

# DARDANELLES REPORT.

## THE OPERATIONS AT SUVLA BAY.

(By Our Correspondent on War.)

Why the Dardanelles Report, after lying in the cupboard for nearly two years, should be brought out for publication precisely at this moment, when we are in the middle of another grave controversy, it would be hard to say.

Perhaps the old fires are expected to drive out the new, and it is certainly a little startling to find how brightly they still burn. But the delay has done some good, for whereas two years ago we were divided into Eastern and Western factions, which had no dealings with each other, there is now quite a considerable measure of agreement about the Dardanelles enterprise.

It used to be thought that Lord Kitchener was opposed to it. But it appears from the Report that he was sympathetic from the first week in January, 1915, when he was already pondering the risk of a military stalemate on the Western front, but he was never convinced that this state of equilibrium had been reached in 1915 or that our defensive line there were safe, and he always regarded these Eastern military operations as a limited liability affair. That was why he jumped at the suggestion that the Fleet might force the Straits alone, and why troops were dribbled out to the East instead of being concentrated for a single effort. It appears, too, from the Report that the opposition to the policy of evacuation after the failures of August was much stronger than appeared at the time. Lord Kitchener was against it until he had seen with his own eyes; Lord Curzon, too, and General Birdwood (this last was known); and as late as December Admiral Wemyss was for a renewal of the attempt to force the Straits by naval attack, and was prepared to offer the army "the practical complete severance of all Turkish lines of communication." He was overruled, probably wisely, though it must be remembered that even the first naval attack would have succeeded if it had been renewed on the following day, that we were at Anzac in a favourable position for exploiting a naval success, and that the moral of the Turkish troops at the end of 1915 in Gallipoli was very low.

However that may be, it is now generally agreed that the strategic idea of the Dardanelles Expedition was sound, that it should have succeeded, and that if it had we might have prevented the breakdown of Russia, saved all the troops employed against Bulgaria at Salonika, and against Turkey in Asia, and possibly have ended the war in 1916. The pity of it that an enterprise so brilliant in its strategic idea, and adorned by the finest flower of young British manhood, the very pick of the Territorials and of the new Army, should have ended in a mire.

The authors of this report have done their work very carefully, but they have no graces of style like Sir Ian Hamilton, and their conclusions, which are for the most part wise and balanced, have almost literally to be crushed out of the quartz. The nearest approach to a summary of the conclusions that are to be drawn from the Report is to be found in a sentence from the Report of Sir Thomas Mackenzie, which observes that the "brief period from August 4 to 10 was the vital time in the history of the later Dardanelles operations, for on the wise and determined use of these few days depended the success or failure of the campaign." Terrible mistakes had been made before the night of August 6. The attempt by the Fleet to force the Straits without the assistance of an army was one, for as it worked out it merely served to give the enemy notice of a plan which depended for

success on secrecy and surprise. A second main mistake was the landing at the tip of the Peninsula. Sir Ian Hamilton was right in rejecting the idea of a landing on the Asiatic shore (except as a diversion), and there were strong arguments against a landing on the isthmus of Bulair. But why he should have deliberately chosen the longest way to his goal by landing at the tip of the Peninsula is incomprehensible, and the more the explanations the more there is to be explained. One can only assume that the Navy was still regarded as the dominant partner in the operations, and that the work of the Army was conceived to be to maintain alignment on shore with the advance of the Fleet up the Straits, and that as the Fleet had to begin at the entrance of the Straits, so must the Army begin at the tip of the peninsula. A third major blunder, traceable to half-baked conclusions drawn from the fall of Namur and Liège about the effect of long-range heavy-calibre artillery fire on fortifications, was the neglect to provide the landing troops with sufficient artillery of the right sort. Howitzer and dropping fire was alone valuable against intrenchments; the flat trajectory of naval guns was comparatively harmless. A fourth blunder was the long delay of some three weeks, owing to the formation of the Coalition Government, in the consideration of Sir Ian Hamilton's telegram of May 17. It says much for the soundness of the main strategic idea that after all this succession of major errors (not to speak of failures in detail) there was still at the beginning of August an excellent chance of success. By July the plan of operations which should have been followed from the first was at last adopted. There were to be two movements against the enemy's flank, one from Anzac and the other from Suvla Bay. In Sir Ian Hamilton's mind the Suvla Bay enterprise had even then laid the promise that it merited, for the main turning movement was from Anzac, and the Suvla Bay landing was designed mainly to provide the Anzac troops, after they had gained the crest of the central range, with a new base. But, in fact, the assistance of the Suvla Army was necessary to the success of the operation from Anzac, and it was a defeat of the Suvla Army from Headquarters to the 9th Army Corps that they were capable of being read as though the supporting attack towards Biyuk Anafarta was optional. It is clear that this attack would have been sufficient to turn the scale, and if pressed would have established our tenure of Koja Cheman Tepe, the main object of the movement from Anzac and the key to the enemy's positions.

