



Operation Tribute

## Gallipoli September 2008

Every year The War Graves Photographic Project tries to arrange a photographic tour to one of the outstanding Campaign areas that needs to be completed for Project Archives. 2008 was no different but this year we decided to be a bit more adventurous and attempt a trip that would be a bit more of a logistical ordeal. Did we achieve the aim?? Marian Bushby gives her impressions as Tour 'Scoops'...

**On September 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 at 5am** 18 intrepid travellers gathered in the deserted, but splendid, new Terminal 5 building at Heathrow to travel into the unknown of the Gallipoli Peninsula of Turkey in the latest and furthest distanced TWGPP Operation Tribute.

We hung around for an hour for the check-in desk to open to be told the new terminal is ticket-free and we had to print our own boarding cards from the machines we'd been hanging around next to! Never mind, that's one we'll know next time.

At 1.30pm (Turkish time) we emerged into a cloudy and chilly Istanbul to be met by the travel company rep **Arcan** and our driver for the week whose name we later found out was **Mehmet Ali**. We boarded the bus and set off on our five hour journey to The Gallipoli Houses. I didn't know what to expect, except that as the supposed meeting between East and West there would be contrasts. The roads were initially good motorways. There were wind turbines on the hills, lots of Turkish flags flying and numerous army bases (conscription lasts 15 months).



There were lots of new cars and very old cars including the one Phil saw where the passenger in the back seat got out to let the driver out. Motorbikers mainly weren't wearing helmets. The best jobs would appear to be lorry driving, concrete production and, to a lesser degree, paint production. There were lots of new apartment blocks, some forming new towns, mainly in the plain old eastern-bloc style either newly painted in assorted bright colours or awaiting painting. But the initial coat would seem to be all because they soon started to look worn. Some buildings looked derelict or waiting to be inhabited and everywhere there were mosque minarets sticking up into the sky.



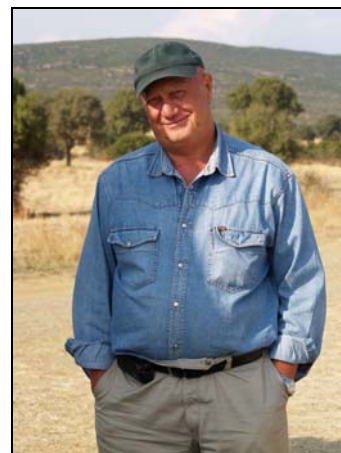
Halfway through the journey we stopped at a roadside café, newly built and in the process of being finished. We noted the absence of health and safety procedures with one welder using a pair of sunglasses as a visor whilst standing on a wobbly ladder. The bit he couldn't reach was completed by another man hanging over the flat roof – he didn't need eye protection at all! The café was literally manned by 4 men, all dilatory, comprising one who spoke some English and took the orders, two who hung round the coffee machine and one who was the chef. Quite obviously what they needed was a WOMAN to liven up their ideas, but it's not that sort of country.

We turned off towards Eceabat and Kocadere where the land became more wooded and attractive as we dropped down towards the Sea of Marmara.

The sun greeted our arrival at the Gallipoli Houses at 6.30 along with Eric and Ozlem (Goossens) and their dogs. The rooms were good - cool, clean and spacious with huge showers - and the evening meal at 8pm excellent. We retired for the night instructed to rise for breakfast at 8am.

At Monday morning's breakfast a tired troop assembled having been unexpectedly woken by reveille at 5.30am courtesy of the Muezzin (accompanied by dogs) and a repeat performance at 6am (accompanied by a cockerel) for the slackers! Those at the village end of Gallipoli Houses had also had the pleasure of the Ramadan drummer at 4am. This was repeated each morning of our stay with varying effect on the sleepers depending on how tired we were and how much we'd drunk at dinner – fortunately Eric's place isn't tea-total.

The day started out grey, cloudy and cool but the sun soon came out. Our guide **Kenan Celik** arrived on time with Mehmet and we set off for our busy programme of cemetery visits and photographing.



