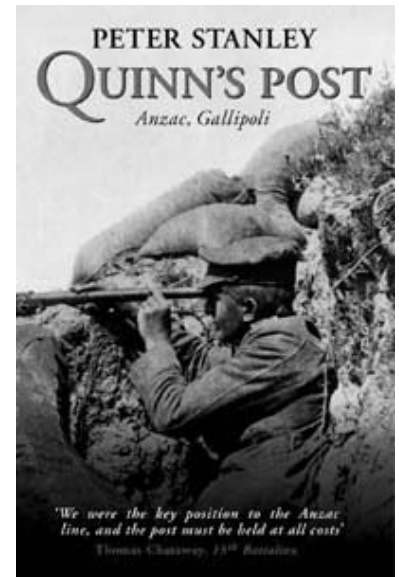


Quinn's Post, Anzac, Gallipoli

Peter Stanley

Reviewed by Mike O'Brien



Another book on Gallipoli! I wonder how many of them there are now: hundreds at least, with more being published each year. Is this one worth it? My reply is a resounding yes.

Peter Stanley belongs to that recent generation of Australian military history writers who get it right. This group of gifted authors know their subjects well because they have researched them in exacting detail. They tell their story with balance and clarity. The context is clear, yet the feeling of the battles and their toll on individuals and units is also told with factual sympathy. In many cases, they let those who took part carry the narrative at first hand. They express the limitations of their book clearly and yet often understate its manifest advantages. They have an eye for detail but the detail adds to the story rather than obscures it. And they avoid acronyms and abbreviations! None of this is unexpected from the pen of Peter Stanley because his earlier books have met this high standard.

Quinn's Post is probably the first book on the Gallipoli campaign based on a place. The Post was always a key one, close to the Turkish trenches (and there's an understatement), always seen by the allies as a most important position in what they saw as a campaign of siege warfare. It was also overlooked by other Turkish positions, and continually under rifle fire from snipers, bombers throwing what we would call grenades and sporadic Turkish artillery. It was called 'the key position of the Anzac line'. Charles Bean evocatively said that 'men looked upon it as they would a haunted house'. Stanley is one of the few who have read Bean's extensive notes and he tells us that the man who wrote this did so with more than the usual depth of feeling: he had his hand blown off and was blinded when he was throwing a jam-tin bomb at Quinn's.

My first knowledge of the Post was gained from an article in a 1971 *Australian Army Journal* by Alf Argent entitled 'Quinn of Quinn's Post'. Not many essays remain in my memory for more than 30 years, but this one deserved it. Because Peter Stanley has chosen to put his footnotes on the Australian War Memorial website (they are not yet there as I write) I do not know how much information flowed from the article to Stanley's book. Quinn and the men of the 15th Battalion AIF are important to this story, but Stanley goes much further.

One of the many refreshing aspects of the book is that it treats the occupation of the Post by New Zealanders with equal attention to that given to the Australians. Too many

studies of Anzac ignore the 'NZ'. Dr Stanley is even-handed and does not resile from relating those examples where Kiwi soldierly virtues

exceeded those of their brothers. This aspect of *Quinn's Post* is a fascinating account of the close teamwork and gentle rivalry that is typical of operations by Australians and New Zealanders.

Peter Stanley is one of the very few historians to have related the actions of commanders and troops in this campaign to the military doctrine of the period. He has examined the 'bible' of *Field Service Regulations*, noted the lessons from the Russo-Japanese War and tells how these rules were applied. His comments on the training given to those occupying the Post, particularly the negligent attitude taken to the preparation of the Light Horse for this task, are worth noting.

The climax of the story of Quinn's is perhaps that of the Turkish attack of 29th May. This is the moment when it was felt that a retreat of only six inches might have driven all the Anzacs from the peninsula

The book is full of interesting detail. Here you will find the story of Lieutenant McSharry, the first Australian winner of the newly instituted Military Cross. You might be surprised to know that the present Quinn's Post cemetery at Gallipoli is not located at Quinn's Post but at Bloody Angle. The maps of the trenches and particularly the tunnels at Quinn's are especially valuable. Perhaps the most valuable and rewarding aspect of the book is the careful use made of the many documentary sources. Not only has Peter Stanley mined the rich vein of letters and diaries held by Australian and overseas institutions, but he has also carefully sifted through those notes of Charles Bean that underpinned his Official History.

Quinn's Post was to be held 'at any cost'. It was a key to the defence line at Gallipoli and the deadliest position on the peninsula. Quinn's has now almost disappeared physically as the weather has eroded its fabric. Peter Stanley's book ensures that its memory will not disappear. ♦

Peter Stanley, 'Quinn's Post, Anzac, Gallipoli', Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2004, Softback. 226pp., RRP \$29.95.