

ONE MAN'S ANZAC STORY

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by Murray Moorehead.

The ranks of the old Gallipoli veterans are thinned now to a mere handful, and there would not be much more than a decade left for anyone to get to know, in person, a man who could proudly claim to have played a part in the forging of the great Anzac brotherhood.

They have certainly had full lives, these dogged veterans. Those still with us on Anzac Day two years hence will be able to look over 70 long and eventful years since they helped make history on the slopes of an arid and inhospitable peninsula which most of the world had never heard of before.

But it is not only the living whom we may get to know with some intimacy. To the members of the Kivell family in New Plymouth, a man named Ralph Doughty remains someone more than merely some distant ancestor who died in a war that was over long before most of them were born. Ralph Doughty is, in his way, still very much a part of the family. New generations of Kivells feel that they know him almost as intimately as those to whom he said cheery goodbyes as he left Taranaki to seek his fortune in Australia shortly before the Great War broke out.

Ralph Doughty was one of those gems of men who kept a diary. He was not unique in that, of course; army records and museums are full of war diaries. But two things make Doughty's record of the war stand out. The first is that unlike most others he kept a record of every day of his war, even the dull days that other diarists might have skipped over, and even had days-apart from those which, through sickness or wounds, he had no recollection.

The second is that his diary was born to be treasured by his family. From the oldest to the youngest, members of the family know this man whose portrait hangs in the Stratford War Memorial arcade, for he reminisces with them through the entries in his diary as surely as if he were still with them as one of the last of the old brigade.

The record of Ralph Doughty's war begins in a small pocket pad, protected inside a cover of thick leather and with the pages fixed firmly in place with a weaving of thin wire. It is not easy to follow, even though it is written in a neat and flowing hand. The entries are in pencil and are written to take advantage of every square millimetre of the precious paper. A member of the family is currently working hard to translate the handwriting into a more easily readable typescript.

With the pad filled on both sides of each page by the end of November 1915, the chronicle continued in a collection of notebooks, day by historic day, until July 23, 1917 when Lady Luck, who had been right at his side on so many occasions during the past 26 months, chanced to be looking the other way. Ralph Doughty died from his wounds on July 25 and was buried at Coxyde [Cosayde] Military Cemetery in Belgium. He died a hero, having been awarded the Military Cross just two months earlier for gallantry.

Stratford

He died an officer and a hero, but he began his war as the most ordinary of men, the most typical of Anzac soldiers. He was born in Stratford and was 22 years of age when he joined the Australian Army in Sydney just a few days after the declaration of war. As a member of the 2nd Battery, 3rd Field Artillery Brigade. Doughty began his diary on April 5, 1915.

Like every other man from down tinter who landed in Egypt in those heady pre-Gallipoli days, Doughty was itching to get into action. His remarks on his first day on which elements of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps began their first move from their camps near the Pyramids towards the eventual landing at Gallipoli, show that clearly: "We got embarkation orders thank God. So here's to it and may our little flutter which we are about to have tend in some way to weight the balance against this Most Satanic Majesty The Kaiser.

Bravado

The landing was still more than 20 days away and the move northwards was broken by an interlude in Alexandria. Poor Alexandria! It was a boom time for the Egyptians as the young soldiers spent their money with the bravado and abandonment of those about to go into action for the first time. But while they spent they also gave birth to those great wealths of yarns that every man of both the 1st and 2nd NZEFs had to tell about a soldier's life in Egypt.

A few entries like: "Had an argument with a cabbie, just to show our independence" and "Had supper at a restaurant . . . they came oft second best!" give the gist of just what the poor Egyptian had to grin and bear while he raked in the skekels.

Doughty's ship sailed from Alexandria on the 10th. "Don't know where we're off to. Think it's the Dardanelles."

The gunners missed out on the Landing. They were off Gallipoli with the rest of the fleet and fully expected to go ashore on the 25th. But, on the following day: "On getting to the shore received orders to go back as the landing was too crowded. Didn't we curse! I'd like to have 5 minutes with the officer who handed out that order." Nine days were spent at sea, learning what it was like to be a sailor on the receiving end of the heavy and accurate Turkish gunfire before getting ashore at last on May 4th.

Perhaps one of the most interesting facets of the Gallipoli campaign was the mental response of those who served on that hellish peninsula. Dare one even consider whether their grandsons would have been able to serve in the same conditions without finishing up psychiatric wrecks?

Accepted

Could any modern soldier kill and be killed as the men of Gallipoli did, live on the verge of death for as long as they did in such charnel house conditions, regard their enemies with such comradely respect as they did the "lurk, leave the place, sick or wounded, with as much reluctance, and finally abandon a lost cause with as much heartbreak? Could such horrors be accepted today as "part of the game" and recorded as the Anzacs recorded them, in such a matter of fact way?

