to him. In any event, d'Amade had been wiring him for instructions, "which of course I have not given him, as I have none!"<sup>80</sup> Despite the huge job he could foresee, Birdwood, perhaps out of loyalty to Kitchener, does not appear to have queried the small number of troops available to him, nor does he appear to have made a request for more men to be placed at his disposal.

Kitchener informed the War Council on 10 March that he would now send the 29th Division to the Mediterranean.<sup>81</sup> In February, a meeting of the War Council had decided that the 29th Division which had been destined for Sir John French's Army in France, was to be made available to support the naval attack at the Dardanelles if necessary.<sup>82</sup> Three days later, Kitchener changed his mind and substituted the Australian and New Zealand Corps for the 29th Division in support of the naval attack. To this Churchill was opposed because the 29th was a division made up of regular and experienced troops.<sup>83</sup> It is clear that Churchill, who had been expecting a naval victory, now believed because of advice he had received from the Admiralty, that it could not succeed without the aid of the army. Consequently, experienced and capable troops were needed to ensure a naval victory.<sup>84</sup> Kitchener said he was ready to send the 29th in case of

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 10 March 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 664.

<sup>82</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 16 February 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 516.

<sup>83</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 19 February 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 527-528.

<sup>84</sup> Robin Prior, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' as History* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 67.

necessity, but preferred to wait before making any firm decision.<sup>85</sup> He repeated this at a meeting of the War Council on the 26th, saying that he objected to sending the 29th Division as it was the only force he had in reserve to send to France if required. He also thought that once the fleet had secured a passage through the Dardanelles, the situation would change in the east and the division would no longer be required.<sup>86</sup> But by 10 March, Kitchener felt that the situation in France was secure enough to allow the 29th Division to proceed to the east.<sup>87</sup>

## V

The following day, Kitchener informed the General Staff that he had appointed General Sir Ian Hamilton to the command of the Allied troops in the Mediterranean. Hamilton's Chief of Staff was to be Major-General W.P. Braithwaite.<sup>88</sup> Orders were now issued for the formation of a General Headquarters for the new Mediterranean Expeditionary Force.<sup>89</sup>

In a letter on 4 March, Churchill informed Kitchener that it was his strong feeling that because of the composition of the army, a soldier of high rank and reputation should be placed at its head.<sup>90</sup> He added that he had heard that Kitchener was considering Sir Ian Hamilton for the command: "Certainly no choice could be more agreeable to the Admiralty and to the Navy, but I would venture to press upon you the desirability of this officer being on the spot as soon as possible, in order that he may concert with the Admiral the really critical and decisive operations which may be required at the very outset".<sup>91</sup> At a meeting of the War Council the previous day, Kitchener had brought up the subject of the command of the military forces of the Allies. He had been asked by Lloyd George to assess the regard in which Birdwood was held. Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, noted that Birdwood was considered the best general in India although he lacked experience of a high command on active service.<sup>92</sup> At the same meeting, Kitchener made it clear that it might be necessary to send a more senior general than Birdwood to command and proposed Hamilton for this

---

<sup>85</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 19 February 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 527.

<sup>86</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 26 February 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 569.

<sup>87</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 10 March 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 664.

<sup>88</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.1, 87.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Churchill to Kitchener, 4 March 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 629.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Meeting of the War Council, 3 March 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 615.

purpose.<sup>93</sup> Kitchener informed Birdwood on 11 March that because the number of allied troops to be used in operations in the Dardanelles would amount to approximately 120,000, he had appointed General Sir Ian Hamilton to the command, Birdwood was to continue in command until Hamilton's arrival.<sup>94</sup>

Birdwood was disappointed at having been superseded by Hamilton although he understood the situation: "I know so well enough, my dear old Chief, that no-one but you would even have contemplated my having the command at all in the first instance...".<sup>95</sup> He still hoped to retain command of the British force while Hamilton had the supreme command of the international forces.<sup>96</sup> Birdwood was too junior a lieutenant-general to have been considered for such a senior command as the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. He would doubtless have been very aware of this fact and could not have seriously contemplated that such a position could be his despite his intimacy with Kitchener.

## VI

Following his appointment to the Dardanelles command, Hamilton understood the following:

(1) We soldiers are to understand we are string Number 2. The sailors are sure they can force the Dardanelles on their own and the whole enterprise has been framed on that basis: we are to lie low and to bear in mind the Cabinet does not want to hear anything of the Army till it sails through the Straits. But if the Admiral fails, then we will have to go in.

(2) If the Army has to be used, whether on the Bosphorus or at the Dardanelles, I am to bear in mind his order that no serious operation is to take place until the whole of my force is complete; ready; concentrated and on the spot. No piecemeal attack is to be made.

(3) If we do start fighting, once we have started we are to burn our boats. Once landed the Government are resolved to see the enterprise through.

(4) Asia is out of bounds. K. laid special stress on this. Our sea command and the restricted area of Gallipoli would enable us to undertake a landing on the Peninsula with clearly limited liabilities.

---

93 Ibid.

94 Kitchener to Birdwood, 11 March 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

95 Birdwood to Kitchener, 10 March 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL12.

96 Ibid.

Once we began marching about continents, situations calling for heavy reinforcements would probably be created.<sup>97</sup>

In fact, Hamilton's orders were obscure. Kitchener had issued them assuming that the navy were going to be successful in their attempt to take the Straits. Therefore, "the instructions" as received by Hamilton, were nothing of the sort. Rather, Kitchener stated a set of objectives and assumptions regarding conditions at the Dardanelles and neglected to state how best the objectives should be achieved.<sup>98</sup> Clearly, he regarded any undertaking by the army as secondary to the attempts of the navy, which, according to Kitchener, "have undertaken to force the passage of the Dardanelles".<sup>99</sup>

Kitchener pointed out that once the "project of forcing the Straits" was commenced, "there was to be no idea of abandoning the scheme".<sup>100</sup> He added that "It will require time, patience, and methodical plans of co-operation between the naval and military commanders. The essential point is to avoid a check which will jeopardise our chances of strategical and political success".<sup>101</sup> Although minor operations may need to be undertaken, the force used should be only strong enough to carry out the operation. There was to be no thought of a permanent occupation. Any troops used on minor operations were to be withdrawn as soon as their mission had been fulfilled.<sup>102</sup>

Hamilton appears to have grasped Kitchener's instructions well. It would seem that Kitchener was ignoring the advice of Birdwood. This is difficult to understand because Birdwood was on the spot and had been so for some time. Therefore, it is clear that Kitchener did not want to hear advice that troops would be needed, rather relying on the navy succeeding in its forcing of the Straits.

The command of the Allied fleet now passed to Admiral Carden's second-in-command, Vice-Admiral Sir John de Robeck. Carden had been placed on the sick-list on 16 March by order of his medical officer.<sup>103</sup> On the day that de Robeck took over, 17 March, a conference was held on board

---

<sup>97</sup> Sir Ian Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.1 (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), 1.

<sup>98</sup> "Instructions for the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force", 13 March 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 684-686.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 684.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 685.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.1, 94.

HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Present were de Robeck and his Chief of Staff, Commodore Roger Keyes; Rear-Admiral R.E.Wemyss, Governor of Mudros; Admiral Guepratte, commanding the French fleet; General d'Amade, commanding the French division; Hamilton and Braithwaite, his Chief of Staff.<sup>104</sup> In his book, *Gallipoli Diary*, written after the war, Hamilton relates that de Robeck asked to see the instructions given to him on his departure from London: "... Braithwaite read them out. When he stopped, Roger Keyes, the Commodore, inquired, 'Is that all?' And when Braithwaite confessed that it was, everyone looked a little blank".<sup>105</sup>

## VII

By 18 March, and having now inspected the peninsula himself from the sea, Hamilton reported to Kitchener that "the real place 'looks a much tougher nut to crack than it did over the map'" at the War Office.<sup>106</sup> He concluded that were Bulair his only way open, he would "have to go right about turn and cable my master he had sent me on a fool's errand".<sup>107</sup> South of Bulair, the coastline to Suvla Bay he found to be "precipitous", while Suvla Bay itself, though a fine harbour, was too far to the north to combine a landing there together with one in the south at Cape Helles.<sup>108</sup> But he found the coast south of Suvla Bay and a little to the south of Gaba Tepe feasible for a landing: "I mean we could get ashore on a calm day if there was no enemy. Gaba Tepe would be ideal, but ... it is a mass of trenches and wire. Further, it must be well under fire of guns from Kilid Bahr plateau, and is entirely commanded by the high ridge to the North of it".<sup>109</sup> Hamilton noted that from Gaba Tepe to Cape Helles, the coastline consisted of cliffs from 100 to 300 feet high. However, there appeared to be in many places, small, sandy strips at the cliff base; he believed the cliffs were not unclimbable, and concluded: "I thoroughly believe ... in going for at least one spot that *seems* impracticable".<sup>110</sup>

On 18 March, the fleet again attempted to bombard its way through the Straits, but again it was repulsed by Turkish minefields. HM Ships *Irresistable* and *Ocean* were lost, together with the French battleship *Bouvet*.

---

104 Ibid.

105 Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol. 1, 23.

106 Ibid., 27.

107 Ibid., 30.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.



This was the day nominated by the Dardanelles Committee in its report to the Admiralty as being the "turning point of the Dardanelles operations".<sup>111</sup> Both the navy and the government were prepared to continue with the attack and the ships' officers expected orders to renew it. Initially, de Robeck was in favour of continuing. However, on 22 March, Birdwood noted in his diary that following a meeting in *Queen Elizabeth* involving Hamilton, Braithwaite and Birdwood, de Robeck had told them that he did not consider the fleet could get through without the co-operation of the army, "which I had always thought must be the case ...".<sup>112</sup> De Robeck had always been of the opinion that the most decisive result would be obtained by a combined army-navy operation and not by one or the other acting alone.<sup>113</sup> This opinion was strengthened by Hamilton informing him that the army was fully prepared to work with the navy in the forcing of the Dardanelles. But it would not be ready to do so before 14 April. De Robeck was still firm in his opinion that the navy could eventually get through. However, the original plan which was based on the assumption that naval gunfire was capable of destroying the forts was clearly mistaken. De Robeck noted: "It would be the worst policy to carry out bombardment which could not be brought to a decisive result".<sup>114</sup> In other words, the navy could not get through. It would now rest with the army to do so.

Hamilton noted at this meeting, that Birdwood seemed to have made up his mind that the navy could not succeed and that no time should be lost by the army in preparing for a landing.<sup>115</sup> However, before the meeting, Birdwood and Hamilton had agreed that the navy must come to their own conclusion without prompting by the army as to whether or not a joint effort would be necessary.<sup>116</sup> Clearly, this had happened.

## VIII

Although Churchill was still in favour of the navy carrying on its bombardment, the government was now against it. Hamilton informed

---

<sup>111</sup> "Attacks delivered on and the Enemy Defences of the Dardanelles Straits", Report by the Dardanelles Committee in Admiralty to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 10 October 1919, AWM 51/39.

<sup>112</sup> Birdwood diary, 22 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>113</sup> de Robeck to Churchill, 27 March 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/38.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.1, 40.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Kitchener that the army's task would be to carry out "a deliberate and progressive military operation ... in force to make good the passage of the navy".<sup>117</sup> From this point, the forcing of the Dardanelles became a military operation. Kitchener was given the alternative of "a great military expedition or of a withdrawal".<sup>118</sup> He replied forcefully:

You know my view that the Dardanelles passage must be forced, and that if large military operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula by your troops are necessary to clear the way, those operations must be undertaken after careful consideration of the local defences and must be carried through.<sup>119</sup>

With Hamilton in command of the army, Birdwood was able to confine himself to looking after his Corps. On relinquishing his former command to Hamilton, they talked of the project before them and discussed the plan as Birdwood had formulated it. As Birdwood recalled after the war:

... before Sir Ian came out ... and when I was in command, I had made up my mind to do my landing at Cape Helles ... In making my plans I had quite determined that my main landing would have to be somewhere about X Beach, for I felt it would not be possible for troops to live in the vicinity of W and V until they got command of the higher ground about X ... In coming to the decision I did regarding it, I was actuated by the fact that the higher ground above X would apparently command good deal of the ground between it and Sed-el-Bahr [sic]. Also the wire which one could see distinctly lower down, was apparently not in existence about X ...<sup>120</sup>

When Birdwood explained his plans to Hamilton, they agreed that Cape Helles was the place to start the attack together with a demonstration at the Bulair lines to draw the Turks.<sup>121</sup> Both were anxious to avoid landing on the Asiatic side, but realised this may be necessary later.<sup>122</sup> He told Kitchener :

Before coming here I had worked out all my plans in minute detail ... [they] are sufficiently cut and dried for me to have been able to hand

---

<sup>117</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 19 March 1915, quoted in Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 200.

<sup>118</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 200.

<sup>119</sup> Kitchener to Hamilton, 20 March 1915, quoted in Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.1, 39.

<sup>120</sup> Birdwood to Aspinall, 28 August 1926, Edmonds Papers II/I/20.

<sup>121</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 23 March 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL15.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

them over to Johnny [Hamilton] for him to make use of for his army and he has accepted them for this ...

I am rather inclined to feel (though I may be wrong) that Johnny's staff - not himself - think that now that I am no longer in command they want little help or advice from me, and think I and staff should confine ourselves to my army corps - so we will - while always helping things along generally in any way we possibly can.<sup>123</sup>

He re-assured Kitchener that he was not upset that Hamilton had taken over the command although he was disappointed "to be No.2 instead of No.1".<sup>124</sup>

Birdwood told his wife that he found Hamilton "as charming and nice as ever. He was most awfully nice about having come out here over my head saying I might be sure I should not suffer from this ... Ian H. is our 2nd senior General, and I would sooner see him here than anyone".<sup>125</sup> He opined that it would "be a long business and I can't think how Churchill can ever have thought - as I fancy he must have - he could rush it through with the Navy". He added, "how the Navy dislike [Churchill]".<sup>126</sup>

## IX

On 1 April, Birdwood wrote to Hamilton that he was constantly turning over all possibilities in his mind for defeating the Turks. He had now come up with some other proposals for achieving this.<sup>127</sup> Originally, he had been of the opinion that the best plan was to advance from Cape Helles.<sup>128</sup> Now, he said, the Turks must realise that a military invasion was imminent and that they would be doing all they could to prevent this :

The chief incident in this connection which weighs on my mind is the idea ... that the Turks now have guns or howitzers on the Asiatic side which could actually command our transports should they anchor off Morto Bay. If this is really the case, and if it seems probable they have brought mobile guns down towards the South of the peninsula, which I believe were not there when I first went up, then the case is rather altered, as it may make landing in that part a very difficult question.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Birdwood to wife, 25 March 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 1 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/45.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Birdwood now suggested a landing on the Asiatic side which he had earlier dismissed as impractical to their purpose.<sup>130</sup> Also, the force was not available, he having only three divisions which may have had to fight against a much larger Turkish force, "while on the limited Gallipoli Peninsula there must be a definite limit to a force which could be brought against me, and I would always have my flanks secure".<sup>131</sup> Now with five divisions available, he thought the situation altered enough to allow contemplation of a landing on the Asiatic side :

I would not like to touch Basika Bay, as we know it is already prepared for defence ... I am sorry to say I have no good map or chart with me here, but there must, I fancy, be many places on the coast anywhere South of Tenedos, where we could probably count on being able to land your whole force practically unopposed, as the Turks cannot possibly have prepared themselves everywhere. If we can make a good footing and land our whole force without much opposition, we should have secured a good deal, and we ought to be able to secure the Mendere River, say somewhere in the vicinity of Esine, and from there work up towards the Dardanelles, clearing the forts on that side instead of on the peninsula as originally contemplated. If we did this while the navy were carrying on a violent bombardment, we should be able to do so with probably little or no artillery opposition, while, later on, if the Turks have to withdraw their mobile artillery from the straits to oppose us, it might just give the navy the opportunity they want of getting through.<sup>132</sup>

He admitted that the country would be difficult making supply and transport a problem, but from the Asiatic side, the army would better be able to dominate the peninsula; "If we can succeed and work up this side, and get the navy through, I feel sure that the peninsula itself will at once be evacuated, and save us all further bother there".<sup>133</sup> While Birdwood's plan may possibly have had some merit, as explained previously, Hamilton was under strict instructions that the Asiatic side was out of bounds to his force.<sup>134</sup> Further, as outlined below, Hamilton had his own convincing reasons for not venturing outside the Peninsula.

The next day, in reply to Birdwood's letter, Hamilton dismissed the idea of a landing on the Asiatic side although he had "most anxiously

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary* , Vol.1, 1.

considered" all that Birdwood had suggested. However, "broadly, I am still all for taking the bull by the horns".<sup>135</sup> He added:

First of all, I have no roving commission to conquer Asia Minor. Indeed the most positive part of my instructions specifically denies me the whole of that country.

Secondly, the War Office objections would be, I know, just as strong to any disembarkation in Europe outside the Peninsula itself.

Thirdly, in the case of a landing between Zeros Bay and Enos, I should be attacked from Adrianople, I should be attacked from Rodosto, and I should be attacked in rear from Bulair.

Fourthly, in the case of a landing south of Tenedos, I would certainly have to meet opposition not only in front but also from my right rear.

Fifthly, against all the difficulties (difficulties I assure you by no means under-rated by me) of landing, is the enormous value of working hand in glove with the Fleet. And not only the enormous value, but the fact that thereby, and thereby alone, am I fully acting on the spirit of my instructions. I have not come here for any other purpose whatsoever but to help to get the Fleet through the

Dardanelles. The War Office think the Gallipoli Peninsula is the best way to effect this purpose. So do the Admiralty, and so also does the Admiral in executive command.<sup>136</sup>

Hamilton also said that he thought Birdwood was mistaken in believing that the Asiatic side dominated the peninsula. His information led him to believe the opposite to be the case.<sup>137</sup> It is apparent that these opposing views were an indication of the lack of hard intelligence available to Hamilton's force and could be taken as an indication of the inevitable consequences of the campaign. Both Hamilton and Birdwood might have been right in their opinion, but evidence to support either general over the other was not forthcoming.

---

<sup>135</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 2 April 1915, AWM 3DRL 3376/45 and Hamilton Papers 5/1.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

## X

It is evident that while Hamilton regarded the taking of the Dardanelles to be the main objective in allowing the navy to reach the Marmora Sea and to take Constantinople, Birdwood was of the opinion that the military operation had become an end in itself. Hunter-Weston, commander of the 29th Division, had written an appreciation of the potential operation for Hamilton. He said that the land operations were to be directed entirely towards assisting the fleet and that no operations should be commenced unless the result allowed the allied fleet through the Straits.<sup>138</sup>

In a letter dated 3 April, John Churchill, a member of Hamilton's staff, told his brother Winston that while Hamilton was very determined to overcome the difficulties of his command, Birdwood, Hunter Weston and d'Amade, commander of the French force, were:

... rather gloomy, and see only the difficult side of the question. They talk of impossibilities and have put their views on papers. d'A[made] is helpful and fully prepared to do whatever is asked to the best of his ability, but the enthusiasm shown by HW[Hunter Weston] in London and B[irdwood] when he thought he was to command, has partly evaporated. They all have alternative plans which do not meet the immediate case. My friend [Hamilton] considers the main object at the moment is to enable the RN to get through as soon as possible. Once that is done the whole situation must be reviewed and further orders will be given from home. He is confident that the others will be all right "on the day", and their forebodings have not affected the plans and orders in any essential.<sup>139</sup>

Hamilton repeated these complaints himself to Kitchener in a letter on the same day:

All goes well and my chiefest worry is that my three or four senior officers (excepting Braithwaite) now seem, for the first time, to see all the difficulties with extraordinary perspicacity. In fact, they would each apparently a thousand times sooner do anything else than what we are going to do. But I have no doubt whatever when once they are fairly embarked they will play up for all they are worth.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.1, 89.

<sup>139</sup> John Churchill to Winston Churchill, 3 April 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 766-767.

<sup>140</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 3 April 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/1.

It is extraordinary that Hamilton should have been so relaxed in this matter given that it was his "three or four senior officers" who were so lacking in confidence as to give rise to his "chiefest worry". However, he must have been turning over in his mind the conclusion written by Hunter-Weston in his appreciation, referred to earlier :

The information available goes to show that if this expedition had been carefully and secretly prepared in England, France and Egypt, and the Naval and Military details of organisation, equipment and disembarkation carefully worked out by the General Staff and the Naval War Staff, and if no bombardment or other warning had been given till the troops, landing gear, etc., were all ready and despatched ... the capture of the Gallipoli Peninsula and the forcing of the Dardanelles would have been successful.

[...]

The return of the Expedition when it has gone so far will cause discontent, much talk, and some laughter ... It will be a heavy blow to all of us soldiers, and will need great strength and moral courage on the part of the Commander and Government.

But it will not do irreparable harm to our cause, whereas to attempt a landing and fail to secure a passage through the Dardanelles would be a disaster to the Empire.<sup>141</sup>

In a letter to Munro-Ferguson, Birdwood explained that the situation had altered since February. Because so much publicity had been given to the British operation, tremendous preparations had been made by the Turks to repel it.<sup>142</sup> Further,

I foresee very great difficulties which may or may not be fully realised at Home. I cannot help thinking that Churchill fully believed the Navy could force the Dardanelles by themselves. From my first visit there I was convinced this was not the case and moreover that any military operations in combination with the Navy must be of a serious nature entailing much consideration and probably heavy losses.<sup>143</sup>

By implication, Birdwood also criticised Hamilton for not fully realising the "very great difficulties" that he foresaw.

He told Kitchener the same thing, adding that although he was far from pessimistic by nature, he still recognised what they would have to expect if a landing was made on the peninsula under heavy fire from the

---

<sup>141</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary* , Vol.1, 91-93.

<sup>142</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 6 April 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL 2574/10/1A.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

Turks.<sup>144</sup> Birdwood repeated his belief that an advance up the Asiatic side would help the fleet enormously:

... I think we could dominate a good deal of the peninsula from there and it almost looks as if we should in any case have to come down that side later on to clear it. An advance up it in conjunction with the fleet might result in the evacuation of the peninsula and so obviate the necessity of our landing there at all - except perhaps to hold Bulair lines.<sup>145</sup>

Birdwood also shared his doubts with Major-General Charles Callwell, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence at the War Office, adding that he understood the Turks had brought more guns to the south of the peninsula.<sup>146</sup> He now anticipated that Hamilton would try simultaneous landings at Cape Helles and near Gaba Tepe.<sup>147</sup> He added that "The precipitancy of the Admiralty has certainly been most unfortunate, as had we started combined operations without previous warning and advertisement to the Turks and Germans, I believe we should have got through without any great difficulty".<sup>148</sup>

## XI

Hamilton remained confident. He told Kitchener that he was convinced that the "very essence of success must lie in upsetting the equilibrium of the Turk by the most rapid deployment of force possible over a fairly wide extent of country, combined with feints where troops and launches cannot be spared for an actual serious landing".<sup>149</sup> He explained his plans to Kitchener :

My main reliance will be on the 29th Division, the covering force of which will be landed at dawn at Sedd el Bahr, Cape Helles and ... in Morto Bay ... To help these fellows along, subsidiary landing in boats will be made along the coast in small groups ... Even a few men able to scramble up these cliffs should shake the first line of defence ... The Australians meanwhile will make a strong feint which will, I hope, develop into a serious landing operation north of Gaba Tepe. Braithwaite has marked out a good circular holding position,

---

<sup>144</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 6 April 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL17B.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Birdwood to Callwell, 10 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/60.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 10 April 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/1.



stretching from about Fisherman's Hut around to Gaba Tepe, and if they can maintain themselves there, I should hope later on they may be able to make a push forward for Koja Dere.<sup>150</sup>

According to Hamilton, the more he thought of the present task, the more convinced he became that his first and most important step towards making a successful landing was to upset the equilibrium of Liman von Sanders, the German commander of the Turks.<sup>151</sup> Although wanting to land all his troops together, "with the fullest violence of its mass effect - as close as I can to my main objective, the Kilid Bahr plateau", he realised that there was no room on the peninsula to deploy his concentrated force. Therefore, he settled on separating his forces believing that "the effect of momentum, which cannot be produced by cohesion, must be reproduced by the simultaneous nature of the movement".<sup>152</sup>

Birdwood believed the 29th Division to be very good, being composed almost entirely of regiments from India and "it has a capital artillery".<sup>153</sup> He was, however, much less optimistic than Hamilton and told his wife that the British were about to attempt "a landing on an open hostile shore in the face of organized and determined opposition...".<sup>154</sup> He continued :

... much must of course have no sort of doubt as to very speedy success, but the difficulties will be great in the way of trenching posdepend on the success of our plans - in deceiving them as to our landing place etc - while we are very much at the mercy of the weather ... The men are splendid and are all activated with absolutely the right spirit and I know will fight for all they are worth ... If it was only a case of being able to get at close quarters, I should think everywhere covered by acres of barbed wire ... I fear we must expect heavy losses ...<sup>155</sup>

He felt that had they only Turks to face, they could expect little opposition, "but we may be quite sure the Germans with them will have seen to everything being right by now..."<sup>156</sup> He added :

...the delay over the whole thing is most lamentable - or rather I should say the premature action of the Navy trying to get through on

---

150 Ibid.

151 Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.1, 95.

152 Ibid., 96.

153 Birdwood to wife, 11 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

their own before any military arrangements were made - and the publicity given to the whole thing. It strikes me as being much on a par with all our advertising of our first "Dreadnought" which so incited Germany to do all she could to be level with us.<sup>157</sup>

Although Birdwood assured his wife that he would take all precaution to protect himself, he would, as a general, have to be where he was wanted to encourage the men and reconnoitre positions:

You know I have thought deeply about this war - for years I have seen it as absolutely inevitable. Now that it is come I regard it as an absolutely just war as far as we are concerned. We are fighting ... in an entirely just cause to maintain our rights and independence which Germany would most certainly have crushed had we not stood up to her now ... It is then incumbent on every Englishman - and of course especially every soldier - to be ready to do all and everything he can ... I have all along realised this though as far as I am concerned I look upon the Dardanelles as far more hazardous than anything I should probably have had to do in France, where in trench warfare the roll [sic] of the General must to a great extent be very limited.<sup>158</sup>

He said his morbid thoughts were the result of knowing what a serious business it was they were undertaking: "My own Australians and New Zealanders are good enough to let me know I have won their confidence and ... I have no doubts about them fighting like tigers and enjoying it - though they don't yet quite realise all that is before them".<sup>159</sup> There is little doubt that Birdwood was apprehensive at this time. General Godley, the New Zealand commander, noted in a letter to his wife that "Birdwood was most pessimistic today".<sup>160</sup>

## XII

It was not until 14 April that a reconnaissance was made of the Gallipoli coast with a view to the selection of landing sites.<sup>161</sup> Birdwood was aboard *Queen* for this purpose, the ship steaming down the coast from Bulair before closing the shore from Ejelmar Bay midway up the peninsula,

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Godley to wife, 15 April 1915, Godley Papers.

<sup>161</sup> Entry, 14 April 1915, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/1 Part 1.

to Cape Helles.<sup>162</sup> Landing places north of Gaba Tepe were examined carefully and the beach selected by Birdwood appeared to be an excellent place to disembark his troops. It was noted that no men were seen ashore nor was there any sign of work in progress.<sup>163</sup>

The orders issued by Hamilton on 13 April outlined the general plan of attack by his army.<sup>164</sup> Estimating the strength of the Turks on the Peninsula to be in the vicinity of 34,000 men, it was noted that information pointed to their landing being opposed.<sup>165</sup> The object of the expedition as outlined, was to assist the fleet to force the Dardanelles by capturing the Kilid Bahr plateau and thus dominating the forts at the Narrows.<sup>166</sup> To achieve this object, the plan was for the navy to bombard the Bulair lines at daybreak on the nominated day of the landing (which at this time was not known). The bombardment was to be followed by a feint landing on the mainland north of the Xeros Islands by the transport fleet of the Royal Naval Division. Simultaneously, Birdwood's corps was to land under cover of fire on the beach overlooked by the promontory of Gaba Tepe. A bombardment was also to cover the landing of the 29th Division at Cape Helles. Also, the French fleet was to make a demonstration at Besika Bay on the Asiatic coast while the French Expeditionary Force landed near Kum Kale to the north.<sup>167</sup>

### XIII

The instructions received by Birdwood from GHQ, stated that his landing was to be made on the beach between Gaba Tepe and Fisherman's Hut.<sup>168</sup> The objective assigned to the corps was :

... the ridge over which the Gallipoli - Maidos and Boghali - Kojadere roads run, and especially Mal Tepe. Gaining such a position the Army Corps will threaten, and perhaps cut, the line of retreat of the enemy's forces on the Kilid Bahr plateau, and must, even by their preliminary

---

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> M.E.F. Force Order No.1, 13 April 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/1 Part 5.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> "Instructions from GHQ to GOC A & NZ Army Corps", 13 April 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/1 Part 5.

operations, prevent the said plateau being reinforced during the attack of the 29th Division, from Maidos, Gallipoli or Bulair.<sup>169</sup>

The objective of the covering force was to be the Sari Bair ridge where it should establish itself in order to protect the landing of the main force. The semi-circle of ridges running northwest and southwest of this position seemed to lend itself to the establishment of a strong covering position.<sup>170</sup> The general plan of operation of the Army Corps was as follows :

As soon as the first division is landed... the disembarkation of the second division will commence. By the time the second division begins to land, sufficient troops should be available to admit of a further advance. Leaving the covering force to protect the northern flank of the landing place and line of communication, an effort will be made to storm Mal Tepe which is the centre and key to the ridge over which the Gallipoli - Maidos and Boghali - Kojadere roads run. Should the A & NZ Army Corps succeed in securing this ridge the results should be more vital and valuable than the capture of the Kilid Bahr plateau itself.<sup>171</sup>

Birdwood does not appear to have questioned whether his force was adequate to perform the tasks and objectives required of it.

On 17 April, Birdwood told his wife in a letter, that he had steamed around the Gallipoli coast in HMS *Queen* and found it "in places ... most forbidding and ... just bristling with trenches - gun emplacements, barbed wire prepared for our reception...".<sup>172</sup> He told her that he would be on board the cruiser when the landing began, until a good part of his force was ashore, when he would join them. Each man was to carry enough food and water to last three days (a small tin of bully beef and two biscuits per day); no blankets were to be taken and they had to sleep as they were. The "troops and ships may be under heavy shell fire from concealed guns so we have to be very nippy in whatever we do".<sup>173</sup> He thought they would succeed however, and felt that their best chance was to land and attack at night.<sup>174</sup>

Birdwood found Hamilton "charming to work with, and he is very good indeed about giving us all free hands...", he told Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzgerald, Personal Military Secretary to Lord Kitchener.<sup>175</sup> He continued:

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Birdwood to wife, 17 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Birdwood to Fitzgerald, 19 April 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL24.

... for example - the original orders I got were to effect my landing after the Navy had carried out a regular bombardment. To my mind, this would have been futile as it seems to me it would only advertise our coming without doing any real good. I have therefore now got leave to do it in my own time, and I have great hopes of my getting 1,500 men ashore shortly after 3:30 a.m. and with any luck I hope to have 12,000 ashore by 8:30 a.m... The ground is very difficult, which is just what I like... I shall land on as broad a front as possible, so that even if opposed I hope my advance may not be checked, and that we may be able to shove through and gain the first ridge, which is about 3/4 mile from the shore, at once... If I find that the firing is too heavy on the ships off the beach... I shall move the whole landing further North up near the Fisherman's Hut, but the country just there is so very difficult and broken that it is impossible to attempt a landing there while it is dark.<sup>176</sup>

He told Fitzgerald that because of the peninsula's lack of water, he had arranged prior to Hamilton's appointment as commander, to have piers for landing purposes brought to the area. As ballast he had these fitted with 2,000 kerosene tins filled with fresh water. Unfortunately, they appeared to have been lost.<sup>177</sup> He had also arranged for one of the water-tank boats used on the Suez Canal to be available, but this too had dropped out of the plan.<sup>178</sup> However, he had got General Maxwell to buy 300 mules together with their drivers from Alexandria to use as transport once they were on the Peninsula. He had purchased a further 100 small donkeys, each of which would carry a couple of kerosene tins up the hills.<sup>179</sup> He intended to land every pack horse available to his Corps as soon as he could, as they would carry ammunition, water and supplies as would the mules of his mountain batteries.<sup>180</sup>

#### XIV

General Hamilton met with de Robeck on board HMS *Queen Elizabeth* on 19 April. Also present at the meeting, were Birdwood, Godley, Hunter- Weston, Bridges and d'Amade. At this conference, it was decided that the landings would take place on 23 April, St George's Day.<sup>181</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Entry, MEF War Diary, 19 April 1915, AWM 4/1/4/1 Part 1.

Birdwood's diary entry for 21 April notes that the weather was cold, wet and windy. All arrangements for the invasion of the peninsula had been put back for 24 hours because of it, "though we only heard this by chance!"<sup>182</sup> The next day was no better being very cold and windy. De Robeck proposed another delay of 24 hours.<sup>183</sup> Birdwood noted in his diary: "I am beginning to fear the delay may defeat my plans of being able to land as a surprise in the dark, as the moon may now give away our approach ...".<sup>184</sup> Hamilton noted in a letter to Kitchener the following day that Birdwood was "absolutely confident", but that he hoped "the actual presence of the enemy will make him prudent...".<sup>185</sup>

On the eve of their landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Birdwood wrote to his wife that Mudros harbour was the scene of great excitement, full of large transports, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats and submarines.<sup>186</sup> He continued :

... the great transports have begun to move quietly down and out of the harbour in turn - we follow at 12 [noon] and all meet at a rendez vous behind the Island of Imbros before attacking. As the transports come down, such as have bands on board play them and the men all cheer and get counter cheers as they pass the battle ships and cruisers. Such fine fellows they all look... and all just as keen as possible on starting fighting. It really makes a lump come in my throat as I watch them return their salutes to think of how many of them must fall almost at once... for I fear we are almost bound to lose heavily...<sup>187</sup>

## XV

It is apparent that Birdwood's ideas had fluctuated for some time prior to the landing becoming imminent. He had initially proposed a landing at Cape Helles by his main force with a naval demonstration at the Bulair Lines and the landing of a small body of troops. He later maintained that had a landing been made at this time at Cape Helles, it would have been possible for his troops to seize Achi Baba immediately although he anticipated a fight for Kilid Bahr.<sup>188</sup> This seems to assume that Turkish resistance would be negligible. At this time Birdwood and Hamilton

---

<sup>182</sup> Birdwood diary, 21 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>183</sup> Entry, MEF War Diary, 22 April 1915, AWM 4/1/4/1 Part 1.

<sup>184</sup> Birdwood diary, 22 April 1915.

<sup>185</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 23 April 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL30.

<sup>186</sup> Birdwood to wife, 24 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

discussed their mutual plans "to get through to Constantinople"<sup>189</sup> and found them to be "identical".<sup>190</sup>

In early April, Birdwood suggested a landing on the Asiatic side. This idea was dismissed by Hamilton as being contrary to his orders. Several days later, Birdwood conceded that they would land at Helles and further north near Gaba Tepe. It could be argued that Hamilton took little notice of Birdwood's advice or suggestions, but this would be to overstate Birdwood's position as a corps commander. His suggestions would have been heard, as would the suggestions of others. But it should be remembered that Hamilton had arrived with a clear set of instructions which could not be exceeded. As Birdwood was also aware, Hamilton's staff felt that as he was no longer in command, Birdwood should confine himself only to the business of his corps. Doubtless, Hamilton was influenced by his staff in this matter.

Clearly, Kitchener placed little faith in Birdwood's advice and judgment. Robert Rhodes James has asserted that "even Kitchener had his doubts about him".<sup>191</sup> It is hard to disagree with this assessment because of Birdwood's excessive enthusiasm. The evidence points to this being the case. Kitchener's instructions to Hamilton of 13 March are a very clear indication that Birdwood's advice was ignored by Kitchener who followed the advice given to him by the Admiralty. Despite their friendship, Kitchener evidently felt that Birdwood did not possess the practical military experience to judge matters despite his being at the site of the proposed operation.

Although Birdwood and Hamilton agreed on the final plan for the Gallipoli landings, this agreement would appear to have been reached independently. There is no evidence to suggest that Hamilton asked Birdwood for his advice although, as discussed, Birdwood would have been quite happy to give it. It would be fair to say that Birdwood did not have a role in the final plan other than that already discussed.

David French sums up the Gallipoli expedition and the peninsula landing by saying that "[t]he military landing was conceived as if it would be no more than the last of Queen Victoria's 'little wars'...".<sup>192</sup> He adds that the "whole expedition had an air of hasty improvisation"<sup>193</sup>, and that the

---

<sup>189</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 23 March 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL15.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 60.

<sup>192</sup> David French, "The Origins of the Dardanelles Reconsidered", *History* (July 1983), 220.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

"one factor vital to success was that the British had to realize from the outset that they were embarking on an operation against a first- class military power and not a backward oriental despotism".<sup>194</sup>

It is strange that no-one was asked to reassess the situation in the Dardanelles in light of the naval failure. Churchill had sold the idea of a British campaign to the Cabinet on the basis that troops would be required only in the event of a naval success which, he had assured the Cabinet, was inevitable. Birdwood seemed to be the only person with any real grasp of the fact that it was not going to be successful. In this situation, he was limited by the fact that his opinion was not sought. It can be conjectured that Churchill himself was probably aware that the navy was not going to succeed, but there is no evidence to support this.

Following Hamilton's appointment as commander of the British force, Birdwood was put in an awkward position. From being the man "on the spot" with the experience of time already spent investigating the military aspects of an invasion by the British, he had been shuttled to the role of a subordinate commander whose advice was not heeded and, indeed, not sought because both Kitchener and Hamilton doubted his judgment. Thus, he was limited in any role that he could play because of this. There is no question that he could have queried the size of the force that was to be utilised. While that in itself may not have changed the object of the operation, it may have limited the early objectives of the invading force to more attainable goals. Once his troops had left the ships bound for the shore, Birdwood could do nothing but watch and wait. His role was limited to one of a bystander until the next stage of the operation.

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 224.



## CHAPTER TWO

### I

The dawn landing by the 1,500 Australians of the 3rd Brigade on the Gallipoli Peninsula had originally been intended by General Hamilton as a "feint" which "will I think develop into a real landing".<sup>1</sup> As early as 3 April, Kitchener had told Hamilton that a current Admiralty report seemed,

... to point to the advisability of the main landing taking place in the neighbour-hood of Cape Helles and Morto Bay while a feint in considerable force which also may possibly land, takes place north and south of Kaba Tepe [sic] with possibly the commanding ground of Sari Bair as its objective in order that the enemy on the southern slopes may not support those on the Kilid Bahr plateau which I presume you will attack in force and occupy and prepare to destroy the forts at the Narrows.<sup>2</sup>

Later, when giving evidence to the Dardanelles Commission, Birdwood stated that he had no idea what had been in Hamilton's mind regarding the landings other than what was in his own orders: "I understood he was going to try to work from the toe upwards and the Anzac force was a menace to cut across to Kilia Bay".<sup>3</sup> But it is difficult to believe that Birdwood, as a senior commander, did not know what was in Hamilton's mind. If this was the case, he should certainly have taken steps to find out.

By 8.30 a.m. on 25 April, some 12,000 men had been landed at a beach further north than originally intended. Birdwood had watched the first boats disappear with some anxiety especially when he realised that instead of heading due east from the ships, they were actually inclining to their left. Of course, he could do nothing. He had particularly not wanted to go to the spot where they were taken because the country there was extremely difficult and the troops, once ashore, would certainly lose themselves in the dark.<sup>4</sup> This position was the one Birdwood had referred to in a letter to Fitzgerald, Kitchener's personal military secretary, on 19 April. He had said

---

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 10 April 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/1 Part 2.

<sup>2</sup> Kitchener to Hamilton, 3 April 1915, Appendix in *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

<sup>4</sup> Birdwood to wife, 29 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

that should the firing on the ships be too heavy from the shore, he would move the landing site further north near the Fisherman's Hut, "... but the country just there is so very difficult and broken that it is impossible to attempt a landing there while it is dark".<sup>5</sup> He told his wife :

This landing further north than was intended naturally caused some temporary difficulties; for these I must take the blame, for they were caused by my insistence on landing before daylight. But the error brought great compensations also. The original spot chosen for the landing was on fairly open ground not far from Gaba Tepe, and troops landing there must have suffered heavily from machine-gun and other fire from the trenches in that locality, which had clearly been dug and wired in anticipation of an attack thereabouts. But though, by this accident, our right avoided this danger, our left came in for bad trouble further north, beyond Ari Burnu. On the open beach near the fishermen's huts we suffered heavy losses, some boats drifting off full of dead with no one in control. The centre landing, in the neighbourhood of what was later known as Anzac Cove, was more fortunate. The country here was very broken and difficult, and the Turks had evidently not expected an attack, for they were only lightly entrenched and were soon driven off by the impetuous Australians.<sup>6</sup>

## II

There has been much debate among historians regarding the ANZAC landing site and there does not appear to have been any resolution to what has become a source of widespread controversy over the years. Robert Rhodes James puts forward a claim by a Gallipoli veteran that Birdwood and Admiral Thursby, the naval officer in command of the Anzac landings, made a last-minute change of plan to land further north than originally intended.<sup>7</sup> But, as he points out, the papers of neither Birdwood nor Skeen give any indication of such a change. On the other hand, Thursby reported to Admiral de Robeck that the boats had landed within a hundred yards of their assigned position.<sup>8</sup> It is unlikely that Thursby would change something as important as the landing site without first consulting Birdwood. Denis Winter queries the eventual landing site: was it "bad luck", or was it was part of Birdwood's plan? <sup>9</sup> He comes to the conclusion

---

<sup>5</sup> Birdwood to Fitzgerald, 19 April 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/61 WL24.

<sup>6</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 257.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 105.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Bush, *Gallipoli* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 110.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Winter, "The Anzac Landing - the great gamble?", *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No.4 (April 1984), 15.

that there is no easy explanation for the boats going to the wrong place. Like others, he accepts that an unsuspected sea current could have been the major factor for the boats losing their way between ship and shore.<sup>10</sup> Winter points out that submarines had been working in the landing area and the navy should have been well aware of the existence of currents there.<sup>11</sup>

According to Eric Bush, a British midshipman in charge of an Anzac landing craft, the British Army High Command took pains to protect the navy from criticism for landing the troops at the wrong place.<sup>12</sup> He noted that Hamilton "lightly dismissed the subject."<sup>13</sup> Birdwood in his diary confined himself to stating that in the dark the boats missed their landing place and landed two miles further north.<sup>14</sup> The official naval historian, blamed an "imaginary current".<sup>15</sup> Bush concluded that it was another midshipman, John Metcalf of HMS *Triumph*, who in the end was responsible for the error made. After he initially mistook the place of the lead boat, he twice altered course to the north on the run into the beach.<sup>16</sup> Bush's explanation appears to be the more acceptable.

The naval historian, Tom Frame, maintains that the Gallipoli landings were "a naval problem first and last".<sup>17</sup> Admiral Thursby had given *Triumph* the task of marking the rendezvous position off Anzac and Rhodes James notes that "Thursby's written orders to the captain show that her position was to be fixed by normal navigational methods ...".<sup>18</sup>

Frame poses the question : how did the ships of the Royal Navy accurately fix their positions when they released the steam pinnaces some two miles from the Gallipoli coast? <sup>19</sup> He continues :

At Gallipoli there were no lights, there was an indistinguishable coastline and insufficient charted depth soundings for a position to be achieved by lead line. The answer is by dead reckoning : running the ships at a set speed on a set course for a set period of time to reach a desired position with an allowance made for likely weather effects

---

10 Ibid.  
11 Ibid.  
12 Bush, *Gallipoli*, 110.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 111.

16 Ibid., 114.

17 Tom Frame, "A Stab in the Dark: The Royal Navy and the Anzac Landings", n.d., unpublished paper, 16.

18 Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 106.

19 Frame, "A Stab in the Dark", 16.



such as wind and current. Given the distances involved, the likely margin of error was around three miles. This corresponded to the distance between Gaba Tepe and Fisherman's Hut. If the Anzacs were landed at either Gaba Tepe or Anzac Cove it would have been by luck. The Navy was going to put them somewhere on a three mile front and that was the best that could be achieved. Birdwood had to accept the consequences of them being landed at each and every point across that front. In other words, there is little point speculating on where exactly they should have been landed when the available precision could not guarantee such a result. And if it was crucial that they land at Anzac Cove or Gaba Tepe, as Birdwood says it was, the operation should never have been attempted.<sup>20</sup>

Frame's would appear to be the most logical argument put forward as well as being the most authoritative.

### III

Once ashore, the troops had to be utilised wherever they were needed. Consequently, this led to a great deal of confusion as units became mixed and, in cases, some detachments under young officers proceeded too far afield. Once in the difficult country, they lost contact with the main body.<sup>21</sup> Birdwood told his wife that "[t]he Turks all the time were fighting us like the Devil and we afterwards discovered we were opposed by three Brigades - and we found they had got trenches everywhere".<sup>22</sup> This was not so. Birdwood told the Dardanelles Commission that "[l]ater on we knew that there were not great Turkish forces up there on the day of the landing".<sup>23</sup> In fact, they had been opposed by only two companies of Turkish troops.<sup>24</sup> All day there was "a perfect pandemonium of noise" while the ships fired broadsides and the Turks returned fire and shrapnel burst everywhere.<sup>25</sup>

Birdwood reported to Hamilton's headquarters at 8.45 a.m. that the surrounding area was heavily entrenched. He believed his casualties to that point were about 2,000.<sup>26</sup> By late afternoon, "[i]nstead of driving 1 1/2 miles inland with a front of 4 miles the troops were clinging to a bare foothold on the Second Ridge little more than a 1/2 mile inland on a front of a mile and,

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Birdwood to Braithwaite, 8 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/37.

<sup>22</sup> Birdwood to wife, 29 April 1915.

<sup>23</sup> Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917.

<sup>24</sup> Prior, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' As History*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Birdwood to wife, 29 April 1915.

