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Solving the Riddle of the Anzac Cove Landing

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ABSTRACT

The landings at Gallipoli's Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915 will forever be enshrined in Australian and New Zealand history, but historians remain deeply divided over whether landing in such appallingly difficult terrain was in fact a mistake. While this issue remains unresolved to this day, research based on primary sources proves beyond reasonable doubt that the Royal Navy was in the wrong place before the landings began. Certain naval officers, however, quickly became aware of the error and did their utmost to correct it. Despite those efforts, the landing still took place more than a mile north of where intended. Corroboration of the eye-witness accounts of those naval officers explains why and how this happened.

When the author looked up at the towering cliffs above Anzac¹ Cove for the first time back in 1989, questions about the Anzac landing returned with compelling force. Why did the Anzacs land in such impossible terrain? Was it a mistake? If so, why did it happen? The quest for answers from the vast bibliography was all-consuming but ultimately proved disappointing. While some historians acknowledge there was a mistake, others claim it was providential, sparing the Anzacs from slaughter on the beach that had originally been selected. Then why select that beach in the first place? And which beach was that? There is controversy about that too! In 1921 the official history of naval operations explained that an unforeseen sea current had carried the Anzacs a mile and a half north of the intended beach.² Both the British and Australian official histories accepted this, and it stood unchallenged for over 50 years until Eric Bush, and then Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, pointed out that the wind-free conditions at the time of the landing could not have produced a current strong enough to affect

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¹A.N.Z.A.C. is the correct acronym for the Australian & New Zealand Army Corps, but the accepted convention 'Anzac' for both the Corps and the troops is used throughout this article.

²Sir Julian Corbett, *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Naval Operations, Volume II*, (London: Longmans Green, 1921), p. 321.

the landing to such an extent.³ This was followed up by the naval historian Tom Frame's research in the late 1990s, which proved beyond all doubt that the sea current story was fallacious.⁴ This did not prevent the Gallipoli Association from retaining the sea current story on its website until 2015 when it was finally removed.



Figure 1: The 400 foot high cliffs above Anzac Cove.⁵

Historians are still trying to separate fact from fiction. In 2015, Chris Roberts wrote, 'Hopefully, future histories and documentaries will place the landing at Anzac in an historically accurate frame, free from the mythology that dominates the present view.'⁶ Why mythology should dominate such a definitive moment in Australian and New Zealand national history, is anyone's guess. While on the subject of mythology, Robin Prior claims the misplaced landing is a myth.⁷ Peter Williams, on the other hand, maintains the primary objective of the landing was to draw in and engage the enemy reserves, therefore where the Anzacs did or did not land was not important and has

³Eric Bush, *Gallipoli*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 111; Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, (London: Papermac edition, 1995), pp. 54-55.

⁴Tom Frame, *The Shores of Gallipoli: Naval Aspects of the Anzac Campaign*, (Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 2000) p. 199.

⁵<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/PRG+381/1>. Accessed 17 June 2021. State Library of South Australia, PRG 381/1. The 'Sphinx' can be seen to the left with the razor ridge to Plugge's Plateau on the right.

⁶Chris Roberts, *The Landing at Anzac 1915*, (Sydney NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2015) Introduction to second edition.

⁷Robin Prior, *Gallipoli The End of the Myth*, (Yale: Yale University Press 2009) p. 124.

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received unwarranted attention.⁸ Steel and Hart concluded that where the landing was intended to take place is an insoluble question.⁹

Such conflicts of opinion motivated visits to repositories in Britain and Australia that held primary-source material relating to the landing, in the belief there had to be some indisputable facts.¹⁰ In whatever format, primary sources are often the only traces of the past left behind. Eye-witness accounts, letters, diaries, service and battalion records, ships' logs, written orders and reports, tend not to have an agenda, but they can, of course, mislead. Chris Roberts discovered that Albert Facey's eye-witness account of the landing, in his acclaimed memoir *A Fortunate Life*, was fabricated, because Facey arrived at Gallipoli on 7 May, twelve days after the landing.¹¹ Official reports, although written within days of the events, sometimes contain thinly disguised bias in defence of decisions and actions taken. Such 'noise' can hamper the search for facts, but through corroboration and cross-referencing, a credible picture of events can be constructed. Months of research did not conjure up any new primary sources. Ships' logs, however, have rarely been scrutinised, and while they provide some fresh insight, more surprising was the discovery that important evidence had sometimes been overlooked or misinterpreted in more familiar primary sources.

A good starting point was to establish the plans and objectives for the Anzac landing. Primary sources were the orders issued by General Sir Ian Hamilton's General Headquarters (GHQ), and Anzac Headquarters' (HQ)'s orders to subordinate commanders, and finally the naval orders of Vice-Admiral Cecil Thursby, whose amorphous fleet was tasked with organising some 400 small-boat journeys from warships and transports, to put some 23,000 Anzacs ashore.¹²

⁸Peter Williams, *The Battle of Anzac Ridge 25 April 1915* (Loftus NSW: Australian Military History Publications, 2007), p. 72.

⁹Steel and Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, p. 58.

¹⁰Research conducted at The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA), the Imperial War Museum, London (IWM), the National Maritime Museum, London (NMM), the British Library, London (BL), the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth (NMRN), the Australian War Memorial, Canberra (AWM), the Mitchell Library, Sydney, Archives New Zealand, The National Archives of Australia, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).

¹¹Roberts, *The Landing at Anzac 1915*, Appendix 3, 'Turkish Machine Guns at the Landing'.

¹²C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 Volume 1*, (Sydney NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1921), p. 261 gives a detailed composition of the Corps.

On 13 April 1915, GHQ issued orders to General William Birdwood, GOC A.N.Z A.C:

A landing in force is to be made by the A. & N.Z. Army Corps on the beach between KABA TEPE and FISHERMAN'S HUT. The objective assigned to the Army Corps is the ridge over which the GALLIPOLI – MAIDOS and BOGHALI – KOJADERE roads run, and especially MAL TEPE.¹³

The distance from Gaba Tepe to Fisherman's Hut is just over three miles.¹⁴ There are three separate beaches along this stretch of coastline, not just the one implied in GHQ's orders. GHQ ordered that the Anzac first wave 'will be transferred ... to H.M. Ships Queen, London, and Prince of Wales, which will steam during the night to a position off KABA TEPE.'¹⁵ A rendezvous position off Gaba Tepe, the southern extremity of GHQ's target area, tends to suggest a landing in that vicinity rather than further north.

GHQ's first-day objective was the ridge that runs diagonally from the Sari Bair Heights in a south-easterly direction down to the waters of the straits at Khelia Bay, including Mal Tepe, the high point at some 500 feet on the southern slopes of this ridge. GHQ provided a clear definition of the holding position they expected Birdwood to establish before pushing on to Mal Tepe.¹⁶ This holding position encompassed the Sari Bair Heights from which steep ridges run down to Fisherman's Hut on the left flank, while a much longer, far less steep ridge slopes down to Gaba Tepe on the right flank. This triangular position formed a natural fortress that could be held against enemy counterattacks or provide a strong platform from which to push on to Mal Tepe.¹⁷

¹³Instructions for GOC A. & N.Z. ARMY CORPS, General Headquarters, 13 April 1915, signed by Major General Walter Braithwaite, GSO 1. Copy No. 9 sourced from Admiral Thursby's papers at the NMM, paragraph 2.

