(February 19th, 1917.)

The Fight at Gallipoli

By Sergeant-Major Middlemiss,*

AT a regular meeting of the Club held on the 19th February, Sergeant-Major Middlemiss said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—I cannot see your beautiful city or the sight of your faces but I am deeply conscious of the great honor that has been accorded me in being privileged to address you this afternoon. The subject of my address will be the concentration for the operations at the Dardanelles; a little about India, where I was stationed when the war broke out; and the part my own battalion took in the fight at Gallipoli. The failure of the Dardanelles operations has, like all other failures, been the subject of much adverse criticism. Most people now are of the opinion that the attempt never should have been made. Others say the failure was due to incompetent leadership. While still a third party maintain that it was a purely strategic move on Britain's part to withdraw and let the rich prize of Constantinople fall into the hands of the Russians. It is not for me to express my thoughts about the rights or wrongs of the case. It will be a long time till those on whom the blame rests will be found. Whatever is done now, it cannot recall or replace the many thousands of brave men who gave their lives so freely to uphold the rights and liberties we are battling to maintain. The memorable landing under General Sir Ian Hamilton on the 25th of April, 1915, has been acknowledged by most experts to be the greatest feat of military arms ever accomplished. To any one who has visited that part of the world, or who has made a close study of the strong natural features in that section of the country, it becomes all the more incredible that such a landing from the open sea, in small boats, against a well organized and well armed enemy, should ever have been made.

I was stationed with my battalion at Lucknow when the war broke out. Like a great many other people, I thought that it would last only a few months and that a large part of the British garrison of India would not be required. It

*Sergeant-Major Middlemiss, as a member of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, took part in the original landing at Gallipoli.

was not long, however, before we heard rumors that such and such a brigade had mobilized and was on the way. But it was not until the middle of September that my battalion received orders to mobilize, and, then, with the usual lazy indolent way of the Orient (where the motto is "never do a thing to-day that can be done next week") it was not until the latter days of October before we received our final marching orders.

The withdrawal of the large British garrisons from India, which in ordinary times consists of 75,000 men, was not looked upon with much favor by the white population. Their minds reverted back to the horrors of the Indian mutiny and another such rising was feared. This view was supported by the fact that large numbers of Indians had been returning from British Columbia, California and South Africa, bribed by the German gold and fine promises to cause a riot and rebellion throughout the country. Several small outbreaks did occur, but the Government was quick to act and they were rendered abortive.

Anxious eyes were also turned to the northwest frontier; here lay Afghanistan with its wild and warlike people; for many years the Afghan army had been trained by Turkish officers and a large section of the people were known to be bitterly opposed to the British rule in India. This was a fine field for the German propagandists and they did not fail to try to inflame these wild border tribes to make raid upon India, but the Ameer of Afghanistan was not to be persuaded and the confidence reposed in him by the Indian Government has not been misplaced. Probably the advice of his father, the old Ameer, may have had something to do with his decision. His father's advice was, that it would be useless to try and drive the British out of India, for no matter what hardships, or what defeats they suffered, they would send their last man and spend their last shilling to obtain the victory in the end.

On the 27th of October, 1915, leaving our wives and children and all our personal belongings, we entrained for Bombay and embarked on board the S.S. *Sardinia* of the P. & O. line. On the 2nd of November we sailed, in company with forty other vessels, under sealed orders, not knowing to which part of the great battle line we were being sent. A few days out from Bombay we were joined by an additional eight vessels from Karachi, our escort being the battleships *Duke of Edinburgh*, the *Swiftsure* and two auxiliary cruisers of the Indian marine service. Despite the fact that the German light cruiser *Emden* was still playing havoc with the

shipping in that part of the world, there was no restriction on lighting up at nights, and the effect of this large fleet of liners, sailing in regular formation, was very remarkable. We sailed in lines of five, half a mile between ships and a half mile between lines, and that night it was like looking down upon the deserted streets of a brilliantly lighted town on a very wet dark night. We called at Aden, and from there part of our force, with the battleship *Duke of Edinburgh* as escort was sent to dismantle some guns which had been causing trouble from the small Arab village of Sheik Said on the coast of Arabia on the Red Sea. Our force was landed, destroyed the guns and defences, inflicted a few casualties and then re-embarked, and we proceeded on our way to Port Suez. Here the whole force was disembarked and we proceeded to Ismaillia, which is midway on the canal between Port Said and Port Suez, and for a month we were kept busy building defences on the north bank of the canal against the threatened invasion of Egypt by the Turks.

