

## THE ANZAC COMMANDERS AND THEIR USE OF ARTILLERY

Major General J. P. Stevens AO (Retd)

This paper examines how the commanders of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) used their artillery at Gallipoli.

When ANZAC was training in Egypt in early 1915, doctrine held that artillery was an accessory Arm whose purpose was to assist in maintaining the mobility and offensive power of the infantry. This doctrine envisaged manoeuvre warfare with devolved command and control and batteries using direct fire, but it also noted the increasing importance of concealment and indirect fire. Lessons from the early engagements on the Western Front reinforced these latter points.

Within days of landing at Gallipoli ANZAC found itself on the defensive, in which the tasks of the guns were to protect the infantry positions, counter hostile batteries, and support any offensive action. ANZAC's Gunners faced multiple disadvantages. The beachhead lacked depth, the enemy held the high ground, observation was difficult, and the relatively-flat-trajectory naval and field guns were ill-suited to the broken countryside. Ammunition supply was restricted, for some months the field guns had only shrapnel shell, and manufacturing defects impinged on shell effectiveness.

The rugged terrain at Anzac posed few problems in siting ANZAC's one howitzer battery, but made field gun positions hard to find. It took two weeks to get the available field batteries ashore and it was not until late May before settled positions were occupied. Meanwhile, the lack of prospects for imminent advance at in the ANZAC area combined with the dearth of obvious positions had caused the Theatre Commander, General Hamilton, to re-deploy five ANZAC field batteries to Helles. This left the Corps with about one-third of a normal allocation of gun-based firepower: two mountain batteries, seven field batteries, a 4.5inch howitzer battery, and supplementary naval gunfire.

The immediate priority was to support the infantry defences. The Corps artillery adviser concentrated on the organisation of naval gunfire support. Many expected this would dominate the battlefield, but the reality was otherwise. Ships and ammunition useful for land targets were limited, the guns could not engage defiladed positions, and the sea charts and land maps used to calculate firing data did not align. Nonetheless, once the firing lines settled the ships proved useful against troops in the open, and a workable system evolved for providing general support controlled by naval observers ashore and afloat. Standard defensive fire tasks were agreed, and the ships were used for interdiction, counter-battery (CB) fire, and the support of attacks.

Pushed up onto the ridgelines ashore, the field guns had restricted arcs of fire and fired from pits for protection. Coverage of the whole front was achieved, albeit with a limited weight of fire. Command and control issues arose because limited battery arcs, dead ground, and the benefit of firing in enfilade when the two front lines were close often meant that guns in a neighbouring defence sector were best placed to provide support. The inability of *1<sup>st</sup> Division's* guns to engage Australian-sector targets behind Lone Pine and Johnston's Jolly while these could be engaged by a New Zealand battery on Russell's Top was a case in point.

The senior ANZAC Gunner was only an adviser and did not have the resources to command the Corps' artillery, so command had to be exercised at Division. The ANZAC area was broken into defensive sectors, with an artillery unit in each sector authorized to fire on sector targets within ammunition restrictions. Telephone nets were established to handle requests to the Divisional Artillery Commanders for artillery support from other sectors.

ANZAC artillery instructions on this system were issued on 25 May. Later, so that they might choose the best guns to engage a target, sector artillery commanders were issued with maps showing the arcs of each fire unit, and the system evolved so that one sector artillery commander could go direct to another sector or to batteries under divisional control if time was of the essence.

To increase the available firepower, the Gunners sought more howitzers. Priorities elsewhere, and some reservations on the part of the Corps commander - because the only weapons available were obsolescent 5-inchers - meant the response was dilatory. Three old 6-inch howitzers and a 4.7inch gun trickled ashore between mid-May and mid-July, allowing the *1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division* to raise a Heavy Battery, primarily for CB purposes. A 5-inch howitzer battery arrived in late June, to be followed by five others in July. These weapons could range more widely across the front and in some depth and were generally kept under divisional control.