¹⁴Kaba Tepe is an alternative spelling for Gaba Tepe.

¹⁵Instructions for GOC A. & N.Z. ARMY CORPS, General Headquarters, 13 April 1915, Copy No. 9 from Thursby's NMM papers, paragraph 3.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, paragraph 6.

¹⁷It was from Mal Tepe in 480 BCE that Xerxes watched his armies crossing the Hellespont on their way to invade Greece.

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Figure 2: GHQ's Defined Holding Position¹⁸

As the day of the landing approached, Birdwood grew less confident of advancing to Mal Tepe. 'He decided his first task was clear. It was to seize the mass of the mountain comprising Hill 971 and its seaward spurs.'¹⁹ Consequently, there was not one mention of Mal Tepe in Major General William Bridges' operational orders to I Australian Division, the first division ashore.²⁰ An assessment of the strength of enemy forces convinced Anzac commanders they would probably have to fight a defensive battle from the holding position before advancing to Mal Tepe. The perimeter of the holding position measured just over seven miles, some 12,500 yards. The 13,000-strong I Australian Division could hold this perimeter comfortably, even without the 8,500-strong New Zealand & Australian Division. British army field service regulations in use

¹⁸Sketch prepared by the author based on various sources and subsequent visits.

¹⁹Bean, *Volume 1*, p. 225. Hill 971 was the high point, so-called because of its height in feet.

²⁰Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume 1*, (London: Heinemann, 1929) Appendix 16, Operation Order No. 1 issued by Major-General W. T. Bridges.

at that time stipulated a ratio of one man per yard for a defensive position, or fewer, if the position was a strong one, which this one was.²¹

Birdwood, Thursby, and their staffs reconnoitred the target area from *HMS Queen* on 14 April. They noted the three ridges that sloped downwards from the Sari Bair Heights from north to south. First Ridge, nearest the coast, was the steepest by far. Cliffs, 400 feet high in some places, fell away sharply to sea level at Hell Spit, the promontory at the southern end of Anzac Cove. Behind First Ridge were the much longer Second and Third Ridges. Second Ridge was not as formidable as First Ridge but was still very rugged, and broadened out onto 400 Plateau, so-called because of its height in feet. Air reconnaissance had revealed a battery of guns there, which Birdwood noted as a prime objective.²² About 1,000 yards beyond Second Ridge lay the critical Third Ridge, the front bastion of the holding position. As the longest of the three ridges at some five miles, it was the easiest in terms of terrain. Beyond Third Ridge a plain stretched for about three miles to Midos and the waters of the Straits. Enemy reserves would advance from this direction, highlighting the importance of establishing the holding position before their arrival.

A more immediate objective was the enemy outpost at Gaba Tepe, protected by trenches, barbed wire, and artillery. Barbed wire extended 500 yards along the sand dunes, north of the outpost, then plunged across the beach down into the sea.²³ Any landing, therefore, had to be made north of this wire. The elimination of this outpost on the right flank was confirmed in Bridges' orders to Colonel Ewen MacLagan whose 4,000-strong 3 Brigade would be the first ashore as the covering force.²⁴

As viewed from Gaba Tepe, the intended landing beach can be seen in Figure 3. Reconnaissance showed it offered an easy and open route to Third Ridge but was threatened by enfilade from enemy guns positioned behind the headland in the foreground. This beach later became known as Brighton Beach. Advancing up and over the appalling terrain of First and Second Ridges to get to Third Ridge made no sense when there was an easier, direct route from Brighton Beach. The Turkish General Staff History confirms a landing north of Gaba Tepe favoured the enemy, and the loss

²¹*Field Service Regulations, Part I, Operations 1909, Reprinted with Amendments 1914*, His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), p. 149.

²²Bean, *Volume 1*, p. 225.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 557-562; Map No. 23 opposite p. 561; footnote on p. 557.

²⁴Major-General Bridges (via Chief of Staff, Colonel Cyril White) 'Instructions to Officer Commanding Covering Force' (MacLagan).

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of the Sari Bair Heights would compromise the Turkish defence of the southern peninsula.²⁵

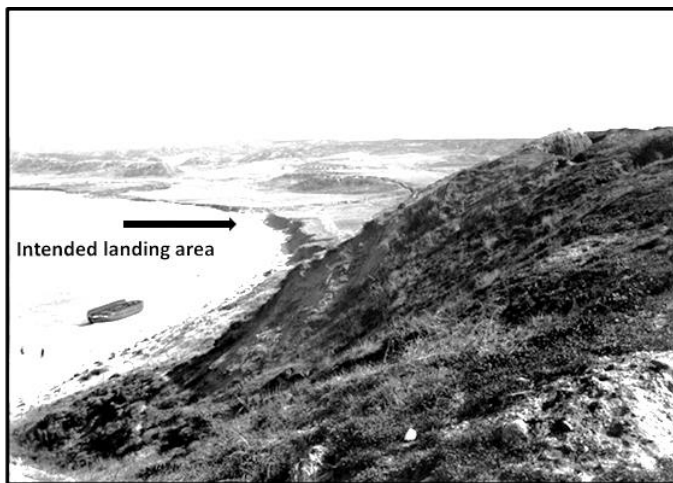


Figure 3: The Intended Landing Beach. ²⁶

Birdwood issued his Operational Order No. 1 on 17 April stating that the ‘Corps is to land North of Gaba Tepe.’²⁷ The following day, his orders to Bridges GOC I Australian Division were more specific. ‘The covering force will have to advance and occupy the ridge running first east from Gaba Tepe and then north-east in Square 212, towards the crest in Square 238 [Chunuk Bair].’²⁸ These orders made it clear that the beach to the north of Gaba Tepe was the easiest place from which to reach Third Ridge. The ridge running ‘east from Gaba Tepe’, and then ‘north-east to Chunuk Bair’ could only be Third Ridge. The numbered squares to which Birdwood referred were on the War Office maps that both GHQ and Anzac HQ were using.²⁹

²⁵*Turkish General Staff History, English Volume I*, (General Staff Publications: Ankara, 1978) pp. 135-136; p. 151.

²⁶Australian War Memorial. Accession No. PO 3631.340

²⁷Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, Appendix 14. General Birdwood’s Order for Anzac Landing, dated 17 April 1915.

²⁸*Ibid.*, Appendix 15. Birdwood’s Instructions to Bridges GOC I Australian Division, dated 18 April 1915.

²⁹War Office Map No. 683, scale 1: 40,000 was not 100% accurate, but was used until July/August 1915 when it was replaced by the 1: 20,000 series, based on more accurate maps captured from the Turks.