About the middle of December we were recalled to England, to re-clothe and re-arm for service in France. Calling at Gibraltar on the way, we had a fine view of the Australian light cruiser *Sidney,* which was undergoing repairs after the glorious action, in which she had sunk the German light cruiser *Emden.*

We landed in England on the 29th of December, and proceeded to Warley in Essex. After a short stay there, we were moved to Rugby in the Midlands and posted to the 87th Brigade of the famous 29th Division, which afterwards became known, like Napoleon's "Old Guard" at Waterloo, as the "Old Guard" of Gallipoli. The battalions comprising this Division were the last battalions of the regular British Army, which had played such a conspicuous part in the battles of Mons and the Marne.

After re-clothing and re-arming, the preparations for the Dardanelles having taken shape, we were ordered to take part in that attempt. On the 16th of March, we stole away from Rugby in the middle of the night and entrained for Avonmouth on the Bristol Channel and embarked on board of the S.S. *Dongola.* We sailed that night about ten o'clock without any escort and proceeded direct to Malta. Our entrance into the grand harbor there was very inspiring. A large part of the French Mediterranean battle squadron was in harbor and also six transports, crowded with troops bound for the same place as ourselves. The band on the flagship *Paris,* struck up the National Anthem—the French sailors and the British

soldiers crowded the decks of their respective vessels and cheered and cheered again as we slowly came to anchor. After coaling, we continued on our way to Alexandria. Here we disembarked and went into camp to await the arrival of the other troops from England, and for the next twelve days we were busily employed loading up stores, munitions and water for the army detailed to make the landing. The water difficulty was one of the hardest problems that had to be overcome. It was known that there were but few wells on the Pensinsula and that before we could get there they would be destroyed or tampered with. Therefore, all the drinking water had to be carried from Egypt. For the 29th Division alone, we had to fill 10,000 tins, each of which held 3 gallons, seal them up and pack them, two in a case, so that they could be easily handled.

On the 12th of April we again embarked on board the SS. *Southlands* (since torpedoed) and proceeded to Lemnos, one of the large islands in the Greek archipelago, which on account of its large, well-sheltered inner harbor, had been selected as the base of concentration for the Navy and the Army. The story of the islands of Lemnos may be of some interest to you. My own Biblical knowledge on the subject is rather hazy, but it was told me by a regimental chaplain and I suppose he ought to know. He said that the island of Lemnos was the spot where the devil alighted when he was expelled from heaven as a wicked angel, but he was not in residence when we arrived, but I think we have all a very good idea where he had taken up his headquarters.

There were many battleships and transports in harbor when we arrived and they continued to arrive until, on the 23rd, it was known that the concentration was complete and that, come what may, the long awaited attempt would take place at daybreak on Sunday morning, the 25th. During our stay in the harbor we were daily practiced in drawing and climbing up and down ships' ladders, with and without accoutrements, so that we could abandon ship at a moment's notice if necessary.

On the morning of the 24th a message from Lieutenant General Hunter Weston was issued to every officer and soldier of the 29th Division. His message was "the 29th Division, which I have the honor to command, has been selected to make the dangerous and hazardous attempt to land at Cape Helles and Sidal Bar. You will be called upon to face death by shots, by shells, by mines and by drowning. Remember the glorious traditions of your brothers and comrades in France and Flanders. With the help of God and the British Navy a landing will be made. In Nelson's day it was England, now it is the

whole British Empire that expects every man of you to do your duty."

The scene in that lonely island harbor on that spring afternoon was one of the most magnificent that any one could wish to look upon. Just picture in your minds a large harbor about three miles long and two and one-half miles wide, surrounded by a ring of low hills just becoming green in the early spring. A very quiet and peaceful spot in normal times, even quiet and peaceful on that spring afternoon, but within that hill-ranged harbor, lay one of the mightiest combined naval and military forces that has ever been collected in one spot. The British fleet was represented by the giant *Queen Elizabeth,* the *Triumph, Swiftsure, Goliath, City of Dublin, Duke of Edinburgh, Amethyst* and *Sapphire,* many smaller cruisers and battleships, a host of torpedo boats and several submarines, while the transports lay so close together that it was impossible to count them. Crowding the deck of these transports was the flower of the manhood of Australia and New Zealand, about 50,000, the last Division of the British Army, about 18,000, and one Division of the Naval Reserves of Volunteers, about 12,000.

