

# Roy Fordham



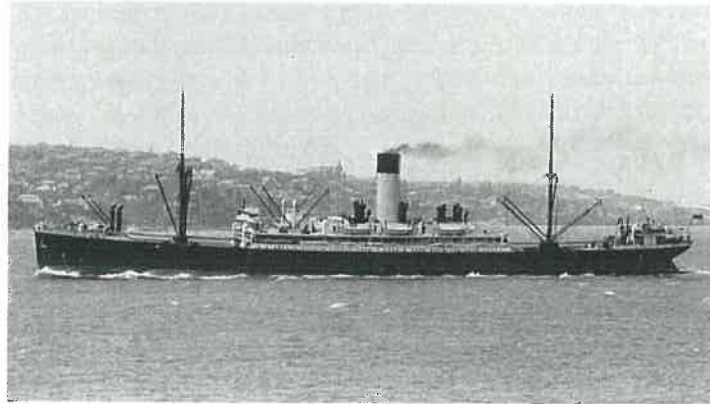
## Roy Fordham and the ANZAC Spirit

On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915, soldiers from Britain, France and their Empire and Colonies landed on the Dardanelles Peninsula in Turkey in an attempt to defeat the Ottoman Empire. This campaign became a source of national pride for emerging nations on both sides; it was a nation-building experience for Australia and New Zealand and one of the foundations of the modern Turkish state. I have researched Roy Fordham, a South Australian who landed on that first day and fought during the campaign.

Roy Ogilvie Fordham was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1893, the youngest of six children. His parents, George and Jane, had been married in 1878. He started school at Marryatville Primary ['Fordham Rest Room' 1917] followed by Norwood Primary, where he was dux of his class ['Roy Ogilvie Fordham', 2014]. He won admission to the School of Mines where he studied in the commercial division gaining credits in Mensuration, Shorthand, Typing, Composition and Business Correspondence ['School of Mines and Industries' 1908]. He was always close to the top of his class but never dux, however he did win a prize for being best at homework. After graduating, Roy worked for Sir Edwin Smith as a clerk until the war ['Fordham Rest Room' 1917].

The Gallipoli Campaign was a Franco-British attempt to attack Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, through the Dardanelles, forcing the Ottoman Empire to sue for peace and opening a southern sea route to Russia [McMeekin, 2011]. The attack was also intended to draw away Ottoman forces attacking Russia in the Caucasus [McMeekin, 2011]. However, it seems unlikely that even a Turkish defeat would have had much impact on the war with Germany [Prior, 2010; McMeekin, 2011]. On 18 March 1915 a naval flotilla attempted to force the straits. Defeated by guns and mines the Allies decided to land soldiers on the Gallipoli peninsula to destroy the artillery. On 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1915, ground forces were landed: British and French forces at Cape Helles on the south of the peninsula; and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) on the western side of the peninsula [*Gallipoli Campaign*, Wikipedia]. The ANZAC landing was initially a success; soldiers were able to land with tactical surprise and some made it to the third ridge, quite far inland [*Gallipoli Campaign*, Wikipedia]. However, the ANZAC forces were split up and Kemal's concentrated Turkish counter-attack drove them back to their dug in positions on the '400 plateau' on the second ridge [*Gallipoli Campaign*, Wikipedia]. From then on there were few changes of territory. Finally, in December 1915, following Bulgaria's declaration for the Ottoman side, British, French and ANZAC troops were evacuated from the Dardanelles [*Gallipoli Campaign*, Wikipedia]. The Gallipoli Campaign was a military failure for the allies, but ANZAC forces achieved surprise and penetrated deep into Turkish defences on the day of the landing. Indeed, it is possible that if more troops had been assigned to the ANZAC cove landing, the campaign may have succeeded.