<sup>26</sup> Birdwood to GHQ, MEF, 25 April 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

even in the centre, with only one ridge between them and their landing place".<sup>27</sup> Birdwood realised that :

... my troops ... had bitten off rather more than we could chew and we had to withdraw somewhat to take up a position we could hold. It was only then I began to discover the awful trouble I was in for owing to the men being so scattered and broken up.<sup>28</sup>

Birdwood praised his men saying they "had done absolutely magnificently - nothing had stopped them, and they had accomplished what any Army might well be proud of...".<sup>29</sup> But his casualties by nightfall had been heavy with approximately 500 killed, 2,500 wounded and 2,000 missing.<sup>30</sup> He himself had landed as soon as he could in the afternoon after the New Zealand Brigade was ashore:

I cannot definitely state the exact hour at which I landed ... I ... went with some of Bridges' staff towards the right flank and some up the valley between the second ridge and the sea, where I found many Australians in the thick bush. I then turned back and joining Walker [commander of the New Zealand Infantry Brigade] climbed with him up as far towards the top of Walker's ridge as we could. ... It was, of course, extremely difficult to see from any of these places exactly what was going on, and it was impossible for anyone to have a grasp of the situation, as we none us really knew where we were.<sup>31</sup>

Birdwood and Godley had gone ashore together at about 4 p.m. After completing his inspection and talking matters over with his divisional commanders, Bridges and Godley, Birdwood had returned to HMS *Queen*.<sup>32</sup> Birdwood realised how precarious the position was mainly because lines of communication were bound to be difficult owing to the terrain; "[t]here was, however, nothing whatever to let me suspect that we could not hold our own, and I felt no real apprehensions".<sup>33</sup>

At 4:30 p.m., the A & N.Z.A.C. headquarters reported to Hamilton's headquarters that they now had about 13,000 infantry ashore, but only one mountain battery.<sup>34</sup> They reported that troops had been "fighting hard all

---

<sup>27</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *Anzac to Amiens* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1961), 111.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 29 April 1915.

<sup>31</sup> Birdwood to Edmonds, 10 March 1927, Edmonds Papers II/1/22.

<sup>32</sup> Birdwood diary, 25 April 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>33</sup> Birdwood to Edmonds, 1 October 1928, Edmonds Papers II/1/16.

<sup>34</sup> Entry, 25 April 1915, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/1 Part 1.

over Sari Bair since morning, and have been shelled from positions we are unable to reach".<sup>35</sup> Birdwood reported that he had personally visited the Sari Bair position and found it to be unsatisfactory. The country was very difficult and heavily entrenched.<sup>36</sup>

Bean wrote of the situation that night :

One clear fact was that the attack had failed to achieve the object laid down and that, though a foothold had been gained, the brigadiers, except Walker, were doubtful whether it could be held even until morning. On the other hand the British troops were known to have landed at Cape Helles, and the position there might be such that the transfer of Birdwood's corps to that area might render victory at Helles certain. Godley and White both felt that the commander-in-chief should be made aware of the failure at Gaba Tepe and informed that the leaders on the spot were of opinion that the best use to be made of the troops was to withdraw them at once and put them in somewhere else. In the end Bridges accepted this view.<sup>37</sup>

While discussing matters with Admiral Thursby on board HMS *Queen*, Birdwood received a message asking him to return ashore as the position was critical:

I went ashore again and was met by Bridges and Godley, with several of their senior officers. They told me that their men were so exhausted after all they had gone through, and so unnerved by constant shell-fire after their wonderfully gallant work, that they feared a fiasco if a heavy attack should be launched against us next morning. I was told that numbers had already dribbled back through the scrub, and the two Divisional Commanders urged me most strongly to make immediate arrangements for re-embarkation.<sup>38</sup>

In a letter to Bean written after the war, Birdwood noted that having read Bean's account of the landing and the first day on the Gallipoli Peninsula, it had brought home to him that had he been more aware of what was happening in the fighting line, he would no doubt have acquiesced at once with the wishes of Bridges and Godley to re-embark the force:

There was, as you know, no doubt whatever in Bridges' mind about being 'thoroughly demoralised'. Godley was equally persistent, and both envisaged a complete debacle next morning when what they

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *Two Men I Knew* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957), 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 259.

considered the inevitable attack would take place. I think I perhaps realised more than they did how almost impossible it would have been to re-embark had I wished to do so, while I also probably felt that the Turkish losses and demoralisation were probably far greater than ours ... I always felt that one of our difficulties at Gallipoli was that we were never able to learn the psychology of our enemy ...<sup>39</sup>

According to Birdwood, both Bridges and Godley urged immediate re-embarkation without a thought of consulting either Hamilton or Thursby. Birdwood told Bean that "[t]his I absolutely refused to do, and when Bridges took me aside ... and urged how important the matter was, I remember so well saying I would far rather wait and die there on the spot in the morning than re-embark".<sup>40</sup> He told Munro-Ferguson that this episode "was very tiring and caused me the most awful of anxious nights I trust I may ever spend ... Imagine my awful feelings and position that night on the confined beach which we held, which was almost wholly blocked by the streams of wounded whom we were trying to get off".<sup>41</sup> Bridges was the most insistent on the necessity of re-embarkation pointing out that unless arrangements were made immediately, it would become an impossible task.<sup>42</sup> Godley agreed with this. When giving evidence at the Dardanelles Commission, he was asked by Sir William Pickford, the chairman of the Commission, "...when you first landed, did you think it was certain that you could hold the place?" Godley replied, "No. The first night both General Bridges ... and I, after consultation, came to the conclusion that it was by no means certain that we should be able to hang on".<sup>43</sup> Although Bridges was in favour of evacuation, Walker was not and fought the idea vehemently.<sup>44</sup> Birdwood felt bound to report the situation to Hamilton. Until now, all his reports to Hamilton had been optimistic. Birdwood realised that receiving a message urging withdrawal, Hamilton's confidence might collapse. He may be tempted to push more troops to the Australian landing site, which he knew could not be spared from the British landing site at Helles where the losses sustained by the 29th Division were very high;<sup>45</sup> "... in view of the losses sustained by both forces he might consider it advisable to abandon one

---

39 Birdwood to Bean, 14 August 1922, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/36.

40 Birdwood to Bean, 24 July 1920, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/2.

41 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 4 May 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL 2574/10/2.

42 Birdwood to Aspinall, 4 May 1927, Edmonds Papers, 11/1/22.

43 Godley evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 1 February 1917, AWM 51/103.

44 Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 455-456.

45 Birdwood to Edmonds, 1 October 1928, Edmonds Papers, 11/1/16.



landing or the other and concentrate all his strength either at Helles or at Anzac".<sup>46</sup>

Birdwood asked Godley to take a message at his dictation:

Both my divisional generals and brigadiers have represented to me that they fear their men are thoroughly demoralized by shrapnel fire to which they have been subjected all day after exhaustion and gallant work in morning. Numbers have dribbled back from firing line and cannot be collected in this difficult country. Even New Zealand brigade which has been only recently engaged has lost heavily and is to some extent demoralized. If troops are subjected to shell fire again tomorrow morning there is likely to be a fiasco as I have no fresh troops with which to replace those in firing line. I know my representation is most serious but if we are to re-embark it must be at once.<sup>47</sup>

This message was a "bombshell" at the headquarters in HMS *Queen Elizabeth*.<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, awakened at midnight by Braithwaite, his Chief of Staff, asked Admiral Thursby for his opinion as to what should be done. Thursby replied that it would take the best of three days to re-embark the troops but that he thought, if asked, they would stick it out.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, Hamilton replied to Birdwood:

Your news is indeed serious. But there is nothing for it but to dig yourselves right in and stick it out. It would take at least two days to re-embark you as Admiral Thursby will explain to you ... Hunter Weston despite his heavy losses will be advancing tomorrow which should divert pressure from you. Make a personal appeal to your men and Godley's to make a supreme effort and to hold their ground.<sup>50</sup>

In a postscript, Hamilton added that having "got through the difficult business, now you have only to dig, dig, dig, until you are safe".<sup>51</sup>

Birdwood was relieved to receive Hamilton's reply telling him to hold on, although he had been confident that this would be the case.<sup>52</sup> Godley confirmed that Birdwood "was only too glad to agree ...".<sup>53</sup> Admiral Thursby, who had delivered Hamilton's message to Birdwood, later wrote

---

<sup>46</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 259.

<sup>47</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 25 April 1914, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>48</sup> Guy Dawnay to wife, 30 June 1916, Dawnay Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary* , Vol.1,144.

<sup>50</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 25 April 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Birdwood to Bean, 24 July 1920, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/2.

<sup>53</sup> Godley to wife, 29 April 1915, Godley Papers.

that he found Birdwood ashore with Godley and Bridges, and "[h]e was cheerful but not very hopeful".<sup>54</sup>

#### IV

Before daylight on 26 April, Birdwood had gone all around the firing lines and found the men improving in spirits after the previous day and night.<sup>55</sup> His visits seemed to cheer the men and, fortunately for them, that day the fighting was light:

The difficulties of the country which they had so magnificently tackled with their dash, went against them however in such circumstances when the regular soldiers' discipline would have helped him - for in this dense country covered with mullahs, many men would quietly slip away from the ranks and lie up in the sand to take an easy [sic] when they were wanted to fight. When going up a valley which was our main communication as I was going round the trenches, the shrapnel came pouring in everywhere I saw men scattering simply because it was new to them. I found quite the best method to adopt to reassure them was to saunter quietly on swinging my stick just to let them see it wasn't anything so very awful ! <sup>56</sup>

All day the men were given short spells from fighting to dig themselves shelters; "... now that they have found they are more or less safe when dug in, they are in quite good spirits again".<sup>57</sup> They missed the help of artillery fire, but the guns had not been able to land until late that evening. Unused to fighting, the troops had fired off thousands of rounds of ammunition unnecessarily. Birdwood urged them to restrain themselves from doing so, telling them "how absolutely they were giving their own game away by this, and now I am glad to say they are already much better and hardly fire at all at night".<sup>58</sup>

By the night of 26 April, Birdwood's corps had failed to achieve any of its objectives. Because of increasing Turkish opposition, the opportunity to break out from Anzac no longer presented itself and no further advance was possible.<sup>59</sup> Bearing in mind that Birdwood had only two divisions, Hamilton's plan was, to say the least, ambitious, and had little chance of

---

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Bush, *Gallipoli* , 109.

<sup>55</sup> Birdwood to wife, 29 April 1915.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Prior, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' As History* , 126-127.

success. When it is realised that the plan called for the capture, by a small force, of several difficult positions along a ridge four miles long together with an advance of several miles while fighting-off Turkish counter-attacks, the absurdity of the idea is apparent.

With the exception of some horses used to haul a few guns, Birdwood had not allowed any other animals to land due to the lack of water on the peninsula. The provision of water was to be on Birdwood's mind throughout the campaign and he was of the opinion that GHQ did not give the necessary attention to its supply or transport : "It was directly due to his own personal foresight and persistence that, both at the landing and in the great offensive in August, at any rate his own troops had sufficient water".<sup>60</sup> Bean notes that the men were aware of this shortage and exercised restraint in the use of water. Because of this, its lack never hampered operations during the campaign.<sup>61</sup>

## V

On 1 May, Birdwood received instructions from Hamilton regarding the original objectives of the landing at Anzac :

Until you receive further orders no general advance is to be initiated by you against the objectives referred to in the Secret Instructions ... dated 13/4/15. But this is not to preclude any forward movements which may be usefully undertaken with a view to occupying such points as may facilitate your advance against the aforesaid objectives hereafter and meanwhile compel the enemy to maintain a large force in your front. By this means you will relieve pressure on the troops in the southern portion of the Peninsula which is your present role.<sup>62</sup>

By this time, the Anzacs had suffered 6,554 casualties; of these, 1,252 had been killed.<sup>63</sup> The Turks had suffered even heavier losses, estimated by the Turkish General Staff to be in the vicinity of 14,000, many of whom had been killed or had died of wounds.<sup>64</sup>

Birdwood delivered a major attack against the Turks on the night of 2/3 May which can only be described as overly ambitious and poorly

---

<sup>60</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.I, 573.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 574.

<sup>62</sup> "Instructions for GOC A & NZ Army Corps", 1 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 3.

<sup>63</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* , 170.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 171.

conceived. Birdwood, in his report to GHQ MEF, described it as "an attempt ... to improve our position by pushing up the valley and attempting to seize the knoll on spur 700...".<sup>65</sup> The plan, devised by Birdwood and his senior commanders, had been to capture Baby 700 by making assaults on 'The Nek' and 'The Chessboard' together with troops scaling the cliffs at the head of Monash Valley. This was to be the main route to Baby 700.<sup>66</sup> It has been described by Bean as "the key of the Anzac position"<sup>67</sup>; "[t]his hill rose above the end of the valley leading up to the centre and left-centre of the Anzac line, was from first to last the main channel of communication to all the posts there".<sup>68</sup> The Anzacs found the position too strongly held by the Turks and had to withdraw.<sup>69</sup> The night had cost them over 2,000 casualties; nearly half of these men had been killed.<sup>70</sup>

When writing to Kitchener on 3 May, Birdwood commented that since landing on 25 April, there had been no respite from the fighting: "Day and night we have been attacked, and yesterday 250 shrapnel burst over one corner of this camp in ten minutes".<sup>71</sup> He reported that the two Turkish divisions against him had now increased to three. His own numbers had been reduced, not only by casualties, but because he lent two brigades and five batteries to the force at Helles leaving him with 10,000 rifles against 20,000 Turks:

However, I hope to get my own Brigades back shortly, and in the meantime am doing what I can by bluff and small attacks to appear to be much stronger than I am, but you will see it is a bit of a risky game, which after all is only right, as Sir Ian wants me to contain as many of the enemy as I possibly can, while he endeavors to take a rather important position further South with the whole of the rest of his force.<sup>72</sup>

## VI

In his history of the Gallipoli campaign, Charles Bean makes the point that Hamilton and his staff concerned themselves more with the

---

<sup>65</sup> Birdwood to Braithwaite, 8 May 1915.

<sup>66</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 584.

<sup>67</sup> Bean, *Two Men I Knew*, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 584.

<sup>70</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 180-181.

<sup>71</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 3 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/47.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

operations at Helles rather than with those at Anzac.<sup>73</sup> As Bean says, Hamilton's and Kitchener's central concern was the taking of Achi Baba, a hill in the south of the peninsula located between the British landing place at Cape Helles and the important plateau, Kilid Bahr, which protected the forts guarding the Narrows.<sup>74</sup> Kitchener cabled to Hamilton on 4 May:

I hope the 5th will see you strong enough to press on to Achi Baba anyway, as delay will allow the Turks to bring up more reinforcements and to make unpleasant preparations for your reception. The Australians and New Zealanders will have had reinforcements from Egypt by then, and ... could spare you a good many men for the advance.<sup>75</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Hamilton had borrowed two infantry brigades and five batteries of artillery from Birdwood to reinforce Hunter-Weston's attempt to push forward from Helles. This left Birdwood's corps consisting of only three brigades each of 2,000 men.<sup>76</sup> For the present, Anzac was confined to holding on and all further British reinforcements were directed to Helles.<sup>77</sup> Birdwood was happy to hear on 10 May that the two brigades were to be returned to Anzac<sup>78</sup>, although having been decimated in the 'Second Battle of Krithia' where one thousand of the two thousand Australian troops engaged had been killed or wounded in a particularly futile attack on the enemy.<sup>79</sup>

Birdwood reported to GHQ MEF that on 4 May, he had made an attempt to seize the promontory of Gaba Tepe.<sup>80</sup> Destroyers had landed 120 Australian troops who had "[f]ound it held strongly with men and maxims in wonderfully concealed galleries so had to withdraw ...".<sup>81</sup> The men had to be evacuated but the casualties had been light because the Turks had withheld their fire when the evacuation began. This operation was Birdwood's only attempt to extend his position to the south by making use of the covering fire of warships.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 601.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Kitchener to Hamilton, 4 May 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 601.

<sup>76</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 262.

<sup>77</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.I, 601.

<sup>78</sup> Entry, 10 May 1915, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 1.

<sup>79</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.1, 346.

<sup>80</sup> Birdwood to Braithwaite, 8 May 1915.

<sup>81</sup> Birdwood diary, 4 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>82</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 180.

## VII

In a letter to his wife, Birdwood was able to tell her how "absolutely lovely" the weather had been since the landing but that no fresh water was available to wash in: "we all have to use the sea and I enjoy a swim when I can ...".<sup>83</sup> Fresh water from two springs had been found and was ample for drinking use, but he had been urged by his staff to stop the men from bathing in the sea for fear of Turkish artillery. He refused to do this believing their spirits would suffer. Birdwood declared that he "was bound to admit that I would rather be knocked out clean than live dirty!"<sup>84</sup> He told his wife of a Turkish attack which had been beaten off and how the place was now strewn with dead: "I tremble to think of what an awful state it may be in a short time hence if we are unable to bury them".<sup>85</sup> Birdwood pointed out that were the Turks to attack at just one point of his trenches, they would undoubtedly get through. He thought them to be an "extraordinary callous lot" who threw corpses of their fellows out of the trenches allowing them to lie unburied: "[t]he stench in some of our trenches is in places too awful and at times I have really been near absolutely sick ... there is certainly one comforting thing, my D.M.O. tells me that though the smell is very unpleasant you get accustomed to it and it is not unhealthy! I'm afraid I could never get accustomed to it!"<sup>86</sup>

Birdwood felt the lack of troops. He needed more to get into a better position than he now occupied.<sup>87</sup> He told Hamilton :

Where I am, I am absolutely blind, as it is impossible to scout through this thick scrub. We have necessarily had to stay here all this time as we have not been strong enough to advance, and I have only been able to consolidate myself and dig in. In the meantime, the Turks have been digging in all round me, and now have two or three continuous rows of trenches right away round everywhere excepting my extreme left flank, and I anticipate the greatest possible difficulty in breaking through these.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Birdwood to wife, May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>84</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 263.

<sup>85</sup> Birdwood to wife, May 1915.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 13 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Birdwood then told Hamilton of his plan to overcome his present problem using the Indian brigade he had been promised <sup>89</sup>:

With the Indian Brigade, I should hope to be able to make a sweeping movement round my left, and direct an attack with its left in the direction of Biyuk Anafarta, and its right on point 971. If I could take this and hold my left on 971 with a position running down the top of that ridge, I should feel in a satisfactory position, as I should overlook the whole of the valley towards the Straits.<sup>90</sup>

(A margin note presumably made by either Hamilton or Braithwaite asks : "Why left ? Right is the way we want him to go".<sup>91</sup> ) Birdwood acknowledged that even with the Indian brigade he might not be able to achieve all his objective, adding that even if he did so, "... it may be almost more than I can hold for I fancy it would be sure to be attacked heavily".<sup>92</sup> He also noted that once having reached his objective, the 971 ridge, his troops could be subjected to heavy gunfire from the Straits, but this they would have to face by digging in.<sup>93</sup> Birdwood continued :

I do not know if you have any definite plans after you get the Achi Baba position ... It strikes me, however, that using my force as a brigade head here, it might be advantageous to land a really large force under its cover, and get a position covering Kilia Bay. If we could get big guns on to such a position, we ought with luck to be able to cut off communications, certainly by land and probably by sea, though to do that, we should want to fix up a search light which I fear would be a great target to the enemy's big guns. <sup>94</sup>

The above could well serve as an example of what Godley told his wife, that although Birdwood was very good, going everywhere in the trenches, his ideas "are finicky ... and he reminds me very much of B-P.\* , without the latter's cleverness. He thinks of all sorts of rotten little dodges and plans rather than main issues or ideas".<sup>95</sup> It is just as likely that Birdwood was showing his frustration at being unable to break the stalemate which now seemed to envelop Anzac. As already illustrated,

---

<sup>89</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.1, 524.

<sup>90</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 13 May 1915.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

\* General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, hero of the siege of Mafeking, South Africa, and later founder of the Boy Scout movement.

<sup>95</sup> Godley to wife, 6 May 1915, Godley Papers.

Birdwood was certainly applying himself to the bigger issues and appears to have been quite active in his attempts to think of solutions to the perceived problems.

## VIII

On 14 May, Birdwood was hit in the head by a sniper's bullet which had penetrated the top of a trench when he was observing the enemy by using a periscope. Fortunately, the bullet had caused only a graze and had not touched the bone thus avoiding a fracture to the skull. At the same time, he was annoyed that General Bridges, commander of the Australian Division, had been wounded by a bullet which had cut an artery in his thigh. Bridges had gone off to Alexandria. This was a serious handicap "as I have really no one to replace him properly ...".<sup>96</sup> Birdwood told his wife:

I am angry too with Bridges who had no right to be where he was in a part of the line outside his own command where he had only gone to see a friend - a dangerous bit too where I never let people go except those who must do so on duty and I am having it much improved ...<sup>97</sup>

His diary similarly notes that he was "most distressed at Bridges being so seriously wounded: a great loss and such a nice fellow".<sup>98</sup>

On 17 May, Birdwood visited Bridges on the hospital ship *Gascon* and found the leg mortifying and the doctors giving little hope of his ability to undergo an operation successfully. Arriving back at his headquarters, he found that Charles Villiers-Stuart of his Corps Staff had been killed.<sup>99</sup> Little wonder that the same day, he wrote his wife:

You can imagine what a state of depression I feel in today and one is almost afraid of becoming unnerved when losses suddenly come on one - though that is the very last thing one can afford to be at times like these and whatever happens one has to appear cheery and confident.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Birdwood to wife, 15 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Birdwood diary, 15 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>99</sup> Birdwood diary, 17 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>100</sup> Birdwood to wife, 17 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.



Birdwood told the Australian Governor-General that he was deeply grieved at Bridges' loss and imminent death and that he was very fond of him and had liked working with him:

My feelings in this respect have altogether increased with further knowledge, and I cannot help feeling that Australia in general, and the Expeditionary Force in particular, owe him a very deep debt of gratitude for all he has done for them ... He was such an uncommonly able and fearless soldier as he so fully proved himself to be during this last few weeks ...  
 ... His loss here really is irreparable, and I feel most sad at the idea of having to carry on in future without him. I am only thankful that I have in Colonel White, Senior General Staff Officer of the Division, a man who is worth anything, and one of the best and most capable soldiers I have met for a long time. As long as he is there I feel quite content, as he is full of commonsense and has much detailed knowledge and sound judgment.<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, Birdwood had written to General Hamilton suggesting that he should recommend Bridges for a knighthood at once, and if necessary, for it to be awarded posthumously should he fail to survive the next day or so.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, King George V knighted Bridges the day before he died.

General Godley, Bridges' fellow divisional commander, was grieved at the loss: "... I fear I have lost a great personal friend. We have worked together so much, and in such perfect amity, that I feel his loss very deeply, and shall miss him more than I can say".<sup>103</sup>

Not only had Bridges been in executive command of the Australian Division, he had also been in administrative charge of the Australian Imperial Force [A.I.F.]. This role now fell to Birdwood. In the past, Bridges had frequently referred A.I.F. matters to Birdwood and the Australian government agreed to him assuming command of it prior to Bridges' successor, Colonel Legge, Chief of the General Staff in Melbourne, arriving at Gallipoli to command both the 1st Division and the A.I.F.<sup>104</sup> After his arrival, Legge referred every promotion and other important decisions to Birdwood for approval. Thus Birdwood, in effect, retained the A.I.F. command.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 17 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/31.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Godley to wife, 19 May 1915, Godley Papers.

<sup>104</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.2, 418.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

## IX

There is no doubt that Birdwood was frustrated at being unable to achieve some kind of breakthrough from Anzac. He had written to Hamilton on 14 May that the Turks were right on top of his position and although his men had driven them off, they were becoming "very bold".<sup>106</sup> On 16 May, Braithwaite had written to him :

... Sir Ian is fully aware that the operations of a containing force employed in such a manner as is the Corps under your Command at present, are not as attractive as a more active offensive would be, but he wishes your men to be informed of the extreme importance of their present role ...<sup>107</sup>

At this time, he still expected to get the Indian brigade referred to earlier, as well as another division. With this in mind, he formulated yet another proposal which he thought may be worthy of Hamilton's consideration.<sup>108</sup> His proposal was to make a night march via Fisherman's Hut, and using the Indian brigade and one of his Australian brigades, attack Rhododendron Ridge.<sup>109</sup> He told Hamilton :

Simultaneously with the advance of these two brigades, I would send two batteries up to the spur running SE from the well at Fisherman's Hut. These two flank attacks I would make in conjunction with an attack of two brigades ... up along the main ridge of the hill. With this force I should hope to take the whole main ridge ...

While this attack was going on I would land at Anzac Cove any new division you were sending me and would bring them on to my right. Having established myself on the main ridge ... I would endeavour to make a joint advance down the ridge leading to Kaba[sic]Tepe in conjunction with an advance from my right on to the same ridge. If this should succeed, I would be holding the line I want along the main spur of the Sari Bair hill and commanding Kojadere and country beyond. I imagine any advance of this sort would bring on a regular engagement with the Turks as if I could get that position it would effect them most seriously, and I am sure I should want the whole force I have mentioned to hold this line as I should have to throw my left well back to safeguard my rear.

---

<sup>106</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 14 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 3.

<sup>107</sup> Braithwaite to Birdwood, 16 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>108</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 16 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

I should also have to take Kaba Tepe if I cannot manage this before, but it is a very strong little bit.

I was thinking of making efforts in the direction of the first part of this programme with my own troops only when I got back my two brigades, but if I can rely on Cox's [Indian] brigade and the other division at no very distant date, I think it would be as well to wait for them, and go for the whole thing at once.<sup>110</sup>

Two days later, Birdwood heard that he must carry on with what troops he had. Surprisingly, he refused the offer of 4,500 Australian mounted troops from General Maxwell in Egypt on the grounds that he needed infantry reinforcements. He was also critical of their lack of training.<sup>111</sup> He justified his criticism by telling Hamilton : "... it means that my force will be composed of a number of weak infantry brigades and small dismounted brigades causing the greatest difficulty in handling and waste in organization".<sup>112</sup> Birdwood now thought the best course open to him was to continue improving his position and worry the Turks "in any way I can without attempting important actions likely to lead to heavy losses ...".<sup>113</sup> He continued, somewhat unhappily :

... I do not think I could take over or hold the considerably larger area which will be necessary when we make a move. This being the case, there is no scheme to put forward for I shall just be carrying on. I need hardly say that I do not of course cavil in any way at this, as I am only anxious to do everything we can here to help ...<sup>114</sup>

On 19 May, the Turks made an all-out effort to drive the 1st Australian Division from its position. Numbering some 42,000 men, the Turks attacked "in wave upon wave, but were everywhere repulsed by well-aimed rifle and machine-gun fire ... It turned out later that in repelling this attack we had expended 950,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition while the mountain guns got through 1400 shells".<sup>115</sup> The next day, Birdwood, still disconsolate, told Hamilton :

I only wish I saw an opportunity of being able to make a really useful or effective counter attack but I don't. They must of course still be

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 15 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 2.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 18 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 265.

around me in very large numbers, and until I am strong enough to take and hold the high ground of this hill no minor advance seems feasible, as it would be so commanded. The small counter attack I tried yesterday did not succeed, as they found the enemy fully entrenched and ready for them.<sup>116</sup>

## X

On the night of 19 May, Birdwood suggested to Hamilton that communications be opened with the Turks with a view to arranging the removal of the dead and wounded.<sup>117</sup> In reply, Hamilton told Birdwood that he was not to initiate any negotiations with the enemy. However, should the Turks themselves initiate such negotiations asking permission to bury their dead, "such permission should be granted after all necessary precautions have been taken".<sup>118</sup> The message continued :

If the enemy commence to bury their dead or succour their wounded under cover of the red crescent flag even without preliminary negotiations they should be permitted to do so and should not be fired on so long as they do not resume [sic] on the concession to gain military advantage.<sup>119</sup>

Another message next day from Hamilton told the Anzac commander :

There is no objection to the men in your front trenches throwing letters into the Turkish trenches saying the Turks may come out to bury their dead and succour their wounded but the white flag must not be hoisted by you first nor must there be any formal communication on the subject with the Turkish commander on your initiative.<sup>120</sup>

Hamilton told Birdwood on 20 May, that he had asked Kitchener for advice regarding burial of the Turkish dead <sup>121</sup> :

Ordinarily I am quite content to sink or swim on my own judgment, but this is a very peculiar case. From the earliest times it has been

---

<sup>116</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 20 May 1915, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>117</sup> Entry, 19 May 1915, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 1.

<sup>118</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 19 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 20 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>121</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 20 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/7.

always considered a tacit acknowledgement of defeat to propose an armistice to bury the dead, or to tend the wounded ... I vividly realise the horrible state of things which may ensue if the corpses are not buried ... Anyway if K. thinks I am wrong he will quickly let me know. It is a case of prestige versus a bad smell.<sup>122</sup>

On 21 May, Birdwood recorded in his diary that Essad Pasha, the Turkish Army Commander-in-Chief, had sent a staff officer "to ask for an armistice to bury their dead - their great interest ... evidently is to get hold of the rifles of their dead as we hear they are very short of them and reinforcements are coming down unarmed. Sent proposals to Sir Ian".<sup>123</sup> Birdwood's message to Hamilton said, in part :

As however the day was too far advanced to enable the suspension of arms to take place on the 22nd, I have arranged the 23rd and trust that you will convey your sanction to the arrangements made before 11 a.m. tomorrow, when I propose to send out Lt.Col.Skeen to meet Bimbashi Kamal Bey [the Turkish staff officer], to learn General Essad Pasha's final approval of the arrangements and to convey to him the fact that it is sanctioned for our side.

I propose to give to Lt.Col. Skeen full powers to sign ... <sup>124</sup>

In reply to this message, Birdwood received a further communication saying that Hamilton disagreed with many of the articles of the agreement that Birdwood had sent with his proposal.<sup>125</sup> He was therefore sending Braithwaite over to Anzac the next day to confer with the Turkish staff officer himself.<sup>126</sup> The following day, Birdwood received a message from Hamilton : "... you are clearly to understand that no agreement whatever is to be signed by you or by anybody on your behalf".<sup>127</sup> Hamilton claimed to be horrified by Birdwood's proposal; "So also would have been the allied Cabinets when tomorrow, tit bits from it were sent round the world by German wireless".<sup>128</sup> Braithwaite told Birdwood that Hamilton was not at all happy with the "tone" of the document, and believed that because of

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Birdwood diary, 21 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>124</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 21 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>125</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 21 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 22 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>128</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 22 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/7.

this, the Turks and anyone else, would assume that it was the British who had requested the armistice.<sup>129</sup> Braithwaite continued :

Sir Ian is horrified at the general tone of the agreement which reads throughout as if our force was the beaten side, and he cannot understand how - after the very definite orders conveyed in the two telegrams ... - a letter came to be sent which was practically a formal request for entering into negotiations - the very thing he objected to so strongly from the first.<sup>130</sup>

For his part, Birdwood regretted the problems perceived by Hamilton, telling him :

This question of the burying of the dead, or what is perhaps more important, the rescue of the wounded is a most difficult and troublesome one, and I fear my proposals on the subject were badly worded if they gave any idea of an armistice. Such was by no means my intention, as I quite agree that a proposal to hold such might be regarded as a tacit acknowledge [sic] of defeat. My intention was much more of an informal nature in the way of raising a red cross flag, and if this was acknowledged and met, for the officers concerned to arrange entirely locally not to fire while dead and wounded were being buried or removed. Such a temporary suspension of firing can I fancy be carried out by the commander of any outpost, and I have never intended to do much more. As a matter of fact, I have not been at all keen on doing anything, but in two or three places ... it has been reported that wounded men were groaning outside ...<sup>131</sup>

Privately, Hamilton was keen on meeting the Turks half way "provided Birdie clearly understands that no Corps Commander can fix up an armistice off his own bat, and provided it is clear we do not ask for the armistice but grant it to them - the suppliants".<sup>132</sup> The Turks accepted the amended terms of the armistice. Although Birdwood was aware that what they really wanted was to collect the rifles of their dead comrades, "[w]hat I wanted was to get away the hundreds of corpses which are lying all round my trenches and which were beginning to make life really unbearable the men being absolutely sick in some cases".<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Braithwaite to Birdwood, 21 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 22 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/2 Part 4.

<sup>132</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, Vol.I, 239.

<sup>133</sup> Birdwood to wife, 24 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

There was no friction between the sides and the work proceeded smoothly, finishing at about 4.15 p.m.<sup>134</sup> The official report noted that the enemy dead were numerous, a fair estimate being 3,000.<sup>135</sup> The Australians probably benefited more than the Turks from the armistice because they were able to use old craters and trenches in No Man's Land as graves which had been used by Turkish snipers and bombers for cover.<sup>136</sup>

## XI

Throughout this period from the time of the landing until the end of May, it is clear that Birdwood was frustrated by his efforts to make a break out of the Anzac position. By the end of the month Hamilton had received another plan from him suggesting "a surprise-movement from the north of Anzac against the heights of Sari Bair".<sup>137</sup> It is apparent that Birdwood was very active in formulating ideas with a view to breaking the deadlock on the peninsula. At the same time, it would have been depressing to a man of Birdwood's character. As Bean remarks, Birdwood was a rare leader who enjoyed being with his men rather than working on tactics.<sup>138</sup>

This was an interesting stage in Birdwood's development as a commander. He was now operating a more-or-less independent command. He was autonomous and could not expect much interference from Hamilton who was busy elsewhere. At the same time, there were several constraints which limited his actions.

First, there was the very constricting size of the peninsula itself which made the problem of supplying troops difficult; it made the movement of troops difficult; and it made the movement of artillery difficult. Further, there was the problem of the terrain itself. These factors made Birdwood's job near impossible.

Secondly, Birdwood was limited with the size of his force and the job he had to do with it. His problems here were twofold: had he a larger force (which was necessary to undertake the operation successfully), he would not have been able to have it on the peninsula because of its size. As mentioned above, the area of the peninsula was not large enough to sustain a force of the required magnitude.

---

<sup>134</sup> "Report on Suspension of Arms", 24 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 187.

<sup>137</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.2, 436.

<sup>138</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.1, 121.

Thirdly, Birdwood was limited by the chain of command. Both he and Hamilton had been ordered by Kitchener to do a job, and neither was going to tell Kitchener that it could not be done once the orders had been given. Both were operating under the same constraints. Neither could say 'no' to Kitchener.

Fourthly, and in some ways most importantly, Birdwood was limited at this time by his own character. There is no doubt that he had to make a very difficult decision regarding the advice of his subordinate commanders as to whether to re-embark his troops shortly after landing. In this he failed, leaving the decision wholly to Hamilton. While it was certainly Hamilton's decision to make in the final analysis, Birdwood had first-hand knowledge and any recommendation he made could not be lightly disregarded by Hamilton. In short, Birdwood abrogated his responsibility in this matter. In his defence, it can be said that he was still very much a novice as a commander. But, there is no question that he should have made a recommendation one way or the other. However, he chose not to do so.



## CHAPTER THREE

### I

Towards the end of May 1915, Hamilton's headquarters issued Force Order No.17. After a month on the peninsula, Hamilton had decided "to explain to officers, non-commissioned officers and men the real significance of the calls made upon them to risk their lives apparently for nothing better than to gain a few yards of uncultivated land ...".<sup>1</sup> According to Hamilton the "rotten Government at Constantinople is gradually wearing itself out. The facts and figures upon which this conclusion is based have been checked and verified from a variety of sources".<sup>2</sup> Finally, he said, that daily the force was making progress and "whenever the reinforcements already close at hand begin to put in an appearance the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force will press forward with a fresh impulse to accomplish the greatest Imperial task ever entrusted to an Army".<sup>3</sup> Hamilton's force was by now depleted to under 45,000 men from 70,000 making the problem of reinforcements an immediate one.<sup>4</sup> During the period from early May to early June, no direct request for reinforcements was made by Hamilton, and this despite his telling Kitchener in May that two army corps would be necessary to achieve victory on the peninsula.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned earlier, Birdwood had sent two brigades from his corps to reinforce the British troops at Helles in early May. These brigades, the 2nd Australian and the New Zealand Infantry Brigade, he told Hamilton, were his two best.<sup>6</sup> Both brigades returned to Anzac Cove in the middle of May.

According to Major-General Woodward, Adjutant-General, MEF, the five major units of the M.E.F., viz., the Royal Naval Division, the 29th Division, the 42nd Division, the 29th Indian Brigade, the Australian Division and the New Zealand and Australian Division, were some 23,000 below the war establishment by 16 May.<sup>7</sup> By the end of May, three battalions of the Royal Naval Division had arrived as reinforcements together with three brigades of Australian Light Horse and a regiment of New Zealand

---

1 [MEF] Force Order No.17, GHQ, 25 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Prior, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' as History*, 148.

5 Hamilton to Kitchener, 17 May 1915, WO 159/13.

6 Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.2, 4.

7 Report, Dardanelles Committee, 10 October 1919, 225, AWM 51/39.

Mounted Rifles.<sup>8</sup> It was clear that to remain inactive would be disastrous as the Turks were reinforcing their troops and were becoming stronger.<sup>9</sup>

Birdwood received intelligence on 29 May to the effect that following the sinking of two Turkish ammunition ships in the Sea of Marmora by British submarines and the fact that there had been a noticeable decrease in Turkish rifle fire, it could mean that the enemy troops on the peninsula were now low on ammunition : "Endeavour every means in your power to ascertain if this is so and seize opportunity of taking advantage of it".<sup>10</sup>

## II

Birdwood was convinced that the Anzac Corps could break out of the Gallipoli deadlock by a strike to the north of Anzac by storming up the valleys at night and seizing the summits of the Sari Bair range. With a breakout in mind, he canvassed the views of Brigadier-General Walker, his chief of staff, who in turn discussed another idea with Brigadier-General R.A.Carruthers, commander of the 3rd Infantry Brigade on the advisability of capturing Gaba Tepe and the intervening ground between it and the Anzac position.<sup>11</sup> Carruthers considered that capturing Gaba Tepe "should not be considered as a thing apart, but as a portion of the general problem of our advance ...".<sup>12</sup> He could not see any advantage would be gained by the capture of Gaba Tepe before Baby 700 and the Lone Pine position had also been captured.<sup>13</sup> His reason for not wanting to attack Gaba Tepe was simply because it was of small tactical value. Further, it was "doubtful if the enemy would regard its loss as sufficiently serious to induce them to deplete their other trenches in an attempt to recover it".<sup>14</sup> He thought also that the taking of the long narrow ridge running due south from the Anzac trenches towards Gaba Tepe, parallel with and nearest to the sea would be of no tactical value.<sup>15</sup> Carruthers pointed out that he could see "no object in holding Gaba Tepe except with a view to denying it to the enemy as an

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Aspinall - Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 41.

<sup>10</sup> GHQ MEF to Birdwood, 29 May 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/2 Part 4.

<sup>11</sup> Walker to Birdwood, 31 May 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Carruthers to Walker, 30 May 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Carruthers, "Notes on Proposed Advance", 7 June 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/3 Part 3.

<sup>15</sup> Carruthers to Walker, 30 May 1915.

observation post ..."; if it were taken, other observation posts further south would be used for the same purpose.<sup>16</sup> He went on :

The more I study the ground the more I am convinced that our advance should be against Baby 700 and Lonesome Pine plateau. The former is the key to the Northern half of the position, the latter to the Southern position. The capture of these two points would make the Turkish positions untenable and would, I think, give us the dark ridge (our original objective). If we hold the dark ridge the enemy must give up Gaba Tepe as we would be in a position that would make its capture a certainty. To take Gaba Tepe now would only saddle us with another responsibility and another source of casualties without any clear tactical object.

I would suggest an attack on Lonesome Pine from West and South at about 10 pm. Under cover of this attack a strong column of 2 or 3 Brigades, if GHQ could spare them to us, should work round by the North and attack Baby 700 at daylight or earlier. I think it probable that we would secure Hill 971 and the dark ridge at the same time.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that at this time, Hamilton was considering Anzac becoming the main focus of the British effort. His first inclination had been to make a south-easterly advance to cut off the Kilid Bahr plateau. Yet Birdwood's plan for a northerly advance had prevailed because the advantages of this outweighed the difficulty of the terrain.<sup>18</sup> Birdwood wrote on 13 May to Hamilton:

... an attack, once the crest of the main Sari Bair is reached, has command over successive positions down to Gaba Tepe, can be supported on the seaward side by ships' fire, and may have opportunities for spotting the enemys' guns now denied to us. And, finally, as a step to a more extended operations this ridge must ultimately be secured in any case.

To secure the northern flank therefore, 971 and the whole ridge to the South should be secured, and this should be the object of any advance.<sup>19</sup>

Birdwood told Hamilton on 30 May that he had made a personal reconnaissance both from the shore and from a destroyer. He reported that "from where it is possible to look into the rear of 971, I found that that point is entirely cut off by precipices from the main ridge, and no assault on it

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> P.A.Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1985), 303.

<sup>19</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 13 May 1915, quoted in *ibid.*

could therefore form part of an attack on the main position without being itself completely isolated".<sup>20</sup>

Birdwood's plan consisted of his "making a big sweeping movement round my left flank on to the 971 ridge".<sup>21</sup> The country here was very difficult. However, he told Hamilton that although many of his troops would lose their way in the dark, they knew they had to press upwards, and "matters will be rectified in this respect in the morning".<sup>22</sup> He hoped that by attacking at night on a broad front, the Turks would be rattled enough either to withdraw or to surrender their position which the Anzacs would immediately secure.<sup>23</sup> Birdwood planned to attack the ridge with three brigades, a total of some 8,000 men, and occupy the position Hill Q -Chunuk Bair-Battleship Hill. Gaba Tepe also would be captured as part of this plan.<sup>24</sup> He added:

The present position - or rather an extended one with its right on Gaba Tepe must be held. The enveloping movement ...is to swing round from the left...On [the] ridge I consider there must be retained one brigade or, say, 2,000 men. From the dividing point to the right of Gaba Tepe I consider that some 12,000 men will be necessary, which can be met from 4 Australian Infantry Brigades and 2 Light Horse Brigades. This leaves me with a force of 4,000 men only to make an enveloping attack, for which the New Zealand Infantry Brigade and the New Zealand Rifle Brigade would probably be used.

To make this attack, I consider that three brigades or between 7,000 and 8,000 men will be necessary. My present force is about 19,000 rifles, which have been accounted for above, and in addition to these I require another brigade of, say 3,000 men. Without these numbers I do not advocate any advance, as though I have only incidentally referred to extending my line to Gaba Tepe, yet I would recommend the seizing of that place at the same time as an enveloping movement is made on to the 971 ridge. I do not know if the two movements can be done with less than the numbers given, for as I have already stated, the enemy is entrenched everywhere, and hard fighting on both flanks is anticipated.<sup>25</sup>

Once the position from the 971 ridge down to Gaba Tepe had been secured, Birdwood considered that the next move should be made as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup> This was to occupy Gun Ridge, the dark ridge running parallel to

---

20 Birdwood to Hamilton, 30 May 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/63.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

the east with the 971-Gaba Tepe ridge referred to earlier, for which he required an additional division.<sup>27</sup>

### III

By the middle of June, Hamilton had endorsed the plan. Like Birdwood, he was becoming increasingly frustrated with the deadlock on the peninsula. He told Kitchener that his force was "knotted up" into trench warfare and this new plan offered a way out of the situation.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, if successful, the result would be effectively to cut the peninsula in two and isolate the Turkish troops in the south who guarded the Narrows forts.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as Aspinall-Oglander explained it :

... the first phase of the operations ... was to consist of a night advance from Anzac to Chunuk Bair; the seizure of Battleship Hill, Baby 700 and 400 Plateau next morning; and the capture - perhaps two days later - of Gun Ridge. While these operations were in progress the Anzac troops would be reinforced as more ground became available; and the second phase would consist of an advance on a broad front to seize a position astride the peninsula from Gaba Tepe to Maidos.<sup>30</sup>

Hamilton, receiving news that he was to receive three New Army divisions, decided to postpone the attack until August from the original date suggested by Birdwood of early July.<sup>31</sup> He asked Birdwood how he would deal with possible reinforcements should they become available for the proposed action.<sup>32</sup> Birdwood replied on 1 July that the main object of the operation was the occupation of the 971 Ridge as a first step in operations for clearing the Sari Bair Hill and advancing across the peninsula.<sup>33</sup> He continued :

To assist in this main object certain connected operations of less importance are also necessary, and available forces should be employed : -

---

<sup>27</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* , 220.

<sup>29</sup> Robin Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party: a reassessment ", *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* , No.7 (October 1985), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 1 July 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/4 Part 3.

	Approximately
(a) To hold the present Anzac position	7,000 rifles
(b) To attack Plateau 400 (Lone Pine and Johnston's Jolly)	6,000 rifles
(c) To assault the " Baby 700 " position, in conjunction with the attack on the 971 Ridge	3,000 rifles
(d) To attack the enemy facing Nos 2 and 3 Posts, and clear the way for columns advancing on	1,000 rifles
(e) To attack the " W " and " Chocolate Hills "	4,000 rifles
(f) To attack the 971 Ridge	14,000 rifles <sup>34</sup>

In all, this represented 35,000 troops which according to Birdwood was the minimum he required to conduct the offensive.<sup>35</sup> As he now had only 21,000 troops, an additional 14,000 were required to occupy the 971 Ridge.<sup>36</sup> Birdwood then went on to outline another plan :

The occupation by the enemy of the hills East of Salt Lake ... makes an operation against these necessary to prevent the powerful guns located there from enfilading against 971 Ridge and Baby 700. The presence of a force here will also engage the attention of the strong enemy detachment known to be watching the North and North - West slopes of 971; and if successful, and strong enough, it is well placed to come in on the flank of the main attack, or to protect it. While, on capturing the enemy's guns, it is hoped to make use of them on our left flank.

This operation should be practically simultaneous with the move against 971 Ridge, as if done much earlier it would very probably draw enemy reserves towards the 971 where they would be nearer than they now are to reinforce 971 Ridge.