The landing at Suvla was successfully effected with comparatively slight opposition in the night of August 6-7. Sir Bryan Mahon's weak division secured its hold on the high coast range of the Karakol Dagh, and General Haggard's 32nd Brigade was in firm occupation of Lala Baba between the sea and the Salt Lake. Everything was in good train, and at 8.45 in the morning of August 7 General Hammersley, the Divisional Commander, ordered an advance on Chocolate Hill and Ismail Oglu Tepe, the foothills half-way between the Salt Lake and Biyuk Anafarta. Chocolate Hill was taken towards dusk, and Ismail Oglu Tepe would have fallen too if it had been attacked, but this attack, entrusted to the 32nd and 34th Brigades, was never delivered. This was the first chance missed. Why?

There were two reasons. The first was the breakdown of the water supply and the exhaustion of the troops after a crowded and waterless sea passage overnight. There were plenty of wells quite near shore, and for this failure General Poet, the Quartermaster-General of the 9th Corps primarily, and after him Sir Francis Stopford and his Staff, are severely but justly censured by the Commission. But the faults of the Staff were not confined to the provision and distribution of water. It was a thoroughly bad Staff. Sir Ian Hamilton had asked for either Sir Julian Byng or Sir Henry Rawlinson for a corps commander, and either would probably have carried through the Suvla landing to victory. Neither could be spared, and Sir Francis Stopford, who was appointed, lacked the power to impress his views on the army.

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# SUVLA BAY.

## STORY OF A COSTLY FAILURE.

### COMMISSION'S PRAISE AND CENSURE.

There is no part of the voluminous Report of the Dardanelles Commission to which more general interest attaches than to the review of the operation of August, 1915, which has come to be known as "The Suvla Bay Landing." A general summary of the Report was given yesterday.

The task was in the first instance committed to the Ninth Corps, under the command of Sir Frederick Stopford. The Report tells how Sir Ian Hamilton had asked for the services of either Sir Julian Byng or Sir Henry Rawlinson, but that neither of these distinguished soldiers could be spared from France. Sir Frederick Stopford had a good record, but he had not been employed for some time. The Ninth Corps consisted of the 10th (Irish) Division, under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Bryan Mahon; the 11th Division, under Major-General Hammersley; and the 13th Division, under Major-General F. C. Shaw. Sir Frederick Stopford had a free hand in regard to the plan of operations.

The place of landing will be seen on the map. North-west of the high ridge of the Sari Bair stretches a flat, sandy plain bordered on the west by the sea, and broken by the Lake. Landwards it is circled by a crescent of low, scrub-covered hills. Two points, one to the north and Nibrunesis on the south, project outwards, forming the arms of Suvla Bay. Between the Salt Lake and the sea is the low hill of Lala Baba. The place is thus described in the Report:

"The area bordering the Salt Lake is a level, doubtless swampy in wet weather. In the dry season it is bare and open until the ground begins to rise. Then high grass and bush appear, the bush being mostly a prickly variety of the *Acacia* hard and tough. The bush in many cases rises in density and height as the hills get higher. The country can hardly be described as well watered during the dry season, but a moderate amount of water is procurable by those who know where to look for it and how to get it.