The landing was planned as a surprise dawn assault with no preliminary naval bombardment. MacLagan's covering force would disembark from warships into strings of open boats towed by small steam pinnaces, and would land at around 04:30 in two waves. The first wave, some 1,500 Anzacs, would disembark from the battleships, *Queen*, *London*, and *Prince of Wales* into 36 open boats at a rendezvous point off Gaba Tepe. Twelve pinnaces would each take three open boats in tow, and attach themselves to the battleships, two to each side, fore and aft. The battleships had orders to head due east at five knots towards the target beach.³⁰ *HMS Queen*, Thursby's flagship, would signal when to stop and release the pinnaces and their tows. The pinnaces would then get into line, numbered one to twelve from right to left, and tow the open boats the rest of the way to shore. Thursby's orders were specific about the landing echelon of the first wave, '*Queen's* boats will land on the beach about 1 mile north of Kaba Tepe. *Prince of Wales's* boats four cables north of *Queen*. *London's* boats four cables north of *Prince of Wales*.'³¹ A cable is 202 yards. The three battleships, therefore, had to keep some 800 yards between them. This would ensure the first-wave boats would land on a front of at least 1,600 yards.

The second wave would not enjoy the first wave's element of surprise. Some 2,500 second-wave Anzacs would disembark from seven destroyers into the destroyers' own boats and the boats returning with the pinnaces from landing the first wave. The destroyers' shallow draught would allow them to approach to about 500 yards from the shore, giving the pinnaces a short tow to the beach.³² The covering force would then advance to Third Ridge. 11 Battalion on the left had orders to advance northeast towards Chunuk Bair. 10 Battalion would take up a central position on Third Ridge after capturing the guns on 400 Plateau, while 9 Battalion would hold the right flank after taking care of the Gaba Tepe outpost. 12 Battalion would act as reserve and take up a position near 400 Plateau.

MacLagan's covering force expected to be in possession of Third Ridge, from just short of Chunuk Bair down to Gaba Tepe by 05:30, when the first part of the main body, Colonel James M'Cay's 2 Brigade, would start landing, disembarking from transports into open boats, again towed by pinnaces.³³ M'Cay's orders were to extend to the left of MacLagan's covering force, and complete the planned holding position by shoring up the left flank from Hill 971 and Chunuk Bair down to Fisherman's Hut. Colonel Henry MacLaurin's 1 Brigade would land next, and act as divisional reserve to be used

³⁰TNA ADM 137/40 - Memorandum A/32, Thursby's Naval Orders, Appendix IV, paragraph 5.

³¹Thursby's Naval Orders, Appendix IV, paragraph 6.

³²Bean, *Volume 1*, p. 264.

³³Steel and Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, p. 65.

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as the situation demanded. All three brigades of I Australian Division planned to be ashore and in position by 09:00.³⁴ The New Zealand & Australian Division, providing two more brigades, an additional eight battalions, would land immediately thereafter.

Thursby's orders to *Triumph*, the marker ship for the rendezvous point, were precise. 'On the night before the landing takes place, you will proceed to a position Latitude 40°-13' N. Longitude 26°-10' E. and anchor on that spot.'³⁵ Captain Fitzmaurice confirmed anchoring *Triumph* on those co-ordinates at 22:30 on 24 April.³⁶ Anchoring on set co-ordinates in 1915, however, was not the exact science it is today. After consulting Iain Mackenzie at the NMRN, it would have been perfectly acceptable practice at that time for *Triumph* to anchor within 500 yards of the co-ordinates in any direction. Plotting the co-ordinates on a modern Admiralty chart, the rendezvous point is exactly 5.33 statute miles or 4.63 nautical miles west, and 1230 yards north of Gaba Tepe.³⁷ Given that *Triumph* could well be off by 500 yards in any direction, the History of Naval Operations cites the rendezvous point as 'five miles west of Gaba Tepe'.³⁸ A naval history would use nautical miles rather than statute miles, but there is little difference between 4.63 nautical miles and 5.33 statute miles. Most Gallipoli narratives quote 'five miles west of Gaba Tepe' for the rendezvous point. Again, none of them are specific as to nautical or statute miles.³⁹ The battleships carrying MacLagan's covering force stood off to port, north of *Triumph*. The rendezvous and landing points would obviously be in proximity i.e. just to the north of Gaba Tepe as ordered.

Because of potential navigational and positional variances like those mentioned, Thursby took special precautions. He appointed a specialist navigation officer, Lieutenant Commander John Waterlow, and gave him licence to alter the course of the first-wave boats by up to four compass points, port or starboard, to keep the landing on track.⁴⁰ Waterlow had sole discretion for both course and speed, and in effect had an enormous 90-degree arc in which to manoeuvre. Waterlow would not need that much latitude, but as will be seen, the licence to change course, as necessary, turned out to be absolutely crucial.

³⁴Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, p. 171.

³⁵TNA ADM 137/40 - Memorandum A/33 Orders for "Triumph" 21 April 1915.

³⁶TNA ADM 137/4, p. 374, Capt Fitzmaurice report, to Rear Admiral Thursby, 1 May 1915.

³⁷Plotted and confirmed by Captain Mike Thomson, navigation specialist, South African Navy. One nautical mile is equivalent to 1.1508 statute miles.

³⁸Corbett, *Naval Operations, Volume II*, p. 319.

³⁹Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, p. 172; James, *Gallipoli*, p. 102 ; Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 99.)

⁴⁰Thursby's Naval Orders, Appendix III, paragraph 10.

There is evidence that Thursby sent a signal at 19:05 on the eve of the landing, moving the landing *one thousand yards closer* to Gaba Tepe, in effect about 800 yards north of Gaba Tepe. Presumably, this was with Birdwood's agreement, as he was on board *Queen* at the time. Thursby's signal appears as a handwritten amendment on all copies of his naval orders which can be found in the Admiralty records held at the UK National Archives.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the naval signal logs were destroyed after the war by order of the Admiralty. The History of Naval Operations, however, seemed aware of the change because it confirms the right wing of the landing was to be 800 yards north of Gaba Tepe.⁴² A surprise landing 800 yards from Gaba Tepe made good sense. Units detailed to capture the outpost and its guns would have less ground to cover, but they had to keep clear of the barbed wire, which as mentioned earlier, extended 500 yards north from the outpost.

Since Birdwood had sensibly sidelined the advance to Mal Tepe as a first-day objective, the overall plan was sound rather than overly ambitious, as so many narratives have claimed. The Anzacs could now simply focus on securing the holding position. Intelligence had revealed the Anzacs might be facing 20,000 enemy infantry, but the actual figure was no more than 13,000.⁴³ The bulk of these were held in reserve about ten miles inland at Boghali and Maidos. The Anzacs, therefore, would have ample time to secure the holding position before those reserves arrived, as well as enjoy a numerical superiority when they did so. Hamilton had planned landings and feints across a wide panorama of more than 100 miles up and down the peninsula. Enemy commanders would have to decide how best to divide their forces to meet what appeared to be multiple threats. The holding position itself, encompassing the Sari Bair Heights, was a major tactical asset. Enemy commanders would be desperate to re-gain these heights, deflecting their attention away from the landings at Cape Helles.⁴⁴ The Anzac operation had the potential to make an immense contribution to the success of the invasion.

Even more in the Anzacs' favour, only one enemy battalion was on duty where they planned to land, one company of which was south of Gaba Tepe and would take no part in the first day's action. A second company was based further inland and fell back to Third Ridge as soon as the Anzacs landed, and waited there for reinforcements. Effectively, therefore, the 4,000-strong covering force would face only a half battalion of enemy troops, two platoons of which, some 160 rifles, made up the garrison at

⁴¹Ibid., Appendix IV, paragraph 6.

