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 aniversary 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 corresposdent. 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:

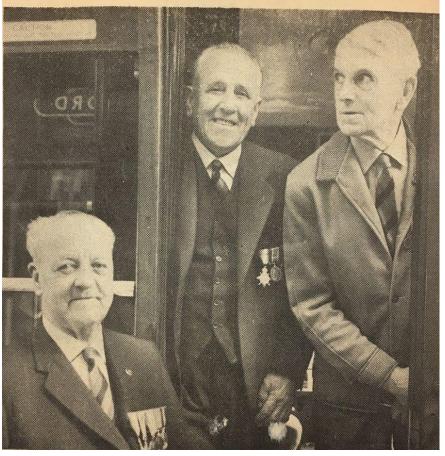
Photographs -_'Setting Off', Hereford Railway Station. LtoR: Lt Col Carr, Harry Slaymaker, Col McClean, John Davies, Thomas Fletcher.

Progress telegrams

BBC 'From Our Own Correspondent' Script

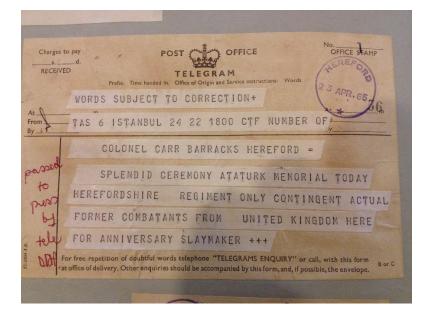


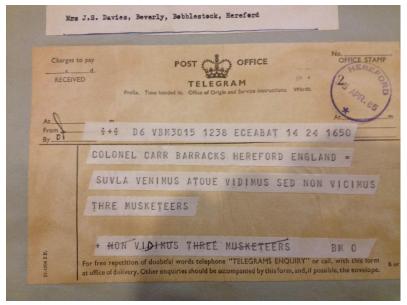
BIRMINGHAM POST, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1











N.795 GALLIPOLI HTY 42910 copied to CYFN 19125

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 come, then we had seventeen degree of frost, I got a bit of shrapnel in the leg, they had to out 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 Germand chartered a ship - the High Command on the Turkish side was held by the German Field Marchal Liman you 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

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-2-

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 occasionaly 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.