Sir Ian Hamilton wrote of it as "a jungle hinged round by high mountains."

The Commission say—

Taking into consideration this and other evidence bearing on the subject, it may, we think, be concluded that the country in the vicinity of Suvla Bay must seriously have impeded military operations, more particularly in the way of breaking up concerted movements, and rendering night operations hazardous if not almost impracticable. The ground east of Anzac was more intricate and more broken, but the natural difficulties at Suvla were of a formidable character.

### PLAN OF OPERATIONS.

The force placed at Sir Frederick Stopford's disposal for the landing consisted of the 10th Division (less the 29th Brigade detached to Anzac) and the 11th Division; the artillery actually available at Suvla seems at that time to have consisted of two mountain and two heavy batteries and of one brigade of field artillery.

Under an operation order the following task was assigned to General Stopford:

- (a) To safeguard the landing place.
- (b) To occupy the enemy posts of Lala Baba and Ghazi Baba, and to establish a footing along the ridge from Ghazi Baba through Karakol Dagh and Kiretch Tepe Sirt to Hill 106, immediately overlooking Eijelmer Bay.
- (c) To occupy Chocolate Hill and Ismail Oglu Tepe.
- (d) To seize Baka Baba and establish connection northwards between that point and the troops advancing on Hill 106.

The time of landing was fixed for the evening of August 6.

The strength of the enemy north of Hill 106 had been estimated on July 22 by the

Chief of the General Staff of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, at 30,000, of which 12,000 were opposite Anzac, and the remainder mostly in reserve at Boghali, Kojadene, and Eski Kevi. There were then believed to be three battalions in the Anafarta villages, one battalion at Ismail Oglu Tepe, one battalion at Chocolate Hill, and outposts at Lala Baba and Ghazi Baba. The ridge of Karakol Dagh and Kiretch Tepe Sirt was understood to be held by gendarmes.

The impression conveyed by the intelligence reports was that little opposition would be met with on landing, save perhaps at Lala Baba, until the occupation of Chocolate Hill and Ismail Oglu Tepe was attempted.

The orders given by General Hammersley to the 11th Division were as follows:—

The 34th Brigade to land at a point opposite Hill 10, and eventually to move to the assault of Chocolate Hill.

The 32nd Brigade to land at C Beach, to assault and occupy Lala Baba, and move north in support of the 34th Brigade.

The 33rd Brigade to land at B Beach, a mile south-east of Nibrunesis Point. Two battalions to hold the line from the Salt Lake south-west to the shore; two battalions to follow the 32nd Brigade and form the divisional reserve.

The artillery to concentrate at Lala Baba.

### START OF THE EXPEDITION.

Ten destroyers and 10 lighters brought the division from Imbros. The flotilla started at 6.30 p.m. on August 6, arriving opposite the points of disembarkation at 10.30 p.m. The 34th Brigade could not land at the exact point prescribed in their orders. They were opposed by shrapnel fire from Hill 10 and rifle-fire from Lala Baba. At 5 a.m. they were all ashore. They did not, however, reach Hill 10. The 32nd Brigade began to land at 11 p.m. on the 6th, after considerable resistance, occupied Hill 106. The 33rd Brigade landed without

difficulty before daylight there was much desultory fighting in the neighbourhood of Hill 10. The attack on this point was organized, and the troops were drawn from the 32nd and 34th Brigades. The attack succeeded, the Turks were driven back, and the 34th Brigade occupied the point. He was directed to land at the point to act under General Hammersley. These were to attack Chocolate Hill. Sir Bryan Mahon with three other brigades of this division also landed early on the morning of August 7 at the new "A" beach, which had proved impracticable. With this small force he was ordered to push along the ridge of Karakol Dagh and Kiretch Tepe Sirt.