⁴²Corbett, *Naval Operations, Volume II*, p. 320.

⁴³Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, p. 165, footnote 2.

⁴⁴*Turkish General Staff History, Volume I*, pp. 135-136, & p. 151, which confirm the tactical value of the Sari Bair Heights.

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Gaba Tepe.⁴⁵ A third platoon, after leaving a few pickets on the beach itself, occupied a trench on Bolton's Ridge overlooking Brighton Beach. The remaining company had platoons in position at Fisherman's Hut, Plugge's Plateau, and one in reserve on Second Ridge. These few units would face the brunt of the Anzac assault. Despite many Anzac and naval reports of machine gun fire, there were no enemy machine guns present at the time of the landing, either at Gaba Tepe or Fisherman's Hut, or anywhere in between.⁴⁶

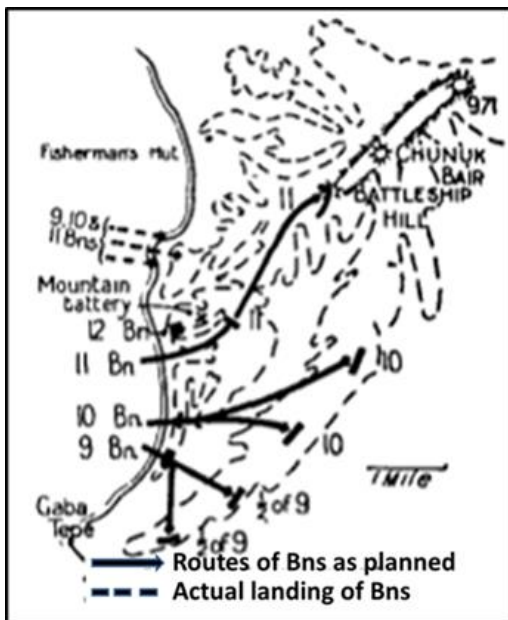


Figure 4: Anzac First Wave Landing.⁴⁷

The landing was supposed to surprise the enemy but instead ended up surprising the Anzacs because it was not what they expected. Figure 4 shows the planned versus

⁴⁵David W. Cameron, *25 April 1915*, (Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007) pp. 25-26, pp. 55-56. (Turkish platoons at some \pm 83 men, were larger than Anzac and British platoons, and were three per company, as opposed to four per company for Anzac and British companies.)

⁴⁶Mesut Uyar, *The Ottoman Defence Against the Anzac Landing*, (Sydney NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2015), Chapter 3, The Initial Defence on the Coast; Roberts, *The Landing at Anzac 1915*, Appendix 3; *Turkish General Staff History, Volume I*, p. 136. All three sources confirm no Turkish machine guns were operating at the time of the landing, although the Turkish reserves brought machine guns with them later in the day.

⁴⁷Bean, *Volume I*, sketch p. 255.

actual landing. Anzac first-wave units landed well to the north of where they should have been. Commander Charles Dix, the naval officer in overall command of the first-wave flotilla, shouted out as the boats were about to land, 'Tell the colonel, the dam' fools have taken us a mile too far north.'⁴⁸ He thought Colonel MacLagan was in one of the first-wave boats, but MacLagan had made a last-minute decision to land with the second wave. Dix was in no doubt that the landing had been made in the wrong place, 'We were ordered to land with the right-hand boat some 500 yards to the north of Gaba Tepe.'⁴⁹ This suggests Dix knew about the last-minute change to move the landing closer to Gaba Tepe, although his 500 yards differs slightly from the 800 yards intimated by Thursby's alleged signal. All the boats of the first wave landed clustered around Ari Burnu, directly in front of the daunting First Ridge, the very place that reconnaissance had sought to avoid. They also landed bunched together on a front of about 500 to 600 yards instead of the planned 1,600 yards. Dix never did explain who the 'dam' fools' might be. After the war, he accepted the sea current explanation, as did everyone else.

The most immediate, and serious consequence of the misplaced landing was that Gaba Tepe and its guns were out of reach. From after 05:05, i.e. some 35 minutes after the first-wave boats grounded, these guns started to harass all follow-up landings. Curiously, some narratives cite the strength of this firepower from Gaba Tepe as proof of the providential nature of the landing. Given that the original plan was to nullify this strongpoint, and given that the misplaced landing had made this impossible, by what logic could this now be perceived as providential? Less than ten percent of the covering force actually landed on Brighton Beach. These were all second-wave Anzacs comprising one 9 Battalion company and a half-company from 12 Battalion that landed from the destroyer, *HMS Beagle*.⁵⁰ The Gaba Tepe garrison gave *Beagle* a hot reception. According to *Beagle's* log, the time was 05:05.⁵¹ Commander John Godfrey, in command of *Beagle*, confirmed heavy rifle and machine gun fire but no shrapnel.⁵²

There were two obsolete Nordenfelt, rapid-fire guns at Gaba Tepe, and Godfrey must have mistaken these for machine guns.⁵³ Importantly, the Gaba Tepe artillery did not open fire on *Beagle* as it did later during subsequent landings when Godfrey did report shrapnel.⁵⁴ This is a key finding because it confirms the Gaba Tepe guns did not

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 252.

⁴⁹Captain C. C. Dix, 'Efficient Navy: How Troops Were Landed', *Reveille, Journal of the Returned Soldiers League*, (Sydney NSW, March 1932).

⁵⁰ Bean, *Volume I*, Map No. 11 opposite p. 256.

⁵¹TNA ADM 53/34912 - *Beagle's* log for 25/04/1915.

⁵²TNA ADM 137/40 - Commander Godfrey's report dated 27/04/1915 sheet 396.

⁵³*Turkish General Staff History, Volume I*, p. 182, footnote.

⁵⁴TNA ADM 137/40 - Godfrey's report, sheet 396.

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threaten landing on Brighton Beach until well after 05:05, some 35 minutes or more after the first wave had landed and would have penetrated some way inland. Moreover, the first-wave Anzac units detailed to destroy the guns would have been bearing down on them from the flank and rear by at least 05:00, if not before.



Figure 4: 9 & 12 Battalion Anzacs Landing from HMS Beagle.⁵⁵

Beagle's second-wave Anzacs did take some casualties getting ashore, but not enough to hinder their progress. Within a matter of minutes these 350 or so Anzacs put the enemy defending Brighton Beach to flight, including the platoon entrenched on Bolton's Ridge, and without sustaining heavy casualties.⁵⁶ The Anzac first wave, with the added element of surprise, would surely have fared even better. This constitutes strong evidence that a full-scale landing on Brighton Beach would not have entailed the high casualties predicted by those who claim avoiding Brighton Beach was an act of providence.

Most senior commanders admitted there had been a mistake with the landing. In his report to Lord Kitchener at the War Office, Hamilton stated, 'The actual point of disembarkation was rather more than a mile north of that which I had selected, and was more closely overhung by steeper cliffs.'⁵⁷ In other words, there had been an

⁵⁵Australian War Memorial, Accession No. WDJ0157.