To outflank the enemy's position (now entrenched to meet attack from the South), and to lessen the numbers moved out along the beach, this force should be launched after dark in Suvla Bay, to advance thence on the hills ...leaving a detachment to prepare the Mount Falcon position to cover re-embarkation if necessary.<sup>37</sup>

At present, Birdwood could not say how a third reinforcing division should be employed.<sup>38</sup> He doubted that a third division could be landed at Anzac with any comfort, but once it was known how the fighting was going and whether the 971 Ridge would be taken:

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

... I think it is very much for consideration whether a Third Division should not be landed either at Anzac - on the coast North of it in the vicinity of Fisherman's Hut, or at Suvla Bay, as the Navy may think more suitable, and for this Division to advance ... when its left would be safe on the sea at Ejelmer Bay - and with its right covering Kuchuk Anafarta. This should give us command of the valley between the two Anafartas, which would be invaluable and possibly essential for supply purposes. It would give us a broad and comparatively speaking secure base for supplies for a large force in the vicinity of Suvla Bay, while wheel transport of all sorts could also be used.<sup>39</sup>

Some days later, Birdwood continued his theme by suggesting to Hamilton that two divisions

... should be shoved through as quickly as possible behind and in direct conjunction with the force attacking point 971, and the hills North of Kuchuk Anafarta - to pass through the gap between the 2 Anafartas, and to make for and seize this high ground ... With that point strongly held, as well as 971, and the rear ground secured by the holding of the ridge ... I feel that we should have a complete domination over the Turkish forces.<sup>40</sup>

Birdwood was of the opinion that because of the way the Turks had entrenched their positions around Anzac, they were bound to endeavour to entrench wherever his corps took up a position.<sup>41</sup> He added :

In our attacks on the 971 ridge ... and the ridge above Kuchuk Anafarta, we may (and I think especially on the firstnamed) lose very heavily, which may prevent us from continuing to shove straight on, as I feel we must do. If, however, a new force is landed immediately in rear of this attack, and shoved right through the Anafarta Valley ... before the Turks have time to start trenching, I feel convinced that a great victory will be within our grasp, for we should be in a position to cut off the Turks in Khalid Bahr almost entirely from their base in Bulair, Gallipoli or Turkey.<sup>42</sup>

He also proposed what he called a "wildcat scheme":

I fancy that when the time comes for advancing we shall be having bright moonlight nights. It has struck me that on the night of our main attack, we might possibly contemplate a raid of light horse round the enemy's position.

---

39 Ibid.

40 Birdwood to Hamilton, 10 July 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/63.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

The light horsemen of my army corps are men who are accustomed to finding their way about country a good deal at night, and to undertake rough work over broken country.

Such a raid with small numbers would I think most probably have an extremely demoralising effect upon the Turks, for they would absolutely have no idea what was intended, while in the moonlight the noise of galloping horses would probably exaggerate the numbers enormously.<sup>43</sup>

Hamilton's reaction to this suggestion is not recorded.

Birdwood's troops had been trying to give the Turks the impression that any future attack would come from the south of Anzac rather than from the north, and daily and nightly they extended their trenches to the right.<sup>44</sup> Birdwood told Hamilton that the Turks were now busy in the direction of Gaba Tepe. It looked as though they were expecting a landing to its south as they were making many new trenches.<sup>45</sup> He also noted, to his regret, that new trenches had been sighted on Suvla Point.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV

Birdwood continued to assess his position and his strategy for the coming operation. He told Hamilton on 21 July that he was averse to attacking and holding Plateau 400 "as to hold it for any considerable time without also holding Baby 700 will entail constant losses from artillery fire without appreciable gain and without much chance of retaliation".<sup>47</sup> He continued:

... unless I have the enemy thoroughly beaten I do not propose any but local attacks with the object of inflicting loss rather than of making ground; and if I have the enemy thoroughly beaten I would try to seize the 971 Ridge but wish to point out that without reinforcements to the extent of 8,000 men I could not be sure of holding my own. I would then have roused the enemy as to the importance of the ridge without any gain and so probably seriously jeopardise any future action which is contemplated in this direction. <sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 12 July 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 21 July 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/4 Part 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



The wisdom of this was seen at Hamilton's headquarters. Braithwaite told Birdwood that Hamilton agreed with him entirely <sup>49</sup>:

Instructions to Birdwood for the forthcoming offensive were issued on 30 July:

The General Commanding has decided to mass the whole of his reinforcements in and immediately north of the area occupied by the corps under your command, with a view to securing Suvla bay as a base of operations, driving the enemy off the Sari Bair, and eventually securing a position astride the Gallipoli peninsula from the neighbourhood of Gaba Tepe to the Straits north of Maidos.

The general outline for your proposals for the action of the A & NZ Army Corps contained in your [memorandum] of 1st July are approved.

The General Commanding wishes your operations to begin on August 6th with a strong and sustained attack on hill 125 (Plateau 400), every effort being made to deceive the enemy as to the locality against which our main effort is to be made, and to induce him to believe that it will be directed against his lines opposite the southern portion of your position. In pursuance of this object the Vice-Admiral has arranged that HM Ships shall in the meantime display increased activity off the coast between Gaba Tepe and Kum Tepe ... and on the evening of August 6th, a naval demonstration will be made off this part of the coast, HM Ships being accompanied by a number of trawlers as if a landing were to be undertaken.

The General Commanding further concurs in the subsequent sequence of the operations outlined by you ...<sup>50</sup>

## V

On 3 August, orders for the forthcoming operations were issued to the Anzac force by Birdwood.<sup>51</sup> These orders told the Corps that it was to take part in an operation the object of which was to secure a position astride the Gallipoli Peninsula from the area of Gaba Tepe to the Straits north of Maidos. To achieve this, a force was to be landed to the north of Anzac with the object of securing Suvla Bay as a base. It would then proceed to seize the "W" and "Chocolate" Hills. At the same time, an attempt would be made to draw the enemy forces to the south.<sup>52</sup> The 1st Australian Division, commanded by Walker, was to assault the Turkish positions on Plateau 400

<sup>49</sup> Braithwaite to Birdwood, 22 July 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> "Instructions for GOC A & NZ Army Corps", 30 July 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/4 Part 2.

<sup>51</sup> Army Corps Order No.16, 3 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

[Lone Pine] while a subsidiary operation against German Officer's trench was to be undertaken to assist the main attack.<sup>53</sup> Walker was instructed to bear in mind that every effort was to be made to deceive the enemy as to the locality of the main attack, Suvla Bay. Birdwood considered that the ideal place for this was the Lone Pine position.<sup>54</sup>

Birdwood's orders to the N.Z. & A. Division told Godley that "an attack in as great strength as possible is to be delivered by night against the Chunuk Bair ridge, which is to be followed by a converging attack from that ridge ... against Baby 700".<sup>55</sup>

In a separate memorandum on 5 August, Walker was ordered to limit his operations to the clearing of Plateau 400 and not to attempt to press forward across the valley in the event that he had a rapid success.<sup>56</sup> Thus,

You will ... be in a position to cut off the retreat of the enemy from their trenches higher up the valley when driven down by the NZ & A Division, and at the same time will be well placed to take immediate advantage of any opportunity of joining hands with the columns from Chunuk Bair when the advance down Gun Ridge commences.  
57

As Rhodes James suggests, Birdwood's proposal on 1 July for a landing near the Salt Lake was "the germ of the Suvla Plan".<sup>58</sup> Hamilton's expanded plan referred to earlier came about because more troops had become available. He suggested that some of these be used to broaden the front of attack by landing them to the north of Suvla Bay.<sup>59</sup> It is clear from Birdwood's proposals that he saw the Suvla force assisting his own attack.<sup>60</sup> However, Hamilton saw this force as one to capture a base for all the forces in the north. His priorities were evidently different from those of Birdwood whose main objective was to advance across the peninsula by seizing the summits of the Sari Bair range.<sup>61</sup>

The plan for Suvla was for a landing to be made to the south of Nibrunesi Point half an hour after Birdwood commenced his attack on the

---

53 Ibid.

54 "Instructions for GOC Australian Division", 4 August 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

55 "Instructions for Major-General Godley", 4 August 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

56 General Staff, ANZAC to Australian Division, 5 August 1915, Appendix in *ibid.*

57 Ibid.

58 Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 238.

59 Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 25.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 26.

Turkish northern outposts.<sup>62</sup> This landing, according to Rhodes James, was considered to be the easiest part of the operation. The inexperienced New Army divisions grouped into the IX Corps would be used.<sup>63</sup> The final orders stated that the main objective of the Suvla force was to capture and retain Suvla Bay as a base of operations for the northern army, thus confirming Hamilton's priorities rather than those of Birdwood.<sup>64</sup>

## VI

During this period, Birdwood had been driving himself hard and causing some concern to Hamilton who told Kitchener in June:

... I am very lucky in my commanders. Birdie is also truly admirable. He and Braithwaite have small occasional spars, as Birdie sometimes gives the impression that he thinks he is commanding an independent force. This is natural enough, especially seeing he has been semi - detached ever since we landed. Luckily I am very fond of him, and consequently there has been no real difficulty whatsoever.<sup>65</sup>

Later, in July, Hamilton told Kitchener that he was becoming more concerned with Birdwood's health and well-being:

Birdie is getting a little bit played out. I have implored him to come away for a day or two's change and rest, but he absolutely refuses to leave Anzac except for a few hours at a time fearing always there may be a big night attack. He has done splendidly sticking to his job, and I hope matters will now soon take such a turn that he won't always be shut up dodging shells in a dug-out.<sup>66</sup>

A major worry in Birdwood's mind at this time was the state of the men's health.<sup>67</sup> He admitted to Hamilton that he was "not too happy" about it but Colonel Howse, VC, the Director of Medical Services, told him that it was to be expected in the hot conditions then prevailing.<sup>68</sup> Birdwood continued:

... but at the same time he considers that the Australian Division with a fighting strength of 14,000 could not from a medical point of view be

---

<sup>62</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 239.

<sup>64</sup> Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 26.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 19 June 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/1.

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, 21 July 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/62 WL75.

<sup>67</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 29 July 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

regarded as containing more than 10,000 fighting men in it. He is a very good man, and far from being an alarmist, so his words carry weight.<sup>69</sup>

" Birdwood explained that there was no complaint regarding the rations the men received, but rather the lack of variety in them. He believed that a canteen ship would have made a great difference to the men's lives.<sup>70</sup> He added:

I am as you may be sure doing all I can to keep things going as cheerily as I can, and only this morning spent six hours going round my right flank where I hope I have arranged a small attack on some trenches for tomorrow night, which will all go towards the end we have in view - to make the Turks as apprehensive as we possibly can about that part.<sup>71</sup>

In a letter dated 4 August, Birdwood explained to his wife that the advance which had been planned for some time was about to begin. He had done all he could to ensure success and envisaged the operation as being as big as the Gallipoli landing in April.<sup>72</sup> He explained it in simple terms:

I have to take an extremely difficult hill held by the Turks in great numbers and I feel my only chance is by attacking them at the most difficult part where they will least expect us. It is a bit covered with deep ravines and precipices every-where over which we must attack at night, so it will be a very high trial. Lots of men will lose themselves but will have to keep pressing on and will I hope find themselves again in the morning ... If we attempted this by day, the Turks who are on the hills above and have "interior lines", could easily move 20,000 men to face us anywhere which would make success impossible.<sup>73</sup>

He told her that it was a great gamble but manageable because to succeed would jeopardise the safety of the Turkish army on the peninsula.<sup>74</sup> Water was still his greatest anxiety. He had just enough to fill the men's bottles but was not sure if he had enough to fill them all at the start of the operation <sup>75</sup>:

---

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Birdwood to wife, 4 August 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

... shells have hit waterships and sunk water lighters - pumps have broken etc.etc. and they keep coming to me, with most doleful faces and prophecies of dire water disaster! However all we can do is to take advantage of every moment we have to pump whenever we can get a waterboat near the shore and to eke out what little we can from our fast drying up wells.<sup>76</sup>

## VII

It is clear that Birdwood had become extremely anxious at this time. There were several causes. First, he was frustrated with not being able to make a breakout. Secondly, when it appeared that a way out was available, he had been told that his men may not be up to it and might not be able to perform as they should to achieve their objective. At the same time, he attempted to put on a brave face by inspecting the trenches at every opportunity. Indeed, he told his wife that if he could not do this he would be miserable because he liked to share with the troops in everything.<sup>77</sup> He was, however, guilty of exaggeration in telling his wife that the men were "quite happy" and well fed.<sup>78</sup> By the time the August operation was to begin, Birdwood could not have been as confident as he may have appeared.

It would be fair to say that had both the Suvla and the Anzac operations been planned by Birdwood, the chances of success by the British would have been greater. As it was, because there had been little co-ordination between Hamilton's plans and Birdwood's, the aim of the Suvla operation was unclear to Birdwood. This was unfortunate because Birdwood's plan was good and may well have worked. But by now, his men were tired and thus limitations were imposed on him by their condition and their fitness to undertake the task set them.

The August operation was Birdwood's plan. He was now as autonomous as any corps commander could hope to be. But, at the same time, he appeared to be content to work within the familiar authority structure, never appearing to question the size of the force with which he had to do the job.

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Birdwood to wife, 6 June 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

When Birdwood was asked by Sir William Pickford, chairman of The Dardanelles Commission, whether the attacks on August 6 and 7, 1915 were only partially successful, he replied, "Yes, very partially."<sup>1</sup> The orders issued to the A & NZ Army Corps gave as their objective, the securing of "a position astride of the Gallipoli Peninsula from the neighbourhood of Gaba Tepe to the Straits North of Maidos".<sup>2</sup> The Anzac troops were to attack the Turks on 6/7 August with the object of drawing part of the enemy's forces to the south of the Anzac position. At the same time, a British force was to be landed north of the Anzac position with the objective of securing Suvla Bay as a base.<sup>3</sup> This operation was also to include the capture of the "W" and Chocolate Hills and the enemy guns there.<sup>4</sup> Birdwood's corps was to advance and occupy a line extending from the neighbourhood of Gaba Tepe along the main spur of Chunuk Bair, then along this ridge to include Hill 971.<sup>5</sup>

The main attack to be made by the 1st Australian Division was launched from Anzac on the night of 6 August as planned with its objective being the capture of the Sari Bair ridge. To achieve this, two columns of troops were to seize the foothills commanding the routes to the summit of the ridge. The right column, the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade, was to advance up Rhododendron Spur to Chunuk Bair. The left column, commanded by Brigadier-General H.V.Cox, was to split into two: one half of the column, the 4th Australian Brigade, was to attack and capture Hill 971 while the other half, the 29th Indian Brigade, was to move up Damakjelik Spur and capture Hill Q.<sup>6</sup> The intention was that Sari Bair would be captured by dawn.<sup>7</sup> But, as Aspinall-Oglander comments, the country to be crossed by the troops was of a "bewildering nature".<sup>8</sup> Further, "the spurs and gullies are so contorted, so rugged and steep, and so thickly covered

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

<sup>2</sup> Army Corps Order No.16, 3 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 185.

<sup>7</sup> Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 182.

with dense prickly scrub"<sup>9</sup> that the troops acting under such a limited time constraint, were unlikely to succeed. The attack on the Lone Pine position was to be a diversion to draw the Turkish reserves away from the main battle. Unfortunately for the attackers, it also drew Turkish reserves to the north. Realising it was only a diversion, they were able to help thwart the main attack.<sup>10</sup> Birdwood had wanted to make the attack at 3 p.m. but the divisional commander, Walker, implored him to delay it until 5 p.m. Birdwood told the Dardanelles Commission: "I have since been rather sorry that against my better judgment I did not make the attack there rather earlier than I did".<sup>11</sup> He believed that had he done so, more Turkish troops would have been drawn to Lone Pine.<sup>12</sup> Because of its situation, the Lone Pine position was considered by the Turks to be impregnable, surrounded by flat ground and protected by barbed wire entanglements.

Walker and his staff had been opposed to the attack. Despite this, the plans for attacking Lone Pine had been prepared with great thoroughness and skill, unusual during the Gallipoli campaign.<sup>13</sup> Walker's instructions were to begin the operation with "a strong and sustained attack on Hill 126 [Lone Pine]".<sup>14</sup> Every effort was to be made to deceive the enemy into thinking that the main attack was to be made in the south. Birdwood believed that this would best be attained by directing the division's main effort against the Lone Pine position.<sup>15</sup> The Lone Pine operation began with a bombardment of the Turkish position by artillery at 4.30 p.m. An hour later, three battalions advanced on the enemy's trenches, overwhelming them but suffering heavy casualties.<sup>16</sup> By the morning of the 8th, despite several attempts by the Turks to recapture it, the Lone Pine position was firmly held by the Australians. By the 12th this was shown to be a clear victory.<sup>17</sup> A total of seven Victoria Crosses were awarded for gallantry in this action. However, the Australian losses were heavy amounting to over 1,700 of all ranks ( approximately 40 per cent of those who attacked). It was estimated that the Turks lost some 5,000 men.<sup>18</sup>

---

9 Ibid.

10 Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History*, 151-152.

11 Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917.

12 Ibid.

13 Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 263.

14 "Instructions for GOC Australian Division", 4 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 3.

15 Ibid.

16 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 179-180.

17 Ibid., 180.

18 Ibid., 180-181.

The instructions for the NZ & A Division consisting of some 20,000 troops and commanded by Godley were to attack the Chunuk Bair ridge. This was to be followed by an attack against Baby 700.<sup>19</sup> Godley was told that his occupation of the Chunuk Bair ridge was essential to the success of the main operation. The area captured was, therefore, to be consolidated without delay and made impregnable against counter-attack.<sup>20</sup>

The main assault columns were late starting from Anzac because the capture of key positions by the covering columns was delayed for two hours due to the difficulties of marching at night over rough and unreconnoitred country, and because of the poor physical condition of the troops involved.<sup>21</sup> The right column made some progress but most of the troops who had set out from Anzac had to return to the start line because they had lost their way.<sup>22</sup> However, Brigadier Johnston with a small force came within 55 yards of the crest of Chunuk Bair, which at this time, was undefended.<sup>23</sup> But, Battleship Hill on the right, and Hill Q on the left, were still occupied by the enemy who was able to enfilade the Chunuk Bair crest.<sup>24</sup> It was clear that holding Chunuk Bair was untenable unless other sections of the ridge were also taken.<sup>25</sup>

The left column never had a chance. The left fork of the column, commanded by Monash, became lost. By dawn, it was nowhere near its objective.

The centre column charged with taking Hill Q, lost direction in the difficult country. One group diverged to the left joining Monash's group while the other diverged to the right joining the column on Rhododendron Ridge.<sup>26</sup> Only the 6th Gurkhas, commanded by Colonel Allanson, took the correct route. At dawn, they were within five hundred yards of Hill Q.<sup>27</sup>

The following day (8 August), a renewed attempt was made by Cox to take the objectives using reserve troops to reinforce the 4th Brigade on the left and attempting to take Hill Q in the centre; the right would again attempt to take Chunuk Bair.<sup>28</sup> On the left, Monash made no progress

---

19 "Instructions for Major-General Godley, NZ & A Division", 4 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 3.

20 Ibid.

21 Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History*, 152.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 213.

25 Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History*, 152.

26 Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.2, 635.

27 Ibid., 636.

28 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 209.



because of the difficult country and the increase in Turkish reinforcements.<sup>29</sup> In the centre, the troops again became lost and were unable to reinforce the 6th Gurkhas holding out just below the summit of Hill Q.<sup>30</sup> However, on the right, the New Zealanders occupied Chunuk Bair and during the day, managed to hold out against Turkish counter-attacks.<sup>31</sup> It was clear that despite the success of the New Zealanders, it was useless to try further attacks by the tired troops in broad daylight. Therefore, it was decided to hold the existing positions at all costs and to try again at dawn the following day.<sup>32</sup>

On the night of the 8th, Birdwood decided to abandon the attempt on the left to take Hill 971. In the centre, there was to be a renewed attempt to take Hill Q. On the right, the New Zealanders were to be reinforced on Chunuk Bair.<sup>33</sup>

Early on the morning of the 9th, Colonel Allanson, commanding the Gurkhas, assaulted Hill Q, and supported by naval gunfire, succeeded in capturing the position after fierce fighting : "... the key of the whole Peninsula was ours ... Below I saw the Straits ...".<sup>34</sup> Mistaking the Gurkhas for the fleeing Turkish troops, the navy again opened fire wiping out one third of Allanson's men. The remainder retired to their original positions.<sup>35</sup> Hill Q was not retaken during the campaign and for this the navy has been unfairly blamed.<sup>36</sup> Hamilton told Birdwood that it was "perfectly clear" to him that the army did not lose its hold on Sari Bair "... owing to the fact of a few misdirected shells".<sup>37</sup> The army had never really occupied the ridge in the first place and it is unlikely that with his small force, Allanson could have fought off the inevitable Turkish counter-attacks.<sup>38</sup>

On the right, reinforcements failed to reach the New Zealanders. As a result, the commanding officer, Colonel Malone, withdrew most of his men from the summit for which he has been much criticised by historians, although it is doubtful whether he could have held the ridge against the strong Turkish counter-attacks which developed on the 10th.<sup>39</sup> Only

---

<sup>29</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 658-662.

<sup>30</sup> Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History* , 152-153.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 215.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Allanson evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 19 January 1917, AWM 51/103.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History* , 153.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 11 September 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>38</sup> Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History* , 153.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

reinforcements in great strength could have saved this force on Chunuk Bair but these were not available.<sup>40</sup>

There is no doubt that the major factor in the British not succeeding in their attempt to capture Sari Bair was lack of manpower. Also missing was artillery support and lack of fire power other than rifles.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore not surprising that they were unable to consolidate any gains made and that it was inevitable the Turks would succeed after counter-attacking these positions.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that had Birdwood's plan of capturing Sari Bair succeeded, the second stage of moving troops across the peninsula would probably have stalled due to lack of reinforcements. Nor was the water supply available for such a push, even if reserve troops had been to hand.<sup>43</sup>

The British official historian was of the opinion that had Birdwood stuck to his original plan and omitted the necessity of capturing Hill 971 on the first night of the operations, and had instead concentrated on capturing Chunuk Bair before advancing on Battleship Hill, the plan would likely have succeeded. With these objectives in hand, the Turkish position would have become untenable and the subsequent taking of Hill Q and Hill 971 made far less difficult.<sup>44</sup>

## II

To the north of Anzac, the Suvla Bay landings took place on the night of 6 August. Hamilton thought that this came as a complete surprise to the Turks whose attention had been fixed in the Bulair and Enos regions.<sup>45</sup> As previously noted, Birdwood saw the Suvla forces assisting his own attack by capturing the "W" and Chocolate Hills and thus preventing the Turkish guns emplaced there firing on his troops engaged in the taking of Hill 971.<sup>46</sup> Hamilton's priority was to establish a base for his northern forces. However, their plans were compatible because the capture of the hills and the Anafarta Ridge would help Birdwood, and would secure Suvla Bay as a

---

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 154.

42 Ibid.

43 Cox evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, n.d., AWM 51/103.

44 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 200.

45 Hamilton to Kitchener, 7 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/5 Part 2.

46 Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 25.

base.<sup>47</sup> Yet, it had never been either Birdwood's or Hamilton's intention that Suvla would be crucial to the capture of the Sari Bair ridge.<sup>48</sup> It was to be important only after the capture of the ridge when it would be used as a base or as a secure line of supply to the Anzac force.<sup>49</sup>

General Stopford, commander of IX Corps and charged with the Suvla operation, thought that he would be unable to render direct assistance to Birdwood's troops in their attempt to capture Sari Bair : "If, however, the operations ... meet with such slight opposition as will free a portion of the troops engaged, you may rely on my giving him every assistance in my power".<sup>50</sup> Stopford's troops landed at three beaches in the Suvla area: at two outside the bay, and at one inside it. His plan was for the 11th Division, commanded by Major-General Hammersley, to land and seize the heights of Lala Baba, Hill 10 and Ghazi Baba.<sup>51</sup> Following this, a force would circle the salt lake and attack the Turkish positions on the "W" and Chocolate Hills before dawn thus assisting Birdwood and his troops in their attack on Sari Bair.<sup>52</sup> Stopford was of the opinion that "the security of Suvla Bay will not be assured until he is in a position to deny the enemy the heights which connect Anafarta Sagir and Ejelmer Bay".<sup>53</sup>

The landings at Suvla were not the surprise they were intended to be, the Turks having mined the landing sites and they were holding newly-made trenches close to Hill 10.<sup>54</sup> However, Lala Baba which the Turks defended with a small force was taken after considerable delay.<sup>55</sup> Stopford reported that by daylight on the 7th, he "had got a footing on shore, but not much more".<sup>56</sup>

By 6 a.m., Lala Baba, Ghazi Baba and Hill 10 had been captured, but Chocolate Hill was not assaulted until dusk that day and the "W" Hills not at all that day.<sup>57</sup> Despite the Suvla area being lightly defended by some 2,000 Turks, the British suffered heavy casualties when the 32nd Brigade

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Stopford to Hamilton, 31 July 1915, AWM 51/102.

<sup>51</sup> Operation Order No.1 by Lieutenant-General Stopford, 3 August 1915, AWM 51/102.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Statement by Stopford respecting the operations of the 9th Army Corps at Suvla Bay, August 6th to 15th 1915, n.d., AWM 51/102.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 28.

attempted to advance from the beach. This led to great confusion.<sup>58</sup> Further losses, confusion and breakdowns in communication all played their part in Hamilton's plan breaking down.<sup>59</sup> Added to this was the fact, that like the Anzac landings in April, inexperienced troops were expected to land in unknown territory without reliable maps and to assault objectives which were also completely unknown.<sup>60</sup> Stopford felt that had he had only a few seasoned regular troops and adequate artillery support, the high ground surrounding the bay could have been taken without much difficulty.<sup>61</sup> He attributed the failure to exhaustion of the men who suffered from shortage of water during the extremely hot weather, the inadequacy of artillery support, and the employment of young, inexperienced troops without the backing of regular troops.<sup>62</sup>

The Suvla operation was a failure and this can be attributed to the plan rather than to the personalities involved.<sup>63</sup> Even had it been successful, it would not have affected the operation at Anzac from where the main advance across the peninsula was to be made once the Sari Bair ridge was taken.<sup>64</sup>

A committee which was set up by the War Office shortly after the August operations to examine the Suvla failure, concluded that the plan had been too ambitious.<sup>65</sup> The members summed up their report by stating : "We think that the whole series of tasks planned for the IX Corps is open to criticism ...".<sup>66</sup>

Birdwood told the Dardanelles Commission that another reason for failure was that the Turks were too strong. He had hoped that the difficulty of the terrain would be an asset. This turned out not to be the case as it took the troops longer to achieve their objectives.<sup>67</sup> Also, he had expected help from the Suvla force to draw the enemy from his front : "... any attack from the left must have helped me enormously".<sup>68</sup> He added that had his troops held the ground they had captured, they would have had complete

---

58 Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History* , 155-156.

59 Ibid., 156.

60 Ibid.

61 Memorandum by Stopford, 18 August 1915, WO 32/5119.

62 Ibid.

63 Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 31.

64 Ibid.

65 Memorandum by War Office Committee, 21 September 1915, WO 32/5119.

66 Ibid.

67 Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917.

68 Ibid.

command of the Straits.<sup>69</sup> However, it is certain that a victory at Suvla would only have been useful if the attack from Anzac was a success as it would have provided a well-situated base for a northern force.<sup>70</sup>

At this time, Colonel Hankey, Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, was visiting Anzac. He cabled to Kitchener and Asquith:

... Birdwood at Anzac carried his share of operations on August 6th with entire success and only lost Sari Bair ridge subsequently owing to bad luck and lack of support by 9th Corps ... Birdwood has a first rate staff and is only General who has gained big success and impressed his personality on troops. Best chance in my opinion would be to put Birdwood in charge of whole northern area and give him free hand necessary rank being granted. I fear Hamilton will never do this on his own initiative, as Braithwaite underates Birdwood, and rather dominates Hamilton ...<sup>71</sup>

It was a completely false assertion that a lack of support from Stopford's IX Corps had lost the Sari Bair operation. However, this came to be acknowledged as fact perhaps because it was in the interests of Birdwood, Hamilton, Churchill or others to affix the blame for the fiasco to someone other than themselves. Stopford loomed as the likely scapegoat.<sup>72</sup> Even had Stopford possessed all the qualities of a military genius, nothing would have been achieved by victory at Suvla Bay. Victory was to be won with success in the capture of Sari Bair, or it was to be lost.

### III

On 15 August, Stopford and two of his divisional generals were replaced at Hamilton's request.<sup>73</sup> Major-General de Lisle was placed in temporary command of IX Corps pending the arrival of Lieutenant-General Byng from France. De Lisle, according to Birdwood, "... is a real thruster ... I believe him to be the right man in the right place and ... I hope he will see things through".<sup>74</sup>

Hamilton now decided to concentrate his forces in attacking the Turkish right near Northern Anafarta, limiting the operation to the seizing

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Prior, *Churchill's "World Crisis" as History*, 159.

<sup>71</sup> Hankey to Asquith and Kitchener, 14 August 1915, quoted in Stephen Roskill, *Hankey Man of Secrets*, Vol.1 (London: Collins, 1970), 198.

<sup>72</sup> Prior, "The Suvla Bay tea-party", 33.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 720.

<sup>74</sup> Birdwood to wife, 18 August 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

of the "W" Hills and of Scimitar Hill which connected the "W" and Chocolate Hills.<sup>75</sup> He told de Lisle that he could not afford to fail by attempting too much.<sup>76</sup> On 17 August, Hamilton asked Kitchener for 45,000 reinforcements to bring his existing units up to strength, and another 50,000 new troops. This increase would double the size of the allied force on the Peninsula.<sup>77</sup>

The attack took place on 21 August. The British did not manage to advance at all and this cost some 5,000 casualties.<sup>78</sup> Birdwood and de Lisle met with Hamilton the next day to discuss evacuation from Suvla. Birdwood opposed it on the grounds that it would endanger his left flank at Anzac. De Lisle opposed it because he believed that British prestige would suffer and not survive such a withdrawal.<sup>79</sup> The failure to make any further advance and the inability of the War Office to meet Hamilton's request for more troops, led to the allied force returning to trench warfare.<sup>80</sup>

#### IV

On 26 August, Birdwood told GHQ that he was contemplating another operation. It would begin, if possible, the next day.<sup>81</sup> He planned to secure Hill 60, a commanding and important position which, if taken, would be of material assistance to IX Corps in any advance they may attempt to the east.<sup>82</sup> Birdwood believed that the heavy expenditure of ammunition including high explosive shell and naval gun fire in support would be justified.<sup>83</sup> Hamilton agreed and the plan was approved the same day.<sup>84</sup>

The attack on Hill 60 was made by troops commanded by Major-General Cox.<sup>85</sup> A naval bombardment commenced at 4 p.m. An hour later,

---

75 "Instructions to Major-General H.de Lisle", 15 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/5 Part 3.

76 Ibid.

77 Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, 307.

78 Ibid., 309.

79 Ibid.

80 "Attacks delivered on and the Enemy Defences of the Dardanelles Straits", Report by the Dardanelles Committee in Admiralty to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 10 October 1919, AWM 51/39.

81 Birdwood to Hamilton, 26 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/5 Part 3.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Hamilton to Birdwood, 26 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 4.

85 Summary of events from 27 to 28 August 1915 by Birdwood, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/5 Part 2.

the assault commenced. The left column reached its objective but the right was checked at once by heavy enemy gun fire and made no progress.<sup>86</sup> In the centre, the New Zealanders captured a communication trench but were held up before reaching the top of the knoll of Hill 60.<sup>87</sup> By the next morning, only the New Zealanders had made any headway having captured and retained about 150 yards of trench north-east of their former line. They also occupied the communication trench across the knoll between the area captured and their former position.<sup>88</sup> The other assaulting parties were back in their original positions having achieved nothing.<sup>89</sup>

The following day, the Turks shelled the captured positions with high explosives and bombs but made no attempt to counter-attack.<sup>90</sup> Another assault was made on Hill 60. On this occasion, a further two lines of Turkish trenches were captured. The force was now established about half way across the hill.<sup>91</sup> On the night of 28th/29th, General Russell who commanded the assault, decided to make another attempt. This time, he met with success.<sup>92</sup> Or so it was thought. What Cox believed was their objective was, in fact, not the summit because this was still held by the Turks in some strength.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the attempt to capture Hill 60 was abandoned.<sup>94</sup> Although the attempt had failed, it had left the troops on the left of Anzac a position astride the spur from which a view could be had over the plain to the "W" Hills.<sup>95</sup>

Birdwood makes it clear in his autobiography that he blamed Stopford for the failure at Suvla <sup>96</sup> although in a letter to his wife written in October 1915, he blamed Hamilton.<sup>97</sup> But, as previously explained, it is more the case that Stopford was made to bear responsibility for the failure of

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Summary of events from 28 to 29 August 1915 by Birdwood, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/5 Part 2.

<sup>91</sup> "Short account of the operations on the Left Flank of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, under command of Lieutenant-General Sir W.R.Birdwood undertaken with the object of helping the advance of the 9th Corps, and of acquiring a position from which the Biyuk Anafarta Valley can be seen and dominated", 30 August 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/5 Part 4.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* , 309.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 761.

<sup>96</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 275.

<sup>97</sup> Birdwood to wife, 15 October 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

others. Birdwood and Hamilton conceded that the plan had several drawbacks and accepted that an operation of this magnitude should never have been attempted by stale or inexperienced troops. Pedersen blames the failure on the mismanagement of the operation by both Birdwood and Godley and is critical of the command arrangements.<sup>98</sup> He also maintains that "[t]he historian is hard put to explain how Birdwood occupied himself during the offensive".<sup>99</sup> It is difficult to understand the point he is trying to make. Like any other commander, Birdwood bore full responsibility for the actions of his troops and was naturally responsible for both success or failure. Later, Birdwood admitted that the task he had set Godley's division was "a most difficult one - more difficult, indeed, than I myself had realised. Perhaps, too, I had assessed the physical capacity of my troops too high, for the old hands were still weak from their past disabilities, and the 13th Division were young soldiers".<sup>100</sup> Bearing this statement in mind, it is difficult to understand Birdwood's opinion that "I have always felt that had more energy and dash - more sense of urgency - been displayed, the whole Force would have won through to the Dardanelles".<sup>101</sup> The facts do not support such a bold assertion. But as Pedersen correctly notes, all the commanders, including Birdwood, were feeling their way: "Their inexperience was evident in every aspect of warfare, from operational staff work to administration ...".<sup>102</sup>

In the final analysis, Birdwood's entire plan for the August offensives was overly ambitious and depended for success on co-ordination at both Anzac and Suvla. There was little likelihood of success and the entire plan produced a fiasco.

Birdwood's limitation in this operation was the one suffered by all corps commanders. Once his troops were committed to action, there was nothing he could do for them nor indeed for the success of the operation. Further, any intelligence he received could be of little or no use as it would be out of date and, therefore, useless to him as a tool.

---

<sup>98</sup> Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander* , 113.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 274.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>102</sup> Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander* , 125.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

In late August, Hamilton was told that the 95,000 reinforcements he had requested from England for his command were not available because of the situation in France.<sup>1</sup> All the Dardanelles Committee were willing to offer was 25,000 troops, approximately one-quarter of Hamilton's request.<sup>2</sup> While success in the Dardanelles was desirable, it had been decided to concentrate British strength on the Western Front. Hamilton must obtain any other reinforcements he required from Egypt. Kitchener told him that "[y]ou must understand that under the circumstances no large divisional units can be diverted from the main theatre of operations in France ...".<sup>3</sup> Hamilton pointed out to Kitchener that his 50,000 troops, many weak and ill, had to hold a thirteen-mile front stretching from Suvla to Anzac : "... it appears inevitable that within the next fortnight I shall be compelled to relinquish either Suvla Bay or Anzac Cove, and must also envisage the possibility of a further reduction of my front in the near future".<sup>4</sup> Kitchener's opinion was that the Turks could not be driven from the peninsula for some time.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the month, Hamilton had persuaded himself that the outlook was not as bleak as he had at first painted it. He had come to the conclusion that with adequate reinforcements, Suvla could be held and his army could fight its way to victory.<sup>6</sup>

### II

In early September, Birdwood was in a position to relieve the 1st Australian Division by the newly-arrived 2nd Australian Division. It was his intention to send the relieved troops to Lemnos and Imbros to rest. He told his wife that "[s]o many of them have got so weak that they really are useless except to stand behind a wall and shoot ... What I have got to do is to

---

<sup>1</sup> Kitchener to Hamilton, 20 August 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 1150.

<sup>2</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 365.

<sup>3</sup> Kitchener to Hamilton, 20 August 1915..

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton to Kitchener, n.d., quoted in Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 767-768.

<sup>5</sup> Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, 27 August 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 1160.

<sup>6</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 368.

try and get them to pick up before the winter as otherwise the cold and damp here will find them out tremendously and half of them will go down with pneumonia ...".<sup>7</sup> Birdwood was now working hard to make arrangements for a possible winter on the peninsula and told the Australian Governor-General :

This is rather a horrible thing to have to contemplate, but still we may have to do it, and with very few local resources, I am afraid one cannot hope to be too comfortable, especially as we must of necessity be cut off for many days at a time from the outside world owing to the severe weather we are sure to have ...<sup>8</sup>

At a meeting of the Dardanelles Committee on 7 October, the Prime Minister had agreed with Lloyd George that a plan for evacuating the Gallipoli Peninsula should be considered and prepared. Kitchener also agreed with this.<sup>9</sup> When asked for his opinion regarding evacuation, Hamilton had replied that he was not in favour of it. He believed it could cost as much as 50 per cent of his force.<sup>10</sup> Cabinet confidence in Hamilton had been on the wane for some time. It had taken a turn for the worse with the help of a letter written by an Australian journalist, Keith Murdoch, to the Australian Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, which cast serious aspersions on the key Gallipoli players. He was especially critical of the General Staff saying their work had been "deplorable".<sup>11</sup> He told Fisher that the men had great faith in Birdwood and his divisional commanders, Walker and Legge, but not much in Godley.<sup>12</sup> Birdwood he thought a good corps commander, but he had not "the fighting quality nor the big brain of a great general".<sup>13</sup> Murdoch could not see any solution to the Gallipoli situation which did not start with the recall of Hamilton.<sup>14</sup> At Gallipoli itself, Hamilton was regarded as lacking in strength and of being swayed by Braithwaite. His lack of success was attributed to the enemy's strength and to want of effort at Suvla.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Birdwood to wife, 4 September 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>8</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 16 September 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/31.

<sup>9</sup> Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, 7 October 1915, quoted in C.V.3 , 1209-1210.

<sup>10</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 781.

<sup>11</sup> Murdoch to Fisher, 23 September 1915, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/17.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 782-783.

Kitchener was of the opinion that to abandon Gallipoli "would be the most disastrous event in the history of the Empire".<sup>16</sup> He now warned Hamilton that the Cabinet were contemplating removing him from his command.<sup>17</sup>

### III

The Dardanelles Committee met on 14 October to discuss the situation on the Peninsula. Asquith said that a decision had to be reached regarding Hamilton's tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the M.E.F. without delay.<sup>18</sup> He felt that Hamilton, despite having had every chance of succeeding, had lost the confidence of those under him. Therefore, he should be recalled and his command handed over to Birdwood.<sup>19</sup> Kitchener stated that Birdwood was too junior for such a command. He suggested that Hamilton remain in command until General Sir Charles Monro, commander of the Third Army in France and Hamilton's successor, could arrive at Gallipoli.<sup>20</sup> Asquith, however, wanted Hamilton's recall to take place immediately before any public debate concerning the Gallipoli campaign could take place.<sup>21</sup>

Birdwood was surprised at Hamilton's recall and was sorry that it had happened. Personally, he had found Hamilton to be a charming and thoughtful chief to serve under.<sup>22</sup> He admired the way in which Hamilton had taken his dismissal without blaming anyone, and he was also of the opinion that it would "buck ... up" the Turks "for any recall of the Commanding General must do so as an acknowledgement of failure ...".<sup>23</sup>

Hamilton left Imbros on 17 October leaving Birdwood in temporary command of the M.E.F. until Monro's arrival at the end of the month.<sup>24</sup> Birdwood felt that Hamilton had been made the scapegoat for the lack of success at Gallipoli and told his wife :

He has ... been asked to do the impossible here - whether these might have been achieved I will not say, but from the first difficulties and

---

<sup>16</sup> Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, 11 October 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 1213.

<sup>17</sup> Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, 14 October 1915, quoted in *ibid.*, 1217.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 14 October 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 386.

strength of the Turkish Army has evidently been underestimated from home, and the final success aimed at has been impossible with the troops at our disposal. So it is hard lines that he should be sacrificed in this way ...<sup>25</sup>

But there is little doubt that Hamilton deserved his dismissal. At no time during the campaign did he act like a commander-in-chief, more often allowing subordinate officers to lead rather than leading himself. Both the April landings and the August campaign were conceived and planned by subordinates.<sup>26</sup> Birdwood, despite his sympathy for Hamilton, blamed him rather than Stopford for the Suvla failure believing that Hamilton should have "really taken command which he has never yet done".<sup>27</sup>

#### IV

Birdwood did not envy Monro his job. Without more troops and ammunition he believed the task to be impossible. It would take time for Monro to grasp the whole situation prevailing on the Peninsula. He told his wife :

... this hiatus in command is I think unfortunate. In a week I can do nothing - in fact it is not up to me to do so - I merely have to carry on till Monro arrives and in the mean time have some considerable responsibility without full knowledge as I really know nothing of the details or disposition of the troops beyond my own four Divisions and in case of any big attack might be a little at sea ...

... Sir Ian was awfully nice in saying he thought I should have succeeded him altogether and wondered that this had not been done, but thought that possibly they did not want to remove me from the command of the Australians ...<sup>28</sup>

Monro had been ordered to determine whether the Government should continue with the campaign in the Dardanelles or whether an evacuation of the Peninsula was more advisable.<sup>29</sup> Prior to Monro's arrival, Kitchener had asked Birdwood for his advice regarding the situation as it then stood. Birdwood had replied that he felt the enemy's flanks could not be turned and could be taken only by assault precluding any advance

---

<sup>25</sup> Birdwood to wife, 15 October 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>26</sup> Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* , 319.

<sup>27</sup> Birdwood to wife, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Birdwood to wife, 15 October 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>29</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 784.

being made with an element of surprise.<sup>30</sup> The Turks now had some 125,000 infantry on the Peninsula and another 85,000 within close call against his own 85,000 troops on the Peninsula and the 5,000 drafts on the way.<sup>31</sup> He felt that the Suvla zone seemed to afford the best prospects for an advance on the Peninsula. He believed that it should be possible to advance against the heights north of Anafarta, hopefully capturing them and the "W" Hills.<sup>32</sup> To carry this out, he thought another two divisions of good troops were required : "Once we are in possession of this ground and I hope Chunuk Bair by mining we should be in a good position to continue the advance with a view to commanding the Turkish lines of communication at Maidos".<sup>33</sup> Birdwood believed the best plan was to sit tight on the Peninsula and to land a really large force south of the straits on the Asiatic side to march on Chanak.<sup>34</sup> This had been his original scheme. The Turkish troops there were few, but any landing that was to be made there would have to be soon as the weather would make it difficult to disembark troops.<sup>35</sup> An alternative to this idea was to make a landing at the head of the Gulf of Xeros to which Birdwood had originally been opposed :

I could see no advantage in placing such a force in front of probably almost impregnable entrenched lines while the sea behind was entirely free to the enemy who could land troops and stores at will at Gallipoli. The situation in this respect is however now entirely altered by the fact of being able to keep submarines continually in the Marmora. The naval objections to landing in this part are however, I understand, very great, the distance from the Base at Mudros alone making transportation of supplies etc. in small ships almost out of the question ...<sup>36</sup>

A few days later, Birdwood cabled again to Kitchener.<sup>37</sup> He outlined four major difficulties which his force now faced : the lack of materials for overhead cover; the reduced number and low physical condition of the troops; the great difficulty of getting stores from Mudros and the lack of space for landing them on the beaches; and the enemy's artillery fire

---

30 Birdwood to Kitchener, 21 October 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/7 Part 4.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Birdwood to Kitchener, 26 October 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/7 Part 4.

thereon.<sup>38</sup> All his corps commanders were of the same opinion.<sup>39</sup> In reply, Kitchener told Birdwood that he and his corps commanders should use all their energies to prepare for future possibilities.<sup>40</sup>

# V

Despite his protests of being a temporary commander-in-chief, it is clear that Birdwood was more familiar with the state of the M.E.F. than may have appeared to be the case. It is also clear that Kitchener trusted Birdwood's judgment enough to ask his advice as to the situation on the Peninsula very soon after Hamilton's departure. Evidence suggests that Hamilton was inclined to gloss over the facts as they were and to put a more optimistic point of view than circumstances dictated.<sup>41</sup> It is likely that Birdwood's opinions were regarded by Kitchener as being more realistic and, therefore, more valuable.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 27 October 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/7 Part4.

<sup>41</sup> Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 387.

## CHAPTER SIX

### I

Birdwood realised that Kitchener had had no choice but to appoint a senior general to the M.E.F. command, one who had seen service on the Western Front and who may be able to give the push required to remove the Turks from the peninsula. He told Kitchener that Hamilton had hoped that should the command be vacated, Birdwood would succeed him. Perhaps Kitchener had not wanted him to leave the Australians and New Zealanders. The Australian journalist, Keith Murdoch, had written a damning letter to the Australian Prime Minister [see chapter 5], and this may have militated against him: "Whatever it was my dear old Chief you will know that I have no feelings in the matter ...".<sup>1</sup>

General Monro arrived at the end of October to take over command of the M.E.F. On 30 October, he visited Helles, Anzac and Suvla.<sup>2</sup> On the strength of these quick visits, he told his corps commanders, Lieutenant-General F.J.Davies of VIII Corps, who had taken over from the invalided Hunter-Weston in August, Lieutenant-General Sir J. Byng of IX Corps, who had taken over from Stopford following his sacking by Hamilton in August, and Birdwood, that he had recommended evacuation of the peninsula.<sup>3</sup> Kitchener was not prepared to accept Monro's seemingly precipitate judgment. He asked Monro whether he had sought the views of his senior commanders. If he had not, he was to do so.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Monro asked for an opinion from each of the corps commanders. Byng was for evacuation, as was Davies.<sup>5</sup> He later changed his mind, considering that evacuation would be impossible with the weather conditions then prevailing.<sup>6</sup> Birdwood was against evacuation although he agreed with Monro that their position was difficult and that progress was poor.<sup>7</sup> He felt that withdrawal would be regarded by the Turks as their victory and feared

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 22 October 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL120.