### CHOCOLATE HILL.

The report of the Commission deals fully with the difficulties of organization of General Hill's attack on Chocolate Hill on the afternoon of the 7th. There were orders and counter-orders, and it is difficult to avoid the belief that there was considerable confusion at the time, since there was no little conflict of evidence afterwards. The advance on Chocolate Hill was begun by General Hill's force. It was captured, and General Hill subsequently stated that there was no reason why Ismail Oglu Tepe might not also have been taken had the 32nd and 34th Brigades been more prompt in advance. The Commission comment on the fact that none of the three Brigadiers concerned accompanied the troops to the attack. The report states:—

The distribution of the troops of the 11th Division on the morning of August 8 is described by General Hammersley as follows:—One field battery and two mountain batteries were at Lala Baba. The 32nd Brigade was concentrated near Hill 10, except a detachment of two companies on the southern slopes of Kiretch Tepe Sirt. Two battalions of the 33rd Brigade were south of the Salt Lake and two at Lala Baba. Two battalions of the 34th Brigade were near Hill 10, one battalion was east of Hill 10, and one (the 11th Manchester Regiment) was on Kiretch Tepe Sirt. The divisional pioneer battalion (4th Essex Yorkshire Regiment) was at Lala Baba.

At this time the 3rd Irish Battalion under General Hill, which had been left in their advanced position when the other troops were withdrawn to the neighbourhood of the beach, appear to have been still holding Chocolate Hill and the ground in its vicinity. The troops generally were much exhausted by the heat, thirst, and fighting of the previous day, besides which many men and parties were scattered owing to

orders of the General Officer Commanding the 14th Division.

Two battalions of the 159th Brigade, presumably under General Lloyd, near the north-east corner of the Salt Lake.

The 6th East Yorkshire Regiment (the Pioneer Battalion of the 11th Division), two field batteries, and one mountain battery at Lala Baba.

The Commission criticize the scattering of the units of the 53rd Division, which they held could not have conduced to their fighting efficiency, especially as hardly any of the officers had been trained in the Regular Army or possessed previous war experience.

On August 8 and 9 Sir Bryan Mahon continued to push forward along Karakol Dagh and Kiretch Tepe Sirt, eventually entrenching on a line running north and south.

### ATTACK ON ISMAIL OGLU TEPE.

In accordance with a letter received by Sir Frederick Stopford from General Braithwaite, Chief of Staff to Sir Ian Hamilton, an attack on Ismail Oglu Tepe and the ridge towards Anafarta Sagir was ordered. General Braithwaite had suggested six or eight battalions. Sir Frederick decided to attack with the 53rd Division, supported by the 11th Division. The attack took place at 5 a.m. on the 10th. The right flank, the centre and left were more successful at first, but the left was eventually driven back and the centre obliged to retire. In the afternoon the effort was resumed, but no headway was made, and the troops retired to the alignment of the previous evening.

On August 10 Sir Frederick Stopford received orders from General Headquarters to take up

after discussion, decided that "no line of future policy could be framed for the present, but that Sir Ian Hamilton should do his best to hold the ground which he had gained."

### CONCLUSIONS.

The Commission find that the operations at Suvla were "a severe trial for a force consisting of troops who had never been under fire." They hold that the attack at Suvla was not pressed as it might have been on August 7-8. They do not exculpate General Hammersley's staff work. They refuse to endorse Sir Ian Hamilton's condemnation of Sir Frederick Stopford's orders on August 8. They think that the intervention of the former on the evening of the same date increased the difficulties of the latter. Further, they consider that after the attacks ending on August 9 had failed the operations contemplated could not have been successfully carried out without large reinforcements.