⁵⁶Cameron, *25 April 1915*, p. 76; Bean, *Volume I*, p. 356.

⁵⁷*The Dardanelles Commission Report*, as reproduced in *The World War I Collection*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 2001), Military Despatch Describing the
69 www.bjmh.org.uk

error. Robin Prior makes a case that since the landing took place 'within the Fisherman's Hut-Gaba Tepe parameters' which 'were all that the higher commanders [including Hamilton] seemed concerned about,' the landing error is therefore a myth.⁵⁸ If this was the case, why did Hamilton report to Kitchener that the landing was rather more than a mile north of where he had selected? Hamilton could have made the same case that Prior makes, namely, the landing had taken place within the parameters set by GHQ therefore there was no error. Hamilton chose instead to report what had actually taken place.

It was common knowledge among soldiers and sailors alike that there had been a mistake with the landing. MacLagan was certainly aware of it.⁵⁹ Eric Bush, as a midshipman in one of the first-wave tows, confirmed he knew about it on the afternoon of the first day.⁶⁰ Even the Dardanelles Commission acknowledged there had been an error.⁶¹ Many of today's historians agree. David Cameron, Edward J. Erickson, and Tim Travers, to name a few.⁶² Finally, here is Charles Bean's diarised dawn encounter with General Birdwood on 26 April:

Birdwood told me that he had been all round the line last night and seen all the men – they were fairly comfortable now. But he was obviously most disappointed by the result of the venture. 'First there was the mistake of landing us a mile and a half north of where we should have landed.' He said, 'In this ghastly country.'⁶³

One cannot be sure how much more evidence is needed to convince those who still doubt there was a landing error, when Hamilton, Birdwood and the Commission of Inquiry confirm there was. Several primary sources already quoted, clearly defined the intended landing place as the open beach to the north of Gaba Tepe. Admittedly, *exactly how far to the north of Gaba Tepe* remains unresolved because several different

Landing of the Army dated 20/05/1915 from GHQ Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to Secretary of State for War, p. 372.

⁵⁸Prior, *Gallipoli The End of the Myth*, p. 114.

⁵⁹Bean, *Volume I*, p. 363.

⁶⁰Eric Bush, *Bless Our Ship*, (London: George Allen & Unwin 1958) p. 48.

⁶¹*The Dardanelles Commission Report*, as reproduced in *The World War I Collection*, p. 139.

⁶²Cameron, *25 April 1915*, p. 31; Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli, Command Under Fire*, (Oxford: Osprey 2015) p. 130; Travers, *Gallipoli 1915*, (Port Stroud: Tempus, 2004) p. 106.

⁶³*Bean's Gallipoli, The Diaries of Australia's Official War Correspondent*, Edited and annotated by Kevin Fewster, (Crowns Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007), Third Edition, p. 92.

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distances from 500 yards, 800 yards, to one mile have all been mentioned. Such differences, however, would not have affected operations significantly. If the right flank of the landing had touched down *anywhere* between 500 yards and a mile north of Gaba Tepe, the entire landing would have taken place on Brighton Beach as planned. The question remains why was Brighton Beach so badly missed?

Eric Bush spent many years researching this very issue. His personal papers in five boxes at the Imperial War Museum are a priceless record of eye-witness testimony from veterans who had all taken part in the landing, three of whom were retired admirals.⁶⁴ One of the focal points of Bush's research was the suspicion of a course alteration to the north during the flotilla's run-in to shore. Bush had made a note of it in his diary at the time.⁶⁵ One of Bush's correspondents was Captain John Metcalf. As a midshipman, Metcalf had been in command of No. 2 Tow, immediately to the left of Waterlow's No. 1 Tow, as illustrated in Figure 5.

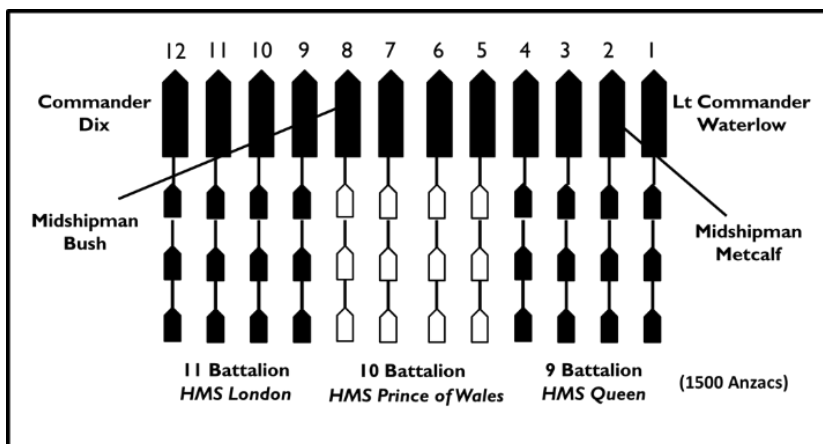


Figure 5: Intended Landing Order of the First-Wave Tows.⁶⁶

⁶⁴IWM DOCS 7481, Private Papers of Captain E.W. Bush, five boxes. Vice-Admirals Aubrey Mansergh and Eric Longley-Cook, as midshipmen, were in command of No.1 Tow and No. 5 Tow respectively. Rear-Admiral Philip Sidney Smith, as a midshipman, was aboard one of the open boats.

⁶⁵Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 114. Bush was about to land when he noted this course alteration.

⁶⁶Author's diagram.

Metcalf made an astonishing admission that must have shocked Bush and his colleagues. Against orders, Metcalf admitted he had deliberately altered course to the north on his own initiative, without recourse to Waterlow, the navigation officer in the tow immediately to Metcalf's right.⁶⁷ Metcalf submitted a written account and a hand-drawn chart of the landing.⁶⁸ Metcalf's chart can be seen in Figure 6, showing how his course alterations allegedly skewed the landing towards the north. Metcalf's first course alteration was two compass points or 22½ degrees to the north, followed by a second course alteration, one compass point and a half, also to the north. His motive was to save the landing from enfilading fire from Gaba Tepe, which was an extraordinary judgment for a junior naval officer to make, when senior Anzac commanders had been planning how to deal with Gaba Tepe for weeks.

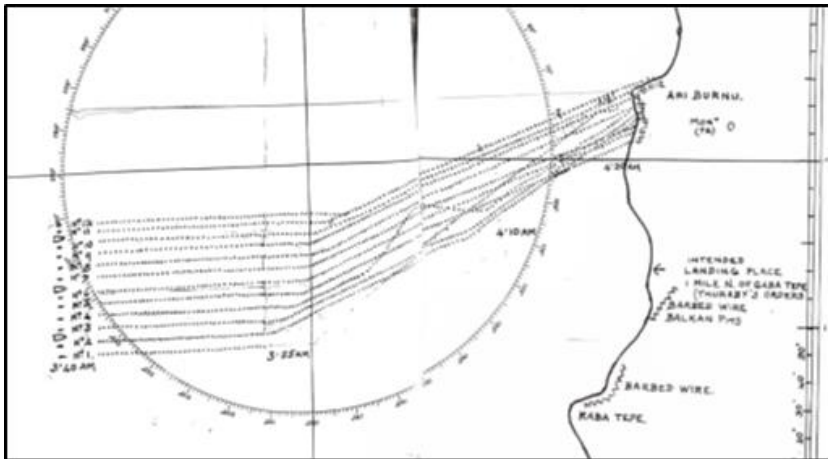


Figure 6: Metcalf's Chart.⁶⁹

Eric Bush concluded Metcalf's course alterations were largely responsible for the landing error, but he also believed the battleships must accept some of the blame for being out of position too far to the north.⁷⁰ Bush's conclusion that Metcalf's course alterations were largely responsible for the landing error is puzzling, because in his own papers there is evidence to the contrary. Steel and Hart, who consulted the same source material, concluded that Metcalf's chart was misleading.⁷¹ As proof, Steel and

⁶⁷IWM DOCS 7481, the Bush Papers, letter from Metcalf to Bush, 4 March 1965.

