

Return to Gallipoli



By Steve Rogers

It's not often we go on a city break and miss out the cemeteries. The likes of Venice, Rome and Prague have very interesting cemeteries for the budding taphophile, all worth a visit.

So it was no different when we considered a city break to Istanbul that we decided that having travelled so far we might as well incorporate a detour, albeit 400 miles, to the Gallipoli Peninsular. Helles memorial was due to have been reopened after two years of restoration so it seemed an ideal time to capture the new panels on camera.

A TWGPP team had visited in 2009 and stayed at **Eric Goosens** 'Gallipoli Houses' so with many recommends we opted for that location in the centre of the Gallipoli battlefields. Eric had advised us that as we were at the very end of the season the weather could be unpredictable but also the weekend we planned to be there was a National holiday so it could be busy in the area. With that advice we contacted the new CWGC supervisor in Cannackale, David Bennett, who informed us that for the holiday period Helles Memorial would be closed with no access to the section that was currently still boarded up due to unfinished work. Having watched 'Midnight Express' a few years back I decided that climbing fences was not a good idea with the potential of getting apprehended by Turkish authorities so something might have to be arranged.

Flight out pretty uneventful but that was due to spending a full 2.45 hours queuing at BA's Terminal 5. The first time I have ever missed a full English whilst waiting for the flight!



Car hire no problem but ground to a halt within five minutes of leaving the airport on Istanbul's equivalent of the M25 car park. Should have remembered it was a National holiday! It is recommended that four to five hours be allocated to get from Istanbul to Gallipoli but even with the holdup we made it to Gallipoli houses in exactly four hours. Apart from one bit of road which was a patchwork of various shades of tarmac I was amazed at how good the roads were and so little traffic. It was actually a pleasure to drive.

Halil was there to greet us at Eric's and we were soon settled in for the evening. We had a lovely room with a view of a minaret and a fat cat named Obama waiting to come in via the patio doors.

On Eric's advice and the fact that the weather was very clear albeit a bit windy we decided to head up the coastal road and re photograph the cemeteries of Shell green, Shrapnel Valley, Ari Burnu, amongst others, and were quite surprised that we were the only ones in the area.



Many of the stones had been re engraved since the first group visit so better defined. We did not see a soul in any cemetery. The sun was always low so gave good contrast with shadow on the names of the headstones.

Sandra was particularly pleased to see the grave of John "Jack" Simpson Kirkpatrick at Beach cemetery who, although feted as an Australian Hero (The Donkey man) actually originated from South Shields in the North East of England. We passed through Anzac Cove which was also deserted but could imagine how packed the area must be on ANZAC Day every year.

We moved on up the coast towards the flat plains of Suvla as we had a special request to lay a card and cross on the grave of Private Parish of the 'The Queens' at Lala Baba. The track was a bit 'iffy' even for the hire car so we had to abandon it and walk in the final kilometre to the cemetery. The large brown snake that slid across the track was a bit out of the ordinary and the wild dogs?, with what appeared like barbed wire collars, were not exactly friendly but needs must. Lala Baba was on a spit of land sticking out into the Aegean which although scenic on a Summers day could appear quite desolate during a coastal storm. I can only guess not many people visit?



Feeling a bit windswept and thirsty as we had not taken the advice to take water with us we decided to return down the coast road and look for a Café. Once again forgetting that it was a national holiday so nothing open at all. Fortunately for us it is a small world and we found a coach parked up with 'TJ Tours' on the side so got talking to a chap who asked about our TWGPP Shirts. It turned out he was 'TJ' and knew the CWGC staff and had Çan's (pronounced Chan) mobile number on his phone. Çan was the local CWGC supervisor who was going to open up Helles for us so we arranged that for the following day. 'TJ' then supplied us with a couple of bottles of water which was appreciated. Refreshed we headed back up the road to complete AZMAK, Green Hill cemeteries before the sun set.



Day 2 - With Helles memorial being opened up for us to photograph the panels we started out early and completed 'Twelve Tree Copse' and 'Pink Farm' where we had cards and crosses to lay for special requests. A quick call to Çan and he met us at the works entrance to Helles and unlocked the gate. On the other side it was found that the security fence had actually blown down over night so access was available to all anyway!