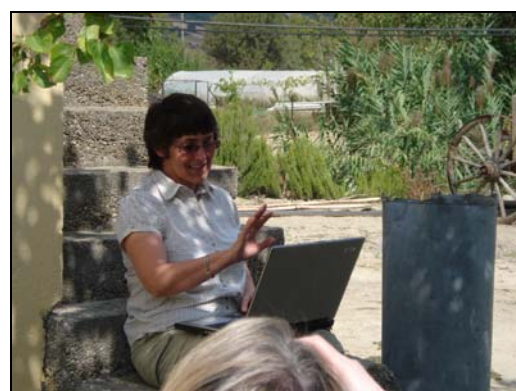
Kenan has been conducting tours of Gallipoli for 25 years. He is a retired University Professor who taught English not history. As the week went by we found out he was born on a farm on the Cannakale side in a rural area similar to where we were staying. There were only two books in his parents' house, one of them being the Koran. The key to his success has been reading and he owns about 3000 books. He won a Fulbright Scholarship to study at the University of Oregon which gave him a totally different experience from home. His talks were peppered with anecdotes from tours he has conducted of people like us but also government leaders including Bob Hawke and Helen Clark. He gave a very balanced view of the events of the Gallipoli campaign, or the Cannakale war as the Turks know it, including different views of what might have happened 'if'... He paid us a very nice compliment when he said that people consider the British to be quiet or standoffish but we weren't like that at all – we were friendly, good humoured, polite, and an excellent example of good team work – and that was well before dinner on the last night!



During the morning we visited No2 Outpost, New Zealand No2 Outpost, Embarkation Pier, 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, Lala Baba, (where Phil showed us the first of his VCs) and passed a Turkish war cemetery on the way in to Anafarta for lunch. Janis had the checklist for each cemetery to ensure we didn't miss any areas since it wouldn't be easy to return at a later date. At 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance Cemetery four **CWGC engravers** were at work. Marsha dashed forward to introduce herself and take some pictures.

Lunch was served for us in the garden of a small house which also had a museum.

The food was good- very much based on a combination of the 5-a-day and Mediterranean diets which were completely ruined at the end by the syrup baklava- type sweet! For Marsha's gluten free diet the pudding was solved by the woman of the house appearing from the kitchen to cut a bunch of sweet grapes from the vine in the garden. **Janis** and Jim tried several places to download photographs before finding a place in the shade. Over lunch we found out Pauline was much older than we originally thought as she reminisced about leather and wooden drinking vessels before glass was in common use.



In spite of her great age however she was the only female to succeed with the non-European toilets – the rest of us decided cross-legged was the better position.

The afternoon resumed with Hill 60, Green Hill, Hill 10 (where I put my cross at the grave of Alfred Jackson who is remembered at my local cemetery) and finished at Azmak where we watched a large herd of goats with goatherd and dogs in attendance going home for the night. We were back 'home' in time for a drink on the terrace as the sun went down and we went in to dinner.

Tuesday dawned warm and sunny and with the prospect of a busy day we were to leave earlier than Monday at 9.30am on the promise of being back an hour earlier. In the event, we returned two cemeteries short at 6pm to homemade lemonade ordered by Pauline.

The day started at the Turkish Hospital Cemetery at Kocadere which is built in the shape of a crescent and star as on the Turkish flag. We travelled on to see the grave of Bill the horse, who survived the campaign then worked for CWGC until his death in 1923, which is behind the CWGC depot overlooking North Beach near Canterbury cemetery, our next stop. At **ANZAC Cove** we encountered a few other coach trips comprising our colonial cousins some of whose knowledge of history left something to be desired and was corrected by Kenan.



Ari Burnu was the next stop followed by Shrapnel Valley where we again encountered CWGC workers. From here some took the steep walk up to Plugge's Plateau to photograph the 21 known graves.

The list for the rest of the day included Shell Green, Lone Pine, Johnston's Jolly, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Parade Ground, Courtney's and Steele's Post, Quinn's Post with the Turkish cemetery across the road, The Nek, Walker's Ridge and finally Baby 700.

As the day progressed we were in danger of developing into a safari tour as we stopped to ooh and ahh at groups of puppies in the road or tortoises for which Mehmet had to reverse the bus so that those of us who missed them first time could **get a look**. Not to mention the goatherds with their goats and shepherds with their sheep. Janis and Lynn were photographing assorted plants and fruits on or off trees or insects on the paths.