Shortly after two o'clock a general movement was noticeable; one by one the ships picked up anchor and moved to their stations. Here the soldiers were transferred on to the battleships; half of my battalion was taken on Board the light cruiser *Amethyst* and the other half on the *Sapphire.* The *Amethyst,* as some of you may remember reading, was the battleship which ran the gauntlet of the Turkish forts in the month of March. Her mission was to cut the cable which connected the two Turkish forts of Kahid Bar and Chenect; the narrows at this point are a little less than a mile wide. She had accomplished her object, but was detected on return and came under a very heavy fire. She was hit 20 times and her steering gear was damaged, but she managed to return in safety. One shell, however, penetrated the side of the ship and landed in the men's bathroom where the stokers were cleaning up after coming up from below. This shell bursting in that confined area killed every man to the number of 20.

We sailed at six p.m. and arrived opposite the point selected for our landing about 2.30 in the morning. The battleships lay about 2,500 yards from the coast and in the darkness we could see the flash of the searchlights from the Turkish Forts, but the intervening cliffs prevented them from getting us in range. At Cape Helles there were five points for landing beaches; they were the only possible places where any landings could be made in a rough and rocky coast line for about ten miles. These landing places were designated on the military maps by letters, commencing on the inside of the peninsula with the letter "S", "V" beach represented Sedd-el-Bahr, "W" was Cape Helles, "X" about half a mile around the north coast of the peninsula, and "Y" beach, where we were detailed to land, was about three miles on the north coast from Cape Helles. Mine sweepers were brought up, each of which had three boats lashed to either side, and we were transferred to these mine sweepers. Just at the first gray streak of dawn we made off for the shore. When about half way the guns on the battleships opened fire over our heads; anwering reports came from the southwest at Cape Helles and from the northeast at Anzac, which told us that the great attempt had at last been begun.

As we drew close in shore, we jumped into the boats when the mine sweepers grounded, the lashings were cut and the boats shot into the beach. When they struck, we jumped into the water, which took us up nearly to the chest. I cannot say with any truth whether any of our men were drowned at that time, but many of us fell and had a nice wet bath before clambering on to the narrow ledge of beach, which, at the most, was about 50 yards long and about 30 yards wide. Every man carried full accoutrements, 250 rounds of ammunition, sufficient food to last him 5 days, if necessary, and his water bottle filled, a total weight, including the rifle, amounting to about 75 lbs.

The enemy had evidently thought this point too difficult for a landing to be attempted and left the tops of the cliffs undefended. The cliffs at this point fell a little back from the general line, forming a shallow re-entrant and rose abruptly to a height of about 250 feet. The first men ashore were sent immediately to climb the cliffs; they were halted a few yards below the sky line and given time to divest themselves of their heavy pack, then at the signal they cleared the cliffs with a rush, doubled inland about two or three hundred yards, and lay down in the low bushes which covered the ground in this vicinity. The enemy had now become aware of our presence and we came under a very heavy shrapnel fire, but he had much over-estimated his range, and most of his shells went harmlessly over our heads into the sea.

The first set to make this landing consisted of my own battalion, the Plymouth battalion of the Naval Reserve Volunteers, and one company of the South Wales Borderers, in

all about 2,200 men. After our Commander had brought his force up to within a few yards of the sky line, he decided to advance half of his little force inland to cause a distraction and relieve the pressure on the other landing points.

We had advanced inland, about three quarters of a mile, when the aeroplanes which were directing the fire of the battleships informed us that the enemy had detached a large body of his reserves to intercept us, the strength of which was estimated in the ratio of six to one. Our little force was compelled to retire to the line we had taken up about 200 yards inland from the edge of the cliffs. The battleships supporting us at this time were the *Goliath* (since torpedoed) the *City of Dublin*, the *Amethyst* and *Sapphire*. Information was sent to the commander of the 29th Division asking that reinforcements be sent as soon as possible, and they were promised at four o'clock. Four o'clock came, but no reinforcements. The enemy by this time had got the range much better and we began to suffer casualties. Orders were given to dig in with the small spade every soldier carries, and to make the best of our positions for the night. At six o'clock every man who could use a rifle was put into the firing line. When darkness fell the guns from the Turkish forts and the battleships ceased, but the machine gun and rifle firing was very heavy all night.