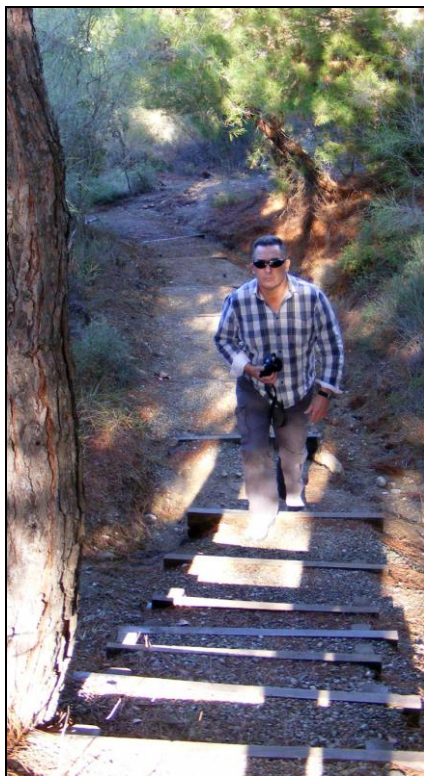
The new panels and the restoration looked very impressive but I could not help feeling that compared to the larger memorials in France and Belgium, Helles must get very few visitors and yet here was a memorial very much worth visiting.

On to 'Lancashire Landing' where the last of the summer flowers were still in evidence. By this time a dark front was coming in from the sea and by the time we got to 'V Beach' it had started to rain. The plan had been to move on to Morto Bay French cemetery but we needed to do Skew bridge as well so Morto was abandoned and we got quite wet at Skew Bridge.



Petrol stations are few on Gallipoli so we detoured towards Ecabat and got there in what can only be described as hurricane conditions. Black sky, absolutely torrential rain and driving conditions that were very similar to those seen on TV in the USA during major storms. We found the garage and decided to shelter in there which was just as well as the tree adjacent the garage promptly fell down across the road. A ferry had just offloaded at Eceabat so we made the decision to follow the caterpillar of traffic now moving slowly along the coast road. We missed the turning to Gallipoli Houses as the wipers had no effect on the amount of water on the screen so had to back track but eventually got there feeling pleased that it was on a hill so unlikely to flood.

The electric storm that was now in progress affected the electrical supply so I could now see why there was a 'Tilly' lamp in our room. Although fluctuating, the lights never did go fully out. However, it did have a detrimental effect on Eric's PC so he was not too happy with a potential mother board failure. No 'PC World' down the road here or IT engineer on call. You get to appreciate at times like this what we have at home as far as IT support is concerned.



Day 3 - A stormy night but a call to prayer from the Minaret at 05:30 ensured no lie in but I was ready for breakfast of eggs and sausage at 0800 then off on an early start as this was our last full day. The planned route was to take in the heights above the coastal road and included the likes of 'Lone Pine cemetery and Memorial', 'Baby 700', 'Courtneys and Steels Post', 'The Nek', 'Walkers Ridge', amongst others. Fortunately the overnight storm had blown away so we had clear skies and a good day for photography. Access to 'Courtneys' and 'The Farm' were down quite **steep and narrow tracks** which had obviously been rivers overnight so the going was a bit precarious. I had not checked beforehand but did mention to Sandra that considering the climb required down to 'The Farm' I was hoping that it would be worthwhile and that knowing our luck there would be only half a dozen graves. There were seven!

Views across the Dardanelles from the high point of Chunuk Bair were quite spectacular as were the views across the Suvla plain towards 'Lala Baba' from 'The Nek'. The mandatory one way system took us back off the heights to the visitor centre which we had completed by lunch so we went East again to Hill 60 which had been missed on day one. The overnight rain had made the track into an ice (mud) rink so the four wheel drive (not) Focus had trouble getting along it and by our return it looked like it had been through the tank training ground at Bovington.

We headed back west to Altıçepe as we have missed 'Redoubt Cemetery' in the storm the day before and on completion decided to have a look at the French cemetery at Morto Bay as we had some light left. Although quite large we started to photograph the graves (Iron crosses with an Aluminium name plaque) having explained in my best Turkish/French/English what we were up to with the caretaker.



I felt he had a thankless task maintaining the site and would be intrigued to find out how many French visitors they get on an annual basis. We completed the site with 10 minutes to spare before the gates closed and with the sun setting directly behind us we headed back to Gallipoli Houses for our last evening meal.

The stay at Gallipoli houses <http://www.thegallipolihouses.com/index.html> had been excellent with great service, company and food. Although the end of season I felt that the end of October is a good time to visit with the Peninsula being deserted, no traffic and the weather still quite warm but perhaps subject to the odd storm! The following morning we left for the city break in Istanbul.

Thanks to David, Çan, Eric, Halil, TJ, Obama and the chef for making it a memorable trip.

Istanbul? Mosques, Topkapi Palace, Harem, Turkish delight, Basilica, Bosphorus, Asia, Europe – Done that!



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