⁶⁸Ibid., 'My Account of the Landing' by Captain J. S. Metcalf, a typed essay with an accompanying chart.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 114.

⁷¹Steel and Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, endnote 4, pp. 425-426.

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Hart cited the eye-witness accounts of Commander Dix and Major Hedley Vicars Howe who were in tows Number 12 and 9 respectively.⁷² Dix confirmed that the left wing of the flotilla held its course all the way to shore.⁷³ Howe corroborated this and sent Bush his own diagram of the landing, which is shown in Figure 7.⁷⁴

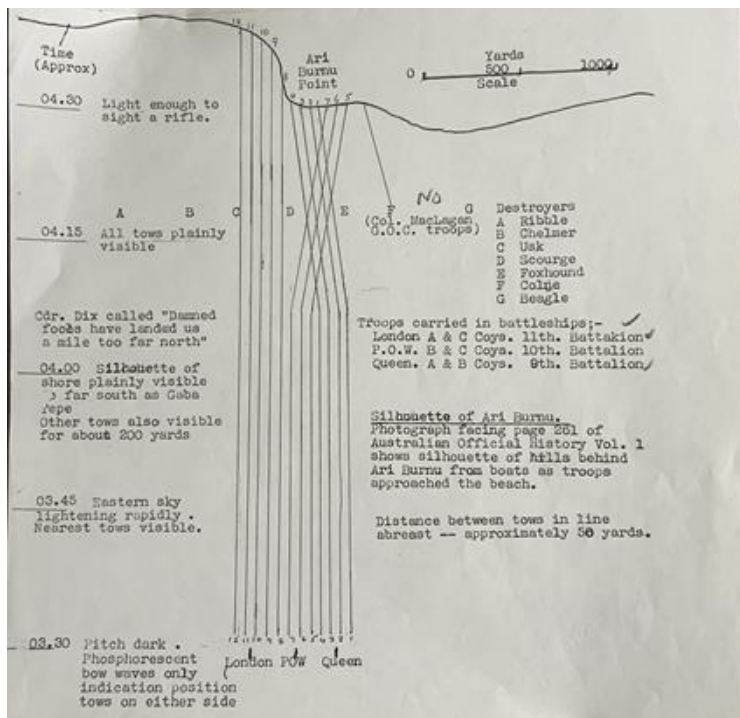


Figure 7: Major Hedley Vicars Howe's Diagram.⁷⁵

Howe and Dix both confirmed that the tows on the left held their course and did not veer off to the north as Metcalf claimed. Howe, who had close links with the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, refused to forward a copy of Metcalf's chart to the

⁷²Major Hedley Vicars Howe was an Australian officer who served with distinction in both world wars. He was a lance corporal in 11 Battalion in No. 9 Tow at the landing and was commissioned later in France.

⁷³Dix, article in *Reveille*, March 1932.

⁷⁴IWM DOCS 7481 - the Bush Papers, diagram attached to a letter from Howe to Bush dated 10 July 1968.

⁷⁵Ibid., Howe's diagram was attached to a letter from Howe to Bush dated 10 July 1968.

Memorial because he believed it was incorrect.⁷⁶ Metcalf's course alterations forced some of the tows to his left to cut across the bows of the central tows, displacing some of them to the right.⁷⁷ This, of course, ruined the landing echelon, but had no influence on the overall direction of the flotilla. Therefore, Bush's conclusion that Metcalf's course alterations were largely responsible for the landing error was mistaken.

Bush, however, was on much stronger ground with regard to the battleships. If Metcalf's course alterations did not swing the flotilla northwards, it must already have been off course to the north after its release from the battleships. Therefore, the battleships themselves must have been off course to the north both before their due-east run-in, and later when they released the tows. The due east run-in was confirmed in the logs of all three battleships.⁷⁸ *Prince of Wales'* log also confirmed an anchorage position 1.82 statute, or 1.58 nautical miles, due west of Ari Burnu at 04:25 that morning.⁷⁹ Captain Robert Bax, in command of *Prince of Wales*, also made a note in his personal diary, 'When daylight came, we found we had anchored one mile too far north.'⁸⁰ The support role of the battleships was to cover the landing with their guns, so Bax naturally anchored where the first wave had gone in. Both his anchorage position off Ari Burnu and his diary entry confirm his battleship was considerably north of the intended landing location. How had this come about?

As alluded to earlier, *HMS Triumph* could well have been 500 yards north of the intended rendezvous point. All three battleships stood off to the north of *Triumph*. Thursby had also ordered the battleships to keep a distance of four cables or 800 yards between them. Adding these distances together is already 2,100 yards, which could well place the battleships and their tows in the vicinity of Ari Burnu, which is about 2,400 yards north of the rendezvous point. From such a position north of the rendezvous point, the battleships then set off on their due east run a few minutes after the moon had set at 02:57.⁸¹ They stopped at 03:22, and made ready to release the

⁷⁶Ibid., letter from Howe to Bush, dated 11 February 1973. Howe was member of Bean's Historical Mission to Gallipoli in 1919.

⁷⁷Both Metcalf's chart and Howe's diagram confirm this.

⁷⁸TNA ADM 53/47099/55828/56781 - ship's logs for *HM Ships London, Prince of Wales*, and *Queen* respectively for 25 April 1915.

⁷⁹Ibid., TNA ADM 53/55828 - *Prince of Wales'* ship's log 25 April 1915, anchorage position plotted on a modern Admiralty chart, making allowance for the 3° West compass variation that obtained at Gallipoli in 1915, confirmed by Captain Mike Thomson, navigation specialist, South African Navy.

⁸⁰Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 114. As a naval officer, Bax must have meant a nautical mile.

⁸¹Steel and Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, p. 53.

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tows.⁸² At a speed of five knots, the battleships would have covered about two nautical miles or about 2.4 statute miles in ± 25 minutes, leaving about two and half nautical miles or three statute miles to go. Most narratives quote 'two and a half miles' to go, without specifying nautical or statute miles.⁸³ The steam pinnaces with their tows would have taken some time to get into line and position before setting off at about 03:40.⁸⁴ The open boats then landed at 04:30, giving a total journey time of ± 50 minutes for the first-wave flotilla.