Gradually the Gunners established a comprehensive system that provided responsive support of adequate weight. The key was personal liaison. Divisional Artillery Headquarters co-located with Divisional Headquarters. Observers and sector artillery commanders worked closely with the trench garrisons and the infantry sector commanders, and batteries soon registered the crucial targets within their arcs. The artillery war diaries are replete with reports of engagement of Ottoman attackers, trenches, machine guns, supply trains and the like, and support of friendly actions. This support was provided despite ever-present ammunition restrictions and the casualties and inflicted by enemy retaliation. Innovative tactics were attempted to reduce the vulnerability of individual batteries, such as all guns firing at the same time and one fire unit protecting another.

Effective CB work proved more problematic. Ottoman guns sited in defilade could only be located by the flash and dust of firing combined with a map appreciation of their likely position. Imprecise locations and greater Ottoman freedom of manoeuvre often required batteries to search for hostile foe. Air observation was occasionally attempted, but proved disappointing. A Hostile Battery map issued in June identified Ottoman guns in 17 locations, and a similar map in September identified 30 firing points. Most could be subject to CB fire, but such missions - or retaliatory fire against a section of the enemy line - normally only stopped the enemy firing temporarily, if at all. This was a disadvantage, but the ANZAC commanders were spared the full consequences of a poor CB capability by significant Ottoman deficiencies in shell supply.

Throughout the campaign, ANZAC was essentially on the defensive with the exception of the attempt in August to capture the Sari Bair Range, and the simultaneous subsidiary attacks at Lone Pine, German Officer's Trench and the Nek.

Fire plans for the offensive can be found in the war diaries. They do not cover the attack on German Officer's Trench, which was to be preceded by the detonation of underground mines, or the attack on the Sari Bair Range, beyond the limited bombardment of an intermediate

position, and the inclusion of two mountain batteries in the attacking columns. For Sari Bair, it appears the view was taken that a programmed fire plan was not appropriate for a night operation reliant on surprise where timings were somewhat flexible and when ANZAC believed the objectives were lightly held.

The fire plan for Lone Pine involved wire cutting by a field battery, and short howitzer bombardments pre-D Day and on D Day itself onto the objective and the flanking positions at German Officer's Trench and Johnston's Jolly. For one hour before the assault, these targets were then subject to fire at the quick rate, with fire further afield placed on trenches at the Nek and Chessboard. At zero hour the fire on Lone Pine was lifted to the valley beyond - where naval gunfire was also playing - while fire continued on the flanking positions, two field batteries in the front line provided immediate support for the attackers, and every other battery undertook CB and opportunity tasks within its zone.

The bombardment attracted some criticism because it did not destroy the log-covered trenches on Lone Pine. However, the wire was essentially cut, the preliminary fire did not compromise tactical surprise, the whirlwind bombardment drove the defenders into cover, and the fire then turned to protective and CB tasks. While the plan was by no means perfect its concept was sound, and it suppressed the defenders at the critical time.

Unfortunately, the fire plan for the Light Horse attack at the Nek, Pope's and Quinn's on the morning of the 7 August did not enjoy the same success. It involved a very-slow overnight bombardment of the opposing trenches at the Nek and the Chessboard by two howitzer and three field batteries, with a further field battery engaging the front of Quinn's. At 0400hrs four ships and mountain guns joined in at the Nek/Chessboard, and the rate of fire rose to one round per gun per minute for 27 minutes followed by a further three minutes at the intense rate before the assault at 0430hrs.

The overnight bombardment was too weak to cause much damage and arguably only served to signal yet another attack. However, the plan's principal flaw was that it did not cover the enfilading machine guns that stopped the attack in its tracks. In addition, some batteries were asked to cover areas greater than their normal frontages, and there was confusion between the two divisional artilleries over support during the assault, which was in any case limited to a very short period.

Reporting on the Nek, Australian official historian Bean records a seven-minute gap between the end of the preparatory bombardment and the beginning of the assault because of a "mistake in the timing of the watches" held by the batteries/ships and the Light Horse. There is no mention of this gap in the war diaries of any of the Light Horse or artillery units involved or in formation after-action reports. All indicate the bombardment lifted at 0430hrs and the assault followed immediately. Rather than being a matter of poor coordination, it seems the faults with this attack lay in the failure of the fire plan to neutralize the enfilading machine guns, and with the command decision to mount and then continue the attack when precursor events had failed.