Lunch today was a pack-up provided by Gallipoli Houses in chilled bags. We stopped at the Gaba Tepe Information Centre and museum to eat, some of us sitting at an open air lecture theatre which would have been appropriate for Martin's talk on Troy to be given after dinner that evening. By the time we reached Baby 700 we were all worn out, mainly due to getting on and off the bus in the heat to travel distances we could more easily have walked. In spite of the rough roads and steep inclines that formed the access to some of the cemeteries it seemed to be an affront to Mehmet's driving skill if he couldn't drive us right up to the entrance.



After a walk up a hill for the men to stroke a battered old rusty gun we gave up for the day and went 'home' for a rest. After dinner the conversation turned more philosophical than normal with Phil unintentionally reflecting that 'there was no life in German cemeteries.' It took him a moment to realise why we were all laughing.



Wednesday was to be a trip to Troy, but before we could go there we had to complete Tuesday's itinerary, so it was off to **Chunuk Bair** and then the energetic ones walked down the slope to the Farm Cemetery which even Mehmet was unable to access by bus. The road to Hill 971 wasn't much better with Maggie having visions of the bus falling off the edge. The hill is now crowned by a lookout post manned by one fire-watcher who was pleased to see some company. As Peter said this was a first day objective for the Australians on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915 and it took us 3 days in a bus and with a guide.

From here we travelled to Eceabat, still on the European side, where we called at a First World War museum and then took the ferry to Cannakale, which is in Asia Minor and is a bustling modern town.

We called for lunch near Troy and spent the afternoon guided around the ruins by Kenan who elaborated on Martin's dit of the previous evening giving us a brief resume of the story of Helen, pointing out the nine different layers of occupation and how the site was excavated. The safari aspect continued with a lizard (not a snake) found in our bedroom in the morning and the study of Turkish sheep transportation on the ferry returning from Cannakale.

The dining highlight of the week was undoubtedly Wednesday night when two representatives from the regional CWGC office joined us for dinner. Whereas Ilhan is Turkish, Eric is French and has worked with the commission in France and Belgium before moving to Turkey. He speaks 'very little' Turkish claiming it's a difficult language. They travel up to the entrance of every cemetery by vehicle – including the Farm. Harry spoke briefly thanking them for the work done on our behalf which means that every cemetery we visit is always beautifully presented and is a tribute to those who rest there. Eric said he would pass the message on to the men, both gardeners and engravers, some of whom we had seen, who make up the 19 employed on the peninsula.

**Marsha**, in order to perpetuate her claim of having a man in every cemetery, dashed forward to claim another email address for her little black book on the pretext of forwarding photographs for the men who were working in Reichswald cemetery during the 'Market Garden' trip in May. **Eric** knew the men concerned and pointed out their multi-national make up, coming from Ukraine, Russia, Croatia and Algeria.

There was another 9am start on Thursday. The days seemed to be getting longer with the early start and the nights shorter with the input from the drummer and Muezzin.



The day started cloudy with a few spots of rain and the geographical split of the group was becoming obvious with the softy southerners donning more clothes and the hardy northerners just shrugging it off.

Today's itinerary was Twelve Tree Copse, Geoghegan's Bluff Plot, Lancashire Landing, Helles Memorial, Pink Farm, Seddel Bahr, V Beach, Skew Bridge and Redoubt Cemetery. Helles Memorial was the last stop before lunch with the 20,000 names of British Empire troops who have no known grave. Some of the panels were very weathered and photographing them was quite difficult even for those with SLR cameras. Lunch was at Mocamp with Harry and Nikki dashing straight into the water for a swim while the rest of us looked on



There was **another gun**, much bigger and shinier than the last at Fort Ertugral overlooking V Beach, exerting the same magnetic effect on the men. Phil was seen on his hands and knees peering into it, causing Maggie to wonder if someone was going to fire him out of it!