As the pinnaces approached the shore, they had to slow down so as to check with boathooks where the water shoaled before releasing their tows. The open boats were then rowed the last 100 yards or so to the shore. The History of Naval Operations suggests that the time was about 04:15 when the boats, with oars muffled, began to row towards the shore.⁸⁵ Subtracting these fifteen minutes or so from the total journey time of ± 50 minutes, gives the pinnaces a total journey time of ± 35 minutes. To travel \pm two and a half nautical miles or \pm three statute miles in ± 35 minutes, requires a speed of \pm five knots, a realistic speed for a steam pinnace of that era towing three open boats loaded with some 125 Anzacs, each carrying a 40 kg pack.⁸⁶ The battleships had also executed their run-in at five knots. The pinnaces would have registered the same speed during this run-in, because slipping one's tow at the same speed as the towing vessel is standard good seamanship.⁸⁷ It is also well documented that the twelve steam pinnaces did not keep to the prescribed 150-yard gap.⁸⁸ It was pitch dark, and the pinnaces closed the gap to about 50 yards in order to remain in sight of one another, facilitated by the phosphorescent glow from their bow waves. Because the tows closed to port towards *HMS London's* tows, which held their course, this effectively reduced the landing frontage from the planned 1600 yards to the truncated frontage of only 500 to 600 yards.

⁸²TNA ADM 53/47099 - ship's log for *HMS London*, 'stopped 3.22', the only battleship to log a stopping time.

⁸³Corbett, *Naval Operations, Volume II*, p. 320 states 'two to three miles'. The following sources all state 'about two and a half miles'. Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, p. 173; Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, p. 54; Robert Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, (London: Pan Books Edition, 1984), p. 103.

⁸⁴IWM DOCS 7481 - the Bush Papers, 'about 03:40' was the time the tows set off, as recorded in Metcalf's account.

⁸⁵Corbett, *Naval Operations, Volume II*, p. 321.

⁸⁶Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations, Gallipoli, Volume I*, footnote p. 172.

⁸⁷This insight is from Commander Andy Schroder of the Royal Australian Navy, the Navy Fellow at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra,

⁸⁸Thursby's Naval Orders, Appendix III, paragraph 10.

All the first-wave boats landed at more or less the same time, therefore, the journey time of the twelve tows must have been about the same, i.e. \pm 35 minutes, with perhaps the exception of Waterlow's tow, which, as will be seen, was last to arrive. Metcalf confirmed he made his second course alteration at 04:10, by which time he must have been quite close to the shore.⁸⁹ Bush diarised this second course alteration as taking place at 04:20 when he was very close to shore.⁹⁰ Dix's account more or less corroborates this. He confirmed the right wing started to cut across the central tows when 'three-quarters of the way ashore'.⁹¹ This must have been Metcalf's second course alteration, the one that Bush had noted. Given that the flotilla had approximately two and half nautical miles or three statute mile to travel, three-quarters of the way would be in the region of about 1,300 yards from the shore. At \pm five knots, the pinnaces would close this distance in about seven or eight minutes. Therefore, they must already have been slowing down at this stage to begin their landing procedure. When three separate primary-source accounts tally in this way with a difference of only a few yards, it constitutes strong evidence for the actual events they describe. Dix's journey time, with his side of the flotilla holding its course was the same as Metcalf's i.e. \pm 35 minutes. This is further proof that Metcalf's course alterations did not skew the flotilla northwards, because the course depicted in Metcalf's chart was a longer journey, and would have taken more than \pm 35 minutes.

Further evidence of the flotilla being too far north after its release by the battleships, is given in Dix's account when he wrote, 'Some of us were awake to the fact that we were *already some way port of our objective*. [author's italics added].'⁹² Dix, and presumably other naval officers in the flotilla, noticed they were north of where they should have been. Therefore, when the tows to the right started their Metcalf-inspired movements *further* towards the north, Dix did his utmost to hold his course because, as he confirmed in his article, 'the less would be the error.'⁹³

As navigation officer, Waterlow must have made the same judgment as Dix and others, namely that the flotilla was already some way port of its objective when released by the battleships. Judging by the course and bearing that Waterlow immediately set for the flotilla, a very important piece of his eye-witness testimony may have been overlooked:

⁸⁹IWM DOCS 7481 - the Bush Papers. On Metcalf's chart, 04:10 is the time recorded for his second course alteration.

⁹⁰Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 114.

⁹¹Dix, article in *Reveille*, March 1932.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

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All the other 11 steam pinnaces were to keep station on me, and we started off about *two points on the starboard bow of Queen, trying to make Gaba Tepe* [author's italics added]. It was now so dark we could see but little, but ... it did seem as if a prominent headland, such as I had been given to understand Gaba Tepe was, loomed ahead of us, so we went gaily on.⁹⁴

Waterlow here confirms he deliberately set a course, *two compass points on the starboard bow of Queen*, i.e. 22½ degrees in a south-east direction. By setting such a course, Waterlow, as he says, was trying to make Gaba Tepe because, as Dix had also noted, they were some way to port of their objective. Waterlow was acting within the licence given him by Thursby to alter course as necessary to keep the landing on track.

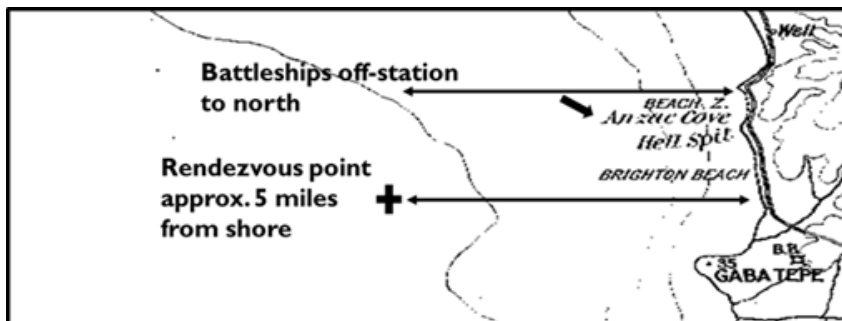


Figure 8: Waterlow's Change of Course towards the Intended Landing Beach.⁹⁵

The short block form arrow indicates Waterlow's attempt to get the landing back on track by steering two points, 22.5 degrees, off the starboard bow of *Queen* towards Gaba Tepe, when approximately two and a half nautical miles or three statute miles from shore. Metcalf confirmed Waterlow's change of course, because in his own account, he admits he complied with this change of course, at least to begin with:

About a quarter of an hour later I realized we were heading *very close to the north side of Gaba Tepe* which, because of its height, is very conspicuous. [Author's Italics added.] Knowing that there were Turkish troops there, and we would get an enfilading fire all along our starboard side as well as from ahead, I was

⁹⁴IWM DOCS 7481 - the Bush Papers, extract from Waterlow's diary. Waterlow was killed during the Battle of Jutland in 1916. In 1970, Waterlow's nephew, Captain Peter Norton RN, found his uncle's Gallipoli diary among some family papers and made parts of it public.

