

THE FATE OF THE 5TH BATTALION AIF ON 25TH APRIL 1915

(An edited version of a commemorative Centenary of Anzac address to the Association on Anzac Day 2015 by Ken McKay)

The 5th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force was an infantry battalion raised in Victoria and recruited men from south of the Yarra River in Melbourne.

The battalion embarked for overseas in late October 1914 then carried out training in Egypt, in the desert near Cairo, from early December that year until early April 1915. The soldiers trained six days a week and on Sundays went on a long route march in addition to church parades.

The desert conditions were trying and the rations insufficient.

On 4 April 1915 the battalion, which was around 1,000 strong at the time, boarded a small ship named the *Novian* at Alexandria, Egypt and steamed for four days north across the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas to the Greek island of Lemnos. Three uncomfortable weeks were spent aboard the *Novian* – a dirty ship, cramped conditions and the food was poor.

At 12:30 on the afternoon of 24th April 1915 the *Novian* left its Lemnos mooring and steamed north-easterly for about 120 km and anchored off Anzac Cove on the west side of Gallipoli Peninsula before daybreak on 25th April. After a move in boats, the leading troops of the 5th Battalion touched the shoreline between 5:30 and 6:00 am.

There had already been confusion over the landing place and the order of landing for the invasion force of Australians and New Zealanders and immediately upon reaching the shore the 5th Battalion became seriously disorganized.

As the battalion was forming up the just inland from the beach, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel D.S. Wanliss,¹ was personally ordered by the Commander 1st Australian Division, Major General W.S. Bridges,² to push on eastward to reinforce the firing line, the actual line and direction to it being unclear.

Also only two companies of the battalion ('A' and 'B' Companies) and one platoon of 'C' Company were ashore and Colonel Wanliss was ordered not to wait for the remainder of his battalion (three platoons and the headquarters of 'C' Company and all of 'D' Company). Thus the battalion became split at the outset of battle.

During the move eastwards Colonel Wanliss became separated from the battalion because of thick scrub and ravines. This meant that movement ashore could no longer be coordinated by the battalion commander.

The battalion's soldiers ashore moved during the morning up a ridge nicknamed The Razorback to a crest about 900 metres inland. There was no sign of the enemy beyond the crest but as soon as the move continued enemy shrapnel, machine-gun and rifle fire began to rain down with all movement.

While continuing to move forward in short rushes, the formations of sections and platoons were lost in the thick scrub. The troops by then were on what is known as the 400 Plateau which includes the present-day Lone Pine Cemetery, ANZAC and the Lone Pine Memorial.

During the afternoon after further thrusts on the 400 Plateau, the forward troops were ordered to pull back and for the 5th Battalion this meant to a ridge nicknamed Bolton's Ridge to the west of Lone Pine and running south-westerly back to the coast.

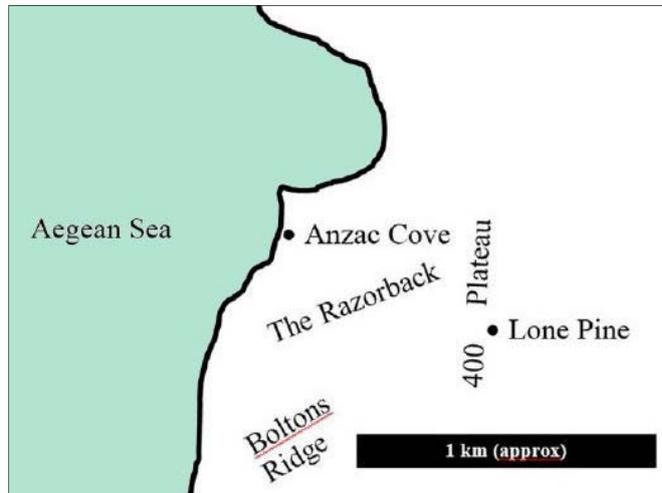
5th Infantry Battalion AIF area of operations, Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey, 25th April 1915.

The Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour shows that 72 members of the battalion died on 25th April 1915. Also, by the end of the month a total of 105 had died as a result of the landing.

As already mentioned, only 'A' and 'B' Companies and one platoon of 'C' Company were ashore when the move inland commenced. The 'C' Company platoon was No. 10 Platoon under the command of Lieutenant A.P. Derham,³ a 23-year old from the Melbourne suburb of Kew East.

Upon crossing the crest onto the 400 Plateau around mid-day, Lieutenant Derham was hit in the thigh by an enemy machine-gun bullet but after the initial shock he carried on hobbling to catch up with the

advancing troops then continued to exercise command. During the afternoon, he was again hit, this time by a bullet in the shoulder but still carried on. He was evacuated five days later, on 30th April.



For his gallantry, Lieutenant Derham was awarded the Military Cross and became the first member of the battalion to be decorated during the First World War.

At the time he enlisted, Derham was a medical student and in late 1916 was granted a request to return to Australia to complete his studies. He re-embarked for overseas service on 2nd November 1918 as a medical officer.

During the Second World War Derham held the rank of Colonel as the Assistant Director of Medical Services at AIF Headquarters in Malaya and became a prisoner of the Japanese with the fall of Singapore. After the war, he was appointed

as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his military service.

¹ David Sydney Wanliss, CMG, VD (1864 - 1943), Barrister, later Judge, b. Perth, Scotland.

² Sir William Throsby Bridges, KCB, CMG (1861-1915), Regular Soldier, b. Greenock, Scotland.

³ Alfred Plumley Derham, CBE, MC (1891–1962), Medical Practitioner, b. Camberwell, Melbourne, VIC.