

## 25 April 1915: The Day the Anzac Legend Was Born

David Cameron

Reviewed by Glenn Wahlert



Leading up to Anzac Day each year numerous publishers push a variety of new titles on the Gallipoli campaign, many of which are simply dressing up old information as new. Occasionally, however, one stands out as particularly noteworthy and David Cameron's *25 April 1915* is such a book. He does not pretend to cover the entire campaign, or to address the higher command decisions and processes. It is simply an account of those first, critical 24 hours from both the Anzac and Turkish perspectives. Most forget that the mistakes made on that first day set the course for the rest of the campaign, and the positions both sides occupied on the morning of 26 April remained largely unchanged until the Anzac withdrawal in December. This book gives the reader a good understanding of why this was the case.

Dr Cameron is an unlikely author of a book of this type. A biological anthropologist and Research Fellow in the Department of Anatomy and Histology at the University of Sydney, he is recognised as a world authority on hominid evolution, with his area of specialisation being the evolution of hominid facial morphologies through time. His last published work, in 2004, was titled *Hominid Adaptions and Extinctions*. He has conducted extensive fossil surveys and excavations around the world and it was during a site survey at Gallipoli in 2003 that he first became interested in the landing. His background and scientific discipline are evident in this book. Dr Cameron's research is thorough and well supported by evidence. His writing style, while easy to read, is detached and matter of fact – steering away from offering opinions and allowing the facts to speak for themselves.

As would be expected from any serious study of this subject, Cameron relies heavily on the works of the Australian Official Historian, Charles Bean. However, his use of primary sources, official histories, manuscripts and published works is extensive and well balanced. This book has clearly been well researched. A particular strength of this research is Dr Cameron's largely successful attempt to balance the Anzac's story with a detailed view from the Turkish side. To this end he draws extensively on the records of Lieutenant Colonel Zeki Bey, commander of the Turkish 27th Regiment.

Many readers of the Gallipoli campaign will be aware of the role played by the Turkish 57th Regiment, and in particular the part played by its commander, Mustafa Kemal. Few, however, would be aware of the central role played by the 27th Regiment's three battalions in attempting to hold back the tide of Australian and New Zealand troops on 25

April. Indeed, it was a battalion from the 27th Regiment, the 2nd Battalion, that manned the trenches and lookouts along the Anzac landing sites, opposed the Australian landing parties and inflicted so many casualties. Kemal's 57th Regiment, while playing a critical role in stopping the Anzacs exploiting beyond the Second Ridge, did not come into play until later on the first day.

Another aspect of balance in this book is the part played by the New Zealanders. Many Australians forget to acknowledge that New Zealand was even present on the first day, if at all, and many Australian publications underplay the role played by the New Zealand battalions. The excellent work of New Zealand historian Christopher Pugsley is used by Cameron to help fill this gap, and the author has gone out of his way to find New Zealand diaries and other records not previously available. To quote Dr Cameron, this was designed to put 'New Zealand back into the word Anzac'.

The book follows a strict chronology from the time of the landing until daybreak on the 26 April. Its key parts detail the landing, the battle for the ridges, the Turkish counter-attacks and the Anzac's first night on Turkish soil. Overall each of these parts is well handled, although at times it is difficult to follow the narrative as it attempts to describe the various, disparate and uncoordinated activities over the entire battlefield from both the Anzac and Turkish perspectives. The author's attempts to describe the chaos of that first day are not aided by his maps and diagrams. These are rather basic and, at times, do not show the key features and areas being described in the narrative. While the absence of coloured maps was most likely a decision of the publisher based on cost, it is a shame that more attention was not given to this aspect as it would have greatly aided the reader's ability to follow the story. I found myself having to constantly flick from map to map and, in the end, simply used a good map of the Gallipoli battlefield that I had in my library.

Notwithstanding this shortcoming, *25 April 1915* is a well researched and well written book that is also a good read. It adds to our already vast knowledge of the Gallipoli campaign by providing a detailed account of that first day of battle. A day that set the course for the entire campaign. ♦

David Cameron, *'25 April 1915: The Day the Anzac Legend was Born'*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007, Softback, 324pp., RRP \$A29.95.