<sup>2</sup> Monro to Kitchener, 31 October 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/7 Part 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kitchener to Monro, 1 November 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/8 Part 2.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum from Davies, 1 November 1915 and from Byng, 2 November 1915 to Monro, in *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Kitchener to Asquith, 17 November 1915 in *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Birdwood to Monro, n.d. in *ibid.*

that morale of the British troops would be considerably lowered.<sup>8</sup> He told Kitchener: "I have served too long in India and with Mohammedans not to be really apprehensive that such a step might lead to such conflagration throughout the Mohammedan world as to seriously jeopardise our position in India, Egypt and Persia".<sup>9</sup> Birdwood made the point that to withdraw from the peninsula would allow the Turks to move troops to other theatres of war "to meet us in Bulgaria or to oppose the Russians in the Caucasus, or to proceed to Mesopotamia".<sup>10</sup> He added :

To my mind the only reason which could now justify such a step [evacuation] would be one that contemplated the launching of the whole force immediately against and in Turkey with good reason for hopes of better success than we can contemplate in the peninsula.<sup>11</sup>

Birdwood told the Dardanelles Commission that after arriving in Egypt in January 1916 following the evacuation of the Peninsula, he had asked the Sultan whether he had been surprised at the lack of reaction by the Mahommedan world. The Sultan had replied that he was absolutely confounded by it".<sup>12</sup> Birdwood thought that because there had been no loss of life and because the allies had not withdrawn simultaneously from each of the three locations on the Peninsula, had shown that the British "did not care a damn for [the Turks],[and] had something to do with the way it was taken".<sup>13</sup>

## II

On 3 November, Birdwood received a cable from Kitchener advising that he was coming out to assess the situation on the peninsula himself.<sup>14</sup> He believed that the navy would attempt again to force the straits. The army must do all it could to assist in this enterprise.<sup>15</sup> As soon as the ships were in the Marmora, the army was to seize and hold the isthmus to enable the navy to be supplied should the Turks hold out.<sup>16</sup> Kitchener continued:

---

8 Ibid.

9 Birdwood to Kitchener, 2 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

13 Ibid.

14 Kitchener to Birdwood, 3 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.



Examine very carefully best position for landing near marsh at head of Gulf of Xeros, so that we could get a line across at Isthmus with ships on both sides ... As regards command, you would have the whole of the force ... I absolutely refuse to sign order for evacuation, which I think would be the greatest disaster, and would condemn a large percentage of our men to death or imprisonment. Monro will be appointed to command the Salonika force.<sup>17</sup>

Birdwood immediately wired Kitchener advising him that any possible landing place was now strongly defended by the Turks and the marsh was impassable.<sup>18</sup> Even if troops were to reach the isthmus, they would be required to fight on two fronts. At least 100,000 men would be required to do so.<sup>19</sup> Byng and Davies had little faith in the endurance of their troops believing them to be capable of only 24 hours of sustained effort.<sup>20</sup> This applied equally to Birdwood's own men and he feared a complete disaster should they be required to evacuate the peninsula and then to face another landing.<sup>21</sup> He hoped that an attempt would not be made.<sup>22</sup> Birdwood also hoped that Monro would remain in command. He had gained the confidence of the Force and his experience in France would prove invaluable.<sup>23</sup> Birdwood added: "He will I know carry out any orders for the Government better than I can".<sup>24</sup> He later told the Dardanelles Commission that he believed that Kitchener had acted prematurely by transferring Monro from his command: "I felt that if that was so, it was not a thing that would create confidence throughout the Army. I felt Sir Charles Monro had been sent out to give his opinion - that he had honestly done so, and that it was not right that he should in consequence be immediately relieved of his command".<sup>25</sup> Major Guy Dawnay, a staff officer at M.E.F. headquarters, assessed Monro as "a fine fellow ... A perfectly delightful man, genial, a great sense of humour, a wonderfully sound judgment of men and affairs, and one who sees down to the root of things - sweeping irrelevancies aside!"<sup>26</sup> Dawnay noted that Monro's report had

---

17 Ibid.

18 Birdwood to Kitchener, 4 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

26 Dawnay to wife, 4 November 1915, Dawnay Papers.

been unpopular both with the Government and with Kitchener : "... it seems likely that his tenure of command may come to an abrupt close !" <sup>27</sup> Birdwood suppressed the cable which arrived on 4 November appointing him to the command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force knowing that it could only hurt Monro. <sup>28</sup>

The same day Kitchener confirmed his intention to visit the peninsula. <sup>29</sup> He told Birdwood that, "[t]he more I look at the problem the less I see my way through. So you had better very quietly and very secretly work out any scheme for getting the troops off". <sup>30</sup> Birdwood replied that he felt Kitchener's dilemma was the more reason for keeping Monro in command to make general arrangements. He and his fellow corps commanders would be badly needed to run things in their own areas. <sup>31</sup>

Kitchener meant to do his utmost to enable Birdwood to hold and improve his position, "as I regard evacuation as a frightful disaster, which should be avoided at all cost. Think over any plan which would enable us to improve our position as to render them sufficiently secure to hold out against increasing artillery fire". <sup>32</sup> Birdwood noted in his diary that he was much relieved to receive this message from Kitchener. No doubt he hoped that the evacuation would not eventuate. <sup>33</sup> As he told the Dardanelles Commission : "I absolutely hated the very idea of giving up the fight, and abandoning all for which we had fought". <sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, he now had instructions from Asquith to "prepare in concert with the Naval authorities and your Staff and Corps Generals in the utmost secrecy a complete plan for evacuation if and when it should be decided upon and to take all necessary measures with object". <sup>35</sup> The Government had not made any decision on evacuation and would not do so until they had Kitchener's opinion. <sup>36</sup>

On 10 November, Kitchener arrived on the Peninsula. He and Birdwood discussed plans in the event that an evacuation should take

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 4 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27 and Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 280.

<sup>29</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 4 November 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/70.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 4 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

<sup>32</sup> Kitchener to Birdwood, 5 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

<sup>33</sup> Birdwood diary, 6 November 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>34</sup> Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

<sup>35</sup> Asquith to Birdwood, 6 November 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

place.<sup>37</sup> Birdwood told his wife that he had been delighted to see Kitchener and that he "was really pleased to see me. I have never seen him so gentle, soft and kind in his manner - the way he took hold of my arm and at once walked me off up the deck when he came on board was quite unlike his old rather abrupt, shy way with people".<sup>38</sup> It was difficult for Birdwood, as Monro was present also, and Kitchener insisted on treating Birdwood as "Chief", referring everything to him while Monro looked on.<sup>39</sup> However, Monro did not appear to take offence. Birdwood believed that Monro was grateful that he had suppressed Kitchener's cable of 4 November regarding the command of the M.E.F.<sup>40</sup> He told his wife:

I found as I expected that K. had been so annoyed at his proposals regarding the force here, that he had there and then moved him on to something else and put me in command.<sup>41</sup>

As yet, no decision had been made regarding evacuation and whatever the final outcome, Birdwood was glad that he would be with his men rather than at headquarters on an island as Chief He added :

I go back to Anzac directly Lord K. leaves ... There was terrible tribulation on Anzac when they thought I might be leaving them altogether and I think they are all pleased I am not now to do so.<sup>42</sup>

Birdwood told his wife that Kitchener had now decided he was to take over the command of the Dardanelles Army as a part of the M.E.F. which would remain under Monro with the force at Salonika.<sup>43</sup>

On 15 November, Kitchener cabled the Prime Minister to report that he had inspected all the positions held on the Peninsula. He considered that what had been achieved was "a most remarkable feat of arms".<sup>44</sup> He found the country far more difficult than he had imagined, the Turkish positions at Achi Baba and Kilid Bahr being formidable fortresses which, "if not taken by surprise at first, could be held against very serious attack by larger forces than have been engaged ...".<sup>45</sup> Kitchener told Asquith that plans were in

---

<sup>37</sup> Birdwood diary, 10 November 1915, Birdwood Papers AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>38</sup> Birdwood to wife, 12 November 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Kitchener to Asquith, 15 November 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/8 Part 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

hand to evacuate the positions held, but that if undertaken, the operation would be of extreme difficulty and danger.<sup>46</sup> He added :

... but I have hopes that given time and weather , which may be expected to be suitable until about the end of December, the troops will carry out this task with less loss than was previously estimated. My reason for this is that the distance they have to go to embark and the contraction of the lines of defence to be held by a smaller force gives them a better chance than I thought previously.<sup>47</sup>

Kitchener paid visits to Athens and Salonika. Displeased with what he saw there, especially at Salonika where spies were active in reporting all troop movements to the enemy, and further influenced by Monro's "able and unhesitating arguments, [he] decided to recommend evacuation".<sup>48</sup> He recommended that the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac should proceed, but Helles could still be held, at least for the moment.<sup>49</sup> By retaining Helles, the Navy could maintain the advantages already gained and still threaten the Turks.<sup>50</sup>

On the 23rd, Asquith informed Kitchener that the War Council had approved the evacuation of all three Gallipoli positions. The final decision would be communicated to him the next day after the Cabinet met.<sup>51</sup> Kitchener sailed for England on the 24th, a decision not having been reached in London.<sup>52</sup> This was still the case on 30 November when Kitchener cabled Monro to say that as the evacuation was still under discussion by the Cabinet and that until a decision had been reached, his instructions referring to the policy of evacuation should be suspended.<sup>53</sup>

On 27 November, Birdwood let Kitchener know that he had discussed the possibility of evacuation with Godley, now acting commander of the Anzac Corps, and with Byng. They had decided it was possible to carry out an evacuation provided two factors were favourable : "[t]hey are two really fine nights for my final leaving of the beaches - and the ability of the

---

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 281.

49 Kitchener to Asquith, 22 November 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/8 Part 2.

50 Ibid.

51 Asquith to Kitchener, 23 November 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/8 Part2.

52 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli* , Vol.2, 422.

53 Kitchener to Monro, 30 November 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/8 Part 2.

Navy to provide us with the necessary small craft on those nights ...".<sup>54</sup> Seemingly forgetting how tired his troops were, Birdwood added :

There is one thing I mean to keep in mind very much, as just an off chance. If the Turks hear we are off, they may come to the point of delivering a very heavy attack with all their available troops while we are still in a position to strike back real hard and counter attack with vigour. Should this by any chance be the case I mean to take full advantage of it, and if we should at the last moment inflict a defeat on them with very heavy loss and follow it up, we might yet get across to Maidos and take the Narrows at the very last moment instead of leaving!! This however is only a very last chance on which I will and dare not dwell ...<sup>55</sup>

As the views of his divisional commanders testified, the troops would not have been in any way able to fight a sustained battle as Birdwood himself had agreed in his cable to Kitchener of 4 November, barely three weeks earlier.

### III

By 1 December, Birdwood was able to tell Monro that his plans for evacuation were "assuming definite shape".<sup>56</sup> He told Monro that his first thought was to evacuate Anzac, Suvla and Helles simultaneously. Further consideration led him to believe that because of the lack of naval resources, Anzac and Suvla should be evacuated in the first instance, followed later by Helles.<sup>57</sup> Birdwood had consulted with the naval authorities who were to assist with the evacuation. All had agreed that to attempt a simultaneous operation could seriously jeopardise any chance of success. Also, there would be no reserve of sea-transport to rely on.<sup>58</sup>

Birdwood and his corps commanders were optimistic that a withdrawal from both Anzac and Suvla would be successful with little loss. He was apprehensive only with potential naval difficulties regarding transport for the troops.<sup>59</sup> Regarding Helles, Birdwood considered that owing to probable bad weather increasing as the season progressed,

---

<sup>54</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 27 November 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL127.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Birdwood to Monro, 1 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/66.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

evacuation may have to be postponed indefinitely.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, while still planning to evacuate Helles as soon as the withdrawal of Anzac and Suvla was completed, Birdwood recommended that full strength of VIII Corps be maintained and that there should be no cessation in the landing of ammunition and supplies at Cape Helles.<sup>61</sup>

Monro cabled Kitchener on 2 December to tell him that Admiral Wemyss had asked him whether, if the Navy was able to force the Narrows and establish itself in the Marmora, it would help the army's operations on the Peninsula.<sup>62</sup> Monro was still in favour of evacuation. He had told the Admiral that after full consideration of all the circumstances, he could not see how any such proposed operation by the Navy could materially improve the military situation on the Peninsula. Monro added : "It must be borne in mind also that the offensive power of the troops has been considerably reduced by the recent bad weather".<sup>63</sup>

General Callwell at the War Office in London wrote to Major-General Lynden Bell of Monro's staff, that he was in despair over the difficulty of getting a decision from the Government regarding the Dardanelles. He complained that "[t]hey are doing their best to make a difficult position absolutely impossible. We have four enemies to contend with - the Boches, the Turks, the Bulgars and H.M. Government - and the last is the most deadly ...".<sup>64</sup>

But the Cabinet had considered the Gallipoli situation all day on the 2nd. Kitchener cabled Monro to tell him that there was a strong feeling against evacuation because of the political consequences which could follow it.<sup>65</sup> The general opinion of Cabinet members was that Helles should be retained. Kitchener asked Monro :

If the Salonika Troops up to four divisions are placed at once at your disposal for an offensive operation to improve the position at Suvla, could such operations be carried out in time with a view to making Suvla retainable by obtaining greater depth and higher positions ? In co-operation the Navy will also take the offensive.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Monro to Kitchener, 2 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Callwell to Lynden Bell, 2 December 1915, Lynden Bell Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Kitchener to Monro, 2 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Monro cabled to Birdwood who had been appointed as commander of the Dardanelles Army on 25 November and had made his headquarters at Imbros <sup>67</sup>, repeating Kitchener's query.<sup>68</sup> Birdwood replied that he had always maintained that given more troops, he could push forward. He added that after doing so, he would require additional mule transport and a large increase in materials for sheltering purposes given the season.<sup>69</sup> Because of the weather it had to be realised that any landing, like a withdrawal, would be a complete gamble and unlikely to take the Turks by surprise.<sup>70</sup> Monro was against using another four divisions to secure Suvla, telling Kitchener that such an operation did not have a reasonable chance of success.<sup>71</sup> He was of the opinion that even were they lucky enough to land and to drive the Turks back a few hundred yards, it would be a purely local success. It would not relieve the existing situation at Suvla.<sup>72</sup> Monro added that Birdwood's views coincided with his: "... that if the amplest artillery of the right type and sufficient time for preparation were available, some improvement in our position at Suvla might be effected. But the essential point is that neither the necessary means nor time are now at our disposal ...".<sup>73</sup>

It seemed wrong to Birdwood that as the one person to have opposed evacuation, he may have to carry it out. He told his wife that "it has such possibilities of terrible disaster, and none of glory or victory! However that is neither here nor there ...".<sup>74</sup>

He was confident of doing the job successfully but feared the weather, which having been good, might turn.<sup>75</sup> He was heart-broken at the thought of leaving Anzac: "[l]eaving my ... position and trenches is for me almost like leaving a child ...". The troops had no idea that they were to leave, and Birdwood was "sure they will feel it terribly when they find they have to ...".<sup>76</sup>

On 4 December, Birdwood wrote to his wife and told her of a terrible storm that had just passed through the peninsula: "It began with a

---

<sup>67</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol.2, 828.

<sup>68</sup> Monro to Birdwood, 3 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>69</sup> Birdwood to Monro, 3 December 1915 in *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Monro to Kitchener, 3 December 1915 in *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Birdwood to wife, 22 November 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

tremendous storm of rain and S.W. wind, which suddenly turned round to the N.E. and came down in a regular blizzard of snow and sleet with 12 degree frost. The cold wouldn't have mattered so much but for the wind which simply killed the men".<sup>77</sup> His only consolation was that the Turks were even worse off as their trenches were higher and still full of snow, and they appeared to have no warm clothing or blankets.<sup>78</sup> Regarding the Peninsula, he told her :

I still do not know what is to happen here as plans are so constantly altered and we may be on for anything! I wouldn't feel a bit anxious but for the time of year. The weather is now so continuously bad that one cannot rely on it from one day to another and one can hardly count on being able to move troops and stores etc. by sea for more than 2 nights a week which makes the situation always serious.<sup>79</sup>

On 8 December the Cabinet finally decided to evacuate the Anzac and Suvla positions while retaining Helles for the present.<sup>80</sup> The order was to be acted on immediately. Kitchener told Monro:

I need not say this decision has only been reached after the most earnest consideration and with the greatest reluctance, but the Government feel that the exigencies of the general military situation render this course inevitable.<sup>81</sup>

Obviously still ambivalent regarding evacuation, Birdwood noted in his diary that he was fearful that they were throwing away "an eventual chance of getting through". However, holding on to Helles would mean a good deal as regards British prestige.<sup>82</sup>

By agreeing to evacuation, Hamilton thought that Birdwood had shown he was not big enough to stand alone, and that Byng, Davies and Birdwood had "broken down" while he, Hamilton, had been the "prop" which had held them together.<sup>83</sup> Birdwood replied to this charge saying that far from having changed his mind, his opinion for staying had been, in effect, superseded by the need for troops in Egypt to avert an attack by the Germans and Turks.<sup>84</sup> Birdwood had been in some doubt as to the size of

---

<sup>77</sup> Birdwood to wife, 4 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Kitchener to Monro, 8 December 1915, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 8042/27.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Birdwood diary, 8 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>83</sup> Hamilton to Churchill, 8 December 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/6.

<sup>84</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 12 December 1915, Hamilton Papers 5/10.



force the enemy could produce. However, his fellow generals had felt that they could bring a large force to bear.<sup>85</sup> The British were not able to produce more troops other than those presently on the peninsula : "In these circumstances the question arose, were we pulling our fair share in the boat by remaining here, while in the general interests of the Empire we could be used more effectually in the defence of Egypt".<sup>86</sup> In conclusion, Birdwood said "... I certainly was not an advocate of clearing out. I was quite ready to take on the German and Austrian howitzers in front of me".<sup>87</sup>

Later, Birdwood commented that there had been no alternative to evacuation. He had come to the conclusion that it was "the only sensible course". With no further reinforcements of men or supplies forthcoming, there was no justification for keeping a large force where it could achieve nothing when it could be "usefully employed elsewhere".<sup>88</sup>

The order to leave affected Birdwood very much. He had visited all the trenches at Anzac and was moved by the troops' attempts to make themselves impregnable.<sup>89</sup> He told Kitchener :

They haven't an idea yet that we are off, which made it all the worse for me, as they were so full of what they had done to stand against anything ...

... I have worked out every detail ... My very last day, my trenches must be held weakly, as I mean to hold the whole line to the very last ...

Having made my arrangements I now spend my days going round the troops as I am sure it is very necessary to keep them in good spirits and cheery, and will be more so when they know we are withdrawing, and I mean to spend the very last day the troops are on shore, with my old comrades at Anzac, so that they shan't be able to say I have deserted them and I want to make sure their final arrangements are all right ...<sup>90</sup>

Birdwood felt that they were "hardly being given a sporting chance!"<sup>91</sup> Evacuation had been discussed in both British Houses of Parliament. This had confounded those on the Peninsula. Birdwood opined : "I suppose we may look to dates of future attacks or withdrawals being given out by some

---

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 281.

89 Birdwood to Kitchener, 12 December 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL130.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

one!"<sup>92</sup> He also thought that Churchill had probably compromised the Admiralty cipher by reading out verbatim to the House of Commons telegrams which had passed between him and the Admiral in the Dardanelles, "the cipher of which the Germans must of course have".<sup>93</sup>

Birdwood decided to evacuate Anzac and Suvla over two consecutive nights, 18/19 and 19/20 December.<sup>94</sup> He had committed himself to guaranteeing that he would get off 75 per cent of his guns and a "somewhat higher percentage of men".<sup>95</sup> On reflection, he told Kitchener that he now expected "hardly any loss at all" so long as the weather held and the navy could supply the necessary transport.<sup>96</sup> The evacuation was to be carried out in two stages. The first, the "Intermediate Stage" would consist of "the gradual and methodical evacuation of all men, guns and animals not required for the tactical defence of our positions ...".<sup>97</sup> The second stage, the "Final", would consist of the embarkation of men and guns only; these men were fighting men and medical personnel.<sup>98</sup> Birdwood told the corps commanders that the number of men and guns to be embarked during each stage was left to their discretion. The number of men kept for the final stage could not exceed 20,000 at each location, this being the maximum number the Navy could deal with.<sup>99</sup>

During this period, Birdwood paid daily visits to Suvla and Anzac, talking to his corps commanders, the officers and men and making suggestions regarding the evacuation.<sup>100</sup> The intermediate stage proceeded during this period without a hitch. At night, the beaches hummed with activity as stores and men were moved. During the day, a semblance of normality was maintained to fool the Turks.<sup>101</sup>

---

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 "Instructions to General Officers Commanding 9th Corps and Australian and New Zealand Army Corps", 10 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/9 Part 7.

95 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 289.

96 Ibid.

97 "Instructions to General Officers Commanding 9th Corps and ANZAC", 10 December 1915.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, Vol.2, 448.

101 Ibid., 451.

## IV

While the plans for evacuation proceeded, Birdwood considered the requirements of the Helles garrison should the Government decide to maintain the position there during the coming winter.<sup>102</sup> He was of the opinion that the only way to maintain the position and the morale of the garrison was to be continually on the offensive, endeavouring wherever possible to gain ground from the Turks.<sup>103</sup> He considered essential for carrying this out were a regular flow of drafts, regular periods of rest for the troops stationed there, and a plentiful supply of ammunition.<sup>104</sup> However, Birdwood was told that Monro was of the opinion that there had been a tendency to keep too many troops on the Peninsula itself. While he agreed with Birdwood's estimate of 34,000 troops being required to garrison Helles, he considered that the lines could be maintained with two-thirds of that number, the balance being kept in reserve at Imbros.<sup>105</sup>

Birdwood suggested to Monro, that after the evacuation, a letter should be sent ashore to the Turks with a view to gaining permission to embark any wounded who may have been left behind on the final night.<sup>106</sup> In a later cable, Birdwood said that he had arranged with the navy to bombard the shore once the armistice was over.<sup>107</sup> Monro agreed to an armistice and signed two copies of a letter addressed to the Turks.<sup>108</sup> In the event, they were not used as there were no casualties to embark.

Birdwood was fully involved in planning the evacuation, and as already stated, visited Anzac and Suvla each day. On the 15th, he wrote to Godley that he had been thinking over the Anzac plan to blow up the neck in front of Russell's Top.<sup>109</sup> Rather, he said, than blow up these mines while still holding their position, would it not be better to wait until the evacuation had taken place and then blow them? <sup>110</sup> He continued :

---

<sup>102</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 14 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Lynden Bell to Birdwood, 20 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ Dardanelles Army, AWM 4/1/17/2 Part 4.

<sup>106</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 14 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>107</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 17 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 2.

<sup>108</sup> Lynden Bell to Birdwood, 18 December 1915 in *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Birdwood to Godley, 15 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 1.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Should the Turks discover we have left the trenches, and come streaming across the Neck, which would be a very natural line of approach for them, it would shake their confidence very severely if these three mines were to burst in their rear, and as large bodies might be coming across at intervals of say a minute of each other, would possibly cause any of them who are already in front to double back, thinking they were cut off ...<sup>111</sup>

On the 20th, Monro cabled Kitchener with the news that the Anzac and Suvla evacuations had successfully taken place that morning. Any losses suffered had been insignificant.<sup>112</sup> Monro told Kitchener that about 65,000 men and 140 guns had been withdrawn without the Turks having been aware of what was happening.<sup>113</sup> Further, he said, the entire credit for this was due to Birdwood, his corps commanders and Admiral Wemyss. The operation had been a complete success.<sup>114</sup>

From HMS *Chatham*, Birdwood cabled to Monro that the mines he had suggested be exploded at Russell's Top had been detonated. The result of several hundred pounds exploding amongst the Turks had caused havoc in the middle of the Turkish positions.<sup>115</sup> Birdwood told Kitchener how he had never dared to hope that the evacuation would be as successful as it had turned out to be.<sup>116</sup> The two nights of withdrawal had been perfectly calm and quiet, windless with a little cloud to dim the moon. This fact saved the navy much anxiety regarding their boats being damaged.<sup>117</sup> He believed that Suvla had managed to save more than Anzac in the way of material, though their facilities were greater as Suvla had more piers and the transports could come into the bay. From Anzac, they had to go a long way out to sea.<sup>118</sup> To turn the Turk's attention from the northern areas of Anzac and Suvla, General Davies at Helles had organised a fairly big attack on the Turk's trenches there. This diversion had apparently been successful attracting the whole attention of the Turks.<sup>119</sup> Birdwood was consoled on leaving Anzac by the fact that his men had suffered no loss at all, while

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Monro to Kitchener, 20 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Birdwood to Monro, 20 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 2.

<sup>116</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 20 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/47.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

inflicting a considerable amount on the Turks by exploding mines. When the Turks realised that the evacuation had taken place, they had come to loot the positions left and were fired upon heavily by the cruisers and destroyers which had remained off the coast.<sup>120</sup> Birdwood praised the corps commanders, Byng and Godley, and their staffs who had made "all the arrangements most excellently, and left me really little or nothing to do beyond perhaps a suggestion here or a word of encouragement there during my practically daily visits to their positions ...".<sup>121</sup> Birdwood wrote later, that to those on the spot, the evacuation had not been a difficult exercise. He had had little to do with it, "apart from the responsibility and the co-ordination of plans worked out by other men".<sup>122</sup>

In his report on the evacuation, General Godley, acting GOC ANZAC, noted especially the contribution of Brigadier-General C.B.B.White to the recent operation.<sup>123</sup> Godley told Birdwood that "[t]he thoroughness and excellence of the Staff work, which resulted in the success of the operation, were mainly due to the conspicuous ability and hard work of this Officer. He never spared himself in perfecting all the arrangements and I look upon him as a General Staff Officer of exceptional merit".<sup>124</sup> White had been largely responsible for the plan which accustomed the Turks to long periods of silence from the Anzac trenches.<sup>125</sup> The Turks appeared to think that these long periods of silence were caused by the Australians concentrating on preparations for winter.<sup>126</sup> The plans for the evacuation had originated with a small committee of naval and military officers working at Mudros during Kitchener's visit in November.<sup>127</sup> The committee members had not attempted to determine the tactics by which the operation would be carried out, so the corps commanders were asked to submit their views on the matter.<sup>128</sup> At Anzac, Godley left the submission of a scheme to his Chief of Staff, White, but he closely examined the resulting plans before accepting responsibility for them.<sup>129</sup> White's plan rested on the belief that the way to

---

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 290.

123 Godley to Birdwood, 23 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, HQ ANZAC, AWM 4/1/25/9 Part 12.

124 Ibid.

125 Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 842-843.

126 Ibid., 845.

127 Ibid., 853.

128 Ibid., 856.

129 Ibid.

avoid a bloody withdrawal was to keep the enemy ignorant of the plan to evacuate.<sup>130</sup>

Bean claimed that White's part in the evacuation was his greatest operational achievement.<sup>131</sup> It may have been, but it appears that more credit has been given to White than is his due for the part he played in this operation. There is no doubt that Bean magnified the role of White in the official history. In fact, White performed tasks expected from any competent chief of staff who in turn would expect his chief to append his seal of approval, or not, as the case may be. Had White's plan fallen apart, Birdwood would have been expected to take the blame. Evidence points to the fact that White was neither more nor less than a competent staff officer who carried out his duties with care and good judgment. As far as Birdwood was concerned, once he had accepted the plan presented by Godley and White, he was prepared to live with it, taking responsibility for the success or the failure of the operation. Like most commanders, his part in the operation once the plans were made, was to support his men and to await the outcome. Monro had made it quite clear to Birdwood that he would be held "entirely responsible for the evacuation".<sup>132</sup>

Birdwood now anticipated being sent to Egypt to prepare for the expected German-Turkish attack to be launched against the Suez Canal.<sup>133</sup> The corps from both Anzac and Suvla had gone there after evacuation leaving the remaining corps of Birdwood's Dardanelles Army at Helles.<sup>134</sup> Munro-Ferguson told Birdwood that he had come through the evacuation with "a great reputation of which you have every cause to be proud ...".<sup>135</sup> John Churchill told his brother, Winston, that Birdwood had carried out the whole operation and that the government and Kitchener owed him a great deal.<sup>136</sup> He added, "[m]y movements are very uncertain. I shall try to stay with Birdwood. He is a great leader and his men adore him ...".<sup>137</sup> This view was shared by George Lloyd, MP, a member of the House of Commons, and currently serving on the Headquarters staff. He wrote to Colonel Fitzgerald, Kitchener's Military Secretary, praising Birdwood's

---

130 Ibid., 857.

131 Bean, *Two Men I K new*, 222.

132 Birdwood evidence, The Dardanelles Commission, 6 March 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/40.

133 Birdwood to wife, 21 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

134 Ibid.

135 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 21 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/30.

136 John Churchill to Winston Churchill, 22 December 1915, quoted in C.V.3, 1343-1344.

137 Ibid.

success with the evacuation, adding, "I do hope it is realised at home how much we owe to Birdwood for this success and to him alone ...".<sup>138</sup>

## V

Shortly after the Anzac and Suvla evacuations, Birdwood received a memorandum from Monro's C.G.S., Lynden Bell. This asked him to prepare a detailed scheme for the evacuation of Helles in case orders should be received from London to carry out such an operation at short notice.<sup>139</sup> Monro was of the opinion that any withdrawal from Helles should be made in one step from the trenches to the beaches and boats and that it should be carried out in a single night : "Careful consideration is needed as to the extent to which the admirably successful methods adopted for the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac might be varied in order to deceive the enemy".<sup>140</sup>

Birdwood had already been considering a plan should it be decided that Helles be evacuated.<sup>141</sup> He agreed that it was important to complete the withdrawal in one night.<sup>142</sup> He urged that if such an operation were to take place, that it should not be delayed beyond 14 January as he expected the weather to deteriorate badly after that date.<sup>143</sup> If he soon received orders, he could arrange for an evacuation on 12 January, this night affording full moon light which he had found at Anzac and Suvla to be of great advantage and "almost a necessity".<sup>144</sup> Birdwood recommended a thinning-out of the various divisions as communications and responsibilities would then not need to be re-arranged.<sup>145</sup> He had also ordered a reconnaissance of the coast line to determine the most suitable points for embarkation of the troops.<sup>146</sup> In conclusion, he said :

... I would beg that the importance of coming to an early decision should be impressed on the Home Authorities, not only by reason of the daily approaching bad weather, but also, and particularly, because it is practically impossible for the staffs concerned to make adequate plans for this most difficult operation when they have at the same

---

138 Lloyd to Fitzgerald, 24 December 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL 137.

139 Lynden Bell to Birdwood, 22 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/66.

140 Ibid.

141 Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 25 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/66.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.

time to consider and make provision for all the requirements for a winter campaign.<sup>147</sup>

Despite his reponsibility in drawing up an evacuation plan for Helles, Birdwood complained to Fitzgerald that he was feeling "very weary of life as I am in such a rotten position, being at present merely a post office between GHQ and Helles! I am told I command the Dardanelles Army, but no such thing exists!"<sup>148</sup> He told Fitzgerald that corps and divisions had been sent to Egypt with no reference to him. Although he found the Commander-in-Chief, General Monro, very pleasant, he knew that the staff were jealous of him and "don't seem to do all they could to make things smooth".<sup>149</sup> Having completed the Anzac and Suvla evacuations successfully, he now felt that his "sphere of usefulness" was over. He wanted to return to his Anzac Corps: "Do please impress on the Chief how anxious I am to be with them again and they are good enough to have both wired and written saying they want me there".<sup>150</sup> He added in a postscript that he had been informed that Admiral de Robeck had sent a telegram to the Admiralty in which he said that after discussions with Birdwood and Davies, it was agreed between them that they had confidence in being able to hold on to Helles.<sup>151</sup> Birdwood made his feelings clear : "I was perfectly astounded when I saw this statement, as though de Robeck is a very great friend of mine, and I naturally constantly see him, yet I have no recollection whatever of ever having such a conversation!"<sup>152</sup>

Birdwood told his wife that on Christmas Day, the men in the camp at Imbros had had a "capital bonfire concert".<sup>153</sup> He continued:

... I must say I was much touched at the end of it, by some one - I think it was Churchill - Winston's brother who is my Camp Commandant here - getting up at the end and shouting "Three cheers for Sir William Birdwood of Anzac". I thought the men would never stop - they went on cheering till they were tired -and none of my own Australians were with them either, as I'm sorry to say they are all over at Mudros. These were all British soldiers - Yeomanry, Engineers etc. and I felt it was so nice of them ...<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Birdwood to Fitzgerald, 26 December 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL139.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Birdwood to Wife, 27 December 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.



## VI

Orders were received on 28 December to carry out the Helles evacuation.<sup>155</sup> Birdwood expected this to be more difficult than evacuating Anzac and Suvla, however he would "do it all right".<sup>156</sup> It had been agreed that because the navy was unable to embark more than 15,000 men on any one night, and because Davies did not want to reduce his force to less than 22,000 men, the evacuation would now be carried out over two nights.<sup>157</sup>

Birdwood doubted that the Helles evacuation could be as successful as those of Anzac and Suvla especially as the Turks would now be on their guard. He trusted to Providence to get them through.<sup>158</sup> He told his wife that the weather was now becoming very unpleasant and the sea was very rough.<sup>159</sup> The Germans were flying over Helles every day and the Turks regularly shelled the beach throughout the twenty four hours. Embarking kit, guns and animals was made a difficult business.<sup>160</sup>

On 6 January, Birdwood told his wife that a few days before, the French flagship had rammed and sunk one of his horse transports which had been on its way to pick up 500 mules.<sup>161</sup> Then, two nights previously, a lighter with 50 mules and 15 crew was upset and all aboard drowned. A Royal Navy piquet boat on its way to help this vessel met the same fate, "so you can see with what troubles we are faced".<sup>162</sup> He believed that General Davies was getting "jumpy" and wanted to change the plans "which I will not have".<sup>163</sup> He particularly liked the French troops under his command and got on well with them and their commander General Brulard.<sup>164</sup> He added :

By the bye I have just had another and I believe much coveted French decoration given me, General Brulard having just wired saying General Joffre [Commander-in-Chief of the French Army] has

---

<sup>155</sup> CIGS to Birdwood, 28 December 1915, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/9 Part 2.

<sup>156</sup> Birdwood to wife, 27 December 1915.

<sup>157</sup> "Report on the Evacuation by General Officer Commanding 8th Corps", January 1916, AWM 51/39.

<sup>158</sup> Birdwood to wife, 1 January 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Birdwood to wife, 6 January 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

conferred on me "La Croix de Guerre avec palme" - the latter is I understand a tremendous honour and very few have been given ...<sup>165</sup>

The Turks launched an attack against Helles on 7 January and suffered heavy losses while Birdwood's losses were light.<sup>166</sup> The bombardment, according to VIII Corps, was the heaviest yet experienced on the Peninsula and there was considerable damage to parapets and communication trenches.<sup>167</sup>

It had decided to make the withdrawal during the night of 9/10 January. However, because the weather was promising and after consultation with Admiral de Robeck, Birdwood decided to advance the final evacuation by 24 hours to the night of the 8/9th.<sup>168</sup> By 4 a.m. on 9 January, the Helles evacuation was over. There had been no French casualties and only one British wounded.<sup>169</sup> Birdwood praised the naval arrangements of Admiral de Robeck and the good work of General Davies of VIII Corps for the successful completion of the evacuation.<sup>170</sup>

Birdwood now felt a free man again with no anxieties.<sup>171</sup> He told Kitchener that he was one of the few who had actually landed on the peninsula on 25 April, the first day, and who had left it on the last day, 8 January, "having had the good fortune to keep my health, and not having had to go away for a day ...".<sup>172</sup> He was now "quite looking forward to getting my boys together again - especially the Australians, from whom I hate being separated ...".<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 7 January 1916, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/10 Part 5.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 7 January 1916 (postscript 9 January 1916), Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>169</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 9 January 1916, Appendix, General Staff War Diary, GHQ MEF, AWM 4/1/4/10 Part 5.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Birdwood to Kitchener, 7 January 1916.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

## VII

Writing some years later, Birdwood claimed that although the British and their allies were defeated at Gallipoli, it was not always realised "how very near our forces came to success".<sup>174</sup> Despite the British failure, "the flower of the Turkish army" had been destroyed, "and prepared the way for Allenby's glorious victory in Palestine in days to come".<sup>175</sup>

There is no doubt that despite being a failure as a campaign, Gallipoli was a personal success for Birdwood. Winston Churchill wrote to his brother John, still serving with Birdwood, on 14 January 1916: "I am so glad you have attached yourself to Birdwood ... He is regarded as the best general we have".<sup>176</sup>

It is clear that Kitchener did not want to evacuate from the Peninsula. Therefore, he was happy to seize on Birdwood's opinion that an evacuation was not in the best interests of the British. Thus, Kitchener was taking more notice of Birdwood's advice because he wanted to, not because he should have. However, Birdwood was relying on reinforcements which the Cabinet was not going to give him. It is clear that Birdwood and Kitchener were each basing their decisions on a different basis. This limited Birdwood because there was no way that his decision could be made with knowledge of the Cabinet's agenda. However, Kitchener, who was a member of the Cabinet, made his decision from another viewpoint: that of accepting the responsibility for the failure of the operation.

Finally, although Birdwood had no responsibility for making the decision to evacuate the Peninsula, there were no limitations imposed on him in the making of the plans to do so.

---

<sup>174</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 296.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Winston Churchill to John Churchill, 14 January 1916, quoted in C.V.3 , 1373.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### I

As discussed briefly in Chapter Two, Birdwood had assumed de facto command of the A.I.F. following the death of Major-General Bridges at Gallipoli in May 1915. Bridges, as commander of the 1st Australian Division, had frequently referred A.I.F. matters to Birdwood, as had his successor, General Legge, who had been sent from Australia to take command of both the division and the A.I.F.<sup>1</sup> Bean asserts that on his departure from Gallipoli in July, Legge agreed that the transfer of the A.I.F. command to Birdwood was desirable.<sup>2</sup> Birdwood wrote to Munro-Ferguson stating that he believed the commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps should also be the commander of the A.I.F.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Government agreed and the powers previously invested in Bridges were delegated to Birdwood. He was not appointed commander of the A.I.F. at this time because it was felt that it would be inconvenient should Australian troops serving outside his command have to be administered by him.<sup>4</sup> Major Griffiths of the 1st Australian Division was transferred to Birdwood's staff as Military Secretary to look after Australian appointments and promotions.<sup>5</sup>

On 5 October, Birdwood issued orders to the corps. These contained a copy of a telegram from the Minister for Defence, addressed to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps commander :

Order in Council issued definitely delegating to G.O.C., Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, all powers previously vested by Order 730 of 1914 in G.O.C., Australian Imperial Force.<sup>6</sup>

This gave Birdwood the following powers:

(a) The power within the [A.I.F.] to change, vary, or group units in such manner as he considers expedient from time to time;

---

<sup>1</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 417.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>3</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 31 August 1915, Novar Papers, MS 696/3355-3357.

<sup>4</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac* , Vol.2, 418.

<sup>5</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 3 October 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/31.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Imperial Force Orders, 5 October 1915, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/72.

(b) The power to transfer officers and men when necessary from one corps or unit to another, and to detail them for any duty in any place which he considers expedient from time to time;

(c) The power to appoint and promote subject to confirmation officers who, in his opinion, are suitable and qualified to fill vacancies in the authorised establishment;

(d) The power to remove officers and men who are unfit by reason of wounds, sickness, or other causes, and to arrange with the High Commissioner in London for their return to Australia;

(e) The power to detail to units the personnel of first and other reinforcements in order to make good wastage due to any cause; and to delegate such power if necessary; and

(f) The power to employ, discharge, attach, or remove civilian personnel required from time to time.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that these powers amounted to giving Birdwood, as they had to Bridges, the role of an administrative commander-in-chief.<sup>8</sup> These powers had been delegated to Birdwood because, as Bean emphasised, he was commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.<sup>9</sup> While Birdwood remained corps commander, his position as administrative commander was rarely questioned. However, when he gave up the field command of the A.I.F., the issue of his administrative command became one of contention. He was jealous of his position and took firm steps to ensure that he retained it when threatened with its loss. Even when it made more sense to give it up as would be the case in 1918, he failed to act in a sensible manner, devoting much of his energy to a campaign to ensure he would hang on to it.

## II

The first matter of any moment concerning the administration of the A.I.F. arose during the Dardanelles campaign when a complaint had been received by the Australian Minister for Defence regarding the training depot in Egypt commanded by Colonel Sellheim.<sup>10</sup> Sellheim considered himself Birdwood's representative in Cairo. His complaint came about because he felt that he had no control over the training and discipline of the Australian

---

<sup>7</sup> Order in Council, No.730, 17 September 1914, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 145.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

reinforcements arriving in Egypt. These tasks had been entrusted to the British by Kitchener, the Secretary of War in London, and had been agreed to by Bridges. They, therefore, did not come under Birdwood's command.<sup>11</sup> The Cairo base had been created to avoid problems with the administration of Australian troops. It now appeared to Senator Pearce in Melbourne that the Australian Government was without influence over some of its own troops.<sup>12</sup> He informed the British Cabinet that the Australian government proposed to appoint an Australian officer to command its troops in Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

Following Birdwood's appointment as commander of the Dardanelles Army in November 1915, Godley, commander of the New Zealand and Australian Division, took over the command of the Anzac Corps. This command also involved the administrative matters of the A.I.F. which had been delegated by Birdwood to Godley. While he held this appointment, Godley made efforts to overhaul the Cairo base by arranging to reconstitute Sellheim's office pending the arrival of Brigadier-General G.G.H.Irving, formerly the Chief of the General Staff in Melbourne, who had been appointed to command the Australian troops in Egypt. Godley's intention was that a new 'Headquarters of the Australian Imperial Force in Egypt' would come into being. This would make Irving "the unquestioned and absolute head of everybody and everything Australian not actually serving with the Army Corps ...".<sup>14</sup> Further, this would make Irving the representative of the government, of the corps commander and of the Australian High Commissioner in London, "and all Imperial Authorities will refer all Australian questions to him".<sup>15</sup> Godley believed that Irving would be recognised as the commander of all Australians not serving with the corps: "[t]his will put matters on a much better footing than they have been hitherto, and will make his position one of unquestioned authority and responsibility".<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that had the Gallipoli campaign continued, command of administration would have passed from Birdwood to another commander, possibly Irving, Birdwood retaining control of the A.I.F.'s fighting arm, the other controlling the base and administration.<sup>17</sup>

---

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 146.

13 Ibid.

14 Godley to Pearce, 10 January 1916, Godley Papers, AWM 3DRL 2233.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 146.

## III

Birdwood had thought for some time that it would be possible to form an Australian Army. He was supported in this by General Sir Archibald Murray who had recently taken over the command of the M.E.F. from Monro. Murray had suggested it to Birdwood who was asked to formulate proposals for his corps and the 30,000 Australian reinforcements recently arrived in Egypt.<sup>18</sup> Despite Murray's approval, the idea was rejected by General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London, who could not see that it would serve any useful purpose.<sup>19</sup> Bean noted that according to many senior British officers, Birdwood had progressed too quickly because of his connection with the Australians and because he was a 'Kitchener man'.<sup>20</sup> These factors could have been reasons for Robertson's attitude. A more likely reason was the fact that Robertson was wary of the autonomy that an 'Australian Army' implied.

Although he would not sanction the formation of an army, Robertson did sanction the formation of two corps, one to be commanded by Birdwood, the other by Godley. Birdwood told Murray that he had no objections to this, but commented that because all Australian promotions and appointments were made by him, it would be difficult to work successfully. It seemed to him "absolutely essential there should be one authority in command".<sup>21</sup> To overcome this problem, Birdwood suggested to Murray that he, Birdwood, perhaps remain in general command of all Australians and New Zealanders, with the executive command of one corps. He admitted that this idea was not really satisfactory because it would mean another shuffle when an army was eventually formed, "as it doubtless will be".<sup>22</sup>

Birdwood suggested to Lynden Bell, Chief of Staff at G.H.Q., M.E.F., that he be given command of the corps with the five Australian divisions under him.<sup>23</sup> He felt that with all five under his command, smooth working would be ensured. He argued that with an army to be eventually formed, there would be less confusion later.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, Birdwood had no intention of giving up his position or of surrendering any of its associated

---

<sup>18</sup> Birdwood diary, 20 January 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>19</sup> Bean diary, February 1916, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Birdwood to Fitzgerald, 7 February 1916, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL147.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Birdwood to Lynden Bell, 7 February 1916, Heyes Papers, AWM 45/31/3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

powers. It is not difficult to understand the reason for this: had he surrendered any part of his administrative responsibilities, it is likely that he would have had to give up the command completely as many believed he should. Birdwood was naturally wary of giving his critics the smallest excuse to relieve him of this post.

Because the administration of the A.I.F. was under Birdwood's control, he had been given two staffs, one to administer the A.I.F., the other his army corps. He told Pearce that "[f]rom the former I issue orders to both Corps, only one of which is under me - it is a rather Gilbertian situation ...".<sup>25</sup> He told Hamilton, the former M.E.F. commander that one of his staffs "solemnly issues orders to the other ...", and had Godley and he not been on good terms, the situation would have been unworkable.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV

On 14 March, it was confirmed that Birdwood was to command the corps going to France. Robertson thus felt able to suggest to Murray that as Birdwood was leaving and the Australian contingent would be separated, it was an ideal opportunity for Murray to take control and to deal directly himself with the Australian and New Zealand governments.<sup>27</sup> To Murray, it was clear that Birdwood would not be able to perform his duties as a corps commander in France and, at the same time, to deal with administrative matters in both France and Egypt.<sup>28</sup>

But Birdwood was determined that he could continue to perform both functions. He told Hankey that he would still like to see an army formed with the freedom for him "to move between France, Egypt, and London, until such time as the two Corps are brought together in one theatre of operations".<sup>29</sup> He told Murray that he did not believe in duality of control because it seemed essential to him that there should be "one controlling authority for the Dominion Forces who should preferably be the Officer Commanding the Australian and New Zealand Forces in the field".<sup>30</sup> He pointed out that,

---

<sup>25</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 20 February 1916, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/9/8.

<sup>26</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 25 February 1916, Hamilton Papers 5/10.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson to Murray, 14 March 1916, Heyes Papers, AWM 45/30/2.

<sup>28</sup> Murray to Birdwood, 16 March 1916 in *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Birdwood to Hankey, 16 March 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/46.

<sup>30</sup> Birdwood to Murray, 17 March 1916, Heyes Papers, AWM 45/30/2.



