

Suvla Bay - 50th Anniversary Visit

There has been, and continues to be much attention paid to World War One Centenaries, but what of the 50th anniversaries? When the young men of 1914-18 would have been fairly recently retired, many of them in their late 60s and early 70s, still relatively fit. Overseas travel was less daunting and perhaps attitudes and finances had lead to an environment when visits to the more distant battlefields had become possible.

Such was the case in April 1965, the 50th anniversary of the landings when 3 former members of The Herefordshire Regiment, who had landed at Suvla Bay on 8 August 1915, undertook a visit to Gallipoli. The 3 were led by Harold Slaymaker (72), who had been detached from the Battalion at Gallipoli as a Staff Clerk with HQ 160 Bde, and he was later to work for the Foreign Service in many embassies throughout Europe and I suspect he may have been the inspiration behind the tour. John (Jack) Davies and Thomas (Tommy) Fletcher both 71 had landed on the beaches on the morning of 8 August, and both were evacuated suffering from wounds and dysentery.

The 3 left Hereford Railway Station and were seen off by The Lord Lieutenant Colonel JF McClean and Lt Col PM Carr - the Honorary Colonel and CO of The Herefordshire Light Infantry respectively – the successor regiment to The Herefords. The intrepid 3 travelled by train and coach via: London, Brussels, Munich, Maribor, Zagreb, Belgrade and Sofia before arriving at Istanbul. There is no indication of how long the journey took, but pre motorway and ‘free’ border crossing and coaches with ‘air-con’, it must have been quite a journey!

These were also the days before common public international phone communication and Harold Slaymaker regularly reported back by telegram.

They attended a reception held by The British Legion (pre ‘Royal’ days), and appear to have met up with a reporter who was recording a piece to be broadcast on the radio programme – *from our own correspondent*. The ‘script’ for the programme is shown below.

I suspect for 2 of the 3 this was only the second time they has travelled overseas, the first being 50 years earlier! I have been so far unable to find an account of their visit – although I know Harold Slaymaker wrote one, or locate any photographs – a task to pursue which may lead to another article!

Supporting Documents:

Photographs - _‘Setting Off’, Hereford Railway Station. LtoR: Lt Col Carr, Harry Slaymaker, Col McClean, John Davies, Thomas Fletcher.

Progress telegrams

BBC ‘From Our Own Correspondent’ Script



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RECEIVED

POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

No. OFFICE STAMP
HEREFORD
23 APR. 65

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

At: KKMJ24 OSEAGRAM BM U CZC VBM 1559 696
From: ISTANBUL 12 21 2100 =
By: COLONEL CARR BARRACKS HEREFORD

At: * m
To: * m
By: *

= PLEASE INFORM DAVIES FLETCHER HOUSEHOLDS
SAFE ARRIVAL = SLAYMAKER +

BM O

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form, and, if possible, the envelope. B or C

passed to press by tele DAF
CO sin
press informed Ltr delivered by hand copy attached NCH

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No. OFFICE STAMP
HEREFORD
23 APR. 65

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

At: * m
From: TAS 6 ISTANBUL 24 22 1800 CTF NUMBER OF
By: COLONEL CARR BARRACKS HEREFORD =

SPLENDID CEREMONY ATATURK MEMORIAL TODAY
HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT ONLY CONTINGENT ACTUAL
FORMER COMBATANTS FROM UNITED KINGDOM HERE
FOR ANNIVERSARY SLAYMAKER +++

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POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

No. OFFICE STAMP
HEREFORD
23 APR. 65

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

At: * m
From: E1 TAS6 VBS246 219 CANKALE 9 26 1800
By: COLONEL CARR BARRACKS HEREFORD ENGLAND =

At: * m
To: * m
By: *

MISSION FULLY COMPLETED = SLAYMAKER++

OSEAGRAM BM

RECEIVED ON 27-10-20
APPT. IMIT. DATE
C.O. 27/4
ADT. 27/4
Q.M.
D.G.
B.M.

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Mrs J.S. Davies, Beverly, Bebblesack, Hereford

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POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

No. OFFICE STAMP
HEREFORD
25 APR. 65

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

At: * m
From: +++ D6 VBM3015 1238 ECEABAT 14 24 1650
By: COLONEL CARR BARRACKS HEREFORD ENGLAND =

SUVLA VENIMUS ATOUE VIDIMUS SED NON VICIMUS
THRE MUSKETEERS

+ NON VIDIMUS THREE MUSKETEERS BM O

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form, and, if possible, the envelope. B or C

PETER FLINN
ISTANBUL
N.795 GALLIPOLI
HTY 42910 copied to CYFN 19125

Typed 23rd April

DURATION: 4'08" FAIR QUALITY.

