

GALLIPOLI

It is 1966 and I am nineteen years old. I have never been back and the detail may now be blurred but my memory of Gallipoli is as sharp as a barb.

Private Albert Frome

Aged 18

Lest We Forget

It is the university vacation and we have driven a battered blue Dormobile through Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia to Greece and Turkey. We have watched a wedding party processing in pairs — men in black, women in white, enchantingly formal — along a promontory to a church on an island in the Ionian Sea. We have slept in warm olive groves and bathed in rocky mountain streams. We have discovered feta and dolmades, ouzo and retsina. We are very young and the world is still new to us.

Lance-Corporal Charles Hemington

Aged 20

Lest We Forget

We have gazed, awed, at the monasteries perched on rocks at Meteora. We have toured the Peloponnese. We have crossed the Corinth Canal. We have inspected the Acropolis in the very early morning. We have climbed Mount Olympus and — reaching its summit in the afternoon — seen the clouds part all the way down to the sea. We have driven through Thessaloniki and on through Thrace towards Turkey. We have eaten yoghurt and wild honey in earthenware bowls on the Turkish border while waiting for our documents to be returned to us. From time to time we have heard news of England's continuing progress in the World Cup from people we meet but we are now in a country where other travellers are rarely encountered and mass tourism will not arrive for many more years.

Private Edgar Mells

Aged 19

Lest We Forget

Which is why, when we cross the narrow strait to Çanakkale and then stand on the beach at Gallipoli, we find we are alone.

Our knowledge of the campaign is sparse but we don't need a guidebook to tell us what we are seeing. High above us are the cliffs from which Turkish troops fired down on the soldiers landing from the sea. There is no cover. There is nowhere to hide. Our appreciation of military matters may be limited to what we learnt in the Combined Cadet Force but the picture is shockingly clear.

Private Frederick Radstock

Aged 19

Lest We Forget

'The odd thing about the Dardanelles Straits,' says our geographer, who has provided us with a stream of facts for more than four weeks, 'is that the water flows in both directions. From Asia to Europe and Europe to Asia. From the Sea of Marmara there's a surface current to the Aegean Sea, and from the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara there's an undercurrent.'

No one says anything. This is a moment when History would be more useful than Geography.

Corporal David Vobster

Aged 21

Lest We Forget

We find that there are stone steps from the beach. We climb them. At the top we emerge from behind a stand of trees and low bushes. We look out at an expanse of white headstones, stretching far in front of us, row after row. We cross the field, reading inscriptions as we pass, and climb more steps. Another expanse of headstones, wider than the first. A perfect parade, a faultless disposition, row after row.

Private Bernard Wells

Aged 20

Lest We Forget

More steps and a further field, greater than the other two; row after row, row after row, stretching into the distance, row after row. We turn back and retrace our steps soberly through the headstones.

By the trees and low bushes we encounter a soldier, a Turkish military policeman, white tin helmet around which is a red band, light khaki uniform, black webbing, immaculate. He halts, salutes us solemnly and walks on. His function is to guard the graves of the fallen enemy.

We return silently to the beach.