While the forces are all employed in the same field this imposes no difficulty for we have already provided the machinery to relieve the Commander of administrative detail by the establishment of "Headquarters of the A.I.F." and "N.Z.M.F." respectively.<sup>31</sup>

Birdwood felt that the reason he had been able to keep his command intact without an army formation was because he had "a special small staff of four officers in my capacity of Commandant of the A.I.F.".<sup>32</sup> With these officers he had been able to carry out a reorganisation of the administration of the A.I.F. and was able to carry out transfers and alterations throughout the whole force without friction.<sup>33</sup>

He realised that with the corps now being split, one going to France, the other remaining in Egypt, the formation of an army was no longer feasible as a tactical unit. However, it could be so administratively.<sup>34</sup> He had made arrangements for the administration to be carried on after his departure "quite comfortably, and reported to the Australian Army Headquarters, which I think should be established in London".<sup>35</sup> He proposed the appointment of a commandant who could deal with all correspondence. This had been the case at Gallipoli when he had a headquarters in Cairo which dealt directly with him. Now that he was going to France, he proposed the establishment of a London headquarters with a branch in Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

According to Lynden Bell, Birdwood ignored the fact that Godley had the same powers as himself regarding the New Zealanders.<sup>37</sup> Murray proposed to do away with all dual control and to obtain authority from both the Australian and New Zealand governments to centralise all statutory powers regarding administration, postings and appointments in the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt, and to delegate to the corps commanders the powers regarding administration, postings and appointments in each corps.<sup>38</sup>

Murray believed that Birdwood had "a distinct eye to his future and will gather in and retain all that helps towards that".<sup>39</sup> Birdwood was of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Birdwood to Fitzgerald, 17 March 1916, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/64 WL150.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Lynden Bell to Maurice, 21 March 1916, Lynden Bell Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Murray to Robertson, 23 March 1916, Robertson Papers I/32/15.

opinion that Murray could no better administer the forces in two different places than he could himself from France.<sup>40</sup> Quite clearly, Birdwood had no intention of relinquishing his charter with the Australian government. The other major factor to consider was that the remaining Australians in Egypt were soon to join the rest of the contingent in France. It therefore made sense for the control to stay in Birdwood's domain.

On 24 March, Birdwood urged Pearce to allow him to continue as Commandant of the A.I.F and to establish a headquarters office in London as a central base.<sup>41</sup> The same day, he "took the bull by the horns" and wrote to Munro-Ferguson saying that he proposed sending his headquarters staff to London to establish a headquarters there, leaving a branch in Egypt : "I have delegated considerable powers to divisional generals to carry out all junior promotions etc. in their divisions, and I now propose to delegate full powers to General Godley concerning the two divisions left behind here ...".<sup>42</sup> This was clearly a smart move on Birdwood's part as he had pre-empted any action the Australian government may have wanted to take to force him to relinquish his charter.

## V

Birdwood left for France in March with the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions under his command. According to Lynden Bell, Birdwood now had another line of argument to retain command of the A.I.F. "which is that the 3rd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions are certain to go to France before long and therefore he should maintain the control in his hands now".<sup>43</sup>

Robertson told Murray that "I know Birdwood very well, and exactly the game he is up to ...".<sup>44</sup> He had told Kitchener that there could be "no personal nonsense of the kind in question". Birdwood must go to France and command his troops in the field and leave it at that : "It is more than foolish to think that he could possibly command a Corps there and also be Head Administrator of the Australian Forces".<sup>45</sup> Birdwood clearly disagreed with Robertson's assessment.

---

<sup>40</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 24 March 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 24 March 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL 2574/12/24.

<sup>43</sup> Lynden Bell to Maurice, 27 March 1916, Lynden Bell Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Robertson to Murray, 5 April 1916, Robertson Papers I/32/19.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

In London, the Australian Prime Minister, W.M.Hughes, complained to Robertson that he had understood that the Australian troops were to be kept together and now were to be "cut up and brigaded" with others. This was sure to dampen the Australians' enthusiasm.<sup>46</sup> He felt "perfectly sure that infinitely better results will be gained if we have an Australian army commanded by General Birdwood, a man in every way competent, who knows the Australian soldier and who is respected and loved and admired by him ...".<sup>47</sup> The British commander-in-chief, Haig, told Robertson that it had never been his intention to separate the Australians. Therefore, "[y]ou can ... assure the P.M. of the Commonwealth that so long as I am in command in France 'the Australian Corps' will not be broken up".<sup>48</sup> Robertson communicated this to Hughes adding that every effort would be made to keep all the Australian troops together, but that normally an army had twelve divisions while the Australian and New Zealand divisions numbered only six.<sup>49</sup> This was not strictly accurate as an army could consist of any number of divisions according to the needs of the moment.

In April, Birdwood attended a meeting at the War Office where it was arranged that all the training of Australian troops would now take place in England, rather than in Egypt. The War Office was to provide accommodation for 30,000 troops on Salisbury Plain. Birdwood had asked for Sellheim and the New Zealand headquarters to be sent over at once.<sup>50</sup> It was thought advisable to have an Australian officer in London who could answer for Birdwood at the War Office and be responsible to it for all Australian matters.<sup>51</sup> On 9 May, the Army Council decided that the Australian administrative headquarters were to be moved from Egypt to London at once.<sup>52</sup>

Birdwood was still frustrated in June that there had been no decision made as to his administration of the force which he found "a nuisance".<sup>53</sup> He suggested to Pearce in a letter on 6 June that a new Order in Council be issued specifically vesting in him by name the powers he held as Anzac Corps commander, or alternatively, appoint him as Commandant of the A.I.F. in the Commonwealth Gazette, and to vest the powers in the

---

<sup>46</sup> Hughes to Robertson, 12 April 1916, Robertson Papers I/35/51.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Haig to Robertson, 16 April 1916, Robertson Papers I/35/52/1.

<sup>49</sup> Robertson to Hughes, 17 April 1916, Robertson Papers I/35/53.

<sup>50</sup> Birdwood to White, 21 April 1916, White Papers in possession of Lady Derham.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Cubitt to Haig, 9 May 1916, Heyes Papers 45/31/4.

<sup>53</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 6 June 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

Commandant.<sup>54</sup> Birdwood was apparently becoming much more concerned that he may not continue in his role as administrative head of the A.I.F. Clearly, it was his intention to ensure that he did so. Birdwood's request was granted. In September, Pearce wrote to tell him that the War Office had agreed to his being gazetted to the command of all the Australian forces, although they had still not agreed to the formation of an Australian Army.<sup>55</sup> Haig noted in his diary on 22 June that he had seen Birdwood that day. They had discussed Hughes's desire for the formation of an Australian Army. Birdwood "said the Australians were anxious to have an Army, but any time before the end of the war would do!"<sup>56</sup>

Birdwood conceded that there were not sufficient Australian and New Zealand troops to form an army. Therefore, it was impossible for them all to be under his direct command.<sup>57</sup> But the force was too large to form one corps which would mean the exclusion of the New Zealanders, "a break in Anzac tradition".<sup>58</sup>

At this time, Pearce asked Birdwood how he would regard his powers being disseminated to Godley, GOC of the 2nd Anzac Corps, and Chauvel, commander of the Anzac Mounted Division, still in Egypt. Birdwood was, of course, for continuing with the status quo. He emphasised to Pearce that it was "essential ... that there should be one head for the whole A.I.F. as the only possible means of ensuring uniformity, coordination and justice to all".<sup>59</sup> Alec Hill makes the point that while it was better in the long run for the A.I.F. to be a unified command, there was no reason for either Birdwood or White not to have made a visit to Egypt, "to see and be seen".<sup>60</sup> Whether such a visit would have been beneficial or practical is open to debate. There is no evidence to suggest that Chauvel's division suffered as a result of its isolation in Egypt.

Birdwood pointed out to Pearce that Hughes had told Haig that should an Australian and New Zealand Army not be formed, it was the government's wish that the whole Australian contingent should remain under Birdwood for administrative purposes.<sup>61</sup> Also, he pointed out that

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Pearce to Birdwood, 14 September 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/25.

<sup>56</sup> Haig diary, 22 June 1916, WO 256/10/9/65.

<sup>57</sup> Birdwood to Kiggell, 23 June 1916, Kiggell Papers V/21.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 14 July 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>60</sup> A.J.Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978), 72-73.

<sup>61</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 14 July 1916.

Chauvel in Egypt was carrying on "perfectly comfortably" with the powers Birdwood had passed on to him. He noted that as things were running so smoothly and to the satisfaction of all the senior Australian officers, "it would seem a pity to make any alterations".<sup>62</sup>

As previously mentioned, Birdwood's appointment as G.O.C., A.I.F. was confirmed on 14 September 1916. He exercised this command for the remainder of the war using a small, efficient staff.<sup>63</sup> The great advantages with having a unified command were, first, there was no rivalry for supreme command of the A.I.F. as it rested solely in Birdwood. Secondly, the A.I.F. enjoyed freedom from political control, social influences and personal jealousies.<sup>64</sup> (This was certainly true until 1918 and will be discussed later in this chapter.) For Birdwood personally, the role of commander of the A.I.F. gave a status that no other corps commander had. No doubt, he revelled in his dual roles of administrator and of field commander. The former was the senior position, but the latter had the prestige. The combination of both was an obvious attraction to Birdwood's vanity. For practical purposes, it made good sense for Birdwood to be in command of the whole rather than breaking it up.

## VI

Following the 1st Anzac Corps' operation at Bullecourt in May 1917, a further push was made for the formation of an Australian Army. The journalist, Keith Murdoch, who acted as unofficial adviser to the Australian Prime Minister, told Hughes in July that the troops had a "strong and insistent desire to fight together". However, GHQ insisted on maintaining its policy of regarding Australian units as "mere British in the Imperial hotchpotch".<sup>65</sup> Bean wrote to Lloyd George, now British Prime Minister, in the same vein, urging that Australians be allowed to fight together because of their "intensely strong family feeling".<sup>66</sup>

Birdwood sympathised with both men, as it was certainly in his interest to agree. However, he realised there was only a slim chance of it happening. He told Murdoch that because troops were at Haig's disposal in France, it would be difficult to keep the divisions continually together, but

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 186.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>65</sup> Murdoch to Hughes, 14 July 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/33.

<sup>66</sup> Bean to Lloyd George, 15 July 1917, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/82.

that he realised "how enormously their value does go up when they are fighting side by side".<sup>67</sup> The solution seemed to Birdwood to be the formation of an 'Australian and New Zealand Army' which could consist of the two existing Anzac Corps together with other corps attached to it "from time to time".<sup>68</sup>

No doubt because of the urgings from Murdoch and Bean, Munro-Ferguson cabled the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London pointing out that now the Australian force exceeded 100,000 men in the fighting line, it seemed appropriate that more regard should be given to Australian formations and the employment of Australian officers on the Staffs.<sup>69</sup> It was desirable that a senior officer be appointed to the War Office to safeguard Australian interests.<sup>70</sup>

In reply, the Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he had consulted with the Army Council which had noted that the majority of staff appointments within the Australian divisions were already filled by Australian officers.<sup>71</sup> It was hoped that the Australian Government did not wish only Australians to serve on the staffs of Australian formations because the Army Council regarded staff generally as an Imperial organisation in which officers of both Dominion and British forces were interchangeable.<sup>72</sup> As the A.I.F. Headquarters in London already had a commanding officer who exercised, to all intents and purposes, the function of Australian representative at the War Office, no further action was considered necessary.<sup>73</sup> For his part, Birdwood was much in favour of replacing British staff officers with Australians at I Anzac Corps Headquarters whenever the opportunity arose.<sup>74</sup> He was doubtful that it would be possible to effect this policy at II Anzac because of the mixed composition of the corps.<sup>75</sup>

The Australian Government was disappointed with the Army Council's response. The Governor-General in reply emphasised the Government's wish that the five Australian divisions be grouped together

---

<sup>67</sup> Birdwood to Murdoch, 15 July 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/33.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Munro-Ferguson to Long, 30 July 1917, Birdwood Papers, MSS EUR D 686/57/2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Long to Munro-Ferguson, 11 August 1917, Birdwood Papers, MSS EUR D 686/57/6.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 9 August 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/79.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

in one or two corps staffed by Australian officers.<sup>76</sup> In London, Murdoch was fuelling Hughes' wish for a separate Australian corps by cabling to Australia that the Army Council had misunderstood the request although he gave no reason for this assertion.<sup>77</sup> He also asserted that an Australian representative was necessary at the War Office because although Birdwood filled this role as commander of the A.I.F., he owed "absolute allegiance to Haig and is at Haig's mercy as corps commander".<sup>78</sup>

Birdwood agreed with the Army Council in this matter.<sup>79</sup> However, Murdoch's assertion is unlikely. As discussed earlier, Birdwood was never in any danger of being removed from his position as a corps commander. He had by this time, reinforced his position as Anzac commander and Haig would have been well aware of the danger of removing him when he enjoyed the confidence of the Australian Government and, in particular, the troops under his command. For example, Chauvel, who commanded the Australian troops in Egypt, told White that he had every confidence in Birdwood and that he had no difficulties with the present system of administration.<sup>80</sup> Nor did he have any desire to alter it as long as Birdwood remained in command :

... though I feel that it would be logical and economical to run Egypt as a separate administrative command, corresponding direct with Australia, these advantages are outweighed by the prestige established by General Birdwood, the protection, to a large extent, from political interference and his own personality.<sup>81</sup>

Birdwood and the Australian Government were in step on the formation of an army or, at least, the wish for the five Australian divisions to serve together. On 29 August, Birdwood wrote to Plumer, commander of the Second Army under which the Anzac Corps was serving. He said that he wished to emphasise the Australian Government's desire that their troops serve together especially as it had been suggested that there was a possibility of the 4th Australian Division being transferred to Birdwood's corps from the II Anzac Corps.<sup>82</sup> As the Australian Government's

---

<sup>76</sup> Munro-Ferguson to Long, 25 August 1917, Birdwood Papers, MSS EUR D 686/57/10.

<sup>77</sup> Murdoch to Hughes, 26 August 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/34.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 29 August 1917, Birdwood Papers, MSS EUR D 686/57/11.

<sup>80</sup> Chauvel to White, 26 August 1917, White Papers, MS 5172/60.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Birdwood to Plumer, 29 August 1917, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/9/54.

representative, he felt that he must represent their views as strongly as he could both to the army commander and to the commander-in-chief.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, he was not intimidated by doing so. As a result, the 4th Australian Division was transferred to Birdwood's corps.<sup>84</sup>

Murdoch reported again to Hughes in August that the 4th Australian Division now came under Birdwood. An attempt should now be made through the British Cabinet to have the 3rd Australian Division, serving with Godleys II Anzac Corps, transferred to Birdwood's corps.<sup>85</sup> He noted how strongly Birdwood opposed the idea of a representative at the War Office. Murdoch felt that he himself should act unofficially as Hughes' agent in this matter : "Birdwood and White strongly deprecate any new tie to [the] War Office but agree [to the] desirability of filling [the] existing blank and suggest that [the] present informal liaison be strengthened".<sup>86</sup>

Monash, commander of the 3rd Australian Division, told his wife how the Australian Government was making strenuous efforts to get rid of II Anzac Corps headquarters because it had no Australian staff at all, only British.<sup>87</sup> He referred to Birdwood's reputation as a 'Kitchener man', noting that now Kitchener was gone, Birdwood did not enjoy any popularity with the Army Council or with Robertson.<sup>88</sup> But as David Woodward comments, Birdwood's standing was probably more easily explained by his strong defence of Australian interests as opposed to British interests.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer, The Soldiers' General* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), 211.

<sup>85</sup> Murdoch to Hughes, 30 August 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/34.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Monash to wife, 1 September 1917, Monash Papers, MS 1884/4/127/938.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> David R.Woodward (ed), *The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff , December 1915- February 1918* (London: The Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1989), 332.



## VII

Following a meeting with Kiggell, Haig's Chief of Staff, on 2 September, Murdoch emphasised in a letter to him how the removal of Birdwood from the fighting command of the Australians would be regarded as a serious blow to the A.I.F.<sup>90</sup> Apparently this question had arisen following a meeting between Haig, Kiggell and Murdoch the previous day regarding the possibility of certain changes in the I Anzac Corps, namely the removal of Birdwood from the corps command to administration. Monash would be given command of the corps.<sup>91</sup> Murdoch now was trying to correct any impression he may have given that the removal of Birdwood from the field to administration would be condoned by the Australian Government. On the contrary, it would be regarded as a serious blow to the A.I.F. because Birdwood's administrative position depended on his field command and the prestige he had created in the force.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, Haig wanted Birdwood removed from the I Anzac Corps command because he (Birdwood) was very much in favour of having all Australian divisions serve in the same corps. Murdoch who spoke on Hughes' behalf, commented that while "we would not question that ... the decision of Sir Douglas [Haig] must be loyally accepted ... I do think that Australia would resent the removal of its field commander for anything else than incapacity".<sup>93</sup> In a veiled threat, Murdoch commented that "[p]ersonally, if Birdwood were removed I should dread a controversy over some of the Australian battles, and that would do infinite harm".<sup>94</sup> Especially, no doubt, to Haig.

In late September, the Australian Government again requested that the British Cabinet consider the grouping together of all Australian troops under the command of Birdwood and staffed by Australian officers.<sup>95</sup> Birdwood told Murdoch a month later that he had heard from White that Monash was to take command of II Anzac Corps. He did not know where this would leave Godley. He opined that, "as we well know, it would not meet Australia's wishes in the very least, for it would not alter the situation

---

<sup>90</sup> Murdoch to Kiggell, 2 September 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/34.

<sup>91</sup> Bean diary, 11 October 1917, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/90.

<sup>92</sup> Murdoch to Kiggell, 2 September 1917.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Munro-Ferguson to Long, 26 September 1917, Birdwood Papers, MSS EUR D 686/57/15.

in the slightest".<sup>96</sup> Haig still believed that tactically, five divisions grouped into a single corps was unworkable.<sup>97</sup>

However, on 3 November, Haig decided to form all five Australian divisions into a single corps commanded by Birdwood.<sup>98</sup> This new corps was to be known as the 'Australian Corps'. In a letter to his divisional generals, Birdwood explained that Haig had arrived at this decision upon being informed by Birdwood that by early spring, the five existing Australian divisions would be faced with a deficiency of some 8,000 men with no available reinforcements to replace them.<sup>99</sup> Haig had therefore decided that one of the divisions must be regarded as a reserve from which the others could draw reinforcements.<sup>100</sup>

Birdwood was delighted with the result of his campaign for the formation of an Australian Corps. He told Murdoch that he had received orders to send a division to II Anzac Corps and to continue as before with two Anzac corps, one under Godley, the other under him.<sup>101</sup> He continued:

On this, I went down to GHQ to have an interview with the Chief [Haig] and Kiggell, and at once launched a strong counter-attack, demanding all five divisions in accordance with the wishes of the Commonwealth Government. I was at first told that it was quite impossible and all sorts of reasons were given, each of which I think I was able to out-manoeuvre in turn, and eventually turned their flank with the results I have mentioned.<sup>102</sup>

## VIII

On 13 May 1918, Birdwood wrote to Pearce to inform him that he (Birdwood) was to take over the command of the Fifth Army.<sup>103</sup> Despite his wish to remain with the Australian Corps, Haig had made it quite clear that should he refuse the appointment, it would block promotion and no Australian officer could hope to command the corps. Haig pointed out that

---

<sup>96</sup> Birdwood to Murdoch, 26 October 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/34.

<sup>97</sup> Haig diary, 29 October 1917, WO 256/23/21/55.

<sup>98</sup> Birdwood diary, 3 November 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>99</sup> Birdwood to GOC, All Australian Divisions, 3 November 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/33.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Birdwood to Murdoch, 4 November 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/21.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 13 May 1918, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/9/13.

as far as Australia was concerned, it would be gratified that its corps commander had been promoted to the command of an army and would be succeeded by an Australian officer.<sup>104</sup> Birdwood, of course, could only agree.

As early as the previous March, Birdwood had suggested to Pearce that should he have to leave the corps command himself, he would recommend Monash to the Australian Government as a suitable replacement. Birdwood would retain his position of G.O.C., A.I.F.<sup>105</sup> It is clear that he had had some indication that a move of this nature would be required of him. He reiterated his opinion that Monash should succeed him despite the separate claims of White, Hobbs, commander of the 5th Australian Division, and of Monash.<sup>106</sup> Birdwood had discussed with all three the administration of the A.I.F., and was able to tell Pearce that they were all of the opinion that Birdwood should retain his position of G.O.C., A.I.F.<sup>107</sup>

Murdoch did not share this opinion. He told Birdwood that he could not run an army and continue in his administrative role with the Australians.<sup>108</sup> However, Birdwood received a telegram in late May from Australia informing him that the Commonwealth had agreed to his continuing as G.O.C., A.I.F.<sup>109</sup>

Birdwood believed that it was the "unanimous wish of the troops" that he retain his A.I.F. position. But he acknowledged that there was a "curious semi-political undercurrent headed by Murdoch" which wanted him to relinquish it.<sup>110</sup> He thought that although Murdoch had the interests of Australia at heart, he was instead doing the country a disservice, and "this I know to be the opinion of all my senior officers here ...".<sup>111</sup>

On 31 May, Monash took over command of the corps.<sup>112</sup> Bean noted in his diary that day how both Birdwood and Monash had tried to persuade him that it was possible for the administration to be run by Birdwood. <sup>113</sup> Bean noted, however, "that the work which really waits to be done by the G.O.C., A.I.F. is greater than any army commander can undertake in his

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 12 March 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>106</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 13 May 1918.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Murdoch to Birdwood, 25 May 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/27.

<sup>109</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 27 May 1918, Novar Papers, MS 696/3306.

<sup>110</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 29 May 1918, Hamilton Papers 1/14.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Birdwood diary, 31 May 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>113</sup> Bean diary, 31 May 1918, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/113.

spare time".<sup>114</sup> It would have been sensible for Monash, as corps commander, to command the A.I.F. as a whole just as Birdwood had done.

Hughes agreed with Bean. On his arrival in Britain in June, he let it be known that should Birdwood's command of the Fifth Army become permanent (it was still temporary), the position of G.O.C., A.I.F. would become vacant.<sup>115</sup> Hughes noted that senior officers such as White and Monash owed their promotions to Birdwood. This may have swayed their judgment.<sup>116</sup>

In a letter to Hughes, Birdwood emphasised that his army command must be regarded as temporary and he could revert to the corps command at any time. All appointments, including the promotion of Monash to the corps must be regarded as temporary also.<sup>117</sup> He continued :

This being the case I think you may perhaps not wish to consider any alteration in existing arrangements until this question is cleared up ... I believe I am right in thinking that the present organisation has resulted in smooth and efficient working of the A.I.F., and the fact of my having gone to an Army really makes far less difference in my position than might appear to be the case at first sight.<sup>118</sup>

Monash in a heated letter to Pearce on 21 June, defended Birdwood's retention of the A.I.F. position.<sup>119</sup> Angry that the present intrigues had been allowed to bring pressure to bear on Birdwood, Monash said :

General Birdwood's personality counts for everything in the A.I.F. He possesses the complete confidence of the whole force. His decisions and his authority have never been questioned. He has kept the force free from intrigue, contented and immune from outside interference. He has been the chief factor in creating and maintaining its prestige and its spirit of unity.

In his new higher status as an Army Commander, his authority and influence for the benefit of the Force will be greater, instead of less. It is not in the least anomolous for one or more of the Divisions to be employed in other Armies than his. Even while he was Corps Commander, the Divisions were frequently fighting temporarily

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Hughes to Pearce, 17 June 1918, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/8/64(p).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Birdwood to Hughes, 18 June 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/16.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Monash to Pearce, 21 June 1918, Birdwood Papers, MS 474.

under two, and sometimes under three, separate Army Commanders, and they will assuredly do so again.<sup>120</sup>

It was in Monash's interest to hold on to the field command as it was the one with the prestige although the administrative command was the senior position. Should Birdwood have given up the A.I.F. command, Monash would have been the natural successor to it. White would probably have taken the field command.

Murdoch maintained that Birdwood had organised a strong defence among the Australians and believed that he wanted to retain the position for its prestige, for the patronage it allowed him to give and for the chance of some future advantage.<sup>121</sup> All this was no doubt true, but Murdoch was unable to mount a plausible argument for changing the present system. He suggested changes in personnel without giving good reasons for doing so.

Six weeks after taking command of the Fifth Army, Birdwood was able to tell Pearce that he now had more time to devote to Australian matters. He made the extraordinary statement : "I really have ... considerably more leisure than I had as a corps commander, where I necessarily had to go into so many minute details, which I now naturally have to delegate to the corps commanders under me".<sup>122</sup>

Following a meeting between Hughes and the senior Australian generals in July, Birdwood told Munro-Ferguson that they had all urged the Prime Minister emphatically not to change the present system in any way.<sup>123</sup> He continued :

Personally, I feel I can look on all this from quite a detached point of view. The appointment, as you know, has no personal advantages for me whatever. I am only glad to be able to hold it with the feeling ... that I can be of more real assistance to officers and men, and the force in general, than I believe any other officer who has been engaged with our troops ... I have at times felt almost inclined to ask deliberately to be relieved of the command through my feelings of annoyance at what I am told is the considerable amount of intrigue which is taking place on the subject, and I have only refrained from doing so being urged by Monash and others in the matter.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Murdoch, "Rough Notes Upon the Australian Army Changes", n.d., Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/34.

<sup>122</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 8 July 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>123</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 10 July 1918, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL 2574/17.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

It is difficult to believe Birdwood's assertion that he really had little interest in retaining the command. However, it is clear that the senior generals were loath for him to leave the position regardless of whether they owed their promotions to him.

Hughes was still not satisfied with the situation. He believed that the corps and administration should be commanded by different men.<sup>125</sup> His resolve strengthened in late July when he received a letter from the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Henry Wilson, to the effect that Birdwood's command of the Fifth Army had been confirmed as had Monash's appointment as corps commander.<sup>126</sup> Wilson suggested that perhaps the altered circumstances would allow Hughes to reconsider the A.I.F. command.<sup>127</sup>

This brought matters to a head. Hughes cabled a recommendation to the Australian Cabinet urging their approval of allowing him to offer Birdwood a choice between remaining G.O.C., A.I.F. or commander of the Fifth Army.<sup>128</sup> The Cabinet agreed to this request.<sup>129</sup> On 12 August, Hughes made the offer to Birdwood stressing that the administration demanded the "undivided attention of the best man we can lay our hands on".<sup>130</sup>

In reply, Birdwood maintained that he was unable to resign his army command without reference to the commander-in-chief. He was forwarding Hughes' letter to Haig for decision.<sup>131</sup> Haig decided that Birdwood should take the A.I.F. position but that he should stay with the Fifth Army until 30 November if Hughes agreed.<sup>132</sup>

Birdwood relayed Haig's decision to Hughes and added that it was his ardent wish to remain with the Australians.<sup>133</sup> But Hughes was not enthusiastic.<sup>134</sup> It is clear that Hughes was trying to avoid a confrontation with Birdwood on the issue. Some weeks later, on 18 October, Birdwood

---

<sup>125</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Vol. 6, *The A.I.F. in France: May 1918-The Armistice* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 213.

<sup>126</sup> Wilson to Hughes, 27 July 1918, Hughes Papers, MS 1538/23/165.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Hughes to Pearce, 1 August 1918, AA, CP A360/8/1/1.

<sup>129</sup> Pearce to Hughes, 9 August 1918, AA, CP A 6006/1918/8/7.

<sup>130</sup> Hughes to Birdwood, 12 August 1918, Birdwood Papers, MS 474.

<sup>131</sup> Birdwood to Hughes, 15 August 1918 in *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Lawrence to Birdwood, 24 August 1918 in *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Birdwood to Hughes, 24 August 1918 in *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Hughes to Birdwood, 18 September 1918 in *ibid.*

told Pearce that no decision had been made by Hughes.<sup>135</sup> Monash confirmed this in a letter to his wife, saying that Hughes was "studiously" avoiding Birdwood.<sup>136</sup>

By the time the war ended on 11 November, Birdwood was still unclear as to Hughes' intentions.<sup>137</sup> On the 21st, they met in London where Hughes told Birdwood that he wished him to retain command of the A.I.F.<sup>138</sup> Had the war not ended when it did, Birdwood would no doubt have lost this position.

## IX

During Birdwood's tenure as both Anzac Corps commander and A.I.F. commander, many issues had been raised which required his attention. These included the conscription referenda of 1916 and of 1917 in which he took an active role on behalf of the Australian Government ; the question of the imposition of the death sentence for Australian deserters ; the problems associated with venereal disease among the troops ; and, particularly, the question of the promotion of Australian officers to fill jobs carried out by British officers. This last point was a bone of contention for nearly the whole period of Birdwood's command. It must be said that he was a great promoter of the Australian cause in the matter, always promoting a qualified Australian to a vacancy when possible. All these issues, and others, exercised Birdwood's powers as an administrator and, sometimes, as a politician. As always, he had the happy knack of choosing subordinates who could do the work without troubling him unnecessarily. He was not a man for organisation, but was a "rare natural leader" who was fortunate to have an able assistant in White.<sup>139</sup> It was because he was always with the men, as one of them, that he enjoyed the confidence of the A.I.F.<sup>140</sup>

Birdwood's position as commander of the I Anzac Corps was different to the other British corps commanders. He alone was responsible not only to the British high command, but also to the Australian government. It must be said that this fact never seemed to limit his authority or his capacity in the A.I.F. command. The only other corps commander who had a similar

---

<sup>135</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 18 October 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>136</sup> Monash to wife, 3 November 1918, Monash Papers, MS 1884/4/127/938.

<sup>137</sup> Birdwood to wife, 11 November 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>138</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 12 December 1918, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/9/88.

<sup>139</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: May 1918-The Armistice*, 211.

<sup>140</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 187.

experience was the Canadian, Currie, who was a Canadian national. Birdwood, of course, was not an Australian.

It appears that Birdwood's main limitation in his role of G.O.C., A.I.F. was the one imposed by his personality. It is clear that he should have withdrawn from the position when first promoted to an army command, allowing it to pass to someone with the time to carry out the duties required. Birdwood could even be accused of a certain irresponsibility in this matter. He was, after all, a soldier, not a politician.

That he never realised his wish of forming an Australian Army was partly due to political reasons at the War Office, and partly due to the fact that the Australian government was intent on Birdwood remaining in command of its contingent. He was still a relatively new corps commander who had enemies, and probably enough of them to tilt the scales against his ambition at that time. Had the Australian government been more intent on the formation of an army, Birdwood may have succeeded in his wish. But the reality was that it appeared to be indifferent in this matter, and was happy to retain the status quo.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### I

A striking feature of Birdwood's autobiography, *Khaki and Gown*, is that he devotes only thirty pages (out of some four hundred) to his period of service on the Western Front as commander of the I Anzac Corps. What attention he does give, deals mainly with personal matters. Although he gives some fifty pages to the period he spent at Gallipoli, offering by no means a comprehensive history of the Dardanelles campaign, it contained far more detail than he gave the Western Front period. As Birdwood in explanation disingenuously stated, a full treatment was hardly necessary because the Australian official historian, Charles Bean, had produced an "incomparable account" of all the operations concerned.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the highlight of Birdwood's war service was the Gallipoli campaign. There he was able to exercise an effectively independent command. In France, he was under the scrutiny of GHQ and was naturally accountable to his army commander. Like all corps commanders serving on the Western Front, he had to operate within clearly prescribed parameters. He was unable to act independently because of the need to co-ordinate actions with flanking corps. Tim Travers points out that the officer corps during the war, "found itself with a GHQ in France that ... detached itself from the rest of the army, [and] was reluctant to admit external advice ...".<sup>2</sup>

Travers maintains that most senior officers were afraid of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig. This made them unwilling to risk their careers by questioning his decisions. Nor were they prepared to make suggestions at conferences.<sup>3</sup> This fact led to the opening of a huge chasm between Haig's GHQ and the army commanders.<sup>4</sup> And, no doubt, to a similar void between army commanders and corps commanders.

It appears that this was not a very happy period in Birdwood's career. He was not accustomed to service in the British Army nor with the foibles of its hierarchy despite having been a soldier all his life. This perhaps highlighted the differences between the British and Indian Armies, of

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 308.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Travers, "The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.17 (1982), 538.

<sup>3</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 104.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

which Birdwood was a product. He clearly looked back on this time with little satisfaction. His experiences showed the reasons for this.

During 1916, the year in which the Battle of the Somme was fought, the 1 Anzac Corps lost some 23,000 officers and men between July and September. The 1st Australian Division lost 7,700, the 2nd 8,100, and the 4th 7,100.<sup>5</sup> In the same period, the 1st Australian Division spent a total of fourteen days in the firing line, the 2nd sixteen days, and the 4th seventeen days. Bean recorded that the result of this period was "a certain bitterness towards the high command" among the troops.<sup>6</sup> He noted that the prevailing strategy of repeated advances on narrow fronts were dreaded and detested by the men.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising that these tactics were extremely unpopular. They required troops to maintain pressure on the enemy by repeated assaults on what were often unsuitable for such combat. Haig firmly believed that this lack of respite would wear the enemy down. Therefore, while the main body of his troops were being saved for a major push, it was left to a small number of divisions to attack constantly on a small scale at different points. But this constant battering was often far more draining on the attackers than on the defenders. This proved to be the case at Pozieres.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this period, Birdwood retained the favour of his troops. But Bean noted that he "incurred a marked loss of popularity in some quarters through the notion that he had too readily offered to undertake impossible tasks".<sup>9</sup> This is not surprising given that he was forced to fight in almost impossible conditions and because the traditional officer corps maintained an unrelenting sense of loyalty and deference which would not permit criticism of the hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> This was no less so at the Somme where Birdwood was given demanding orders that he could not refuse.

## II

The battle, which had commenced on 1 July, was conceived in February 1916, when Haig had committed the British to an offensive the following summer in the Somme sector. It was chosen by Joffre, the French

---

<sup>5</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Vol.3, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 862.

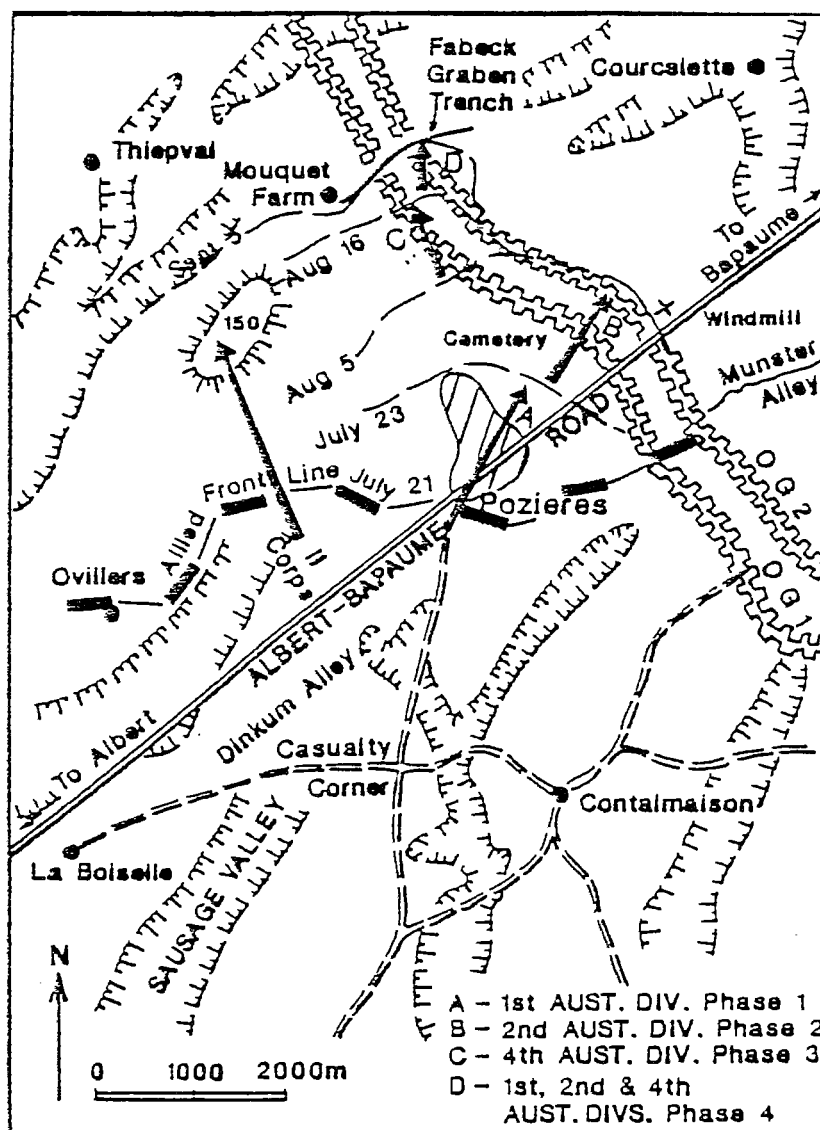
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 871.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 872-873.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 876.

<sup>10</sup> Travers, "The British Officer Corps, 1900-1918", 538.



commander, because it was the point where British and French armies joined and where he could control the British participation. Haig had initially selected Flanders for the British offensive.<sup>11</sup> However, he realised the virtues of attacking with the French on a broad front and agreed to a combined attack on the German line.<sup>12</sup> John Terraine has written that criticism of the Battle of the Somme is rarely made on strategic grounds. Critics have generally focused on the tactical errors made by Haig and his generals and the vast number of casualties that resulted.<sup>13</sup>

The Fourth Army carried out the main British attack and consequently incurred the heaviest casualties on 1 July.<sup>14</sup> General Rawlinson, its commander, had been given the objective of securing the Pozieres Ridge. This would allow Gough's Reserve Army to break through to Bapaume and advance up the German line towards Arras.<sup>15</sup>

The Germans opposing the Fourth Army had completed a series of trench systems. The first consisted of "three lines of trench 150 to 200 yards apart, one for the sentry groups, the second ... for the front-trench garrison to live in, and the third for the local supports".<sup>16</sup> Incorporated into the front line was a series of fortified villages: Fricourt, la Boisselle, Ovillers, Thiepval and Beaumont Hamel. These were protected by wire. The second line system, also protected by wire, was situated between 2,000 and 4,000 yards further back on a reverse slope.<sup>17</sup>

By the time the Australians went into the line later in July, the Germans still held Pozieres which was the highest point on the Thiepval-Ginchy Ridge. This small agricultural village situated on the Albert-Bapaume Road was important because it had been incorporated into the German second line system by the construction of a strongly wired trench around its southern outskirts.<sup>18</sup> The Germans stubbornly defended it, thus restricting the forward movement of the Fourth Army's flank which had

---

<sup>11</sup> Prior, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' as History*, 215.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), 201.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 257.

<sup>15</sup> "G.H.Q. letter O.A.D. 12 to General Sir H. Rawlinson, 16th June 1916 stating the objectives", quoted in *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1916, Appendices*, Vol.1, 86-87.

<sup>16</sup> G.C. Wynne, *If Germany Attacks: The Battle in Depth in the West* (London: Faber, 1940), 100-101, quoted in Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 139.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 140-141.

<sup>18</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 456-457.

been charged with attacking the German second line.<sup>19</sup> Rawlinson was of the opinion that Pozieres was the key to the area.<sup>20</sup>

### III

The Reserve Army, commanded by General Gough, had taken over the northern section of the front and had been given the job of capturing Pozieres.<sup>21</sup> On 18 July, Major-General Walker, commander of the 1st Australian Division, attended the headquarters of the Reserve Army where he was ordered to prepare plans for the capture of the village.<sup>22</sup>

Birdwood was ordered to place two troops of cavalry at the disposal of the 1st Australian Division. These troops were to move on the morning of the 23rd to the neighbourhood of Sausage Valley and to wait there in the event of an opportunity arising to push out towards Courcellette.<sup>23</sup> As this village was a mile or so further to the north-east of Pozieres, it is highly unlikely that an advance could have been made from Sausage Valley, lying over one and a half miles to the south-west of Pozieres.

There is no record of Birdwood's reaction to this plainly nonsensical plan. It is difficult to imagine that he would have given it any serious consideration. He was also ordered to move forward one brigade from his 2nd Australian Division to a suitable position in reserve north-west of Albert.<sup>24</sup> The brigade was to be in position by 9.30 p.m. on the night of 22 July and arrangements were to be made to reconnoitre a suitable position.<sup>25</sup> The brigade group of the 2nd Australian Division was to be at the disposal of the GOC 1st Australian Division but reference would be made to corps headquarters before the issue of any orders for its employment.<sup>26</sup> These were the corps commander's sole duties during the operation. There appears to be no explanation as to the reason for this. It may be surmised that it was not an auspicious beginning to the battle as far as Birdwood was concerned.

---

<sup>19</sup> Reserve Army Operation Order No.13, 21 July 1916, AWM 26/2/41/60.

<sup>20</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916*, 454-455.

<sup>21</sup> Gough, General Sir Hubert, *The Fifth Army* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 141.

<sup>22</sup> "Report on the operations of First Australian Division at Pozieres", 3 August 1916, AWM 26/2/51/27.

<sup>23</sup> Reserve Army Operation Order No.13, 21 July 1916.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> BGGS, I ANZAC to GOCs 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, 22 July 1916, AWM 26/2/50/13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

It is important to note that while not having been given any responsibility on the battlefield, Birdwood and White, his Chief of Staff, had succeeded in modifying the plans for the Reserve Army operations including a delay in the start of the operation to 21 July, and the extension of the initial plan of capturing the trenches in front of the village to include the capture of a larger area east and west of the village and a newly-begun German trench also to its eastern side.<sup>27</sup> Bean recorded "their reason being a well-founded conviction that the 1st Australian Division would put into the advance an impetus sufficient to carry it at least half-way through the village".<sup>28</sup>

The operation was deferred to the night of 23 July because of changes which needed to be made to the artillery arrangements.<sup>29</sup> The result of this operation was the partial capture of the village by the Australians. On the night, the Fourth Army had failed to gain any ground along its entire front of attack. This had been Haig's third push on the Somme. Except in the Pozieres region, it had failed.<sup>30</sup>

On the 25th, the push began to secure the remainder of Pozieres. Throughout the day, the Germans kept up a heavy bombardment of the Australian positions, but the village was taken. All the objectives of the 1st Australian Division had been carried with the exception of the German lines immediately south of the main road.<sup>31</sup> It was now relieved by the 2nd Australian Division. During its operations against Pozieres, the division had lost 5,285 officers and men, the effect of which was reflected in the attitude of both officers and men to the higher command. Bean recorded that it was becoming obvious to both that "the struggle at Pozieres was being fought on lines which rendered it particularly intense and difficult, since it involved frequent short advances on a narrow front".<sup>32</sup> These advances were the only ones being made by any of Haig's force. Not surprisingly, the Germans were able to concentrate all their artillery resources in that sector on the narrow fronts presented to them each time an advance was made.<sup>33</sup>

---

27 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 483.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 485.

30 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens* , 243.

31 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 592.

32 Ibid., 595.

33 Ibid., 596-597.

For the next few weeks, the enemy bombarded the newly captured village and trenches running eastwards between Pozieres and Ovillers with heavy artillery.<sup>34</sup> Gough wrote later that

[d]uring the next fortnight this section of the front was the scene of constant and bitter fighting, which was marked by small gains to us, usually won in night fighting, the rest of the Army front remaining fairly quiet. We had so far fulfilled our role of holding the enemy to his positions and forcing him to be in constant anticipation of attacks, thus preventing him from withdrawing troops or guns for action against the Fourth Army; at the same time, by counter-battery work, bombardments and digging, we were making all the necessary preparations for our own future operations.<sup>35</sup>

Amazingly, Birdwood thought that the taking of Pozieres had not been "such a difficult job". Considering the losses suffered by his corps, this was an almost frivolous remark.<sup>36</sup> But he was quick to thank Walker for his division's success in taking Pozieres, acknowledging the great strain it had been for all concerned.<sup>37</sup> The worst of it was that they could all look forward to a continuous series of such strains during this current stage of the fighting.<sup>38</sup> There is nothing to show that Birdwood could see any other way of achieving their objectives which would lessen the numbers killed or wounded. Nor is there anything which discloses that he thought the actions of the high command inept. In any event, given the authority structure of the British Army, it was difficult for corps commanders to recommend courses of action, especially if they involved a reduction in offensive activity. There seemed little prospect of change.

#### IV

The 2nd Australian Division commanded by Major-General J.G.Legge, took over the positions occupied by the 1st Australian Division on 27 July.<sup>39</sup> Birdwood's orders to the 2nd Australian Division as it moved into the line were to make an attack on the German positions north and north-east of Pozieres.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 142.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>36</sup> Birdwood to Lord Derby, 15 August 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/16.

<sup>37</sup> Birdwood to Walker, 27 July 1916, AWM 26/2/51/27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> I ANZAC Order No.15, 26 July 1916, AWM 26/2/50/14.

<sup>40</sup> I ANZAC Order No.16, 26 July 1916 in *ibid.*

The following day orders were issued by the Reserve Army. It is significant that these simply repeated Birdwood's orders of the previous day, adding that the night and the precise time for the attack were to be determined by the corps commander.<sup>41</sup> It can be surmised that Birdwood was now playing a more significant role in the planning of operations which were then submitted to Gough for approval prior to execution by I Anzac Corps.

While he had few executive planning responsibilities, Birdwood nonetheless attempted to maximise his influence on the conduct of operations. Mindful of the well-being of his subordinates, Birdwood directed his chief of staff to draw the attention of his divisional commanders to the need for arranging brief reliefs for all commanders in order to avoid complete exhaustion at an early stage of an operation.<sup>42</sup> Further, he thought that if this need was impressed on all commanders, even battalion commanders would be able to secure short respites by arranging reliefs with their senior majors.<sup>43</sup>

The 2nd Australian Division attacked German positions north and north-east of Pozieres on the night of 28/29 July.<sup>44</sup> The plan was for the division's artillery to batter the wire entanglements in front of the German lines before the advance. It failed to do so.<sup>45</sup> Despite some early success, the Germans repelled the Australian attack.

Haig blamed a lack of proper preparation for the division's failure and castigated Birdwood and White for what appeared to him to be over-confidence on the part of the Anzac Corps staff and of the division's commander.<sup>46</sup> Bean did not apportion blame to anyone in particular. Chris Coulthard-Clark opines that both Birdwood and White gave "tacit endorsement" to the operation by not opposing what they probably considered to be a flawed plan.<sup>47</sup> It is unclear whether the plan itself was flawed but the preparations themselves were certainly hurried. This was not the fault of Birdwood or White as Gough had insisted that speed was of the essence. Coulthard-Clark is therefore of the opinion that Gough was to

---

<sup>41</sup> Reserve Army Operation Order No.15, 28 July 1916, AWM 26/2/42/1.

<sup>42</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to HQ, 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, 27 July 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "Summary of operations for week-ending 6 p.m. Friday 4/8/16", AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>45</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 250-251.