The Report is a careful analysis of a complicated and difficult military situation. It tells the story of the landing and of the events which followed it clearly and well. It apportioned blame and praise convincingly. It is the tale of a costly failure, but of a failure in which the New Armies gave early evidence of their mettle. Perpetually within the zone of fire, suffering from heat and often from thirst, plagued by dysentery, and uncheered by prospect of an early victory, the record of the men who fought at Suvla rightly remains a proud tradition of the war.

## THE BATTLES OF GALLIPOLI.



and enchain a line across the whole front, as in the case of the Gallipoli Peninsula, and the





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attack on Chocolate Hill, and partly to the south in search of water, carrying and accompanying the wounded to the rear, and so on. We have, in fact, reason to believe that a considerable number of stragglers had collected at or near the shore.

On August 8, Sir Frederick Stopford was anxious to push on, but the divisional commanders doubted the possibility of further advance that day, as the troops were exhausted by continuous fighting and lack of water. It was therefore decided to attack Ismail Oglu Tepe and the Anafarta Sagir Ridge at dawn of August 9. There was a shortage of artillery and Sir Frederick Stopford was opposed to frontal attacks, but desired the troops to push on as far as possible and to turn any trenches that were met with.

In his dispatch of December 11, 1915, Sir Ian Hamilton criticized Sir Frederick Stopford for delay at this period, but the Commission thought that there was a misunderstanding, and that, as a result of it, Sir Ian Hamilton so worded his criticism "as to obscure Sir Frederick Stopford's specific intention and injunction that the troops should push on as far as possible."

There is little doubt that the low trajectory of the naval guns was ineffective against deep trenches.

### SIR I. HAMILTON'S INTERVENTION.

On the afternoon of August 8 Sir Ian Hamilton, dissatisfied with the progress of the operations, proceeded from Imbros to Suvla. On arrival he appears to have altered the orders for the projected attack. He decided that, since the 32nd Brigade was concentrated and ready to move, the attack should begin at the earliest possible moment. He also directed that this brigade should endeavour to occupy the heights north of Anafarta Sagir. In his dispatch he speaks of the 13 battalions detailed for the attack, but the correct number appears to be 11—namely, four battalions of the 33rd Brigade, together with one from the 31st Brigade, on the right, with Ismail Oglu Tepe as the objective; four battalions of the 32nd Brigade on the left, with Anafarta Sagir as the objective; and two battalions of the 34th Brigade in reserve. Sir Ian Hamilton in his plans and dispositions for the attack at dawn on the 9th, he repudiated any responsibility for the results of the action.

The 32nd Brigade received instructions to concentrate at Sulajik, and thence to occupy the high ground at Tekke Tepe, but the concentration was not successful. At 3.30 a.m. on the 9th one battalion supported by a second was sent on. At a point 1,000 yards south of Tekke Tepe the head of the column was attacked by a superior force of Turks, and both battalions were compelled to retire after suffering heavy loss.

Three battalions of the 33rd Brigade, with two battalions from General Hill's force, attempted, about 4.45 a.m. on the 9th, the attack on Ismail Oglu Tepe, and on the ridge running thence to Anafarta Sagir. A heavy rifle fire opened from the direction of Alrikju and from Chocolate Hill. Hill 70 proved to be occupied by Turks instead of by our troops, as was expected. The centre battalion was enfiladed from this point and attacked at close quarters. The attack was brought to a standstill, and it became a question of holding on at all costs.

During the night of the 8th and morning of the 9th the 53rd Division had landed at Suvla. It was distributed in support near Chocolate Hill and Hill 10. During the 9th desultory fighting continued, and at nightfall the distribution of the troops was as follows:—

The 9th Sherwood Foresters and 1/1 Hereford Regiment near Hetman Chair.

Five battalions of the 10th Division under General Hill, with one field and one mountain battery on Chocolate Hill and Hill 50.

The 33rd Brigade, less the 8th Sherwood Foresters, plus two battalions of the 160th Brigade, under General Maxwell, from Hill 50 to the vicinity of Sulajik.