CHECKED WITH TAPE. POK.

Commissioned for "FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT" - 24th April 1965. FREE FOR USE
THEREAFTER. Tape recorded in Istanbul on 22.4.65. and received in Foreign News
on 23.4.65.

CUE MATERIAL: The fiftieth anniversary of the Gallipoli/landings - the Allies' operation of 1915 designed to force the straits guarding Constantinople and to open communications with armies of the Czar of Russia. Peter Flinn reports from Istanbul - in those days, Constantinople.

Constantinople - the luxurious metropolis of the Ottoman Empire: hot baths, rich food, women - it was the dream of the men on the beaches and the rocky hills of the Gallipoli peninsula, where in nine months the losses on both sides totalled half a million, of whom more than a hundred thousand were dead.

Today, in a new Constantinople, modern Istanbul, Private Tommy Fletcher, of the First Battalion, the Hereford Regiment, Territorial Army, looked round from his armchair and said: "Well I never would've believed it. We never saw above four mile of Turkey, and most of the time we had our heads down. Landed in Suvla Bay in the August; November, the rain came, then we had seventeen degree of frost, I got a bit of shrapnel in the leg, they had to cut the boots off me."

Three tough seventy-year-olds from Hereford, backed by their own county, made their way here independently, and with Drummer Jack Davis map reading, with his schoolmate, Private Fletcher, Staff Clerk H.E. Slaymaker handling administration, independently they made their way back to Suvla Bay. Unknown to them, heading for the same destination from Newfoundland was the Prime Minister, Mr. Joseph Smallwood, with a party of six. From Germany came serving soldiers. Sergeant Brooks and two other Royal Horse Artillerymen organised a lift with the American Air Force. Captain Kellie and his five drove by minibus from Germany, to represent the Hampshire Regiment. A French Gallipoli commander, General Lehr, brought his men by chartered aircraft; the German chartered a ship - the High Command on the Turkish side was held by the German Field Marshal Liman von Sanders. But the major operation was organised by the Australians and New Zealanders: over three hundred of them in their chartered Turkish ship cruised along the Mediterranean coast, visiting Tobruk and Alamein, sailed calmly and peacefully through those straits which had meant so much fifty years ago, and tied up here in the heart of the city to a most extraordinary reception. As leathery tough seventy-year-old, and older, Australians came down the gangway, a quiver ran through the ranks of the equally tough, broad, seventy-year-old Turkish veterans. Tears came to the Turks' eyes and they sighed with relief, as their leader, General Selahaddin Selishik, broke the emotion and broke ranks to embrace an Australian

Continued....

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opposite number whom he seemed to recognise from fifty years ago.

In part the congratulations on each side have been on the sheer achievement of living through it all. For, after that strange truce after the first month's fighting when each side met on the battlefield to bury their dead, the hatred disappeared.

In the long days between battles, each side would throw gifts across - food or cigarettes. One Australian said an old Turk used to come across and collect washing on his sector - the Turks had water, the Anzacs hardly any. It is certainly true that occasionally individual marksmen, one Australian and one Turk, would stand up in the hushed trenches and blaze away at each other until one fell.

It was another world. On the beaches today and in the rocky hills are stone memorials and cemeteries - the graves wonderfully green with the Spring rains.

But the war reminders are there. The bulldozers cutting a road down to Anzac Cove for landing, this anniversary turned up dozens of hand grenades. One relic changes hands this anniversary: a Turkish bugle, captured by the Hampshires, goes back to the Turks by the hand of the serving soldiers of the Hampshire Regiment.

The old soldiers are proud of their past, but they do not live in it. Fifty years ago they existed somehow for months on Turkish soil, when as they say, all they knew of the Turks was, if you saw one, you either chucked a tin of bully beef at him or blew his head off. Today the Anzacs see ordinary Turks catching buses, going shopping, looking forward to the introduction of television; and, seventy-year-old or no, the old soldiers are quite capable of making the most of the present wonder: that they should be alive, and in Constantinople.

SMJ/23.4.65.