<sup>46</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916*, 643-644.

<sup>47</sup> C.D.Coulthard-Clark, *No Australian Need Apply* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 148.



blame for Legge's failure in this operation. It is difficult to disagree with this conclusion.<sup>48</sup>

Birdwood told Andrew Fisher, now the Australian High Commissioner in London, that the troops of the 2nd Australian Division were in no way disheartened by their failure to secure their objectives.<sup>49</sup> It is difficult to take this comment seriously. He had gone around the trenches after the operation and told Fisher:

The rain of big shells was still going on without intermission, and I feel I was uncommonly lucky to get back unscathed, as one of those big six inch fellows landed within two or three feet of me, but providentially turned out to be a "dud", otherwise I should not be writing to you now! My staff are generally kind enough to try and prevent my going out on these occasions, but I know that the men like seeing me with them, and I feel that it is the very least that I can do in return for their magnificent bravery and the confidence which they are good enough to tell me they have in me, and which I feel is by far the greatest reward for which any human being could possibly wish.<sup>50</sup>

Haig had forbidden staff officers to visit the front because of the danger for hard-to-replace officers.<sup>51</sup> Travers relates that it was not normal for army, corps or divisional commanders to visit the front, nor for GHQ staff officers to make inspections.<sup>52</sup> This fact caused rifts between corps headquarters and divisional headquarters, and could even exist between divisional headquarters and brigade. So frequent were the complaints that senior officers were not aware of conditions at the front, that it is evident a basic problem in command structure existed throughout the whole BEF.<sup>53</sup> What is equally clear is that no such problem existed in I Anzac Corps and Birdwood appears to have had good communications with all his subordinate commanders. Travers points out that the problem was caused by inexperienced staffs, to the increase in the size of the army, and "to a traditional sense of army hierarchy whereby information and orders came down the chain of command, while lower-level reports from the front were

---

48 Ibid.

49 Birdwood to Fisher, 31 July 1916, Fisher Papers, MS 2919/1/222-3.

50 Ibid.

51 Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 108.

52 Ibid., 109.

53 Ibid.

often disregarded or treated with scepticism".<sup>54</sup> Again, Birdwood does not appear to have had to contend with problems of this nature.

## V

Following the failure of the division to capture its objective, Legge pleaded with Birdwood for permission to make another attempt. Bean recorded that "Legge's pride, and that of his division ... prompted him to urge that his division, though its losses were already over 3,500, should undertake the renewed attempt".<sup>55</sup> On 30 July, Birdwood directed Legge to make another attempt to capture "by deliberate and systematic attack the German second line trenches".<sup>56</sup> Birdwood was clearly apprehensive as to whether Legge could carry out a successful operation. He was naturally cautious.

In a memorandum on the 30th, he made known his desire for a clear plan showing the defences of Pozieres and the distribution of Legge's troops in these positions.<sup>57</sup> He also wanted plans for both offensive and defensive works, including the provision of communication trenches and cover for supporting troops and reserves.<sup>58</sup> As the weather favoured a gas attack by the enemy, he wanted assurance that all protective measures were tested daily and that the supply of gas helmets was adequate.<sup>59</sup>

Birdwood wanted Legge to impress on all ranks that there was to be no failure in the contemplated operation.<sup>60</sup> Legge had requested a brigade of the 4th Australian Division as a reserve. Birdwood had agreed although he wanted to be informed as to what Legge's intentions were regarding its use. He also pointed out the disadvantages of using a new unit in an area with which it was not familiar.<sup>61</sup>

Birdwood now appeared to be more engaged with the important issues of his command and, of course, he was responsible for all corps orders and correspondence. Bean made it clear, however, that in this particular situation, it was White who wrote out for Legge "a number of points of

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 644.

<sup>56</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to GOC 2nd Australian Division, 30 July 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>57</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to HQ 2nd Australian Division, 30 July 1916 in *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to GOC 2nd Australian Division, 31 July 1916 in *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

advice embodying a thorough preparation for the attack".<sup>62</sup> This was White's job, but clearly Birdwood was more in control of the planning of operations than he had been. This was no doubt due to the experience that he had gained and the realisation that if he was to succeed then he would have to be more in control than he had been.

On 1 August, Birdwood told Senator Pearce, that during advances by his men, the lines were thinned out as much as possible to avoid heavy losses. The great difficulty was that the long-range guns used by the enemy made it hard to find any place of safety within reasonable reach of the front to enable reinforcements to be brought up quickly in case of heavy counter-attack.<sup>63</sup> He thought that the taking of the German trenches on the higher ground beyond the village, now before them, to be a more difficult job than Pozieres. He anticipated a great struggle.<sup>64</sup> Despite his feeling that the war was progressing towards a satisfactory resolution, Birdwood conceded that the Germans meant to dispute every foot of ground. He believed the end was by no means yet in sight.<sup>65</sup>

In the meantime, improvements were made to the defences of the village. A new line was dug nearer to the enemy's trenches with a view to renewing the attack after further artillery preparation.<sup>66</sup> A set programme of daily bombardments was carried out. By 3 August, reports from patrols and aeroplanes indicated that the enemy's wire was practically destroyed.<sup>67</sup> Throughout this period, the Germans kept up a heavy bombardment of Pozieres, causing considerable casualties both in the front line trenches and in the back areas.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that the British counter-battery programme was not succeeding, a familiar occurrence at this stage of the war.<sup>69</sup>

## VI

Orders were issued by Birdwood on 2 August for the 2nd Australian Division to renew the attack on the German second line on the night of 4/5 August.<sup>70</sup> This order shows that for the first time more input was being

---

<sup>62</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 649.

<sup>63</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 1 August 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Summary of operations for week-ending 4/8/16".

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 239.

<sup>70</sup> I ANZAC Order No.18, 2 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

made at corps headquarters. There were far more specific instructions for the divisional commander than had been provided for previous attacks. This could have been due, in part, to Haig's reprimand of I Anzac after the failure by the 2nd Australian Division to capture their objectives at the end of July. It probably left Birdwood with some sort of resolve to issue more specific instructions when next ordering troops into battle. As already noted, he had been issuing very general and vague instructions up to this point as indeed was the practice of the other commanders from GHQ down.

Gough had sent a memorandum on the 3rd to Birdwood and the other corps commanders in the Reserve Army, stressing the necessity for the energetic measures and offensive action which the present situation required, should be impressed on subordinate commanders.<sup>71</sup> Gough was clearly intent on pushing forward but it is difficult to ascertain his motives for issuing this memorandum given the 'energetic measures and offensive action' which were taking place at the time. How Birdwood reacted to this entreaty is not recorded.

In tandem with Gough's memorandum urging action and energy, Birdwood received a letter from the Reserve Army's chief of staff the same day requesting that he forward an explanation for the delay by the commander of 2nd Australian Division in delivering his new attack.<sup>72</sup> Legge had stated initially that he would be ready to launch an attack on the night of the 2nd/3rd. This was changed to the night of the 4th/5th. There was no wish to hurry any attack, but delay meant upsetting the bombardment programs as well as dislocating the arrangements of the other corps and armies.<sup>73</sup> Birdwood was finally asked to state whether, in his opinion, "the delay could or could not have been avoided by greater energy and foresight on the part of the higher commanders".<sup>74</sup>

In reply, Birdwood submitted several reasons for the delay. First, he reported that Legge had based his estimated time for the attack on the time he needed to construct some 1,250 yards of new forward trench, but he had under-estimated the time it would take due to the constant shell fire. Working parties were not able to effect the full number of hours expected of them. Secondly, Birdwood said he regretted the delay and the inconvenience caused at Army Headquarters. He went on to add:

---

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum by Army Commander, Reserve Army, 3 August 1916, AWM 26/2/41/64.

<sup>72</sup> MGGS, Reserve Army to I Anzac Corps, 3 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

In all probability under a more experienced commander the operation would have been more expeditiously effected. In stating this I would point out that this is the first operation which, as a divisional commander, Major-General J.G.Legge has undertaken. He was appointed to a divisional command in succession to the late Major-General W.T.Bridges by the Australian Government, and I am anxious that he should be given full opportunity to prove his capability for command. The Commonwealth Government are very desirous that Australian officers should, if they are found capable, be given the opportunity of filling higher commands. There is not in consequence any intention of retaining any officer in high command who is proved unfitted and this the Australian Government clearly realise. To retain their confidence, however, it is essential to give such officers fair trial. Major-General Legge's capabilities will be judged by the extent to which he benefits by his present experience.<sup>75</sup>

The above indicates a strong desire by Birdwood to be fair to both the Australian Government and those serving under his command. According to Coulthard-Clark, Legge was subjected to undue pressure by Gough to prove his competence. While this may well be true, he goes on to make the claim that a British officer in the same situation would not have been subjected to the same pressure because "it proceeded from an assumption that a dominion officer could not be the equal of an imperial officer".<sup>76</sup> But Gough could have applied the same pressure to anyone.

Birdwood issued a memorandum on the day of the attack (the 4 August) addressed to the commanders of the 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, stating that he wished consideration be given to the action necessary after that night's operation.<sup>77</sup> It was essential to press their offensive and avoid any delay. Their next advance was to be in the direction of Mouquet Farm to the north of the village and of the cemetery. Legge was to take every opportunity of pushing his front line in this direction.<sup>78</sup> Birdwood hoped that the new objective could be assaulted after that night's operation. He added that the brigade commander in that area should be aware of the possibility of doing so while seizing any opportunity that presented itself.<sup>79</sup>

Following the operation, Birdwood told his wife that the attack had been successful and that the division had taken all the trenches and

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Coulthard-Clark, *No Australian Need Apply*, 150.

<sup>77</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to GOCs 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, 4 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

presently held the crest originally held by the Germans. They had counter-attacked twice that morning in an effort to regain the position, but had been driven back with heavy losses. Although the Germans were sure to counter-attack again, he was confident that his troops would hold their own. He felt no apprehension.<sup>80</sup>

The same day, Birdwood wrote to Andrew Fisher and advised him of the admiration he felt for the men's courage and tenacity.<sup>81</sup> He related how they had been subjected to continual and heavy bombardments. Because of this he had contemplated withdrawing the 5th Brigade which had taken a particular bruising, allowing a brigade from the 4th Australian Division to replace it. He went on:

Though I am sure they were almost worn out for want of rest, they absolutely refused to budge, and I was told that some battalions would be on the point of mutiny if they were taken out before the rest of the division, as they felt it was up to them to see the job through, and I am so delighted they have done it in the magnificent way they have ...<sup>82</sup>

The question may well be asked how Birdwood was able to write letters during an attack by his corps. Very simply, he had nothing better to do. As a senior commander, he was not personally involved in the fighting. Practically the only way he or any other senior commander could influence a battle was in the matter of reserves and whether they should be called up and when they would be thrown into the battle. This left him time to concentrate his mind on other matters. In this, as in any other operation, once the plans were made it was up to the divisional commanders to carry them through. A corps commander would await news of the battle.

## VII

Because the Australian advances against the Pozieres position was not accompanied by similar advances on the flanks, the Australians found themselves in a salient. Consequently, the Germans were now able to bombard them from all sides. This artillery fire was heavy between the 4th

---

<sup>80</sup> Birdwood to wife, 5 August 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/15.

<sup>81</sup> Birdwood to Fisher, 5 August 1916, Fisher Papers, MS 2919/1/226-227.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

and the 9th as were the casualties sustained because of it.<sup>83</sup> The bombardment on the 6th was so heavy that the 4th Australian Division could not leave the trenches.<sup>84</sup>

The 2nd Australian Division was relieved by the 4th Australian Division on 7 August.<sup>85</sup> During its twelve days in the line, the 2nd Australian Division had sustained 6,848 casualties.<sup>86</sup>

Only raids were made by the Australians until Birdwood next issued orders for a general attack. The orders of 9 August were for the 4th Australian Division to advance along the main ridge as previously, and to take a position some four hundred yards south of Mouquet Farm.<sup>87</sup> The operation was successful probably because of more careful planning by the divisional and battalion commanders.<sup>88</sup> Before the attack, all the officers and NCOs involved in the operation studied the ground they were to cover, and the German machine-gun emplacements were bombarded intensely.<sup>89</sup> More importantly, the attack was to be made obliquely, not frontally, as had been tried previously when the German machine-guns had cut down the attackers.<sup>90</sup> As a result, by the next morning, the division's northern flank was astride the ridge north of Pozieres.<sup>91</sup>

## VIII

At this point, it is worth noting a memorandum issued on 10 August to the I Anzac Corps from the Reserve Army's chief of staff, Major-General Malcolm, concerning the structure of the corps as an entity. This gives an insight into what a corps was supposed to be. Malcolm noted that there was still too much inclination in the British Army to look upon the division rather than the corps as the "proper fighting unit", this being a relic of the pre-war army where the corps was practically unknown.<sup>92</sup> He went on:

---

<sup>83</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 255-259.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>85</sup> I ANZAC Order No.20, 5 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/15.

<sup>86</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 258.

<sup>87</sup> I ANZAC Order No.22, 9 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/16.

<sup>88</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916*, 740.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 740-741.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 740.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 743.

<sup>92</sup> MGGS, Reserve Army to I ANZAC, 10 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/2.

With our present forces the present system is unsuitable, and the Corps must be regarded not as three separate divisions but as a single organisation.

This means that the control must be kept more in the hands of the Corps Commanders and their Staffs, particularly in the case of the Artillery, Royal Engineers and the various services. Although the Field Artillery necessarily belongs to, and forms part of, the Divisions, it must not be regarded as inseparable from them. It may often be necessary to cover the front of one Division with the Field Artillery of the whole Corps. Consequently, reliefs of the artillery should not be too much influenced by the relief of the Infantry.

From this it follows that just as the Corps Commander fights his three or more Divisions, so the GOC RA of the Corps must fight the artillery under the direction of the Corps Commander. He is responsible to the Corps Commander for ensuring that the Infantry is properly supported by the artillery, and consequently no important moves should be made without his orders. Put shortly, the GOC RA of the Corps must be a real commander.<sup>93</sup>

The memorandum went on to say that the Army commander wished for corps commanders to do all in their power to encourage and improve the counter-battery work in their commands.<sup>94</sup>

Following this, a memorandum written by Birdwood's chief of staff to the commanding officers of the Australian divisions was issued on the 14th and was apparently *apropos* the letter from Malcolm to Birdwood:

The Corps Commander wishes me to explain that while it is intended to maintain the Corps as the fighting unit this will be done with a minimum of interference in the powers and responsibilities of Divisional Commanders. The homogeneity of the division and its commander's control over administration will be disturbed as little as possible. Corps control will be limited to the most efficient and most economical distribution of our fighting power.<sup>95</sup>

It is interesting to speculate on the discussions which possibly took place between Birdwood and his divisional commanders regarding this matter as the letter is almost conciliatory in its approach to them. It seems possible that the divisional generals had objected strongly to the curbing of their powers as commanders of the corps' fighting units. They possibly

---

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 BGGs, I ANZAC to GOCs 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, 14 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/16.



perceived the corps as being synonymous with the general staff which, in their view, already possessed too much power.

## IX

The Reserve Army issued orders to I Anzac on 10 August to continue its operation to capture Mouquet Farm.<sup>96</sup> The 4th Australian Division was to attack the enemy's lines south-east of Mouquet Farm on the night of the 12th/13th.<sup>97</sup>

Following consultation with Birdwood, General Cox of the 4th Australian Division, was given permission to make his attack in one operation rather than in two which had been part of the original plan.<sup>98</sup> Mouquet Farm was shelled all day. At midnight, the assault was launched under a heavy barrage. As soon as this lifted, troops rushed the German trenches. With several exceptions, the objective was reached.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the following night, the 13th/14th, the Germans shelled the positions gained and launched a counter-attack recapturing a part of their former position. A short time later, the Germans were again driven from this position.<sup>100</sup>

On 16 August, General Malcolm informed Birdwood in a memorandum that the enemy were making use of advanced posts to break up the British attacks and to give warning to their line of defence.<sup>101</sup> As this had been evident for some time, an advanced barrage by 18 pounder guns had been arranged to form part of the attack by the 4th Australian Division on the night of 14 August.<sup>102</sup> It had come to the attention of the Reserve Army that the division's commander had altered this order. Instead of forty-eight guns having been utilised in the barrage, only sixteen had been used. It was described as "worse than useless", and would act only as a warning.<sup>103</sup> Malcolm noted that this arrangement by the divisional commander had infringed "those principles of violence and concentration" in the employment of artillery which had evolved from the experience of

---

<sup>96</sup> Reserve Army Operation Order No.18, 10 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/3.

<sup>97</sup> I ANZAC Order No.23, 12 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/16.

<sup>98</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to GOC 4th Australian Division, 13 August 1916 in *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> "Summary of operations for the week-ending 19/8/16", AWM 26/2/50/17.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> MGGS, Reserve Army to I ANZAC, 16 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

two years of war.<sup>104</sup> Through no fault of its own, the infantry had failed because of a lack of assistance from the artillery. Malcolm noted that on the only two occasions the Australian troops had failed during the numerous recent attacks, the artillery programme had been altered almost at the last minute at the request of the divisional commanders. In each case, fundamental principles had been disregarded.<sup>105</sup> In conclusion, Malcolm wrote:

The Army Commander has no wish to interfere with the legitimate initiative of Corps and Divisional Commanders, but considers it essential that the Artillery programmes should not be altered after they have been passed by the GOC RA of the Army, unless the conditions have been altered.<sup>106</sup>

It was Birdwood's job to be aware of any changes made to the artillery arrangements. Perhaps being made aware of problems in the artillery led him to visit certain field batteries of the 1st Australian Division on the 20th. He had been disturbed to find that at each battery he visited, the times-pieces were shown to be different. None was actually correct.<sup>107</sup> This fact speaks volumes for the lack of professionalism which still seemed to be prevalent, not only in the Australian corps, but no doubt throughout the army. As the historians Bidwell and Graham explain, tactics employed by the British artillery at this time were of "quantity not quality". Orders to fire usually came from division or brigade dug-outs. Observed and accurate shooting was the exception rather than the rule.<sup>108</sup> As Travers points out, the infantry and the artillery did not co-operate. Rather, "the infantry adapted to the artillery programme". Because there was little understanding of the 'creeping barrage' by either the infantry or the artillery, this led to confusion particularly on the part of the artillery which also resented the interference from corps and division in the technical side of things.<sup>109</sup> It is probably fair to conclude that like the other arms of the British Army, the artillery was having trouble coming to terms with new techniques. Travers notes that

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> BGGS, I ANZAC to GOC 1st Australian Division, 20 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/17.

<sup>108</sup> Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 113.

<sup>109</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 162.

"the gunners were very individualistic and each battery commander had his own ideas" which included the dislike of being interfered with.<sup>110</sup>

A memorandum concerning artillery was issued by General Malcolm on 26 August to the corps under the Reserve Army's command.<sup>111</sup> Malcolm pointed out that various artillery reports received indicated that a considerable proportion of the artillery available was always out of action during active operations, quite apart from any damage inflicted by the enemy. It was therefore essential that every precaution was taken to minimize wear and tear of artillery equipment. Furthermore, commanders were to ensure that the cause of the damage, rapid fire, be limited to periods of necessity.<sup>112</sup> He concluded with the extraordinary statement: " .. it does not seem that the Artillery personnel itself is paying sufficient attention to the instructions which already exist on the subject of the care of equipment. Corps will take steps to call the attention of all unit Commanders in the Artillery to their important responsibilities in this connection".<sup>113</sup> It seems that this is a further example of the lack of professionalism that pervaded the British Army at this time. It was doubtless not peculiar to the Reserve Army, but was astounding all the same. Unfortunately, no specific comment on this matter by Birdwood appears to be extant. However, he was of the opinion that to advance on the Somme, the best way of doing so was by doubling the use of artillery. In this, he would appear to be correct.<sup>114</sup>

Birdwood told Pearce in a letter on the 14 August that his artillery was excellent and he thought the infantry now had complete confidence in it.<sup>115</sup> He reported that the men were enthusiastic regarding the way in which the artillery barrage lifted over their heads as they advanced, preventing the enemy from raising their heads to fire their weapons. Recently when attacking, he had sent in as few troops as he dared, finding that by doing so, their losses could be minimised. In the same way, when holding his own trenches, he did so with a reduced garrison of a few men with Lewis guns ensconced in convenient shell holes.<sup>116</sup> But there was a limit to this, as there had to be sufficient troops available to repel heavy attacks. Because of

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>111</sup> MGGS, Reserve Army to II Corps, V Corps, XIII Corps, I Anzac Corps, MGRA, 26 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 31 December 1916, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL 2222/1/26.

<sup>115</sup> Birdwood to Pearce, 14 August 1916, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

long-range artillery, it was difficult to find safe places for supports and reserves close to the front line when necessary.<sup>117</sup>

Birdwood had issued a memorandum on the 10th regarding the density of troops when attacking the enemy.<sup>118</sup> He drew attention to the fact that some German prisoners claimed that following bombardment by the artillery of their positions, the damage to these positions was so severe, that there were few men left to defend them. But, when the British attacked the bombarded position, they came so thickly that only a couple of German machine guns had little trouble inflicting heavy damage on the advancing troops; "[t]he principle of depth is as great a principle as ever, but the Corps Commander thinks that we are rather inclined to apply depth to situations where the principle is inapplicable".<sup>119</sup> This, of course, was good sense on Birdwood's part.

## X

The 4th Australian Division was relieved by the 1st Australian Division on 15 August. It had lost 4,649 men in the nine days it had been in the line.<sup>120</sup> The Reserve Army's advance had now been halted by the Germans. In six successive night attacks, the 4th had only brought the line within striking distance of Mouquet Farm.<sup>121</sup>

Over the next two and a half weeks, various Australian formations were to attack Mouquet Farm on seven occasions. For any of these attacks to succeed it was imperative that the artillery subdue the German defences (in particular machine-gunners and artillery) - not absolutely, but to a sufficient extent to allow the infantry to make some progress. It was characteristic of these operations that on not one occasion was the artillery able to achieve this feat. The gunners at this stage of the war did not have either the experience, expertise or technical knowledge to hit such defences with any accuracy. Consequently, the infantry were called upon to attack under impossible conditions. That is to advance across No Man's Land in the face of a barrage of shells and a hail of machine-gun fire. In these circumstances,

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> BGGS, I ANZAC to GOCs 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions, 10 August 1916 in  
ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1916*, 770.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

no amount of planning on behalf of the infantry could possibly succeed as the following account of these operations will make clear.

Birdwood informed Walker that his division would be expected to undertake two operations. The first would be to the north to capture the German line east and west and to surround Mouquet Farm. The second would be to the east of Mouquet Farm to capture the German Fabeck Graben trench.<sup>122</sup>

Suggestions were made by Birdwood on the optimal means of conducting both operations including, for the first operation, the establishment of a jumping-off trench half-way to the German lines. On completion of both operations, it would be necessary to increase and strengthen the lines which were tactically most suitable for defence and to establish in front of them, patrol and observation posts.<sup>123</sup> The new line would be some 3,500 yards in length but would reduce the strength of the brigades. Therefore, it was suggested that Walker select certain strong points where machine-guns could be easily utilised thus allowing for a smaller garrison to hold the line and enabling a brigade to be kept in reserve.<sup>124</sup>

During the day of the 16th, the artillery concentrated on Mouquet Farm and the surrounding trenches, all of which were heavily shelled. At 10 p.m., an attack was launched against the farm by the 1st Australian Division. The Australian troops discovered that the British artillery had not managed to overcome the German positions. Consequently, the German machine-gunners were able to bring a devastating fire to bear on the advancing troops. The attack was easily repulsed.<sup>125</sup>

## XI

The 1st Australian Division's next attack on Mouquet Farm took place on the 21st in daylight. The left brigade was to establish a line on the Thiepval-Courcelette Road and to occupy the German trenches on the high ground to the east of Mouquet Farm.<sup>126</sup> This operation was partially successful, and enabled the brigade to establish its line at three points on the

---

<sup>122</sup> BGGs, I ANZAC to GOC 1st Australian Division, 15 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/16.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> "Summary of operations for the week-ending 19/8/16", AWM 26/2/50/17.

<sup>126</sup> "Summary of operations for the week-ending 26/8/16", AWM 26/2/50/18.

road. The right of the attack met with strong enemy opposition and no advance was made.<sup>127</sup>

The 1st Australian Division was relieved by the 2nd Australian Division on 22 August having lost 2,650 officers and men. Bean recorded that "[t]he progress achieved in its two attacks along the ridge had been trifling; the task ... had indeed long since reached the stage where further progress became impossible ...".<sup>128</sup>

All efforts by the Reserve Army were now directed towards the capture of Thiepval.<sup>129</sup> Birdwood's corps which had originally held a mile of front, now held over double this length and did so with one division.<sup>130</sup>

On the 26th, the Australians again attacked Mouquet Farm on the eastern side.<sup>131</sup> The attack was unsuccessful as they were beaten off by heavy machine-gun fire from the Germans on the right. In the centre, the attackers lost their way and had to return to the starting line.<sup>132</sup>

The 4th Australian Division which had relieved the 2nd Australian Division on 28 August, had been ordered to attack the German lines again on the night of the 29th/30th.<sup>133</sup> Haig had visited Gough's headquarters on the 29th and noted in his diary that the Australians were to attack Mouquet Farm that night.<sup>134</sup> He also noted Gough's comment that "the Commanders of the Australians are becoming less offensive in spirit! The men are all right".<sup>135</sup> This is hardly surprising in view of the losses suffered by the corps, but White had recommended to Birdwood that heavier force be used against the enemy to take the farm in this latest attack.<sup>136</sup> The weather conditions had played a large part in this, the sixth, attempt to take the farm. But another factor had been the weakness of the attacking force.<sup>137</sup> Now, in the final attempt by Birdwood's corps to take the farm which was part of Gough's three-sided assault on Thiepval, the mistake was not to be repeated.<sup>138</sup> Clearly, Birdwood's tactic of thinning the infantry lines to

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 802.

<sup>129</sup> MGGS, Reserve Army to II Corps, V Corps, I ANZAC, XIII Corps, 3rd Cavalry Division, 20 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/4.

<sup>130</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 803.

<sup>131</sup> Reserve Army Operation Order No.23, 25 August 1916, AWM 26/2/42/6.

<sup>132</sup> Peter Charlton, *Pozières 1916, Australians on the Somme* (London: Leo Cooper with Secker and Warburg, 1986), 255.

<sup>133</sup> I ANZAC Order No.39, 28 August 1916, AWM 26/2/50/19.

<sup>134</sup> Haig diary, 29 August 1916, WO 256/12/10B/81.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 828.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 838.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

which reference was made earlier, was not effective. Although the objective was reached, the enemy counter-attacked immediately with considerable strength forcing the attackers to withdraw to their original line.<sup>139</sup>

## XII

Prior to the next operation, Birdwood and White had been invited to Haig's headquarters. Haig noted in his diary that he found White to be "a sound capable soldier. Birdwood is useful too, though at present he is not much use for directing operations".<sup>140</sup> Haig told Birdwood of his pleasure with what the Australians had done, and observed that Birdwood's "taste lies in making speeches to the Australian rank and file and so keeps them contented. He is wonderfully popular with them, but seems rather to do work which his subordinate Generals should perform".<sup>141</sup> Birdwood's role was, of course, to direct operations. The fact that Haig knew that he was not doing so is a clear indication that Birdwood was not performing the duties of a corps commander, as understood by Haig. Perhaps Haig should have considered that had Birdwood not been among his men after so many attempts on a strong German position and after suffering such devastating losses, they may not have been so keen to continue trying to assault such an obviously hostile position. As mentioned earlier, Birdwood appears to have possessed the happy knack of choosing skilled subordinates so he did not have to involve himself in things they could handle, probably far better than he. This was certainly not a skill that Haig himself possessed.

## XIII

The attack of 3 September on Mouquet Farm by the 4th Australian Division was made in great strength. This attempt also ended in failure, although it managed to capture a narrow front on the crest of the ridge.<sup>142</sup> Bean related that:

Seven times the Australians had been launched from the head of their salient against these defences. Only the last and greatest effort had resulted in any gain of value, and that on a front so narrow that

<sup>139</sup> "Summary of operations from 6 p.m. 26/8/16 to 6 p.m. 1/9/16", AWM 26/2/50/19.

<sup>140</sup> Haig diary, 2 September 1916, WO 256/13/11/2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 853.

no troops in the world could have retained it against deliberate counter-attack.<sup>143</sup>

The position was lost by the Canadians on 8 September.<sup>144</sup>

Birdwood issued orders on 2 September giving the news that the Australians were to hand over command of the front to the Canadian Corps the following day.<sup>145</sup> I Anzac Corps was now to come under the orders of the Second Army.<sup>146</sup>

Since the I Anzac Corps had gone into the firing line on 20 July, it had lost some 23,000 officers and men. As Bean recorded, the Australian divisional losses were in line with the losses suffered in other British divisions at the same time. Nearly all occurred in the infantry brigades and their attached units.<sup>147</sup>

In October, Bean recorded in his diary that a "wild story" was going around to the effect that while visiting reinforcements to the 4th Australian Division, Birdwood had been hooted and called "butcher".<sup>148</sup> Bean wrote:

The men have undoubtedly had as much fighting as they want for the present. They are sick of the punishment they have had from the German bombardment ...

Birdwood, straight honest little man that he is, will not tell the men that they are going to have a prolonged rest if he knows that they are not. It is unpopular to tell them that they have to go into it again, and he knows that they don't like it. But he never hides the fact from them. His attitude all through is to assume that they want to get at the Germans again and to cheer them on to do it.

... Their faces drop at this but he never lets them see that he notices it and he never varies his attitude.

... the result of the wracking which they got at Pozieres is that Birdwood's popularity has suffered ... It was to some extent the same after the August battle in Gallipoli.<sup>149</sup>

#### XIV

As a corps commander, what could Birdwood have been expected to achieve which would contribute to the success or the failure of the Somme

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 860.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> I ANZAC Order No.43, 2 September 1916, AWM 26/2/50/19.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France:1916* , 862.

<sup>148</sup> Bean diary, 3 October 1916, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/60.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



operations? His responsibilities included the means to achieve success. After all, he had control of the corps' artillery; he could interpret the wishes, as he understood them, of the army commander; he was able to criticise effectively the operational plans of the divisions in his corps; he could replace divisional and brigade commanders who had failed or who were incapable of performing their duties satisfactorily. Most importantly, he could supply direction to the corps as a whole. Judging by the results of this period, Birdwood did no better or worse than his fellow corps commanders. This is illustrated by the fact that he had not been sacked as a corps commander.

Clearly, senior commanders were more experienced after two years of war, but were no closer to understanding how to defeat the enemy than they had been two years before. As Travers comments, "[t]he entire army resembled a floating and helpless whale, powerful in itself, but lacking co-ordination, proper purpose and articulation".<sup>150</sup> However, Birdwood was certainly in touch with what was going on in his command and, as mentioned earlier, intervened when necessary in the planning of operations by giving advice and encouragement to his subordinates.

It is difficult to assess Birdwood's overall success or otherwise as this can only be measured by comparison with his fellow corps commanders. It can be said, however, that no corps commander was better than another, no spectacular results having been achieved by any of them during this period. The limitations imposed on all the corps commanders were so overwhelming that none was an obvious success.

At Gallipoli, Birdwood had been able to exercise a meaningful and important role as commander of both a corps and then an army. On the Western Front in 1916, he had no chance of exercising his initiative. It proved to be a professionally disappointing year for him.

There were several limiting constraints on Birdwood at this time. He, like many other corps commanders, was unfamiliar with the conditions of the Western Front. Gallipoli had presented a completely different set of conditions to which he had adapted well. But in 1916, because of his inexperience and the fact of being answerable to an army commander for all his actions, Birdwood was clearly feeling a certain sense of inadequacy and a lack of confidence in his ability to perform satisfactorily.

Unlike Gallipoli, the Western Front fighting relied on artillery firepower. In this, a corps commander had little input to make and no decisions

---

<sup>150</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 189.

to make - this was done at GHQ or at army headquarters . He was told where to fight. In this matter, he had no say at all. He was trapped by the authority structure of the British Army in France, whereas at Gallipoli, this had hardly interfered with his command of the corps at all. In general, he accepted the decrees of the high command and rarely questioned the orders given to him.

Birdwood had not been a great success as a corps commander in 1916. It is apparent that he was more of a spectator than he had been at Gallipoli or, indeed, than he would be later. It would be fair to say that the Somme in 1916 was the nadir of Birdwood's command.

## CHAPTER NINE

### I

The first battle of Bullecourt was fought in April 1917. It was the first battle in which Birdwood's corps experienced fighting with tanks. Birdwood had been sceptical about the power of the tank because it was a virtually new and untried weapon. This battle justified his doubts.<sup>1</sup> Travers has said that senior British Army officers before and during the First World War readily accepted new weapons, but had "emotional difficulty in coming to mental grips with the tactical and command changes implied by the new or improved technology".<sup>2</sup> The debacle at Bullecourt is a case in point. The tanks did not do their job in this battle and were a complete failure.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly one corps commander could see a future for tanks. In August 1917, Maxse wrote that "[t]he only alternative to man power is mechanical power. The tank, if used in the battle with discretion, is capable of economising man power and minimising casualties".<sup>4</sup>

But it appears that senior officers resisted learning from previous battles and were not open to new ideas. As Travers points out, "the evolution of both the learning process and the decision making system on the Western Front was evidently central to the way offensives were thought about, planned and actually carried out".<sup>5</sup>

### II

The Bullecourt battles, fought in April and May 1917, had their genesis in February when the German forces began to withdraw to the Hindenburg Line, some thirty miles behind the German front. The I Anzac Corps was now again under the orders of the Fifth Army, formerly the Reserve Army, and holding about 6,000 yards of front south of the Bapaume Road.<sup>6</sup> On 24 February, patrols found the first definite signs of the German retirement. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 312.

<sup>2</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground* , 253.

<sup>3</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* , Vol.4, *The A.I.F. in France:1917* , (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 352-353.

<sup>4</sup> Maxse to Fifth Army, 21 August 1917, quoted in Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power* , 130.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Travers, " Learning and decision-making on the Western Front, 1915-1916: the British example " , *Canadian Journal of History* , 8, no.1 (April 1983), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Gough, *The Fifth Army* , 177.

allowed the Australians to advance within 2,000 yards of the village of Bapaume by the end of February.<sup>7</sup>

Birdwood records that Bapaume was captured by his 8th Australian Brigade unopposed by the enemy on 17 March, "the Germans having slipped away as quietly as we had done at Gallipoli".<sup>8</sup> After this, the Australians captured a series of villages enabling them to push forward advance posts to within assaulting distance of the Hindenburg Line.<sup>9</sup>

The Third Army, commanded by General Allenby, was given the task of striking the main British blow against the Hindenburg Line. Only its southern flank faced the Line. But it was to be assisted by the Fifth Army whose position facing the Hindenburg Line would allow it to threaten the rear and the southern flank of the Germans opposing the Third Army, "if sufficient resources could be concentrated to make the threat a real one".<sup>10</sup> Bullecourt was a village which had been incorporated into the Hindenburg Line. Gough hoped that he could breach the line either side of the village using a division of the British V Corps to the west, and an Australian division to the east.<sup>11</sup> The line was protected by two belts of heavy and wide wire entanglements which were intended to divide attacking troops who would then be at the mercy of heavy machine gun fire.<sup>12</sup> As Gough explained later, the Fifth Army's plan of drawing troops away from the Third Army's front would allow the Third Army to achieve its objective of advancing its right and centre.<sup>13</sup>

In April, Birdwood's orders to attack the line west of Bullecourt meant that the wire would have to be cut before an attack could be carried out. Nor had he any intention of attacking until the wire was cut.<sup>14</sup> As he relates:

We were to be given twelve "tanks" to assist us in the operation, the idea being that they would go successfully through the wire and over the trenches, making roads for us, and knocking out strong points. The "tanks" were to rendezvous at Noreuil during the night, and lead our advance through the enemy's wire.<sup>15</sup>

---

7 Ibid.

8 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 312.

9 Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 180.

10 Ibid, 182.

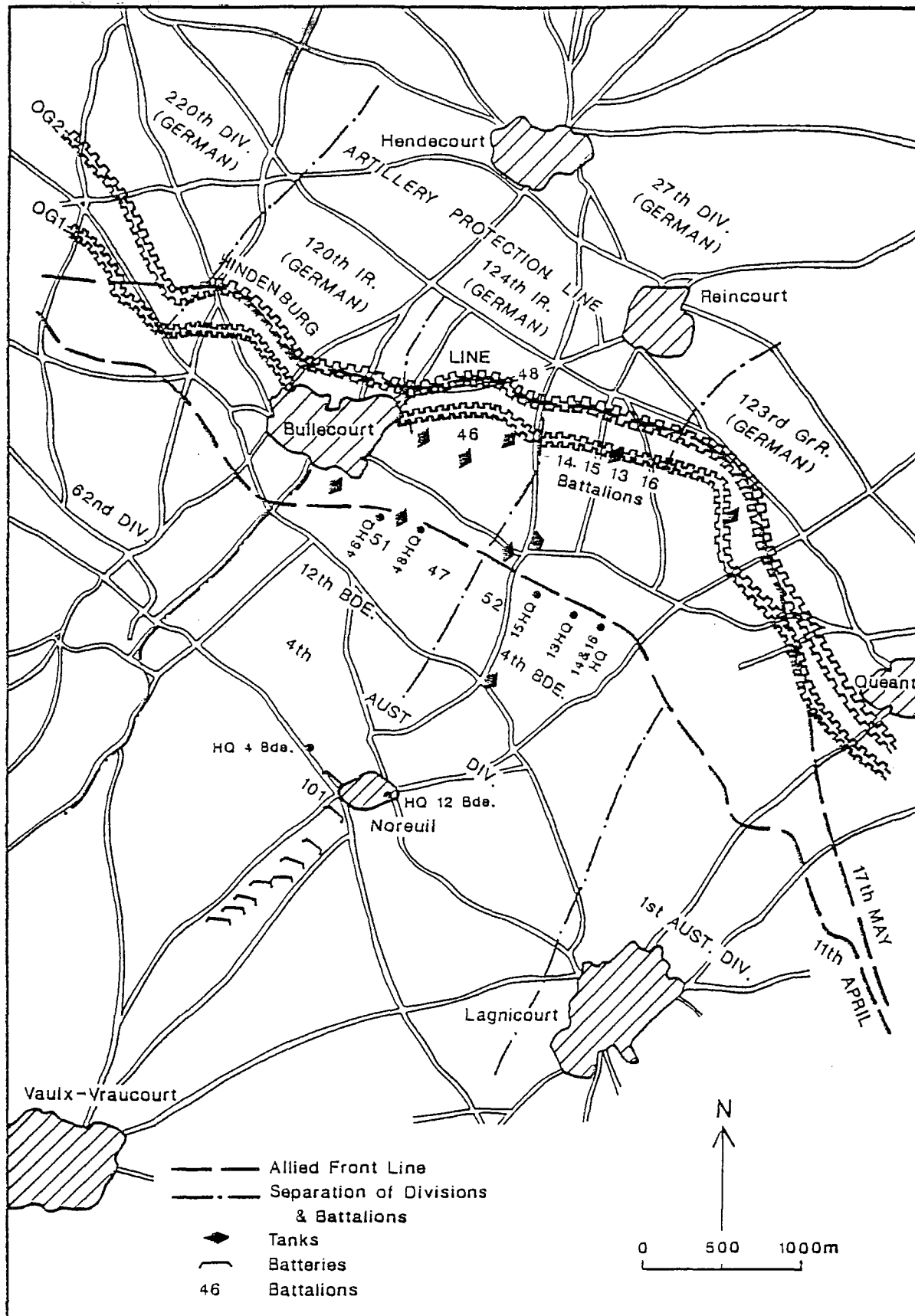
11 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 328.

12 Ibid.

13 Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 184.

14 "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May, 1917", Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/76.

15 Ibid.



*Bullecourt was the scene of two immense battles. During the first, on April 11, 48th Battalion troops failed to maintain their position. By May 17, Australian soldiers had captured the German trenches.*

There is no doubt that Birdwood was opposed to the use of tanks. He objected strongly to Gough's suggestion of an attack on Bullecourt on the 8th because the wire had not been cut sufficiently, the line was strongly held by the Germans and the tanks were unreliable.<sup>16</sup> Birdwood's chief of staff, White, told Gough at a conference on the same day that it would take about eight days to cut the wire adequately.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that Birdwood was in favour of using artillery to complete the wire cutting. The Fifth Army had 26 batteries of medium and heavy howitzers available for the task, but there had been delays in moving the available field artillery into the area.<sup>18</sup>

In the event, the Fifth Army's operation for the 8th was postponed because the wire was found to be still intact in many areas. Australian patrols reported that east of Bullecourt the average depth of wire was 30 yards and no gaps could be found.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, Gough overruled Birdwood's objections, placing his faith in the tanks to cut the wire.

### III

The British First and Third Armies launched their offensive in great force on 9 April. Tanks were used in the attack. Of the forty-eight which were used to assist the infantry, at least two-thirds failed to complete their task due to mechanical or other failure.<sup>20</sup>

The reports that Gough received during the day indicated that the attack was successful. He believed that the Hindenburg Line was held much less strongly than previously understood.<sup>21</sup> He, therefore, notified his corps commanders that it seemed

that the chances of our getting patrols into enemy lines are greater than imagined ... Corps must be prepared to push forward as instructed [i.e. to send forward patrols and, if these could establish themselves in the Hindenburg Line, follow them up with larger forces and advance farther] ... and, in order to assist the possible advance of patrols and advanced guards this afternoon, corps will instruct that artillery fire of all calibres should be kept as intense as possible ...<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Birdwood diary, 9 April 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/29.

<sup>17</sup> Cyril Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan, 1940), 358.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 268.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>22</sup> Gough to corps commanders, 9 April 1917, quoted in *ibid.*

An attack was ordered for the following day, the 10th. The tanks which were to assist the infantry by leading the advance, lost their way, arriving too late to make an attack feasible.<sup>23</sup> Birdwood related that he was delighted, regarding it as "an intervention of Providence".<sup>24</sup> The plan had been for the tanks to break down the wire and then to signal for the infantry to advance and occupy the Hindenburg Line. But Birdwood was doubtful that it could be successful.<sup>25</sup> At a conference at Army headquarters that day, he suggested that it might be difficult for the tanks to form up suitably and, therefore, they might lead the following infantry astray.<sup>26</sup> The tank commander assured him that the tanks could form up without difficulty and also unobserved.<sup>27</sup> Birdwood also pointed out the folly of attacking with the wire still uncut. Gough, although in agreement, responded that because of the tanks, conditions were now altered.<sup>28</sup> While the situation was being discussed, Gough received a telephone call from Kiggell, Haig's chief of staff at G.H.Q. Returning to the meeting, Gough reported

that there was every hope that the attack by 3rd Army on Cherisy and Fontaine would be a great success, and that it was of the greatest importance that we, i.e., 5th Army, should shove through to capture Riencourt and Hendecourt, as it would throw out a separate flank, which might well hope to succeed in capturing a large number of Germans driven down from the North West by the 3rd Army. Indeed, I understood that G.H.Q. wanted to know if the attack could not be delivered the same evening, but Gough informed us he had said that it would not be possible until the following morning. With such information it was of course impossible for me to make any further objections, as though I [Birdwood] still had personal doubts as to the wisdom of making such an attack, yet, after all, it was only a small part of a large operation carried out in accordance with the Commander-in-Chief's plans. The attack was accordingly launched at 4.30 a.m. on the morning of the 11th.<sup>29</sup>

In an extraordinary report concerning the attack by the tanks on the 11th, the war diary of 'D' Battalion, 1st Tank Brigade said:

On the morning of the 11th eleven Tanks were in position at 80 yards interval and 800 yards from the Hindenburg Line at

---

23 "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May, 1917".

24 Ibid.

25 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 328.

26 "Proceedings of a conference at Army Headquarters on 10.4.17", AWM 26/180/4.

27 Ibid.

28 "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May 1917".

29 Ibid.

4 a.m. At 4.45 a.m. the first wave of infantry advanced. Tanks arrived on Hindenburg Line breaking lanes in wire through which the infantry passed through and both the front and support trenches of the Hindenburg Line were captured. Two tanks turned Eastwards and four Tanks turned Westwards and advanced in direction of Bullecourt and of these only one reached Bullecourt, the other three receiving direct hits by shells and put out of action. The Tanks still in action went into Bullecourt and cruised about the village shooting all enemy visible. The enemy fled in disorder and our own infantry were unable to keep close up to the Tanks.

Two Tanks assisted in the capture of Riencourt.

Two Tanks led the infantry into Hendecourt.<sup>30</sup>

Gough was convinced that the tanks had done all they could to assist the operation, and "that the failure was due to no fault of theirs".<sup>31</sup>

As the British official historian records, this episode became "a veritable legend and one of the most curious of the War ... Actually no tanks and no infantry reached Riencourt, far less Hendecourt. If the Australian records were not conclusive on this point, the German accounts, which support them, would finally settle the question".<sup>32</sup>

The battalion commanders who had led the Australian attack were scathing in their report of the operation calling the tanks "useless, or worse than useless".<sup>33</sup> The tanks were late in arriving at the jumping-off place and only three arrived to join in the attack. The tank crews appeared to be ignorant of what was required of them and knew nothing of the operation itself. The commander of one tank had not even synchronised his watch, his time being some five minutes behind the time given to the infantry.<sup>34</sup> It was claimed that the tank crews were not aware in which direction the enemy were. This was "verified by the fact that they opened fire on our troops, thereby causing us many casualties. One Tank in particular opened fire on our men at [the] jumping off place, killing 4 and wounding others".<sup>35</sup> No-one appeared to be in command of the operation and tanks wandered about aimlessly, thus drawing enemy fire to the infantry as well as to themselves.<sup>36</sup>

---

30 Extracts from War Diary of 'D' Battalion, 1st Tank Brigade - co-operating with Vth and I Anzac Corps in attack on Bullecourt - April 11th 1917, Heyes Papers, AWM 45/24/7.

31 MGGS, Fifth Army to OC 'D' Battalion, H.B., M.G. Corps, April 1917 in *ibid.*

32 Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1, 364.