The 32nd Brigade, less one battalion, plus two battalions of the 159th Brigade at and to the north of Sulajik.

Two battalions of the 34th Brigade, with one battalion of the 32nd Brigade, further to the north.

The remaining two battalions of the 34th Brigade at point 28, west of Kuchuk Anafarta Ova under the

and trench to the south of the whole front extending from Anzak Dere on the south, through the knoll east of Chocolate Hill, to the ground held by the 10th Division on Kiretch Tepe Sirt. The entrenchment of the line from Kaalar Chair to 600 yards south of Sulajik was assigned to the 11th Division, thence to the west of Kuchuk Anafarta Ova to the 53rd Division, and thence to Kiretch Tepe Sirt to the 10th Division. The length of this line was over five miles.

On August 10 the 54th Division landed at Suvla Bay. On August 12 General Headquarters ordered this division to attack the heights at Kavak Tepe and Tekke Tepe, and thence to Anafarta Sagir, marching that night and attacking at dawn on the 13th. On the afternoon of the 12th the 163rd Brigade was sent forward to occupy Kuchuk Anafarta Ova, since Sir Frederick Stopford believed that the ground eastward of this place was held by the enemy. In spite of strong opposition from the Turks this manoeuvre was successfully accomplished.

On the same day general headquarters inquired from Sir Frederick Stopford as to whether the 54th Division could, if they succeeded in gaining the high ground of their objectives, be supplied with food, water, and ammunition. Sir Frederick replied that he foresaw grave difficulty. Thereupon the orders for the night march at the attack on the heights were cancelled.

### CHANGE OF COMMAND.

On August 15 an attempt was made to straighten the line by capturing Kiretch Tepe Sirt. At first it was successful, the 6th Dublin Fusiliers capturing the top of the ridge, but after severe fighting and heavy casualties the troops had to fall back. On the same date Sir Frederick Stopford was relieved of his command and succeeded by Major-General de Lisle. At the request of the new commander the 29th Division was brought from Helles to Suvla on August 20. The second mounted Division had landed two days before.

An important attack was planned for August 21. The 53rd and 54th Divisions were to hold the enemy from Sulajik to Kiretch Tepe Sirt. The 11th Division on the right and the 29th Division on the left were to attack Ismail Oglu Tepe the ridge towards Anafarta Sagir. In support the 2nd Mounted Division and the remains of the 10th Division. It was arranged with Sir William Birdwood at Anzac that a force of nine battalions should cooperate by advancing from Damskjelik Bair so as to connect with the southern end of the outpost line of the 9th Corps near Kaalar Chair. It had been decided to attack in the afternoon, and it so happened that a fog came on which seriously interfered with the preliminary bombardment of the enemy's position from 2.30 p.m. to 3 p.m. The advance was begun at 3 p.m. by the 11th Division, the 34th Brigade rushing the Turkish trenches between Hetman Chair and Aire Kevak.

So far as the 11th Division was concerned the operation failed. As regards the 29th Division, the 87th Brigade on the left succeeded in carrying the trenches on Hill 70, but a bush fire brought the 86th to a standstill and eventually the whole division withdrew to its former position. Later efforts secured no greater success. On the right a lodgment was effected at Kaiajak Aghale, and a line from that place northward to Susak Kuyu was taken up and subsequently connected with the right of the 9th Corps. The casualties in the 9th Corps on August 21 were approximately as follows:— In the 11th Division, 58 out of 129 officers and 2,306 other ranks out of 6,400. In the 29th Division a little under 5,000 officers and men. In the 2nd Mounted Division, which was about 4,000 strong, 1,200 officers and men, or 30 per cent. The failure of August 21 was attributed by General de Lisle mainly to want of artillery. It was the last great attempt to achieve success at Suvla Bay. The Commission state that the fighting after General de Lisle replaced Sir Frederick Stopford was really of a defensive character.

On August 27 the Dardanelles Committee,