The ordinary Anzac soldier was not a clever man, neither interested in nor particularly gifted at composing words to cover true feelings. He wrote down what he thought. His relishing of his role in the Great Adventure was as overt and immodest as it was possible to be. He saw no need to feign reluctance to fight or to take a modest stance on expressing his feelings about King, Empire and Country.

Brashness

Brashness, flippancy and the sense of adventure might have been understandable in the writings of the Gallipoli men at the beginning, but the same attitudes are to be found in their words right up the end.

On June 7 Doughty mused in a casual way about a new type of shell fired by '-our friends.'" One small J extract from the musing: "One has just come over and landed in front of the battery. Several chaps have been blown out. The funny thing about this shell is that it just strolls through the air just like the hum of an aeroplane motor but the burst is terrific . . . one has just struck on the road and out of 30 men 27 are down..."

He wrote in equally casual manner just a few days later of a way of dealing with one of the greatest dangers to life; "' I' his evening we captured four snipers. Had a firing party, the only thing was that we had the rifles, they didn't. Only way to deal with these chaps, although they are brave men." The attitude was little changed as far on as November 25 when he described the result of a breakthrough by a party of Turkish soldiers: "They were met in Monash Gully by sonic of our lads. The Turks, not that lads, went west"

Atmosphere

In his writings Ralph Doughty displays a talent for being able to create atmosphere and to be able to present a clear picture of what he is trying to describe with the greatest economy of words. There could be no one day's entry which might be singled out as an example of the average day on Gallipoli. There was really no such thing. But perhaps if one were seeking an example of what a day in action was like, the entry for July 13 would do nicely:

"Up at 4am. Turks counter attacked in force . . . we've just stopped firing for the third time this morning, 6am. Had a glorious time . . . Started again at 6.30am, stopped firing at 9.10pm. Worked the old gun till the springs broke and the piece itself was that hot that the bearings expanded with the heat and stopped the recoil. We fired 1160 rounds. My hands are burnt beautifully. Can hardly close my left. Got a whack on the knee which put me off the gun for half an hour, but it's OK again.

"What a day. One of the hottest and best we've had . . . Have just repulsed another massed attack by the Turks. Can't close my right hand, agony to write. We're all . . . absolutely black with cordite smoke and dust. Like Mater to see me now!"

It has already been mentioned that Lady Luck spent quite a bit of time with Ralph Doughty on Gallipoli. Some examples: June 4: "A shell burst just in front . . . , knocked me a bit silly but didn't hurt much." July 24: "(The Turks) lobbed one just 12 yards away. We all got covered in sand and stuff but no damage done. Were all going to take a ticket in Tatts when we get back." And August 22: "Nearly had a trip to Alexandria, by the way, per shrapnel."

Doughty survived the bullets and shrapnel, but like almost every man who was there from start to finish, he couldn't escape the scourge of sickness. It is a chilling exercise to be able to follow the record of his illness through the long succession of daily entries. It must have begun on July 17: "We are quartered in a - of a hole! The trench for close on a mile is full of dead Turks with but 6 ins of earth over them. The odour is, well, I won't try to describe it, but it's no EAU DE COLOGNE! And we're here for 48 hours. How romantic!"

Reluctant

Not surprisingly, his sickness began soon afterwards, but it was not until July 28 that he collapsed and had to submit to evacuation. His was typical of the Anzac spirit. Doughty was reluctant to go, and once off, reluctant to stay off. He wrote on July 30: (On Lemnos) "Find that this hospital is . . . British.

Applied for a transfer to our Australian hospital but was refused (only a few yards away). Before I'll come away again to an English field hospital they'll have to shoot me. I am cutting out a few days here. Won't record anything. Want to forget this spasm."

On August 4 he was: "Off back again, thank God. Feeling pretty rotten but I'll take my chance in getting better hack there!"

Violence

Doughty's unit was evacuated from Gallipoli on December 8, first to Lemnos where the troops became involved in a series of inter-unit rugby matches which, as far as violence was concerned, seemed to lose little in comparison with some of the event of the past eight months. "Look at me. Both knees minus skin, ditto ankle and nose and a swollen lip. Watson got a bump on the head which knocked him silly for 3 hrs and England got a broken rib. Still it was a ripping match. We beat the Engineers 9 to 0."

This period of time is contained in the second diary. The third diary commenced in March 1916 on the eve of the next Great Adventure, the one which would, for Ralph Doughty, last but 16 months. Even now, after eight months of what most historians would agree on as being close to the ultimate in hellish campaigns, the old Anzac spirit remained unquenched:

"Hur-blooming-ray. Marching orders at last and as pleased as a cat with two tails. This time I leave Egypt as a blooming officer. Am feeling awfully fit, so watch out somebody!"