33 "Special report on 'Tank' co-operation in attack night of 10/11th April 1917" [by GOCs of 16th Bn. and 14th Bn], AWM 26/171/11.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*



Only one tank reached its objective, but it was put out of action by direct hits from a gun in Riencourt. The other tanks appeared to make no effort to reach their objectives. The Australian battalion commanders were of the opinion that tanks could probably serve usefully if they were directly under the orders of the infantry officers commanding the attack. However, they should never be relied upon as the sole arm of support in an attack by infantry.<sup>37</sup>

In an attempt to put this incident into a better light, the British official historian opined that "[t]heir noise and formidable appearance undoubtedly affected the nerves of the German infantry in the early stages of the fight and the artillery concentrated its fire upon them, to the profit of the Infantry".<sup>38</sup> He acknowledged that "[o]n the other hand, the whole scheme depended on them, and from this point of view they were a handicap rather than a help. When they failed, the Australian troops found themselves committed to an attack on the redoubtable Hindenburg Line, with the wire only slightly damaged, no barrage in front of them, and no further aid from tanks".<sup>39</sup> He noted that in the whole course of the war, no other attacks were made "in such disadvantageous circumstances against such defences".<sup>40</sup> In a report of the operation, Birdwood limited his comments to an observation that because the tanks had been used in the operation, it had prevented the usual artillery barrage being laid down prior to the attack.<sup>41</sup> He allowed to pass the obvious comment that had the artillery been able to carry out its normal schedule, more wire would have been cut.

#### IV

On the 13th, Birdwood wrote to Gough requesting that the next operation be postponed until the wire had been definitely cut. He emphasised that "[u]nless this wire is effectively destroyed the success of the operation will be very doubtful, and I ask therefore that the date of the attack be not fixed until sufficient evidence is available that the preparation is complete".<sup>42</sup> Clearly, Birdwood had strong objections to the use of the tanks, preferring to rely on the tried and tested artillery with which he was familiar and in which he had faith.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1, 366.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May, 1917".

<sup>42</sup> Birdwood to Fifth Army, 13 April 1917, AWM 26/152/8.

General Holmes, commander of the 4th Australian Division which had carried out the attack of the 11th, was of the opinion that had it been carried out under an artillery barrage, even with the wire only partially cut as was the case, the ground covered initially in the attack, could have been held.<sup>43</sup> Gough, however, claimed in a letter to Birdwood that had Holmes brought up his reserves within thirty minutes of the attack starting, they would now hold Riencourt and Hendecourt.<sup>44</sup> There is no doubt that Birdwood would have disagreed with Gough's opinion although there appears to be no direct comment from him extant in this matter.

Since the failure at Bullecourt on the 11th, there were repeated postponements by the Fifth Army, in renewing the attack.<sup>45</sup> This was due to Birdwood's distrust of the tanks and his desire to act without them. He preferred to rely on the artillery to cut the wire.<sup>46</sup> By now, the motive for continuing the Bullecourt operation had altered. The object of the first attack had been to exploit any success made by the Third Army in its strike against the Hindenburg Line.<sup>47</sup> The object of a second attack, was to maintain the position won by the Australians, although it was of no tactical value, "except so far as its tenure might assist further British efforts by hampering the enemy's defence of Bullecourt".<sup>48</sup>

## V

The second attack was the subject of very careful preparation, which was in striking contrast with that of the first attack.<sup>49</sup> The British official history records that "[o]rders and instructions went into minute detail, and the infantry practised the attack on ground marked out to represent the enemy's entrenchments".<sup>50</sup>

Birdwood had advanced some of his guns to a position which he realised might be dangerously close to the German trenches. He claimed that this had been essential to enable the field guns to deal with the trenches at an effective range.<sup>51</sup> Although the Germans managed to destroy five of these guns, the

---

43 "Report on attack against Hindenburg Line by 4th Australian Division, April 11th, 1917", AWM 26/169/37.

44 Gough to Birdwood, 14 April 1917, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/7.

45 Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1, 455.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 489.

49 Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1, 458.

50 Ibid.

51 "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May, 1917".

Australians' counter-attack was a success, driving the enemy back to their lines.<sup>52</sup> The German wire and trenches in the vicinity of Bullecourt were now kept under a continuous bombardment.

Birdwood was given a considerable addition to his heavy artillery which eventually consisted of some thirty batteries. By firing day and night, the enemy's wire was eventually cut.<sup>53</sup> After some delay, the 3 May was fixed as the day for the attack on Bullecourt at the same place as the previous attack in April.<sup>54</sup>

The Australians attacked Bullecourt to the east of the village. Simultaneously, the 62nd Division of the 5th Corps attacked the village and the Hindenburg Line to the west.<sup>55</sup> The 2nd Australian Division established itself in the German trenches gaining a front of some 800 yards in the Riencourt re-entrant between Bullecourt and Queant.<sup>56</sup> As Gough related, the Germans placed considerable importance on their maintaining the Bullecourt position, "but we gradually extended our hold, in spite of fierce resistance - a continuous ebb and flow of attack and counter-attack".<sup>57</sup>

This discussion by Gough in a couple of lines of the second Bullecourt battle belies the reality of what actually happened. Birdwood had maintained from the first that the Australian position could not be held unless Bullecourt was captured. Until the 7th, these attempts were unsuccessful.<sup>58</sup> On that day, the eastern side of Bullecourt was seized by the British who met with Australian troops who had bombed their way down the Hindenburg Line to join them.<sup>59</sup>

Bean recorded that in both battles, the Australian casualties amounted to some 10,000; in the first battle, 3,000 casualties, and in the second, 7,000.<sup>60</sup> The casualties were high because in the latter battle, the Germans "launched against the Australians seven general counter-attacks and perhaps a dozen minor ones".<sup>61</sup> Bean further noted that Bullecourt more than any other battle, shook the Australians' confidence in the capacity of the British high command.<sup>62</sup> It is hard to disagree with the assessment of Eric Andrews and B.G.Jordan who

---

52 Ibid.

53 "Operations by 1st Anzac Corps during the period 17th March to 13th May, 1917".

54 Ibid.

55 Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1, 455.

56 Ibid.

57 Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 188.

58 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 342.

59 Ibid., 343.

60 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 543.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., 544.

have chastised Gough and the British high command because "they created a situation in which the cards were stacked heavily against the Australian troops".<sup>63</sup> They assert that the primary error in the second battle was the same as in the first battle: that of attacking in a re-entrant.<sup>64</sup>

It is unfortunate that there does not exist a comment by Birdwood regarding this particular operation. After all, the wire had been cut by the artillery before the attack commenced, and this was something he purported to rely upon for success. Later, he gave the Bullecourt episode little attention in *Khaki and Gown*. The first battle is described in approximately one page. The second battle is not mentioned, even in passing.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, Birdwood did not regard Bullecourt as a highlight of his time on the Western Front. Nor perhaps did he wish to reveal his criticisms to a wide audience.

Birdwood appears to have been critical of the high command during these operations as noted above. His criticisms were never of the sort for which he could later be chastised, or criticised himself. Rather, they appear to have been eminently sensible. He was right to be critical of Gough's haste to commence operations without proper preparation. As at Pozieres and at Mouquet Farm, he had ample opportunity at Bullecourt to address military problems in his capacity as a corps commander. But he may have had to leave the majority of the running to others rather than being a major force himself.

## VI

As with 1916, it is difficult to assess Birdwood's achievements in this period of 1917. Although he had been dubious about the role that tanks could play in warfare, he had every reason to be so. Used for the first time on the Somme in September 1916, of forty-nine which had been allotted to Fourth and Reserve Armies, thirty-two reached the start line; "[o]f those 9 subsequently broke down, 5 were ditched, 9 failed to rendezvous with the infantry and 9 reached their objectives and did serious execution".<sup>66</sup> Clearly, Birdwood was hardly guilty of an ill-founded lack of confidence in the new technology.

Birdwood at this time was a far more experienced commander. He had overcome the limitations of his inexperience to a certain extent. Before the first battle, he had not been forceful enough in putting across his view that the way

---

<sup>63</sup> E.M.Andrews and B.G.Jordan, "Second Bullecourt revisited: the Australians in France, 3 May 1917", *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 15 (October 1989), 43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 312-313.

<sup>66</sup> Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 135.

to win was to fight with artillery. In this opinion, he was right. He should, perhaps, have been prepared to give an ultimatum to Gough, and have been forceful in demonstrating the way in which he believed the operation should be undertaken. Instead, he bowed to the wishes of his superiors and, therefore, displayed a limitation as a commander. This episode demonstrates again that Birdwood was prepared to continue working within the command structure without questioning it.

## CHAPTER TEN

### I

By the time the I Anzac Corps joined the Second Army commanded by General Sir Herbert Plumer in August 1917, the focus of the fighting had moved to Belgium. From Ypres, Haig intended to launch his main attack to the north-east, clearing first the Passchendaele-Staden Ridge and then the German defences which guarded the Belgian coast.<sup>1</sup> This task was to be undertaken by the Fifth Army commanded by General Gough who was ordered to take the high ground of the ridge between Gheluvelt to the south-east of Ypres and the Passchendaele Ridge.<sup>2</sup> As it advanced, the ground already captured was to be taken over by the Second Army which would safeguard the Fifth Army's right flank and rear against attack from the south.<sup>3</sup>

Haig launched his attack on 31 July, hoping to clear the ridge by early August to facilitate an attack by the Fourth Army on the Belgian coast. It was intended that as Gough broke out from the Ypres salient and headed towards the coast, Rawlinson, commander of the Fourth Army, would drive a force up the coast. At the same time, he would land an amphibious force behind the German lines between Ostend and the mouth of the River Yser.<sup>4</sup> This was intended to divert the German forces away from Gough.<sup>5</sup>

Because progress by Gough was slow, the Passchendaele-Staden Ridge not having been taken towards the end of August, the coastal scheme was abandoned.<sup>6</sup> Cruttwell suggests that had it been successful, "it would have given a true strategical direction to the whole operation, unattainable by a mere frontal attack".<sup>7</sup>

Gough claimed later that his intention had always been that the operation of clearing the ridge would take at least a month to complete and must be done in stages.<sup>8</sup> He envisaged "a series of carefully organised and prepared attacks, only gaining ground step by step".<sup>9</sup> By early August, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 192.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 271.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 439.

<sup>8</sup> Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

weather was so bad that operations should have been halted until it improved. Haig and Gough were adamant that they must proceed.<sup>10</sup>

On 24 August, Gough requested that Plumer step up his participation in the operation by advancing the Second Army's front thus drawing fire away from the Fifth Army. Plumer demurred. He had spent the last two years in a salient and had no intention of pushing himself into another.<sup>11</sup> Asked to settle the matter, Haig decided to give a more active role to the Second Army. Plumer's objective was to be the Polygon Wood-Broodseinde Ridge.<sup>12</sup>

## II

On 28 August, Plumer asked Birdwood to submit his preliminary views regarding the forthcoming operations. Birdwood did so noting that fuller consideration and more detailed knowledge of the area could lead him to modify his opinions, but would not alter the main considerations.<sup>13</sup>

Birdwood's plan noted that any advance up the ridge would have to be made in a north-easterly direction. Therefore, the spur running in a northerly direction with its southern extremity at Tower Hamlets, and its northern extremity on the high ground at Veldhoek and which presented a potential problem, would have to be taken and a flank established before he could advance.<sup>14</sup> Until this flank was established, his advance could not extend further than the fringe of Polygon Wood, about half a mile north of Veldhoek.<sup>15</sup> Birdwood suggested that the first operation advance only as far as the fringe of Polygon Wood, the next step being to advance directly to the east to Joist Farm, a distance of some five hundred yards.<sup>16</sup> Birdwood believed that to achieve his objective would require three divisions, perhaps four, depending on the enemy's resistance and the disposition of their forces.<sup>17</sup> The remainder of the task divided itself into another two steps. First, the occupation of the ridge where it turned directly to the north, a further advance of some four hundred

---

10 Ibid., 205.

11 Ibid., 207.

12 Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), 210.

13 Birdwood to Second Army, 28 August 1917, AWM 26/7/220/10.

14 "Note upon any proposed operations between the Ypres-Menin Road and the Roulers Railway against the high ground between Becelaere and Broodseinde", 28 August 1917, in *ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

yards. Secondly, the occupation of the ridge between there and Broodseinde, an advance of about a mile.<sup>18</sup>

The following day, Plumer submitted his plan to GHQ for advancing his army to the east which incorporated Birdwood's suggestions for the advance by the I Anzac Corps along the ridge.<sup>19</sup> After taking advice from Birdwood and others, Plumer estimated that it would take at least three weeks to make the necessary preparations for an attack.<sup>20</sup>

Birdwood believed that the rifle was now going to play a major part in the forthcoming operations. Instead of attacking the enemy in their trenches,

hereafter we must expect to find him irregularly disposed, but disposed to the best tactical advantage and making full use of all arms. We must not only alter our bombardment and barrage plans in consequence but troops must now advance in a fighting formation behind a barrage which will move slowly enough to allow them to fight in areas behind it - a form of semi-open warfare wherein troops are protected by a slow barrage in depth. The rifle will again become the principal weapon and this must be instilled into the troops.<sup>21</sup>

This new system of attack involved a swift advance by each company, battalion and brigade to escape the German barrage, and then each shaking itself out into consecutive waves being followed by a creeping barrage from its own artillery.<sup>22</sup> The barrage moved forward at an extremely slow pace: "sometimes 100 yards in 8 minutes, instead of in 2 as on the Somme, and with several long pauses, each of up to an hour or more".<sup>23</sup> Having just made the point that the barrage would allow the infantry to fight, Birdwood was loath to acknowledge that it was the artillery which was the principal weapon rather than the rifle.

Birdwood expanded on his memorandum when he wrote to his divisional commanders on the 30th, regarding the kind of fighting to which they were not familiar. Instead of advancing in a line, they would now have to clear whole areas of ground before they could advance.<sup>24</sup> There were two main facts to keep in mind regarding this. First, it was of extreme importance to impress on all troops the necessity of the use of the rifle in these forthcoming

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Plumer to GHQ, 29 August 1917, AWM 26/7/273/16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> BGGs, I Anzac Corps to 1st Australian Division, 29 August 1917, AWM 26/7/220/10.

<sup>22</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 363.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Birdwood to GOCs, 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, 30 August 1917, AWM 26/7/220/10.



operations. Secondly, attacks were to be arranged so that when the inevitable counter-attack was made by the Germans, the men would not be exhausted and unable to meet the enemy.<sup>25</sup> With these thoughts in mind, Birdwood suggested that troops be trained in open order formations. He observed that it was not possible to emulate the kind of ground they would have to cover in an attack: we must just make the best of such fields as are available in carrying out rapid movements to the front and flanks - quickly getting into artillery formations and forming lines by platoons, etc., etc. as quickly as possible".<sup>26</sup> To ensure that the troops would not be too tired to meet a counter-attack by the enemy, Birdwood stressed that any distance covered in this country would be exhausting and, therefore, any advance made must be of only a short distance.<sup>27</sup> It was accepted by Birdwood that any advance made, must be of no greater distance than 1,500 yards in a day. This was to be achieved in stages.<sup>28</sup> All attacks were now to be made on a wide front, and in the interval between main attacks, minor operations were not to be considered.<sup>29</sup> Birdwood noted that a "few clean rifles might just make all the difference at a critical moment". He urged that because of the mud, serious attempts be made to keep all weapons clean and ready for use.<sup>30</sup>

Putting his ideas into practice, Birdwood wrote to Plumer on 1 September outlining his ideas for the forthcoming operation. He stressed that the remedy to correct their position on the ridge should not be an operation carried out on a narrow front.<sup>31</sup> Birdwood pointed out, that his first "correct" objective, a point at the fringe of Polygon Wood, could not be selected as a first objective because the distance to be covered was too great. It required a greater extent of activity on his south flank than possible to achieve because of the terrain.<sup>32</sup> He proposed, therefore, a preliminary objective a shorter distance from his starting point. He acknowledged that the drawback to such an operation was that the front was limited and that this would not allow the Fifth Army to the north, to assist him.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, he could advance further north and south along the ridge. However,

---

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 735.

29 Ibid.

30 Birdwood to GOCs Australian Divisions, 30 August 1917.

31 Birdwood to Second Army, 1 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/10.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

[t]his has the disadvantage of making the advance on the south flank too far (some 1,500 yards) for the capabilities of the troops and not far enough to be fully sound tactically. The capacity of the troops to cover the distance will be largely dependent on weather conditions. Against this drawback are to be set the two considerations -

(a) the necessity for attack on a big front

(b) the fact that in an operation of magnitude the first advance can generally be a greater one than is possible afterwards.

A third set off is that a line further forward would give us observation over the enemy's most probable lines of counter-attack.<sup>34</sup>

After consideration of all these factors, Birdwood was prepared to make his first step in the proposed operation to advance to a point to the south of the fringe of Polygon Wood.<sup>35</sup> In other words, this was in line with his previous plan of the 28th. He now proposed as a first step an advance of some 1,500 yards. He suggested that the corps both north and south of his own would have to concurrently carry out certain movements to enable his plan to succeed.<sup>36</sup>

By now, Birdwood was clearly in command of his thoughts for any future operations and he was able to contribute significantly in the planning. As Bean pointed out in the Australian official history, "the main work in producing the detailed tactical plan fell on Birdwood's chief-of-staff... White. To some extent, other corps conformed to this plan ...".<sup>37</sup> These plans could not have been submitted to Plumer without Birdwood's assent. It is fair to suggest that he had a large part in the overall planning of the operation despite Bean's allusion to the "leading staff officer of the A.I.F.". <sup>38</sup>

A few days later, Birdwood told Plumer that he was apprehensive regarding the weather. If it remained dry, he had every hope of advancing the proposed 1,500 yards satisfactorily. If it became wet, he was not so sanguine.<sup>39</sup>

### III

On the 3rd, Birdwood issued orders outlining the proposed operations. Stating that the role of the Second Army was now to capture the southern portion of the Passchendaele Ridge from Broodseinde southwards to Hollebeke

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

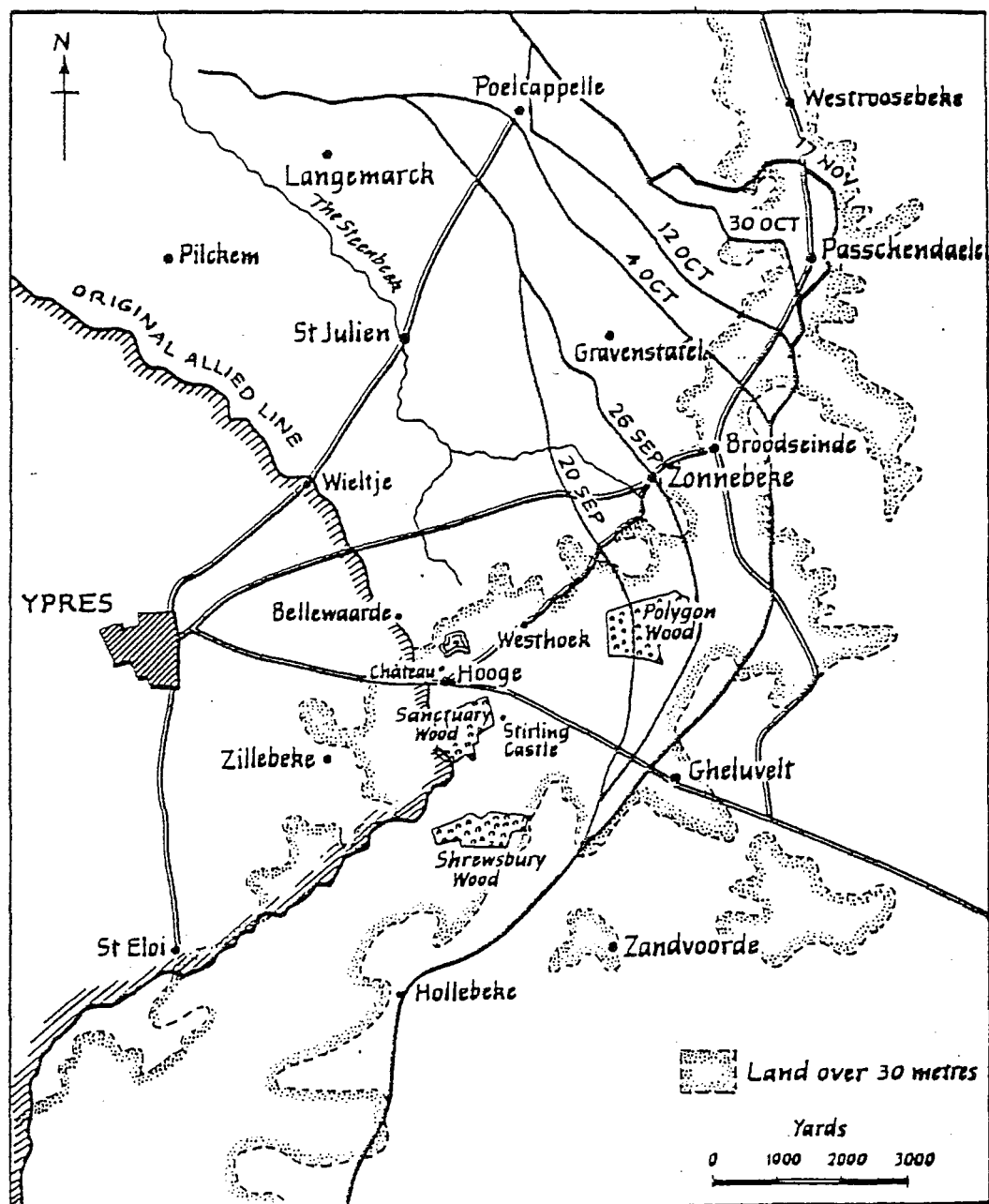
<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 735.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Birdwood to Plumer, 3 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/10.



Third Ypres, September–November, 1917

including the Poldehoek and Tower Hamlets Ridges, this would facilitate the further advance and protect the right flank of the Fifth Army which was to advance at the same time as the Second Army.<sup>40</sup> The task of advancing north-east up the ridge towards the line Becelaere-Broodseinde had been given to the I Anzac Corps.<sup>41</sup>

Major-General Harington, Plumer's MGGS, wrote to corps commanders on 5 September, asking for their recommendations regarding the use of tanks in the forthcoming operations.<sup>42</sup> Not surprisingly, Birdwood replied that the state of the ground precluded the use of tanks in his part of the operation.<sup>43</sup>

On 8 September, Birdwood wrote to his divisional commanders regarding the German method of counter-attack and the reasons for its success.<sup>44</sup> He had concluded, after interviewing officers who had been involved in recent fighting, that the German success was due to advanced posts being too far forward, whereas 100 to 150 yards was sufficient to warn the first formed line of troops of a counter-attack. This body of troops must be prepared to stand and fight off the counter-attack rather than feel that they were going to be inevitably overwhelmed and, therefore, retire. The supports to the first formed line must advance to meet the counter-attack if the first line retired. He continued: "Any tendency for the supports to fall back with a line that is being driven in on them must under no circumstances be permitted. The very sight of them advancing will probably be sufficient to stem the German advance ...".<sup>45</sup>

On 14 September, Birdwood, in reply to a request from Plumer, outlined his plans subsequent to the operation already outlined.<sup>46</sup> Birdwood pointed out that the decision as to the distance of the next step must have regard to the time it would take to make an advance, the improbability of advancing too great a distance and the difficulties involved of advancing the artillery: "This ... will be necessary and the intention must be to advance the guns far enough forward to deal, not only with the second, but the third step of the operations".<sup>47</sup> He believed that the selected objective must be one where the task of flank protection would not be too difficult. Therefore, he thought the

---

<sup>40</sup> I Anzac Corps Operations Preliminary Instructions No.1, 3 September 1917, in *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> MGGS, Second Army to I Anzac, X IX Corps, 5 September 1917, AWM 26/7/274/1.

<sup>43</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 5 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/11.

<sup>44</sup> Birdwood to GOCs, 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, 8 September 1917, in *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 14 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

next objective should be a line to the east at a further distance of about 1,200 yards.<sup>48</sup> Birdwood admitted that

[t]he centre of the objective line indicated would be opposed by slightly higher ground and is within some 1,200 - 1,500 yards of a crest line which the enemy is sure to make great efforts to retain, and behind which he has facilities for moving and assembling counter-attacking troops. This inevitable disadvantage will probably have the effect of causing a drain on available reserves in the maintenance of our positions.<sup>49</sup>

Prior to the attack, Haig visited I Anzac Corps headquarters on the 17th. He was pleased to find all the divisional commanders full of confidence and their men carefully trained.<sup>50</sup> He noted that "[a]ltogether I felt it was most exhilarating to go round such a very knowledgable and confident body of leaders".<sup>51</sup>

Birdwood's preliminary instructions for the attack were very detailed. Clearly, much thought had gone into their preparation.<sup>52</sup> Some eight pages in length, the instructions covered everything from the assembly of troops to the marking of the troops' steel helmets.<sup>53</sup> Every unit involved was to ensure that it had a certain number of guides who were familiar with the ground to be covered and with the assembly positions. It was to be ensured that to enable the prompt and proper use of reserves, information was to be sent from the front regardless of whether telephone communications had broken down. This was to be impressed on every commander.<sup>54</sup>

Like his preliminary instructions, Birdwood's orders for the attack were also detailed. Clearly a lot of thought had been given to them.<sup>55</sup> Certainly they were far more detailed than any issued during the Somme offensive the previous year. Having been given the responsibility for the main operation of capturing the ridge, Birdwood clearly felt it incumbent on him to be as careful as possible in the making of his preparations. It appears from the evidence available that Plumer interfered as little as possible. On the contrary, he does

---

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Haig diary, 17 September 1917, WO 256/22/20/31.

51 Ibid.

52 I Anzac Corps Operations Preliminary Instructions No.5, 16 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/12.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 I Anzac Corps Order No.172, 18 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/13.

not appear to have altered the plans made by Birdwood and White at all. Bean commented that

The heavy pressure of the staff work at this stage was evident to all who were aware of these preparations. General Harington offered to come to General White at any time for consultation. "It will save you time and that is all that matters, as you are the busiest man".<sup>56</sup>

What is abundantly clear is that by this stage of the war on the Western Front, Birdwood and White were both far more confident of their ability to plan an attack and to carry it through to fruition. It must be said that each corps had to conform to the overall artillery plan laid down by the Second Army, and this severely restricted the initiative which could be exercised by Birdwood or any other corps commander.

#### IV

On the evening of the 19th, drizzle began to fall and by 11 p.m. rain was falling steadily. Plumer suggested to Birdwood that a postponement of his attack due to begin the next morning, may be necessary. Birdwood was entirely against this as his 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions were already making their way to the assembly point.<sup>57</sup>

The attack on 20 September was a success. The corps assaulted, captured and consolidated the enemy positions running north and south through Polygon Wood.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, the training given the troops prior to the operation had paid dividends. Initiative and knowledge had both been developed and morale was high.<sup>59</sup> There was no doubt of the efficacy of the barrage in depth. The corps' barrage had been dense and regular and the troops found it easy to move closely with it.<sup>60</sup> Divisional commanders agreed with Birdwood's assessment. Walker of the 1st Australian Division claimed that the main reasons for the success were the fitness and fighting spirit of the men. All officers had made themselves familiar with the ground to be covered in the attack. The men had had the whole scheme outlined to them on a large scale model and every man knew exactly what was expected of him and was thoroughly conversant with the barrage lifts and pauses.<sup>61</sup> General Smyth,

---

<sup>56</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 748.

<sup>57</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 314.

<sup>58</sup> "I Anzac Corps narrative of operations on 20.9.17", AWM 26/7/220/13.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Walker to I Anzac Corps, 23 September 1917, in *ibid.*

commander of the 2nd Australian Division, agreed with Walker's assessment, adding that the systematic establishment of ammunition dumps had also been helpful, as had been the issue of good maps, aerial photographs and other information.<sup>62</sup>

The outstanding gain of the operation had been the driving out of the Germans from the major part of their key position on Gheluvelt plateau.<sup>63</sup> As successful as the attack had been, Birdwood's corps had lost some 5,000 men and the Germans about 4,500.<sup>64</sup>

## V

On 21 September, GHQ issued orders for the next general attack by the Second and Fifth Armies. This was to take place on the 26th.<sup>65</sup> Birdwood's corps, which was to make the main attack, was to carry the line forward another 1,200 yards and capture the whole of Polygon Wood and the southern part of Zonnebeke village.<sup>66</sup>

Birdwood submitted plans to Plumer on the 21st for the continuation of the operation.<sup>67</sup> Again, the artillery barrage had been meticulously planned by the Second Army. The result of this planning was that on the 26th, "the most perfect barrage that had ever protected Australian troops" was laid down.<sup>68</sup> Birdwood's orders to the corps were also detailed, omitting nothing. Each commander would have been aware of exactly what was required at every step of the attack.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the "perfection" of the barrage, the casualties again were heavy. The 4th and 5th Australian Divisions lost about 5,500 men.<sup>70</sup> The casualties were no doubt high due to the fact that the Germans had made "desperate efforts" to retain the positions captured, counter-attacking many times. Harington recorded that this indicated the importance they attached to denying the British "ground observation facilities from the heads of the valleys between

---

<sup>62</sup> Smyth to I Anzac Corps, n.d., in *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2 (London: HMSO, 1948), 278.

<sup>64</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 315.

<sup>65</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 280.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 21 September 1917, AWM 26/7/220/13.

<sup>68</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 368.

<sup>69</sup> I Anzac Corps Order No.177, 24 September 1917, AWM 26/7/221/1.

<sup>70</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 369.

Gheluvelt and Becelaere, and how much [they were] willing to pay to hold the area".<sup>71</sup>

Birdwood submitted plans to Plumer on the 27th for the third stage of the operation.<sup>72</sup> This was to be commenced in early October, the attack being undertaken by the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions on a front of 2,000 yards from Polygon Wood to Zonnebeke.<sup>73</sup> Once again, the preliminary instructions issued by Birdwood were full, apparently leaving little to chance. As in the previous two stages of the operation, the details regarding the barrage to be laid down were spelt out in exact detail as were the rest of the planning details.<sup>74</sup> There could be no doubt by any of the participants as to what was required of them.

Obviously thinking and planning ahead, Birdwood suggested to Plumer before the operation began, that after the next stage it would be necessary to move the artillery forward to the neighbourhood of Zonnebeke.<sup>75</sup> He, therefore, suggested that a light rail link be established next to the main railway line for the purpose of moving the guns forward rather than try to move them by roads which, doubtless, would soon be the worse for wear.<sup>76</sup>

Because the first two steps of the current operation had been so successful, Haig was hopeful that the main Passchendaele-Staden Ridge could be taken by the end of October.<sup>77</sup> On 28 September, Haig told Plumer and Gough that the capture of the eastern end of Ghelevelt Plateau and Broodseinde, the third step, "would complete a definite stage of the offensive".<sup>78</sup> Following this, he expected to pursue the enemy either eastwards towards Moorslede, or northwards to turn the German flank on the main ridge towards Roulers.<sup>79</sup>

## VI

The main assault for the third step was to be made by I Anzac Corps on 6 October. Its objective was to capture Ghelevelt plateau northwards to

---

<sup>71</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 294.

<sup>72</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 27 September 1917, AWM 26/7/221/1.

<sup>73</sup> "Weekly summary of operations 27/9-4/10/17", AWM 26/7/221/2.

<sup>74</sup> I Anzac Corps Operations Preliminary Instructions No.2, 29 September 1917, AWM 26/7/221/1.

<sup>75</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 30 September 1917, in *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 296.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-297.



Broodseinde.<sup>80</sup> However, both Plumer and Gough hoped to be ready by the 4th to carry out the operation.<sup>81</sup> Haig was adamant that the opportunity of exploiting any success made after the attack not be missed, "and that all the necessary means for this purpose should be at hand, This must not involve over-crowding the forward areas with troops, but will necessitate the maintenance of fresh troops in suitable places whence they can be transported rapidly by bus, rail, or on horseback to the battlefield".<sup>82</sup>

As pointed out in the British official history, the Second Army artillery plan was designed to confuse the enemy as to when the next step would be carried out.<sup>83</sup> The first step had been preceded by a seven day bombardment; the second step by a 24 hour bombardment.<sup>84</sup> For the third step about to be undertaken, there were no plans for any artillery preparation other than the normal counter-battery work and the deliberate destruction of strong points.<sup>85</sup> Birdwood suggested that gas shells be used prior to the attack to neutralise German batteries as he considered them more effective than 60 pounder shrapnel.<sup>86</sup> He could see no reason why it could not be used the day before the attack, although he thought it unwise to do so just before the attack because it may bring retaliation to their own troops.<sup>87</sup> In the event, the preliminary bombardment consisted only of practice barrages for a couple of days prior to the attack. As already discussed, there was no intense bombardment until the the attack began.<sup>88</sup>

The next step was to be carried out in two stages. The first advance was to be to the 'red line', 100-200 yards short of the objective. After an hour's pause, the second advance was to be made to the 'blue line', some 200-400 yards beyond which was the final objective.<sup>89</sup> This meant that the 1st Australian Division would advance between 1,200-1,800 yards, while the 2nd would advance between 1,800-1,900 yards.<sup>90</sup>

The attack commenced at 6 a.m. on 4 October, and by 8.12 a.m., the first objective had been captured. By 12.20 p.m., the I Anzac Corps had captured

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> "Record of a conference held at Second Army Headquarters, Cassel on 2nd October 1917, AWM 26/7/273/3.

<sup>83</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 300.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 2 October 1917, AWM 26/7/221/2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 838-839.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 838.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 837.

the final objective.<sup>91</sup> The corps had again suffered heavily with some 4,000 casualties.<sup>92</sup>

The attack was a great success. Bean exaggerated its success by stating that it was "indeed the most complete yet won by the British Army in France in that war".<sup>93</sup> As the ground captured varied in distance between 3/4 mile to under a quarter of a mile, it is difficult to agree with him, bearing in mind the heavy casualties. However, compared with the failures of the past, some observers felt that "[f]or the first time in years ... British troops on the Western Front stood face to face with the possibility of decisive success".<sup>94</sup>

Anxious to exploit the success, Haig sent his head of GHQ Intelligence, Brigadier-General Charteris, to discuss the possibility of doing so with Plumer.<sup>95</sup> According to Bean, most corps commanders were in favour of pressing on while the enemy was still in shock. Birdwood was strongly against a plan to advance eastwards proposed by another corps (II Anzac) although Bean fails to give the reason for this.<sup>96</sup> Edmonds, however, relates that Birdwood was against moving until the artillery was in a position to give close support and the supply communications had been improved.<sup>97</sup> After further consideration, Plumer decided to abandon any thought of exploitation.<sup>98</sup>

## VII

Continuous rain now fell and the Germans had reinforced their line with fresh troops. However, Haig decided to continue operations against the village of Passchendaele which lay on the next section of the main ridge.<sup>99</sup> The Second Army's orders of 4 October stated that the fourth stage of the operation would take place on the 9th. The operation was to be undertaken by I and II Anzac Corps.<sup>100</sup>

Birdwood submitted his plans for the operation to Plumer on the 4th. He noted that he assumed the role of the I Anzac Corps to be mainly flank

---

91 Sir Charles Harington, *Plumer of Messines* (London: John Murray, 1935), 121.

92 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 316.

93 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 371.

94 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 877.

95 Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 316.

96 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 870.

97 Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 317.

98 Ibid.

99 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, 372-373.

100 Second Army Operation Order No.7, 4 October 1917, AWM 26/7/274/5.

protection while II Anzac carried out the main attack.<sup>101</sup> Again, the plans were detailed and clear in their intention.

The following day, Birdwood pointed out in a memorandum to Plumer, that while the operation as planned could be carried out by his two divisions now in the line, it would not be possible to provide a reserve brigade from each division for exploitation of any success achieved on the 9th.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, he suggested bringing the 5th Australian Division into the line, using two of its brigades to exploit any success which may become practicable. This move would have the effect of reducing his reserve for further operations after the 9th, and his capacity for any offensive would be considerably diminished, "the more so as in my role of flank protection my resources will be greatly drained in forming the necessary defensive flank".<sup>103</sup> Birdwood noted that this operation necessitated him using four divisions, "two to the full".<sup>104</sup> In the event, only the 4th Australian Division was utilised in the attack.

Birdwood's corps was, by now, in a considerable state of exhaustion. Following the recent operations, each of the divisions was depleted by casualties. Birdwood wrote : "Indeed, in the present state of the 2nd Australian Division I am doubtful if it will even be fit to come into the line for some time".<sup>105</sup> He concluded with great reluctance that his corps could not be counted on to be available to see through the current operation of capturing Morslede.<sup>106</sup>

## VIII

The task given to Birdwood on the 9th because of his stated incapacities, was to provide protection to the right flank of II Anzac Corps which had been given the task of capturing Passchendaele.<sup>107</sup> This operation met with no success because most of the 3rd Australian Division got bogged in the mud below Passchendaele, and the ground which had been gained had to be given up. But, based on reports received during the operation, Haig believed he

---

<sup>101</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 4 October 1917, AWM 26/7/221/2.

<sup>102</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 5 October 1917, in *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Birdwood to Second Army, 8 October 1917, in *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> I Anzac Corps, Operations, Preliminary Instructions No.1, Series No.5, 9 October 1917, in *ibid.*

would be able to break through and pass Passchendaele in a further operation on the 12th.<sup>108</sup>

The I Anzac Corps had sustained a further 1,100 casualties on the 9th, and Birdwood, therefore, insisted that his action be limited to safeguarding the right flank of the II Anzac Corps in the operation.<sup>109</sup> Orders for the operation issued by the Second Army on the 10th reflect Plumer's agreement with Birdwood's proposal.<sup>110</sup>

The attack launched on the 12th was unsuccessful, Birdwood losing a further 1,000 troops.<sup>111</sup> He recorded that the conditions experienced made it impossible to move the guns forward to their intended positions : "[t]he supply of planks failed, and the ground was utterly impassable ... [n]or could any progress be made by the pack animals on which the ammunition supply depended; horses sank into the mud and disappeared ... when at length some ammunition did reach the guns it was so coated with mud as to be unusable, till cleaned. The conditions were simply indescribable , and a state of havoc ensued".<sup>112</sup>

Haig recorded that because the weather now made any movement difficult, the resultant delays to the British operations allowed the Germans to bring up reinforcements and to reorganise after each attack.<sup>113</sup> He wrote, "it was ... the difficulty of movement far more than hostile resistance which continued to limit our progress, and now made it doubtful whether the capture of the ridge before winter finally set in was possible".<sup>114</sup>

The fighting in the mud from the 9th onwards, resulted in no valuable British gains. Haig realised that there would be no breakthrough that year.<sup>115</sup>

Birdwood was keen to ascertain and to record all the lessons of the recent fighting. He, therefore, requested his divisional commanders to encourage their subordinates to give their experiences and their suggestions as to possible improvements in tactics and equipment.<sup>116</sup> This request was no doubt designed to keep up the morale of his troops who were badly suffering the effects of too many attacks on the German lines. But the active participation

---

<sup>108</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens* , 374.

<sup>109</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 317.

<sup>110</sup> Second Army Operation Order No.8, 10 October 1917, AWM 26/7/274/5.

<sup>111</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917* , 928.

<sup>112</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 317.

<sup>113</sup> J.H.Boraston (ed.), *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches (December 1915- April 1919)* (London: Dent, 1920), 127.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Bean, *Anzac to Amiens* , 374.

<sup>116</sup> BCGS, I Anzac Corps to GOCs, 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, 14 October 1917, AWM 26/7/221/3.

by the I Anzac Corps was practically ended on 12 October although it continued to hold the line of the Broodseinde Ridge.<sup>117</sup>

## IX

The Second Army resumed its offensive in conjunction with the Fifth Army on 26 October. Its task was to be the capture of Passchendaele by the Canadian Corps which would carry out the operation in three attacks.<sup>118</sup> Birdwood was to advance with, and protect, the right flank of the Canadian Corps in the attack on the 26th.<sup>119</sup> In the next operation on the 27th, Birdwood was to again protect the Canadian Corps' right flank.<sup>120</sup> In the event, no Australian infantry took part in either of these operations.<sup>121</sup> In the third attack on 30 October, the Canadians protected their own flank, I Anzac helping with some artillery and machine gun fire.<sup>122</sup>

Birdwood was anxious as regards the condition of his field artillery. On the 31st, he requested that arrangements be made by Second Army to relieve them.<sup>123</sup> He had withdrawn the artillery of the 4th Australian Division from the line, and thus had three divisional artilleries remaining. He considered that two divisional artilleries would be sufficient to cover the present corps front, but would not be able to provide an adequate co-operation in barrages and other bombardments during the operation being undertaken by the Canadian Corps on his left flank. He therefore requested permission to withdraw one divisional artillery.<sup>124</sup> In reply, Harington advised that as all the Army artillery was badly in need of relief, it would not be possible to relieve the Australian artillery until the forthcoming operations had finished.<sup>125</sup>

On 6 November, the eighth phase of the operation to capture Passchendaele was undertaken by the Canadian Corps. I Anzac again assisted with counter-battery work.<sup>126</sup> As a result of the attack, the Canadians were successful in taking and retaining a section of the Passchendaele high ground.<sup>127</sup>

---

117 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 930.

118 Second Army Operation Order No.9, 21 October 1917, AWM 26/7/274/6.

119 Ibid.

120 Second Army Operation Order No.10, 27 October 1917, AWM 26/7/274/7.

121 Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 935.

122 Ibid.

123 Birdwood to Second Army, 31 October 1917, AWM 26/7/221/5.

124 Ibid.

125 MGGS, Second Army to Birdwood, 31 October 1917, AWM 26/7/274/8.

126 Second Army Operation Order No.11, 4 November 1917, in *ibid.*

127 Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.2, 358-359.

Birdwood recorded how his "worn-out and sadly reduced divisions had to be withdrawn".<sup>128</sup> I Anzac was relieved on 14 November by II Anzac. The Australian forces in Flanders, including the 3rd Australian Division, had lost 38,093 men during the Ypres offensive.<sup>129</sup>

## X

The three battles of Menin Road, Polygon Wood and Broodseinde "were the cleanest and most decisive victories" that the Australians had yet fought.<sup>130</sup> In congratulating his men for their recent efforts at the time of their withdrawal from the front, Birdwood wrote : "All I think must realise that the fighting we have been through has been of an entirely satisfactory nature in that we were able to attain our objective in every one of the many attacks which we have put in, and that without a single hitch of any sort".<sup>131</sup> This was true for the early attacks, and although the objectives themselves were modest and attainable, the cost in casualties had been high. Birdwood's definition of success must be viewed with some scepticism. The blame for the failure of the attacks of 9 and 12 October, which were spectacularly unsuccessful, can be laid at Plumer's feet. Both these attacks had been ill-conceived and poorly executed because the objectives were too optimistic and Plumer's confidence in the troops' ability to cope with dreadful conditions misplaced.<sup>132</sup>

There is no doubt that the artillery fire plans used by Plumer were of great effect until the weather turned, making the battlefield a quagmire. Plumer was a firm believer in artillery and deployed on his front a total of 1,295, of which 575 were heavy and medium pieces.<sup>133</sup> This was the densest British artillery concentration of the war, one piece to every 5.2 yards of front.<sup>134</sup>

While Plumer was responsible for the artillery planning, there is no question that Birdwood and White were responsible for the planning of the infantry attacks, which were as successful as those of the artillery on which they were dependent. Left to himself, Birdwood, with White's assistance, made detailed and successful plans for each phase of the operation to capture the Passchendaele-Staden Ridge. Clearly, in such a situation, Birdwood was

---

<sup>128</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 318.

<sup>129</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917* , 936.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Birdwood to I Anzac Corps, 12 November 1917, AWM 26/7/221/5.

<sup>132</sup> Powell, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General* , 228-229.

<sup>133</sup> Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* , 358.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

confident. As at Gallipoli, his superior commander left him more to his own devices, unlike the previous year during the Somme offensive when he was clearly uncomfortable with the prevailing situation. This frame of mind is reflected in *Khaki and Gown* where 1917 is dealt with in far more detail than 1916, the reader gaining a far better idea of the Flanders operations than of those of the Somme.

This was a much more satisfying time for Birdwood. Where he had been limited in what he could achieve, he was now able independently to exercise more initiative due to Plumer's methods of command. Gough appears to have held a more tight rein over his subordinate commanders. Plumer, on the other hand, appears to have allowed his corps commanders more freedom to exercise their abilities, interfering only when strictly necessary, although he "kept his finger on the pulse of everything".<sup>135</sup>

Although the operation as originally envisaged was a failure, Birdwood was of the opinion that had the weather held, Haig could have won a great victory.<sup>136</sup> But by the time of the Australians' withdrawal, Haig "had abandoned his larger strategic design, and was merely endeavouring to secure a tenable position on the ridge".<sup>137</sup> Clearly, this was no great victory. The Canadian success had not led to a great victory either.<sup>138</sup> However, for Birdwood, 1917 proved to be a far more satisfying year professionally than 1916 had been.

Until the 4 October, Plumer's more open style of command gave Birdwood more scope to use his initiative than when the I Anzac Corps had been under Gough's orders. Towards the end of 1917 Birdwood was more experienced. This is reflected in the fact that Plumer left so much of the operational planning to him and White. However, it is clear that Birdwood was limited by having to act within the parameters laid down by Plumer. If Plumer's artillery plans did not succeed, nothing that Birdwood did could succeed either. Conversely, if Plumer's plans were successful, so also were Birdwood's.

Birdwood demonstrated that he realised the limitations imposed on the army. Without a good artillery plan, the infantry could not succeed. After the 9th, his corps was so depleted that he was limited in what he could achieve, although he must have known that success was unlikely. But he was not

---

<sup>135</sup> Powell, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General*, 156.

<sup>136</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 318.

<sup>137</sup> Bean, *The A.I.F. in France: 1917*, 945.

<sup>138</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium: 1917*, vol.2, 366.

prepared to say so, demonstrating his reluctance to speak up and perhaps be counted as a commander without confidence.