I was sent with a party of sixty men to reinforce the left side of our firing line. While making my way up the side of the cliffs, I heard orders shouted out to retire, but not recognizing the voice as belonging to any of my own officers, I halted my party and sent two men forward to reconnoitre. They found the officer in charge of that section of the line who stated no such orders had been issued and the next morning it was discovered that a German officer, attached to the Turkish Army, had either been hidden in the bushes all day, or had broken through the line when darkness fell and had shouted these contrary orders to cause confusion. Getting on toward Monday morning, the enemy had sent forward his bombing parties under cover of the darkness and they threw their deadly missiles into our thin line—our casualties from these were very heavy.

Reinforcements were again requisitioned, but they could not be sent in time and we were ordered, if it was impossible to maintain our position to withdraw, reimbark and join the main body at Cape Helles—a very difficult operation—in the face of a vastly superior enemy. Our casualties by this time amounted to about half the entire force. Of my own battalion

we had lost our commanding officer, the adjutant, five captains, seven lieutenants and about 500 men killed and wounded. The senior officer left was a man who had seen much hill warfare in India, and he decided to adopt the same tactics on this occasion; selecting the strongest and most active men he could find, he withdrew them back to the very edge of the cliffs, separated them at wide intervals, gave them a plentiful supply of ammunition with orders that as soon as their front had been cleared of the wounded, they should keep up a rapid fire and deceive the enemy as to our intentions. By this manoeuvre the whole of that little force which was left alive was safely taken down the cliffs, put into boats and taken back on board the battleships.

The landing at "Y" beach had been forced to withdraw, but it had in the main achieved its object. During the whole of the Sunday and Monday morning, it had held back a vastly superior number of the enemy and had relieved the pressure on the other points, where a footing had been gained by the Monday morning—a foothold which was fought for yard by yard, until at last a firm grip was maintained on the peninsula, and when any one can but dimly realize the enormous difficulties that had to be overcome, that three parts of the army sent to make that landing were but partially trained men, fighting 3,000 miles away from their base, that in the month of June the enemy was so badly battered that success was almost a certainty, but owing to lack of munitions and men our commander could not push home his advantage, it becomes all the more pitiful that such a glorious page in the history of the war should have to be turned down as a failure. If there were not many rewards given for personal bravery to the men who made that landing, it was not because there were no brave deeds done, but because so many officers had been killed that no recommendations could be sent in.

The following instances will show you the spirit which animated these men:

In my own vicinity during the night, I know of one officer, one sergeant and two men who had received severe scalp wounds, which, if they had wanted to, would have kept them out of further danger, who, after having their wounds attended to, voluntarily returned and took up their positions on the firing line.

I regret to say the officer and sergeant were killed early Monday morning.

The hand bombs set fire to the bushes in many places and the men in the vicinity of where these fires occurred got up

without orders, beat out the flames and lay down and continued with the fighting,

The regimental chaplain, whom I told you about, was indefatigable in his efforts to succor and help the wounded, but he became so excited and indignant that for a moment he forgot himself and started to swear, but he suddenly remembered, knelt down in the middle of all the firing and prayed.

It was just previous to the retirement being ordered, I was in the firing line and had come down to reload my rifle, when a Turkish hand grenade, landing on the ground close to my head, exploded and deprived me of my sight. At first I did not know my eyes were injured. Very fortunately for me, I did not lose consciousness. I managed to rid myself of my accoutrements, tie my bandage over my face and calling out to my superior that I was wounded, I crawled back through the bushes to the edge of the cliffs and waited there until I was found and assisted down to the beach. I was then taken back on board the ship *Amethyst* and that same evening transferred to the hospital ship *Guilford Castle*. After 12 days, I was landed at Port Said in Egypt and later transferred to Cairo, where I underwent several operations, some with the hope of saving the sight of my left eye, but unfortunately they were not successful. After a total period of five and one-half months in hospitals, I was discharged as permanently blind, and went to St. Dunstan's, the Training School for Blinded Soldiers in London. I have come from there to the United States to assist in the work of raising funds to alleviate the conditions of those, who, like myself, have been blinded in this war.