⁹⁵Author's diagram.

confident that we must be heading for a wrong place. There was no one to consult and I felt the lives of the men I was towing were my responsibility. Without any delay I altered course two points to port to get away from Gaba Tepe.⁹⁶

Metcalf confirmed the flotilla was on course heading towards the north side of Gaba Tepe and therefore on course towards the intended landing place. Metcalf's course alteration two points to port, however, cancelled out Waterlow's two points to starboard. The net result of this was that the greater part of the flotilla, certainly those over to the left, were unaware of any change of course. Bush, for example, in Tow 8 did not notice any change of course, either to starboard or port, until Metcalf made his *second course alteration*, by which time Bush and the flotilla were very close to shore. In hindsight, if Waterlow had been on the extreme left of the flotilla instead of the extreme right, the landing would have taken place where intended, regardless of Metcalf's apprehensions. However, being on the extreme right, Waterlow found himself isolated when Metcalf changed course in the opposite direction. For a while, Waterlow remained on the course he had set back towards Gaba Tepe, but then noticed the gap between himself and the other tows widening very quickly. He had no choice but to follow after them in the hope of drawing them south again:

At last I altered course and went down the line astern trying to draw them to the southward with me. This failed, and I was now convinced [this] was not Gaba Tepe. It was too high ... the one place on the whole coast on which we would have decided not to land ... in despair I dashed straight for the frowning cliffs now straight ahead.⁹⁷

Waterlow's description of 'frowning cliffs' can only be the terrain above Anzac Cove. Vice-Admiral Aubrey Mansergh, as a 16 year-old midshipman, was at the helm of Waterlow's pinnace and he confirmed that No. 1 Tow with 9 Battalion Anzacs ended up on the far left of the flotilla.⁹⁸ This explains something that has puzzled readers over the years. Namely, how Major S.B. Robertson and his 9 Battalion men managed to take part in the subsequent fight for Baby 700 on the far left flank, when the rest of 9th Battalion took part in the fight for 400 Plateau on the far right. The most probable landing order of the tows is shown in Figure 9. Waterlow's 9 Battalion tow is placed on the far left in accordance with Mansergh's testimony. Bush's tow is the solitary 10 Battalion tow in the centre, because Metcalf and the two 9 Battalion tows to his left, cut across the bows of the 10 Battalion tows, displacing three of them to the far right.

⁹⁶IWM DOCS 7481 - the Bush Papers, extract from Metcalf's account of the landing.

⁹⁷Ibid., the Bush Papers, extract from Waterlow's diary.

⁹⁸Ibid., letter dated 29 January 1962 from Vice-Admiral Mansergh.

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The only tows that landed together in the correct order were the four 11 Battalion tows on the left.

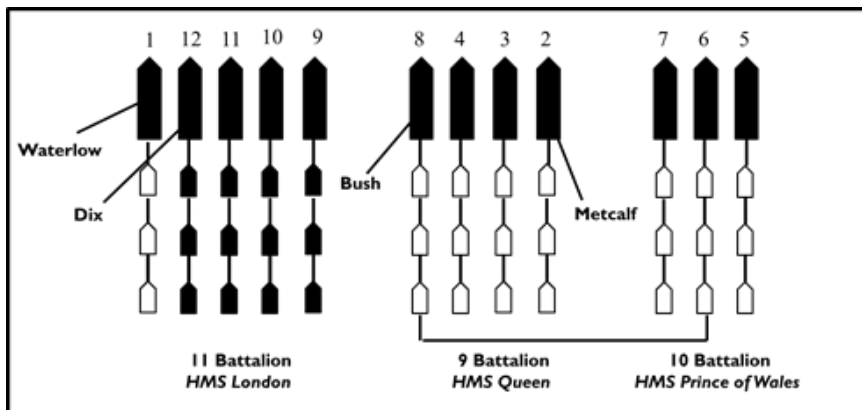


Figure 9: Most Probable Landing Order of First Wave Tows.⁹⁹

In summary, the Anzac first-wave flotilla was off-station to the north when it was released by the battleships because the battleships themselves were off-station to the north before and after their due east run-in. The anchorage position recorded in *Prince of Wales*' log confirms this, as does Captain Bax's diary entry. Dix's testimony that the first-wave tows were already some way port of their objective after the battleships released them corroborates this. Vice-Admiral Thursby had made provision for such an eventuality, having given Waterlow licence to alter course, as necessary, to put the landing back on track. There seems little doubt this was what Waterlow was doing when he set a southeast course *back towards Gaba Tepe*, which was corroborated by Metcalf before he changed course in the opposite direction. The battleships were in the wrong place - too far north, but they would have followed in the wake of Waterlow's revised course, had it been sustained. Then they would then have been in the right place, providing fire-support off Brighton Beach as planned. The destroyers too, following closely behind the first wave, would have landed the second wave on Brighton Beach as planned.

Metcalf's course alterations were not responsible for skewing the landing off to the north, but they did destroy the planned landing echelon. More importantly, Metcalf prevented Waterlow from executing his role as navigation officer. Metcalf must accept the blame for his actions, and *ipso facto* so must the Royal Navy. Eric Bush and Christopher Pugsley set the blame squarely on the Royal Navy. Bush wrote, 'It is

⁹⁹Author's diagram.

beyond my understanding why the Army ... took pains to shield the Royal Navy from its responsibility for putting the Anzacs down in the wrong place.¹⁰⁰ Pugsley concluded, 'At Anzac the Navy failed ... the mistake was primarily due to the Navy being in the wrong place.'¹⁰¹ It seems harsh to blame the Royal Navy for the misguided actions of one junior officer. At the same time, one must bear in mind that amphibious assaults were breaking new, unfamiliar ground in 1915. Edward J. Erickson points out:

Nothing like this had ever before been attempted nor were there any doctrines, training or similar experiences available from which to draw conclusions. After the Second World War, historians and the public were so familiar with successful assault landings that it became easy to forget how difficult these operations were, and fashionable to characterize Hamilton's landings as badly planned and poorly executed.¹⁰²

Because of the misplaced landing, the Anzacs had to negotiate the appalling terrain above Anzac Cove. This used up valuable time, but they still had time enough to occupy Third Ridge and the Sari Bair Heights as planned. Some of their senior commanders, however, seemed overly disorientated by the misplaced landing. MacLagan, M'Cay and Bridges failed to grasp and rectify the new situation in line with original plans and objectives. Halting his covering force on Second Ridge and ordering it to dig in, was MacLagan's first mistake, made worse by his second, namely, persuading M'Cay to deploy 2 Brigade on 400 Plateau instead of following original orders to secure the left flank and the high ground. These poor tactical decisions handed the initiative to the Turkish reserves who occupied Third Ridge and the Sari Bair Heights ahead of the Anzacs. Once the enemy had possession of the strongest points of the Anzacs' own holding position, the game was virtually over.

The Royal Navy was in the wrong place, but if Metcalf had obeyed orders and allowed Waterlow to execute his, this would not have mattered a jot. The landing on Brighton Beach would have gone ahead as planned. Given a direct, easy route to Third Ridge and the Sari Bair Heights, the Anzacs could have been in a winning position, achieving all their objectives instead of failing to achieve any.

¹⁰⁰Bush, *Gallipoli*, p. 110.

¹⁰¹Christopher Pugsley, *Gallipoli The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1998) p. 141.

¹⁰²Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli, Command Under Fire*, pp. 116-117.