## EPILOGUE

Following the Flanders fighting, Birdwood took over the temporary command of the Second Army from Plumer who had been sent to Italy to command the British force there.<sup>1</sup> Birdwood remained in command from December 1917 until March 1918 and kept the newly- formed Australian Corps in the Second Army, together with the II Corps, VIII Corps, X Corps and XXII Corps.<sup>2</sup> This latter corps had previously been II Anzac Corps. Because the Australian divisions were now combined into one unit, the Australian Corps, it had been decided to rename the former Australian and New Zealand unit as a numerical corps, of which the New Zealand Division was one of the units. The corps was commanded, as before, by Godley.<sup>3</sup>

Birdwood's resumption of command of his corps in March on Plumer's return from Italy, coincided with the German offensive which began on 21 March. It was "a skilfully 'orchestrated' barrage supplied by almost 6,000 guns burst forth on the fronts of the British Fifth and Third armies from the Somme to Cambrai".<sup>4</sup>

The Australian front was held by the 1st, 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions, with the 3rd and 4th resting in reserve.<sup>5</sup> The corps was moved south to Villers Bocage near Albert, to take over the sector held by the VII Corps and where the fighting was less intense than further north in the region they had just vacated.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Birdwood wrote to Senator Pearce on 15 April, the 5th Australian Division, commanded by Major-General Hobbs, was holding an important part of the line, with its left on the Somme covering the village of Villers-Bretonneux on the high ground immediately protecting Amiens from the east.<sup>7</sup> Birdwood told Pearce that the Germans had surprisingly not yet attacked the division heavily. It was inevitable that they would do so.<sup>8</sup>

The attack came on the 24th, the Germans bombarding the British front for two hours. The main force of this fell on the 8th Division and the III Corps on Birdwood's left, causing them to fall back from Villers-Bretonneux. This was

---

1 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 320.

2 Ibid.

3 Birdwood to Lord Liverpool, 5 January 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/22.

4 John Terraine, *The First World War 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1983), 162.

5 Birdwood to Pearce, 15 April 1918, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/26.

6 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* , 321.

7 Birdwood to Pearce, 15 April 1918.

8 Ibid.

serious because the retention of the position was essential.<sup>9</sup> Entrusted with retaking it, the 5th Australian Division counter-attacked the same night. Birdwood was of the opinion that "[t]he operation was well planned and brilliantly executed".<sup>10</sup>

Birdwood considered this operation to be the great turning point of the war, writing later that "[f]rom that day the Germans never advanced a foot".<sup>11</sup> While this is certainly an over-statement, the battle was an important one because it prevented the Germans from taking Amiens, a key rail junction.<sup>12</sup>

Although Birdwood had had little to do in the planning or execution of operations such as Villers-Bretonneux, Bean recorded in the Australian official history, that Haig ordered Birdwood to meet with Rawlinson to plan a counter-offensive against the Germans in May.<sup>13</sup> The Australian task was to attack along the Somme. Rawlinson told Birdwood to draft plans accordingly. This meeting was so secret, that no record exists of it, nor of the plans made by Birdwood. Bean recorded that the proposal was apparently shelved, and any suggestions made by Birdwood remain unknown.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of any success he may have had as a corps commander, Birdwood was promoted to the rank of general in October 1917 because of the retirement of older Indian Army officers. Since his promotion, he had been the only full general serving as a corps commander. Bean wrote that "his thoroughly successful leadership of the Australian forces had rendered it almost certain that he would be selected to fill the next vacancy in the army commands".<sup>15</sup>

Haig had decided to form another army headquarters to control some of the divisions recuperating in reserve which would later be put into the line.<sup>16</sup> Although the Army Council did not agree with this proposal, the members believing that the front was already too large, they agreed to sanction an army temporarily.<sup>17</sup>

Birdwood's transition to the command of the Fifth Army came as no surprise to him. He was, of course, the senior general available for such a

---

<sup>9</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 322.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 284.

<sup>13</sup> C.E.W.Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, vol.6, *The A.I.F. in France During the Allied Offensive, 1918* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 680.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Bean diary, 18 June 1918, Bean Papers, AWM 3DRL 606/115.

command. A vacancy had occurred when Haig had sacked Gough in late March 1918 following the retreat of the Fifth Army during its operations south of the Somme.<sup>18</sup> Rawlinson, who had been serving as the British military representative on the Supreme War Council at Versailles, succeeded Gough, reconstituting the remnants of the Fifth Army as the Fourth Army.<sup>19</sup>

General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the MEF in 1915, was delighted to hear of Birdwood's elevation to an army command. He told Birdwood that

I don't believe anyone outside your immediate family circle ... is more thoroughly pleased and happy than I am to hear you have got the 5th Army. Believe me, whatever your personal inclinations may be, it would be taken by the ordinary outside soldier as a reflection upon you and your skill and renown as a General had you not got an Army command after all that your men have done. There are hundreds of ignorant asses only too ready to separate the personality of the general from the spirit of his men. The two are inseparable and your share of the credit of what your troops have done has been long overdue.<sup>20</sup>

On 29 May, Birdwood's ADC, Captain McGrigor, noted in his diary that his chief had spent the previous five days touring his Australian divisions and brigades, farewelling both officers and men.<sup>21</sup> Birdwood was genuinely upset to be leaving the Australian Corps, telling Hamilton that he "still cannot get over my unhappiness at leaving my only child - this corps ...".<sup>22</sup> In reply to Hamilton's letter, Birdwood wrote:

You are kind enough to say that personality in my case has accounted for much. Though I take no credit on that account, yet I do agree with you in principle, and have ... gone out of my way to try to influence the troops under me by one's personality in seeing one or more units practically every day, and talking to them constantly, also once a week seeing brigades in turn, giving them what news I can of the war, and impressing upon them the necessity of keeping up the offensive spirit etc...

... I feel I now know both my officers and troops well enough to be able to forecast fairly accurately their capabilities, and to realise to what extent they can be relied upon to meet a big attack, or to carry out a successful offensive. In an army, I despair of ever being able to do this - but one can only do one's best and that I will do.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Gough, *The Fifth Army*, 320-321.

<sup>19</sup> Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, *The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent: From his Journals and Letters* (London: Cassell, 1928), 213.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton to Birdwood, 25 May 1918, Hamilton Papers 1/14.

<sup>21</sup> McGrigor diary, 29 May 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Birdwood to Hamilton, 29 May 1918, Hamilton Papers 1/14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

When he assumed leadership of the Fifth Army, Birdwood's command took over a portion of the front between the First and Second Armies.<sup>24</sup> Between June and October, Birdwood was involved mainly with protecting the flanks of the armies advancing on either side of his own. On 17 October, the Fifth Army occupied the city of Lille. Birdwood wrote:

Plumer's Second Army had crossed the Lys and pushed on beyond Courtrai with the French, thus turning Lille from the north, while my simultaneous enveloping movement from the south and west had compelled the enemy's withdrawal.<sup>25</sup>

By early November, the war had all but finished, with Turkey and Austria surrendering and the Germans falling back, eventually to sign an armistice with the allies on 11th November. The Fifth Army was demobilised at the end of March 1919, and thus Birdwood's command was terminated.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after the war ended, Brudenell White, Birdwood's chief of staff for the last three years, wrote to his chief:

No words of mine could adequately express my appreciation of all that you have done for the Australian Imperial Force, or convey to you my own sense of gratitude.

The greatest tribute I can pay you - and it is all too inadequate - is to say sincerely that Australia and the Empire are richer by reason of your service and that I personally have by your example been given an ideal which will be ever before me.<sup>27</sup>

Birdwood had not been very active in 1918 as far as corps operations were concerned. Limitations of command were imposed on him until May because of the position in the line that the Australian Corps held. Later, when in command of the Fifth Army, he was limited by the needs of the higher command and the resources available to him. He was given no opportunity to do anything more than act within the parameters set him by the higher command. He found that army command was little different to corps command. Thus, the limitations were similar but army command gave greater scope for autonomy.

---

<sup>24</sup> Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, 325.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>27</sup> White to Birdwood, 9 April 1919, Birdwood Papers, AWM 3DRL 3376/11.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to illustrate the functions of a corps commander and to examine the limitations which were imposed on him in performing these duties. An examination has been made of the three main areas where Birdwood was involved from December 1914 until May 1918: Gallipoli, the Western Front, and as administrator of the A.I.F.

### I

Birdwood's first command was as GOC of the Anzac Corps at Gallipoli. It was in this role that he was able to exercise command with an independence not available to him later in the war. He himself assessed this period as his most fulfilling as a commander. For these reasons, it has involved the most detailed study.

There were several limitations imposed on Birdwood at Gallipoli. As detailed in Chapters Two to Six, Birdwood was limited in his actions by a variety of factors. There were the limitations imposed by the actual size and topography of the peninsula, making troop and supply movements difficult. There was the limited size of his available force to restrict any operation he might consider. There were also the associated problems of logistics. Then there was the fact that Birdwood was only one link in the chain of command. He could only consider operations prescribed by Hamilton who, in turn, could only consider those prescribed by Kitchener. Also, there was the limiting factor of Birdwood's character and personality.

One of the most severe limitations on Birdwood was his subordinate position in the command structure. This was shown in Chapter One. His advice was ignored by Kitchener. At first sight, this is strange, because Birdwood appeared to be the only person able to recognise the pitfalls of the operation. What must have been extremely frustrating for him, was the fact that his advice was not sought although he was "on the spot". He had spent a considerable amount of time investigating the situation in the Dardanelles and there is little doubt that he was on top of the situation. But, Kitchener was not entirely confident of Birdwood's ability to assess a situation although he was willing to push Birdwood's career prospects by appointing him to a senior position. Superseded by Hamilton as commander at the Dardanelles, Birdwood was sidelined to the role of a subordinate commander.

So at this time, Birdwood was limited by the fact that he had become a bystander and that no-one wanted to hear his opinion. Because he had been put into the position of a subordinate commander, any influence he may have had, was minimal. But, clearly, he could not have done any more than he did. As a novice corps commander, and bearing in mind the structure of the officer hierarchy, anything he said would no doubt have been treated with a measure of disdain. To have pushed his views then would have counted against him later.

By the time of the August operations discussed in Chapter Four, this limitation still applied. Although Birdwood appeared to be more confident with himself and more at ease with the role he was playing as a corps commander he was not given a clear role in directing the Suvla operation. In the event this led to Birdwood's operations and those to his north being conducted without reference to each other with deleterious results for the attack as a whole.

A further limitation concerns Birdwood's personality. Following the Gallipoli landing, he was called upon to make a decision as to whether to recommend evacuation to Hamilton. In this respect he failed passing on the decision wholly to his superior commander. This episode reveals a limitation on Birdwood's part - indecisiveness in a crisis.

By the time of the evacuation from Gallipoli discussed in Chapter Six, Birdwood was a seasoned corps commander at ease with his authority and confident of his ability to command. He had not been limited in the making of the plans for the evacuation, Monro having left all the details to Birdwood and his subordinates. Clearly, the success of the operation did a lot for their collective confidence.

## II

The Western Front presented new limitations to Birdwood. As noted in Chapter Eight, 1916 was the nadir of Birdwood's command. He was now one of twenty or so corps commanders, all vying for resources and attention from the high command. His lack of experience was clearly limiting for him. He provided little guidance to the operations his corps undertook as part of a much larger unit. He recognised his limitations and did not attempt to overreach them and thus jeopardise his position. There were occasions when he should have made some attempt to curb the objectives of the higher command, but was restricted in doing so by the authority structure of the army. That he did not appear to question the objectives is a

reflection on him as a commander. In particular, any chance he may have had of using his initiative was quashed by the authority structure.

Birdwood was clearly inexperienced with the type of fighting required during the Somme operations. He was unfamiliar with the conditions of the Western Front as has been described. This led to hastily and ill-prepared operations which did not take into account either the pre-conditions for success (artillery accuracy and predominance) or the strength of the defences facing his men. These factors led to a feeling of inadequacy on his part as far as his command of the corps was concerned. Given Birdwood's personality, the Western Front must have been disappointing to him both personally and professionally.

As discussed in Chapter Nine, the command structure played an important role in the two Battles of Bullecourt which were not a success. Birdwood, however, was far more confident in 1917 in his role than he had been a few months earlier during the Somme operations. As noted earlier, Birdwood was again guilty of not pressing his views on his superiors, preferring to remain in the background and not allowing what may have been his real opinions, any latitude. It must be conceded that Birdwood was firmly aware of what was required for the operation to succeed. The wire had to be cut before troops should be committed to action. It was unfortunate that he allowed others to make the running while he remained silent. Clearly, he was as happy to continue working within the command structure as he had been in the past.

By the time of the Third Battle of Ypres discussed in Chapter Ten, Birdwood was an experienced corps commanders. The limitations imposed on him were no fewer than they had been twelve months earlier on the Somme. By now a seasoned commander, he was able to carry out a limited but important role within the parameters set by Plumer and the Second Army staff. It was unfortunate that he was not forceful enough in putting his views across to his superiors. This demonstrated that he continued to operate within the limitation of unquestioning deference to the command structure. Even when operations were successful Birdwood was forced to operate within a restricting command structure..

### III

The limitations imposed on a commander can be categorised as permanent and impermanent. As far as Birdwood was concerned, the

permanent ones were those largely self-imposed such as the way he handled the issue of the command of the A.I.F.

The limitations imposed by the high command on subordinate commanders were also of a permanent nature as was the command structure itself. These factors appear to be self-evident although this does not lessen the impact of limitation on a subordinate commander. Clearly, any commander served at the behest of his senior commander, whether he was Birdwood, or Haig, or Kitchener. As Norman Dixon points out, "[a] senior military ... commander does not, indeed cannot, act in lonely isolation but is fettered by the organization to which he belongs".<sup>1</sup>

Other limitations were those which were impermanent. They were the limitations caused by events, technology, resources, and the personal restrictions caused by lack of experience, knowledge and an inability to adapt to the conditions imposed by warfare. All these could be overcome, some more easily than others. Even when a commander had gained experience, this could be slow in paying dividends. An example of this is Birdwood's performance at Gallipoli compared with his performance on the Somme. As illustrated in Chapter Eight, Birdwood should have been a more influential corps commander during the Somme campaign because of his experience at Gallipoli.

As for the limitations imposed by events, technology and resources, these could all be overcome. But not by a commander in the field. All were limitations imposed by outside forces such as the higher command, politicians and the resources available to the suppliers of, for example, ammunition or food supplies. These were outside the control of a corps commander, or of the commander-in-chief for that matter.

#### IV

In another two ways, Birdwood was able to transcend the limitations imposed upon him. First, he had the ability to rarely alienate himself from either his officers or his troops. This allowed him the freedom to move around and do what he did best: fraternise with the men. By being seen, he was able to project himself as a soldier rather than only as a general. He appears to have maintained an unparalleled popularity with his men for the duration of the war. Bean explained that Birdwood did not care for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman F. Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 34.



conventional outward signs to assess a man, preferring rather "to look past the forms at the man himself".<sup>2</sup> There is no reason to disagree with Bean's assertion that Birdwood was "a rare leader - undoubtedly one of the greatest leaders of men possessed by the British Army during the war".<sup>3</sup> He recorded that it was Birdwood's "delight ... to be out in the field among his men, cheering them by his talk, feeling the pulse of them. He would come back from the front apparently far more interested in the spirits and condition of the men than in the tactical situation".<sup>4</sup> With another commander, this may have provided some cause for concern. Secondly, Birdwood had the happy knack of selecting able subordinates. This allowed him to concentrate his efforts on other things. But it should be noted that Birdwood was not inept as far as tactics were concerned. The imaginative plan for the August offensive at Gallipoli had been his. This showed him to be a commander with potential. Unfortunately, this failed to be realised until late in the war, particularly at the Third Battle of Ypres, when as a corps commander, he was planning and carrying out infantry operations in conjunction with the artillery plans laid out by Second Army staff.

## V

In his role as an administrator, discussed in Chapter Seven, Birdwood succeeded in maintaining a high profile as G.O.C., A.I.F. He was limited by his personality when he was unable to concede that he should surrender the position although it was incumbent on him to do so. Another commander, one perhaps more self-effacing than Birdwood, might have handled the situation in a different way. In this instance, Birdwood was his own worst enemy. Those who supported his stand, such as Monash, did so for their own purposes, not necessarily because they agreed with Birdwood. Had the war not ended in November 1918, the outcome of his battle with the Australian government would have been different. He would have lost considerable kudos within the A.I.F.. That said, he was successful during his tenure in the position where he needed the skill of a politician to handle the various problems which arose.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, vol.1, 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## VI

It has been shown that Birdwood was a leader of men and was popular with them. He had the drive to get things done. Whether he was a true leader in the military sense is a source of contention. An examination of the evidence indicates that had he not been appointed to the command of the Australian and New Zealand contingents, it is reasonably certain he would not have achieved the prominence he enjoyed because of it.

In times of war, there are more aspects to being a leader than only military prowess. Perhaps the stress on tactical matters has been over-emphasised. Birdwood showed himself to be a leader who led his men by example. He was also an excellent judge of character as shown in the success he had in choosing able subordinates. Another man may have tried to hide his limitations by making foolish decisions alone without seeking the advice of more capable people. Birdwood showed that in this area, he had humility enough to admit his short-comings, allowing others more able to guide his decision-making.

Birdwood gave the Anzac Corps cohesion and a sense of unity. He was never a "national leader" in the sense that the Canadian Corps commander, Currie, was or Monash was after he succeeded Birdwood as Australian Corps commander. It is unlikely that another leader would have been as successful in forging the unique spirit enjoyed by the corps when under his command.

The most vital element to Birdwood as a commander was the fact that he was a source of inspiration, radiating confidence to those around him. For all the reasons identified, Birdwood should be judged a success as a commander within the limitations imposed on him.

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated that historians have been much too sweeping in their judgments of First World War leaders at the corps level. As has been shown, it is simply inadequate to characterise Maxse as a 'good' corps commander or Hunter-Weston as a 'bad' one. All commanders had to work within strictly prescribed parameters. All were subordinate in the chain of command. All had technical and topographical constraints imposed on them. Most had been schooled within the authority structure of the British Army. Only in the area of personality was there any room for individuality or independent action. And as this study of Birdwood has amply demonstrated, personality could count for something in keeping up the morale of the troops. It could not capture the Sari Bair Ridge or Pozieres or Bullecourt or drive forward to the Belgian coast. Only technical

competence and predominance could accomplish these things. It was not in the ambit of any one corps commander to provide them. Only when this is realised will the true texture of the First World War be revealed.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### OFFICIAL MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

#### Australia

#### Australian War Memorial, Canberra

#### AWM 4:Gallipoli Operational Records

File 1/1/1 Parts 1-2	AIF Diary of events 29/7-31/8/14
File 1/1/2 Parts 1-2	AIF Diary of events Sept 1914
File 1/1/3 Parts 1-2	AIF Diary of events Oct 1914
File 1/1/4 Parts 1-2	AIF Diary of events Nov 1914
File 1/1/5	AIF Diary of events Dec 1914
File 1/4/1 Part 1	Copy of War Diary of MEF 13/3-30/4/15
Part 2	Correspondence MEF 30/3-30/4/15
File 1/4/2 Parts 1-2	Diary of General Staff,GHQ MEF May 1915
Parts 3-4	Correspondence MEF May 1915
File 1/4/3 Part 1	Diary of General Staff,GHQ MEF June 1915
Parts 2-3	Letters,correspondence MEF June 1915
File 1/4/4 Part 1	War Diary MEF July 1915
Part 2	Appendices to War Diary for August 1915
Part 3	Correspondence July 1915
File 1/4/5 Part 1	War Diary MEF August 1915
Part 2	Correspondence Aug 1915
Part 3	Correspondence Aug 1915
File 1/4/6 Part 1	War Diary MEF Sept 1915
Parts 2-4	Correspondence Sept 1915
File 1/4/7 Part 1	War Diary MEF Oct 1915
Parts 2-5	ditto
File 1/4/8 Part 1	War Diary MEF Nov 1915
Part 2	ditto
File 1/4/9 Parts 1-2	Correspondence Dec 1915
File 1/4/10 Part 1	War Diary MEF Jan 1916
Parts 1-5	Correspondence Jan 1916
File 1/4/11 Parts 1-2	War Diary MEF Feb 1916
Parts 3-9	Correspondence Feb 1916
Part 10	Force orders
File 1/4/12 Part 1	War Diary MEF Mar 1916
Parts 2-3	Correspondence Mar 1916
Parts 4-6	Correspondence MEF Mar 1916
Part 7	Force orders
File 1/5/1	Intell.summary Mar 1915
File 1/5/2 Part 1	Intell.summary May 1915
Part 2	Turkish divisional orders
File 1/5/3	Intell.summary June 1915
File 1/5/4	Intell.summary July 1915

File 1/5/5 Part 1	Intell.summary August 1915
Part 2	Maps and appendices
File 1/5/6 Part 1	Intell.summary Sept.1915
Part 2	Maps and appendices
File 1/5/7 Part 1	Intell.summary October 1915
Part 2	Appendices
File 1/5/8	Intell.summary November 1915
File 1/5/9 Part 1	Intell.summary December 1915
Part 2	Appendices
File 1/5/10	Intell.summary January 1916
File 1/5/11 Parts 1-2	Intell.summary February 1916
File 1/5/12 Parts 1-2	Intell.summary March 1916
File 1/17/1 Parts 1-2	HQ Dardanelles Army GS War Diary appendices, situation reports 30/10-1/12 1915
File 1/17/2 Parts 1-5	HQ Dardanelles Army GS War Diary, appendices, situation reports 30/11-31/12 1915
File 1/17/3	HQ Dardanelles Army GS War Diary,Jan 1916
File 1/25/1 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary,April 1915
Parts 2-8	Appendices to above
File 1/25/2 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary May 1915
Parts 2-5	Appendices to above
File 1/25/3 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary June 1915
Parts 3-4	Appendices to above
File 1/25/4 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary July 1915
Parts 3-6	Appendices to above
File 1/25/5 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary August 1915
Parts 3-8	Appendices to above
File 1/25/6 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary Sept 1915
Parts 2-10	Appendices to above
File 1/25/7 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary Oct 1915
Parts 2-4	Appendices to above
File 1/25/8 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary Nov 1915
Parts 2-8	Appendices to above
File 1/25/9 Part 1	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary Dec 1915
Part 3-15	Appendices to above
File 1/25/10	HQ Anzac Corps GS War Diary Jan 1916
File 1/28/1	HQ Anzac Corps War Diary Admin. Dec.1914
File 1/28/2	ditto, Jan.1915
File 1/28/3	ditto, Feb.1915
File 1/28/4	ditto, March 1915
File 1/28/5	ditto, April 1915
File 1/28/6	ditto, May 1915
File 1/28/7	ditto, Jun. 1915
File 1/28/8	ditto, July 1915
File 1/28/9	ditto, Aug.1915
File 1/28/10	ditto, Sep.1915
File 1/28/11	ditto, Oct.1915
File 1/28/12	ditto, Nov.1915
File 1/28/13	ditto, Dec.1915

## AWM 26:Western Front Operational Records

Box 40	Items 1-14	GHQ BEF GS 10/7-16/9/1916
	Items 15-19	GHQ BEF Intell 27/7-19/10/1916
Box 41	Items 59-64	Res.Army GS 10/7-6/8/1916
Box 42	Items 1-15	Res.Army GS 27/7-19/10/1916
	Items 16-25	Res.Army Intell 16/7-19/10/1916
	Items 26-42	Res.Army Admin.10/7-8/9/1916
Box 50	Items 12-19	I Anzac Corps 10/7-3/9/1916
Box 51	Items 24-30	I Aust Div GS 10/7-22/8/1916
	Items 31-37	I Aust Div Adm.10/7-27/8/1916
Box 52	Items 1-7	I Anzac Corps Intell 10/7-3/9/1916
	Items 8-15	I Anzac Corps Admin 10/7-3/9/1916
Box 56	Items 1-10	2 Anzac Div GS 10/7-3/9/1916
	Items 11-13	2 Anzac Div Admin 10-26/7/1916
	Items 15-18	2 Anzac Div Admin 7/8-3/9/1916
Box 59	Items 1-14	4 Aust Div GS 10/7-8/9/1916
	Items 15-23	4 Aust Div Admin 10/7-8/9/1916
Box 144	Items 3-6	GHQ BEF Intell 29/3-10/5/1917
Box 146	Items 9-12	Fifth Army Int.29/3-10/5/1917
	Items 17-20	Fifth Army Admin 29/3-10/5/1917
Box 152	Items 5-8	I Anzac Corps GS 23/2-13/4/1917
Box 153	Item 1	I Anzac Corps GS 26/4-10/5/1917
	Item 4	I Anzac Corps GS 14-25/4/1917
Box 154	Items 6-9	I Anzac Corps Admin 29/3-10/5/1917
Box 156	Items 4-7	I Anzac Corps GOCRA 29/3-10/5/1917
Box 163	Item 12	2 Aust Div GS 14-25/4/1917
Box 164	Item 1	2 Aust Div GS 26/4-10/5/1917
	Items 9-10	2 Aust Div Admin 14/4-10/5/1917
Box 165	Items 3-4	2 Aust Div Artillery 14/4-10/5/1917
Box 169	Items 36-37	4 Aust Div GS 29/3-13/4/1917
Box 170	Items 3-4	4 Aust Div Admin 29/3-13/4/1917
	Items 10-11	4 Aust Div Artillery 29/3-13/4/1917
Box 171	Items 11-12	4 Aust Inf Bde 8-25/4/1917
Box 179	Items 5-7	GHQ BEF GS 8/4-10/5/1917
Box 180	Items 3-6	Fifth Army GS 29/3-10/5/1917
Box 220	Items 8-13	I Anzac Corps GS 27/5-23/9/1917
Box 221	Items 1-5	I Anzac Corps GS 24/9-15/11/1917
	Items 6-10	I Anzac Corps Intell 5/8-30/9/1917
Box 222	Items 1-4	I Anzac Corps Intell 1/10-15/11/1917
Box 229	Items 17-25	2 Anzac Corps GS 5/8-15/11/1917
Box 231	Items 37-41	I Aust Div GS 27/5-17/9/1917
Box 232	Items 1-6	I Aust Div GS 18/9-15/11/1917
Box 272	Items 49-52	GHQ BEF GS 31/7-17/9/1917
Box 273	Items 1-5A	GHQ BEF GS 18/9-15/11/1917
	Items 6-14	First Army GS 31/7-15/11/1917
	Items 15-16	Second Army GS 31/7-4/9/1917
Box 274	Items 1-8	Second Army GS 5/9-15/11/1917
	Item 9	Third Army GS 7/6-30/7/1917

Box 275	Items 1-9	Third Army GS 31/7-15/11/1917
	Items 10-18	Fifth Army GS 31/7-15/11/1917

AWM 51:Dardanelles Commission Reports, Statements, Evidence

Australian Archives, Canberra

File A 4719/63/12	Pearce correspondence with Birdwood
File A 4719/63/13	ditto
File A 6006/1914/11/18	Military forces nearing Egypt to be landed for training-suggestion by Kitchener 1914
File A 1/1914/13142	Lord Kitchener re Aust.contingent 1914
File A 2/1917/4031	Death of Lord Kitchener
File A 360/8/1/1	Letter from Hughes to Pearce, 1.8.18
File A 5954/1212/10	Letter from Hughes to Birdwood, 12.8.18, re AIF command
File A 6006/1918/8/7	AIF Command 1918
File A 6006/1918/7/31	Repatriation, Birdwood's proposals 1918
File A 2487/20/2876	Anonymous complaint to Birdwood concerning repatriation
File B 539AIF290/1/424	Officers temporarily commanding units AIF promotions by Birdwood

United Kingdom

Public Record Office, London

Cabinet Papers [Cab]  
War Office Papers [WO]

PRIVATE PAPERS

Bean, C.E.W., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 606, 3DRL 6673, 3DRL 7953, 3DRL 8042)

Birdwood, Field-Marshal Lord, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 3376, PR 88 /011, MSS 1405)

\_\_\_\_\_ National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 474)

\_\_\_\_\_ India Office Library, London (MSS EUR D 686)

\_\_\_\_\_ Imperial War Museum, London (Correspondence with Colonel D.Rintoul)

Cunliffe Owen, Brigadier-General C., Imperial War Museum, London

\_\_\_\_\_ Public Record Office, London (CAB 45)

- Dawson, Brigadier-General K., Australian War Memorial, Canberra
- Dawnay, Major-General G., Imperial War Museum, London
- Fisher, Andrew, National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 2919)
- Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir J.E., Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives,  
King's College, London
- Elliott, Major-General H.E., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (2DRL 513,  
3DRL 3297, 3DRL 3856)
- Gellibrand, Major-General W., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL  
1473)
- Godley, Sir Alexander, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 2233)  
\_\_\_\_ Ministry of Defence Library, London
- Hamilton, General Sir I., Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's  
College, London
- Heyes, T.H.E., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (AWM 45)
- Holmes, Major-General W., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 2803)
- Hughes, W.M., National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 1538)
- Hunter-Weston, Lieutenant-General Sir A., British Library, London
- Hutton, Sir E.T.H., British Library, London
- Howse VC, Major-General Sir N.R., Australian War Memorial, Canberra  
(2DRL 1351)
- Kiggell, Lieutenant-General Sir L., Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives,  
King's College, London
- Kitchener, Field-Marshal Lord, Public Record Office, London (PRO 30/57)
- Lynden-Bell, Sir A., Imperial War Museum, London
- McGrigor, Captain A.M., Imperial War Museum, London
- Maurice, Major-General Sir F.B., Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives,  
King's College, London
- Maxse, General Sir I., Imperial War Museum, London
- Monash, General Sir J., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 2316)  
\_\_\_\_ National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 1884)
- Murdoch, Sir K., National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 2823)
- North, John, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London
- Novar, Viscount, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 2574)  
\_\_\_\_ National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 696)
- Pearce, Sir G.F., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (3DRL 2222)  
\_\_\_\_ National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 213, MS 1827, MS 1927)
- Piesse, Major E.L., National Library of Australia (MS 882)
- Robertson, Field-Marshal Sir W., Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives,  
King's College, London



- White, Lieutenant-General Sir C.B.B., Australian War Memorial, Canberra (PR 85/83, 3DRL 1400)
- \_\_\_\_\_ National Library of Australia, Canberra (MS 5172)
- \_\_\_\_\_ in possession of Lady Derham of Toorak, Victoria
- Williams, Dr Orlo C., Imperial War Museum, London
- Wilson, Field-Marshal Sir H., Imperial War Museum, London

### BOOKS, ARTICLES, THESES

- Adam-Smith, Patsy., *The Anzacs* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1981)
- Andrews, Eric and B.G.Jordan, 'Hamel:Winning a Battle', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 18 (April 1991),5-12
- \_\_\_\_\_ 'Second Bullecourt Revisited:The Australians in France, 3 May 1917', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 15 (October 1989),34-44
- Andrews, E.M., 'Bean and Bullecourt:Weaknesses and Strengths of the Official History of Australia in the First World War', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 72 (1990),25-47
- \_\_\_\_\_ 'The Media and the Military:Australian War Correspondents and the Appointment of a Corps Commander,1918-A Case Study', *War & Society*, 8, no.2 (1990),83-103
- Arthur, Sir George, *Life of Lord Kitchener* (3 vols)(London: Macmillan,1920)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *General Sir John Maxwell* (London: John Murray, 1932)
- Aspinall-Oglander, Brig-Gen.C.F., *Military Operations:Gallipoli* (2 vols) (London: Heinemann, 1929,1932)
- Asquith, H.H., *Letters to Venetia Stanley* (selected and edited by Michael and Eleanor Brock) (London: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- Barclay, C.N., *Armistice 1918* (London: J.M.Dent, 1968)
- Baring, Maurice, *Flying Corps Headquarters 1914-1918* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1968)
- Barnett, Correlli, *The Great War* (London: Peerage Books, 1979)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *The Swordbearers:Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963)
- Barrow, Gen.Sir George, *The Life of General Sir Charles Carmichael Monro* (London: Hutchinson, 1931)
- Bean, C.E.W., *Anzac to Amiens* (4th ed)(Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1961)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 'Celebrities of the A.I.F:Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood', *Reveille* (March 31,1932),3, 48

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Gallipoli Mission* (Crow's Nest: ABC Enterprises, 1990)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.1, The Story of Anzac* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.2, The Story of Anzac* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.3, The A.I.F. in France: 1916* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.4, The A.I.F. in France: 1917* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.5, The A.I.F. in France: December 1917-May 1918* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol.6, The A.I.F. in France: May 1918-The Armistice* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Two Men I knew: William Bridges and Brudenell White, Founders of the A.I.F.* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957)
- Bidwell, Shelford and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985)
- Birdwood, Field-Marshal Lord, *Khaki and Gown: An Autobiography* (London: Ward Lock, 1941)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *In My Time: Recollections and Anecdotes* (London: Skeffington, 1945)
- Blake, Robert, ed., *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952)
- Blaxland, Gregory, *Amiens 1918* (London: Frederick Muller, 1968)
- Bond, Brian, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972)
- \_\_\_\_\_ ed., *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Lord Moyne, 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987)
- Bonham-Carter, Victor, *Soldier True* (London: Frederick Muller, 1963)
- Boraston, J.H., *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches* (London: Dent, 1920)
- Bush, Eric, *Gallipoli* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975)
- Calwell, Sir C.E., *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries* (London: Cassell, 1927)
- Campbell, P.J., *In the Cannon's Mouth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986)
- Cassar, George H., *The French and the Dardanelles: A Study of Failure in the Conduct of War* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Kitchener: Architect of Victory* (London: William Kimber, 1977)

- Charlton, Peter, *Poizieres 1916, Australians on the Somme* (London: Leo Cooper with Secker and Warburg, 1986)
- Charteris, Brig.-Gen. J., *Haig* (London: Duckworth, 1933)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *At G.H.Q.* (London: Cassell, 1931)
- Churchill, Winston S., *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (4 vols) (London: Odhams, 1949)
- Cohen, Eliot A. and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991)
- Collier, Basil, *Brasshat: A Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961)
- Cooper, Duff, *Haig* (2 vols) (London: Faber, 1935)
- Coulthard-Clark, C.D., *A Heritage of Spirit: A Biography of Major-General Sir William Throsby Bridges K.C.B., C.M.G.* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *No Australian Need Apply: The Troubled Career of Lieutenant-General Gordon Legge* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988)
- Cruttwell, C.R.M.F., *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936)
- Cunneen, Christopher, *Kings' Men: Australia's Governors-General from Hopetoun to Isaacs* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983)
- Cutlack, F.M., *The Australians: Their Final Campaign, 1918* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1918)
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed., *War Letters of General Monash* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1935)
- De Groot, Gerard J., *Douglas Haig, 1861-1928* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988)
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Educated Soldier or Cavalry Officer? Contradictions in the Pre-1914 Career of Douglas Haig', *War & Society*, 4, no. 2, (1986), 51-69
- De Weerd, H.A., 'Puleston, Churchill, and the Dardanelles', *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 58 (November 1932), 1577-1582
- Denny, W.J., *The Diggers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919)
- Dixon, Norman, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Cape, 1976)
- Dolden, A. Stuart, *Cannon Fodder* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1980)
- Dunn, J.C., *The War the Infantry Knew, 1914-1919* (London: Cardinal, 1989)
- East, Sir Ronald, ed., *The Gallipoli Diary of Sergeant Lawrence of the Australian Engineers-1st A.I.F. 1915* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1981)
- Edmonds, Sir James E., *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916* (1 vol. with 1 vol. of appendices) (London: Macmillan, 1932)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1948)

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918*, vol.2 (London: Macmillan, 1937)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918*, vol.4 (London: HMSO, 1947)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918*, vol.5 (London: HMSO, 1947)
- Ellis, John, *Eye-Deep in Hell* (London: Croom Helm, 1976)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (London: Cresset Library, 1987)
- Facey, A.B., *A Fortunate Life* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1981)
- Falls, Cyril, *The First World War* (London: Longmans, 1960)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan, 1940)
- Farmar, Lieut.-Col. H.M., 'The Gallipoli Campaign, 1915, From the Point of View of a Regimental Officer', *The Gallipoli Campaign, 1915* (n.d.), 641-655
- Farrar-Hockley, A.H., *The Somme* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Goughie: The Life of General Sir Hubert Gough* (London: Hart-Davis/MacGibbon, 1975)
- Ferro, Marc, *The Great War 1914-1918* (Newton Abbot: Victorian and Modern History Book Club, 1974)
- Fewster, Kevin, 'Ellis Ashmead Bartlett and the Making of the Anzac Legend', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 10 (June 1982), 17-30
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed., *Gallipoli Correspondent: The Frontline Diary of C.E.W. Bean* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985)
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'The Operation of State Apparatuses in Times of Crisis: Censorship and Conscription, 1916', *War & Society*, 3, no.1 (May 1985), 37-54
- Fitzhardinge, L.F., *The Little Digger 1914-1952: William Morris Hughes, A Political Biography*, vol.2 (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979)
- Frame, T.R., 'A Stab in the Dark', (unpublished paper, n.d.)
- French, David, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986)
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut : Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916', *War & Society*, 5, no.1 (May 1987), 45-61
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'The Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign Reconsidered', *History* (July 1983), 210-224
- French, Sir John, *1914* (London: Constable, 1919)
- Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975)
- Gammage, Bill, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975)
- Gilbert, Martin, *Atlas of the First World War* (London: Dorset Press, 1970)

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Challenge of War: Winston S. Churchill 1914-1916* (London: Minerva, 1990)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Winston S. Churchill, vol.3, Companion, Part 1, Documents: July 1914-April 1915* (London: Heinemann, 1972)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Winston S. Churchill, vol.3, Companion, Part 2, Documents: May 1915-December 1916* (London: Heinemann, 1972)
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed., *Lloyd George* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968)
- Godley, A., *Life of an Irish Soldier* (London: John Murray, 1939)
- Gough, General Sir Hubert, *Soldiering On* (London: Arthur Baker, 1954)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Fifth Army* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931)
- Grant, Ian, *Jacka, VC: Australia's Finest Fighting Soldier* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989)
- Graves, Robert, *Goodbye to All That* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960)
- Gullett, H.S., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914- 1918, vol.7, The A.I.F. in Sinai and Palestine* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984)
- Haig, Countess, *The Man I knew* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1935)
- Haldane, Lord, *Richard Burdon Haldane: An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929)
- Hamilton, Sir Ian, *Gallipoli Diary* (2 vols) (London: Edward Arnold, 1920)
- Hankey, Lord, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961)
- Harington, General Sir Charles, *Plumer of Messines* (London: John Murray, 1935)
- Harries-Jenkins, Gwyn, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977)
- Harris, John, *The Somme: Death of a Generation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966)
- Harris, Stephen J., *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988)
- Hetherington, John, *Blamey, Controversial Soldier* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1973)
- Heydon, Peter, *Quiet Decision: A Study of George Foster Pearce* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965)
- Hill, A.J., *Chauvel of the Light Horse* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978)
- Hobbs, Sir Talbot, 'A Gunner's Reflections: Gallipoli Campaign', *Reveille* (March 31, 1932), 29, 66-67
- Hodges, Arthur, *Lord Kitchener* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1936)
- Holmes, Richard, *Firing Line* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987)

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Little Field-Marshal: Sir John French* (London: Cape, 1981)
- Home, Brig.-Gen. Sir Archibald, *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* (Tunbridge Wells: Costello, 1985)
- Horne, Alistair, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London: Penguin, 1964)
- Horner, D.M., ed., *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1984)
- Howard, Michael, ed., *The Theory and Practice of War* (London: Cassell, 1965)
- Huguet, General, *Britain and the War: A French Indictment* (London: Cassell, 1928)
- James, Robert Rhodes, *Churchill: A Study in Failure* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gallipoli* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1965)
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'A Visit to Gallipoli, 1962', *Stand-to*, 9, no. 2 (March- October 1964), 4-6
- Janowitz, Morris, *The Professional Soldier* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960)
- Jeffery, Keith, ed., *The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson 1918-1922* (London: The Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1985)
- Jenkins, Roy, *Asquith* (London: Collins, 1964)
- Jessop, Captain E.P., 'Failure at Gallipoli', *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 61 (February 1935), 191-200
- Jolliffe, John, ed., *Raymond Asquith: Life and Letters* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1987)
- Keegan John, *The Face of Battle* (London: Cape, 1976)
- Koss, Stephen, *Asquith* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985)
- Laffin, John, *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Damn the Dardanelles! The Agony of Gallipoli* (Melbourne: Sun Papermac, 1985)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Digger: The Legend of the Australian Soldier* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986)
- Liddell Hart, B.H., *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Through the Fog of War* (London: Faber, 1938)
- Liddle, Peter, *Men of Gallipoli* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1988)
- Lloyd, Alan, *The War in the Trenches* (London: Hart-Davis/ MacGibbon, 1976)
- Lloyd George, David, *War Memoirs* (2 vols) (London: Odhams, 1938)
- McCarthy, Dudley, *Gallipoli to the Somme: The Story of C.E.W. Bean* (Sydney: John Ferguson, 1983)
- Macdonald, Lyn, 1914 (London: Michael Joseph, 1987)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *1914-1918 Voices and Images of the Great War* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988)

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Roses of No Man's Land* (London: Michael Joseph, 1980)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Somme* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *They Called It Passchendaele* (London: Michael Joseph, 1978)
- Mackenzie, Compton, *Gallipoli Memories* (London: Panther, 1965)
- Magnus, Philip, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: John Murray, 1958)
- Malthus, Cecil, *Anzac: A Retrospect* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1965)
- Marder, Arthur J., *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965)
- Marshall-Cornwall, Sir J., *Haig as Military Commander* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1973)
- Marwick, Arthur, *The Deluge* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1967)
- Masefield, John, *Gallipoli* (London: Heinemann, 1916)
- Maurice, Major-General Sir Frederick, *The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent: From his Journals and Letters* (London: Cassell, 1928)
- Middlebrook, Martin, *The First Day on the Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)
- \_\_\_\_\_ and Mary Middlebrook, *The Somme Battlefields* (London: Viking, 1991)
- Miles, Captain Wilfrid, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916*, vol. 2 with 1 vol. of appendices (London: Macmillan, 1938)
- Monash, Lieut-Gen. Sir John, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1920)
- Montgomery, Field-Marshal Viscount, *A History of Warfare* (London: Collins, 1968)
- Moorehead, Alan, *Gallipoli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956)
- Morgan, Ted, *Churchill: The Rise to Failure: 1874-1915* (London: Triad/Panther, 1984)
- Morton, Desmond, ' "Junior But Sovereign Allies": The Transformation of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918', *Journal of the Institute of Commonwealth History*, 8, no. 1, (October 1979), 56-67
- Munson, James, ed., *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)
- North, John, *Gallipoli: The Fading Vision* (London: Faber, 1966)
- Northcliffe, Lord, *At the War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916)
- Pedersen, P.A. *Images of Gallipoli: Photographs from the Collection of Ross J. Bastiaan* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Monash as Military Commander* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1985)
- Pound, Reginald, *The Lost Generation* (London: Constable, 1964)
- Powell, Geoffrey, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990)

- Prior, Robin, *Churchill's 'World Crisis' as History* (London: Croom Helm, 1983)
- 'The Suvla Bay "Tea-Party": A Reassessment', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 7 (October 1985), 25-34
- and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-18* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)
- 'What Manner of Victory? Reflections on the Termination of the First World War', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 72 (1990), 80-96
- Pugsley, Christopher, *Gallipoli: The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984)
- Reid, Brian Holden, *J.F.C. Fuller: Military Thinker* (London: Macmillan, 1987)
- Robertson, John, *Anzac and Empire* (Melbourne: Hamlyn, 1990)
- Robertson, Sir William, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London: Constable, 1921)
- Robson, L.L., *The First A.I.F.: A Study of its Recruitment 1914- 1918* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982)
- Rose, Kenneth, *King George V* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983)
- Roskill, Stephen, *Hankey, Man of Secrets* (2 vols) (London: Collins, 1970)
- Royle, Trevor, *The Kitchener Enigma* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985)
- Sassoon, Siegfried, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber, 1965)
- Scott, Ernest, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914- 1918*, vol.11, *Australia During the War* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989)
- Serle, Geoffrey, *John Monash* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982)
- Sixsmith, E.K.G., *British Generalship in the Twentieth Century* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1970)
- *Douglas Haig* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976)
- Smithers, A.J., *Sir John Monash* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973)
- Smyth, Sir John, *Leadership in Battle 1914-1918* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1975)
- *Sandhurst* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961)
- Souter, Gavin, *Lion and Kangaroo, Australia: 1901-1919, The Rise of a Nation* (Sydney: Collins, 1976)
- Spiers, Edward M., *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1980)
- Steiner, Zara S., *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1977)
- Taylor, A.J.P., *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (London: Hutchinson, 1971)
- Taylor, F.W. and T.A. Cusack, *Nulli Secundus: A History of the Second Battalion, A.I.F., 1914-1919* (Sydney: 1942)



- Taylor, Phil and Pam Cupper, *Gallipoli: A Battlefield Guide* (Kenthurst, N.S.W.: Kangaroo Press, 1989)
- Terraine, John, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Hutchinson, 1963)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The First World War 1914-18* (London: Leo Cooper, 1983)
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed., *General Jack's Diary 1914-1918* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Mons: The Retreat to Victory* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1960)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *To Win a War* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *White Heat: The New Warfare 1914-18* (London: Guild Publishing, 1982)
- Thomson, Malcolm, *David Lloyd George* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.)
- Travers, Tim, 'The hidden army: structural problems in the British officers corps, 1900-1918', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17(1982), 523-544
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Learning and decision-making on the Western Front, 1915-1916: the British example', *Canadian Journal of History*, 8, no.1 (April 1983), 87-97
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'The offensive and the problem of innovation in British military thought 1870-1915', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13(1978), 531-553
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987)
- Tuchman, Barbara W., *The Guns of August: August 1914* (London: Constable, 1962)
- Verney, Guy, 'The Army High Command and Australian Defence Policy, 1901-1919', Ph.D. thesis (University of Sydney, 1985)
- Von Clausewitz, Carl, *On War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
- Von Seeckt, General (trans. Gilbert Waterhouse) *Thoughts of a Soldier* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930)
- Warner, Philip, *Field-Marshal Earl Haig* (London: Bodley Head, 1991)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Kitchener: The Man Behind the Legend* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985)
- Welborn, Suzanne, *Lords of Death: a people a place a legend* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1982)
- Wester-Wemyss, Lord, *The Navy in the Dardanelles Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.)
- Williams, Jeffery, *Byng of Vimy: General and Governor General* (London: Leo Cooper/Secker and Warburg, 1983)
- Wilson, Trevor, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Oxford: Polity, 1986)
- Winter, Denis, 'The Anzac landing-the great gamble?' *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 4 (April 1984), 13-21
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Death's Men* (London: Penguin, 1979)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Haig's Command: A Reassessment* (London: Viking, 1991)

- Wolff, Leon, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959)
- Woodward, David R., *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983)
- ed., *The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915-February 1918* (London: Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1989)
- Yule, Peter, ed., *Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1987)