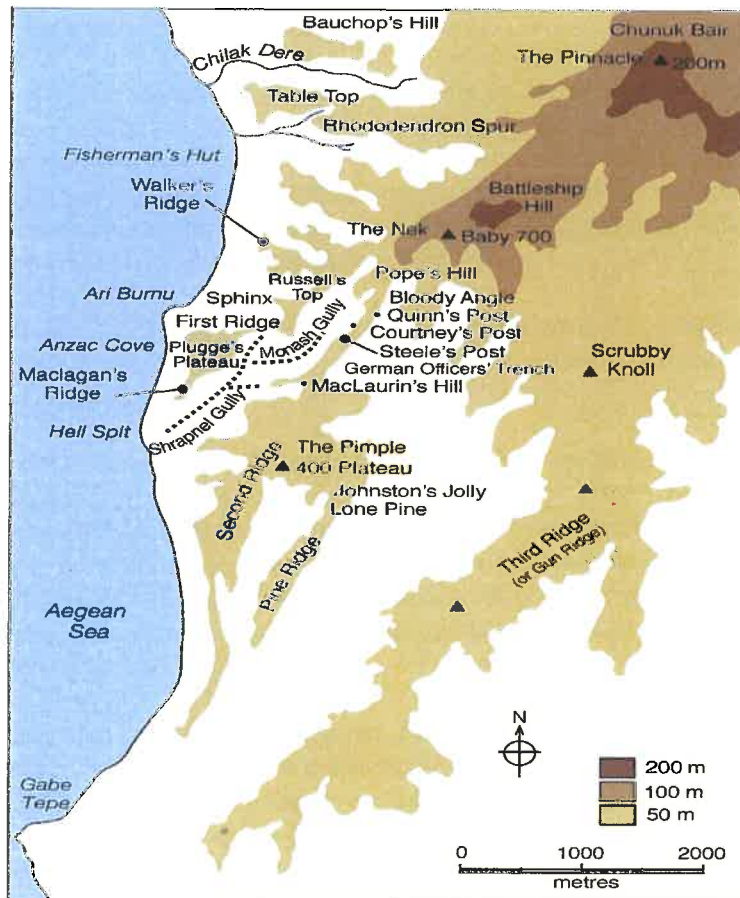
Roy Fordham was an enthusiastic soldier. He joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion as soon as he could, on the day after his birthday, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1914. His brother Horace had joined the previous day. The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was the first AIF unit to leave Australia, on the HMAT *Ascanius* on 20<sup>th</sup> October [Lock, C.B.L., 1936]. *Ascanius* arrived in Alexandria on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1914 and the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved to Mena Camp, near Cairo where Roy's brother Horace died of smallpox on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1915 despite having been vaccinated on board the *Ascanius*. He was to be the second South Australian fatality of the war ['Horace Utting Fordham', 2014].



*HMAT Ascanius*

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion boarded Ionan, a Greek steam ship, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1915 to get to Lemnos, where the attack on the Dardanelles was being prepared. Roy later described Lemnos in a letter appearing in *The Advertiser* on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1915 [*'The War: Letters from the Front'* 1915]:

*"Lemnos is a beautiful island, mountainous, but treeless. The whole place is clothed in grass about 18 in. high, and as all the grasses flower the hillsides are simply beautiful. Large red poppies grow in abundance, and every other color is mingled in with the scarlet and green. The sea and sky are a lovely deep blue, as only Mediterranean skies can be, and, above all, the whole place is alive with skylarks. It is truly a paradise, and the finishing touches are put on by the little villages dotted here and there and with quaint stone houses and old tiled roofs."*



*The area surrounding ANZAC cove*



Roy Fordham was in Lieutenant Noel Loutit's platoon for the landing at Anzac Cove. Lieutenant Loutit was a fellow South Australian who, like Roy, had been at Norwood Primary and the School of Mines. They had done compulsory military service together in the Senior Cadets before the war. Rowing together in an open boat they were in the courageous first unit to land at ANZAC cove from the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion at about 4:30am on the first day.