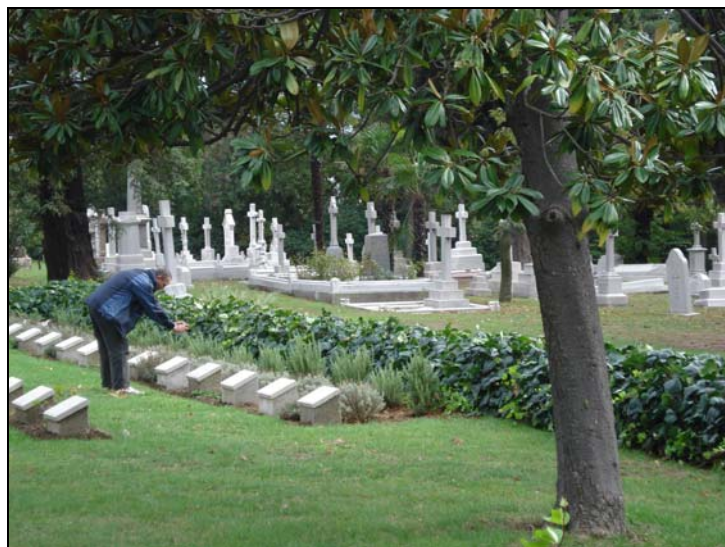
At Redoubt Cemetery we thought we would have to walk when we turned into an avenue of trees bent by the wind into an obstacle course, but not an obstacle to Mehmet. This was our last 'official' stop and from here we visited the French cemetery and then the Turkish Martyr's Memorial which stands above Merto Bay which had been visible from Troy the previous day.

Eric had invited Kenan to stay for dinner on Thursday night and on our return to Gallipoli Houses was waiting with mulled wine for us. Harry thanked Kenan for his efforts with us during the four days and presented him with gifts – two books and some money to buy more!

Friday morning saw us waving goodbye to Gallipoli Houses as we returned to Istanbul for a two night stay. We were saddened at the start of the journey when Jim gave us a message from Steve that Peter Magnall had died at the beginning of the week.

We called at the same motorway stop. There were still no women to organise the men in the cafe and the welders were now working at ground level, with no protection for themselves – or the customers walking past.

We arrived at the Istanbul ring road in torrential rain and had to travel across to the other side of the city in the search for **Haidar Pasha cemetery**. In complete contrast to Gallipoli this was a huge modern city (Kenan said the population was 15m) full of roads and traffic. Finding the cemetery involved a few turns around a one-way system, asking the police for directions. Eventually Nikki saw the green CWGC sign pointing the way.



It was worth the journey, as well as the graves we wanted there were graves from the Crimean war and of numerous notaries.

The journey from here to our hotel in the centre of the city was not for the faint-hearted. The motorway was three lanes plus hard shoulder but seemed most of the time to have five lanes of vehicles jostling for position. Eventually thanks to Mehmet we squeezed down a road and arrived at the hotel in time to change and go out to dinner.



The time until Sunday morning was now our own. There were the Blue Mosque, **Agia Sophia**, the Grand Bazaar, the Spice Market, Topkapi Palace and numerous restaurants all within easy walking distance. On Saturday it rained all day and those of us who were guided by our companions the wrong way from the Bazaar to the Spice Market saw real Istanbul life in the back streets. Although it's a large city it seemed safe and, although lost, we were never concerned either in the daylight or at night.

The departure from Istanbul was the usual drill, up and away at the crack of dawn. In this case breakfast was ready at 5.30am and Mehmet was back with the bus to take us to the airport before it was light.

On arrival at Heathrow the troubles of Terminal 5 seemed to have been dealt with as the luggage appeared almost before there was time to turn round. We said our farewells with the meeting at Cosford to look forward to in November and the possibility of a trip to Arras in the Spring. From my point of view it wasn't a holiday but an experience. Most of the people I know who go to Turkey go for the sun and sand on the southern coast whereas Gallipoli was like a step back in time and it was interesting to see how people live there. The unspoilt and relatively undeveloped coast also gave an idea of what it must have been like **landing there 93 years ago**.



As always there was the sadness at the sense of loss in the cemeteries, especially of the 'believed to be' or those whose resting place is totally unknown and whose name is marked on a memorial. But there is also the satisfaction in seeing that the CWGC cemeteries are always the best maintained and show we haven't forgotten. During the trip we placed at varying cemeteries twelve Remembrance Crosses on behalf of either ourselves or other volunteers and each was a poignant moment. The business end of the trip saw us collect 36500 names on the way to achieving our goal.

**Marian Bushby** ('Scoops')