Rather than preceding the attack at the Nek as planned, the attacks on the Sari Bair Range all occurred afterwards. The fire support was limited to naval gunfire, two mountain batteries, around six New Zealand field guns, three batteries of Australian field guns, two 4.5-inch howitzers, three batteries of 5-inch howitzers and a 6-inch howitzer. An impromptu fire plan onto Chunuk Bair on 7 August led to little success. Following a two-hour bombardment of

the range on the morning of 8 August, the New Zealanders established a foothold on Chunk Bair, which they were able to hold with artillery and naval gunfire support until their relief was cleared from the feature by an Ottoman counter-attack on 10 August, which the guns and ships were unable to halt. Bombardments on 8 and 9 August did not assist in the capture of other features on the range, and short rounds causing friendly casualties added to the difficulties. The overall impression is that once surprise was lost there was too little artillery to effectively support the attacks, and the effective use of what was available was hampered by observation and communications difficulties. In evidence to the Dardanelles Commission, the commander of the *NZ&A Division's* Artillery was critical of the Force and Corps Commanders for not planning for set backs, and for not deploying howitzers he believed were available in Egypt. He was also critical of his Divisional Commander for not understanding fire planning.

After the August offensive, ANZAC's area expanded northwards to include the lower slopes of the Sari Bair Range between old Anzac and the area captured by the *IXth Corps* at Suvla. Defensive sectors were re-allotted, with the *NZ&A Division* assuming responsibility for the new territory. The ANZAC batteries at Helles slowly rejoined their parent formations, and more guns arrived. By September there were 105 guns at Anzac as opposed to 72 in July. The *NZ&A Division's* artillery expanded from one artillery brigade to two.

Artillery activity between the August offensive and the evacuation in December largely resembled that between May and July, but in late August three attempts were made to capture Hill 60, a low eminence at the end of a spur running down from Sari Bair, in order to anchor the line across to Suvla, and provide observation over Ottoman positions around Anafarta.

The enemy initially held the Hill itself, supporting positions in the lower ground to the west, and entrenchments running up the spur to the Hill's south-east for about 1,000 yards to the next higher knoll (Hill 100). The first attack aimed to capture the Hill and the positions in the low ground, but the supporting fire plan suffered from the fact that only howitzers were used to provide the preliminary bombardment and covering fire, and thus the Ottoman positions were not sufficiently suppressed. The attack succeeded in capturing the positions in the low ground, but only gained a toehold on Hill 60. A second attack made later that night, effectively without a supporting artillery fire plan, made no significant gains.

A few days later, a third attack aimed to complete the capture of Hill 60. The assault was to occur at 1700hrs. The fire plan was more comprehensive in that from 1600hrs until dark, four ships and the heavier artillery were assigned to CB work and roads in the rear, some field artillery and a mountain battery were directed onto the roads behind Hill 60, and a field battery equivalent and a mountain battery section were to engage the spur and Hill 100. From 1600 to 1700hrs four howitzer batteries and a mountain battery section were to engage Hill 60 itself and then, until dark, lift onto the spur and Hill 100.

The attack was somewhat successful in that on Hill 60 itself more ground was gained, although the crest remained in Ottoman hands. The Australians attacking on the immediate right of Hill 60, next to the spur, made no progress. Artillery records show that the field guns allotted to the spur did not fire on the area, and the 5-inch howitzers allocated to provide covering fire after Zero Hour primarily engaged targets elsewhere. Why this is so is not clear, but may well reflect that orders for this attack were issued late and left little time for necessary dissemination to artillery units and for artillery preparation.

Overall, in terms of defensive fire, it is evident that in the face of many disadvantages the ANZAC artillery commanders adapted to the situation and established a responsive system for supporting the infantry with an adequate weight of shell. In so doing they built confidence and trust in their arm. They were less successful at countering Ottoman artillery and, along with the formation commanders, in providing effective fire support for major attacks. In these respects they were no different from commanders elsewhere at this stage of the war. This was a time of transition in the provision of artillery support and all commanders were developing an understanding of what could be achieved.

For modern Gunners the experiences on the peninsula reinforce the requirement for sound technical and all-Arms training before deployment, and highlight the need to be able to adapt and innovate. Anzac also provides a reminder that the effective use of firepower is a command responsibility and not just a matter for the Gunners. The days of the infantry making a plan and the Gunners and others doing their best to support it were over. An all-Arms plan, indeed with naval gunfire a joint plan, was required.