The platoon had instructions to keep advancing until they met significant Turkish resistance. Roy and his mates displayed tremendous teamwork dashing onwards to Gun Ridge, which they reached by 8:00am, the group sticking together during the advance [Kearney, R., 2005]. At the third ridge they met a group being led by Lieutenant Haig, nephew of Sir Douglas Haig [Rosenzweig, P.A., 2005]. While Haig led most of the men against a party of Turkish scouts on the ridge, Noel and Roy led from the front, advancing further, to about 200m south of Scrubby Knoll. Until 1934 it was believed that this group had advanced further than any other ANZAC soldiers during the campaign [Kearney, R., 2005; Rosenzweig, P.A., 2005]. Noel later recalled that they 'saw the waters of the narrows' as their position allowed them to see the sea on the other side of the peninsula [Rosenzweig, P.A., 2005]. In fact, just 200m away from their position, on Scrubby knoll, was the Turkish commander, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the three battalions of the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and an artillery battery with him ... overwhelming odds against a single Australian platoon.

At about 9:30am the Turkish counter-attack began and Roy's platoon withdrew towards 400 Plateau on the second ridge, where the main ANZAC defensive line had been established [Kearney, R., 2005]. What followed was a courageous fighting retreat against overwhelming odds. Many of the platoon were killed; more were wounded. Roy and Noel ended up carrying one of their wounded mates most of the way back to 400 Plateau, which they reached by 11:00 am [Cameron, D.W., 2007]. Carrying a wounded man that distance over that terrain while being shot at was hard and dangerous work and it showed their tremendous courage and loyalty.

Throughout the rest of the campaign, Roy was to remain in the trenches defending against Turkish attacks until unsanitary conditions took their toll and he developed septic poisoning from an infected hand ['The War: Letters from the Front' 1915]. In that time before antibiotics such an infection was life threatening and he was quickly evacuated to Lemnos. While there he wrote a letter describing among other things the immense sorrow felt by the troops at Gallipoli on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015 about after the destruction of the HMS Triumph, of which Roy said:

*"Day after day she had been our best friend, and every night her comforting search lights played on the hills, showing us clearly any movements of the Turks, and yet almost in a flash she was disabled and done for."*

Many elements of Roy's service at Gallipoli and later in the First World War reflect the ANZAC spirit. Eager to participate, on the day of the landing like so many of the ANZAC troops he showed courage, loyalty and mateship. Roy showed endurance tenaciously holding on to the tiny strip of land not seized by the first Turkish counterattack. In his surviving correspondence he appears laconic and understated but well-spoken with a good sense of humour. Roy's later promotions were based on his ingenuity and initiative. His strong friendship to Lieutenant Noel Loutit was typical of the mateship and loyalty displayed by the ANZAC troops.

Roy Fordham was killed in action at Bullecourt, France, on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1917 [Army Service Record, Fordham RO]. This loss of a second son would have been terrible for his family in South Australia. His father George's letters to the Army are dignified but reflect the uncertainty of a death so far away and correspondence from his older brother Charles shows that as late as 1925 he was still seeking photographs of Roy's Grave [Army Service Record, Fordham RO]. In June 1917 the first rest room for female teachers was built at Marryatville Primary in commemoration of school alumni killed in the war – a very practical war memorial ['Fordham Rest Room' 1917]. It was organised and paid for by Roy's dad and his former employer Sir Edwin Smith and named the Fordham rest room after Roy and Horace.

ANZAC was initially just an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, but then came to be associated with people who served in it, the place they first fought and the spirit they displayed. The ANZAC spirit is a set of qualities expressed by many members of the ANZAC during the war, especially mateship, loyalty, bravery and endurance. The term was first used by Australian war correspondent Charles Bean, when writing about the events at Gallipoli. However, in my opinion, the ANZAC spirit has come to refer to not just the Gallipoli Campaign, but to the application of these fundamentally Australian qualities in modern life as well. It is also about empathy. The ANZAC spirit is not just about having physical courage but about a moral courage and resilience in the face the hardship.

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