

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF FIRE SUPPORT AT ANZAC

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An army's tactical and operational performance in the opening campaign of a war is rooted in its pre-war structure, doctrine and training. Consequently, any consideration of fire support at Anzac must start with the foundations upon which the Australian and New Zealand artillery was built: the pre-war army, and the prevailing doctrine and training regime it operated under.

Rather than having a standing army of professionally trained regulars, for defence, New Zealand and Australia relied on the newly established, part-time, compulsory service Territorial Force (TF) and Citizen Force (CF) respectively, supplemented by a small, permanent force comprising staff officers, instructors, and a few artillery units, largely coastal garrison batteries. Training with British doctrine the artillery was regarded as an accessory to infantry fire tactics, much like had been done during the 19th Century. Nonetheless, the decade prior to the Great War (1914-1918) witnessed considerable reform in the British Army, with the artillery focussing on introducing better and heavier guns, and accuracy in gunnery. Doctrinal issues concerned with the deployment, and command and control of artillery on the battlefield, however, were not fully resolved by the time war broke out.

Tactically, the central issue confronting British field gunners was the issue of indirect versus direct fire support; that is, whether the guns would fire from concealed positions, or would continue to be pushed forward alongside the infantry and directly observe the target. The value of concealed positions was well understood, but the need for close and accurate fire support for the infantry, together with the argument that placing the guns in or immediately behind the firing line raised the morale of the infantry provided impetus for the direct fire school of thought that could not be ignored, and the British Army went to war in 1914 without any firm resolution of the matter. Coming from a very low professional base, the Australians and New Zealanders tended to favour the simplicity of direct fire, and although indirect methods were practiced occasionally, the officers lacked the experience to get into action quickly enough to render effective support.

Command and control of artillery was not clearly defined in British doctrine. Nominally, the control and tactical employment of the divisional artillery was vested in the divisional Commander Royal Artillery (CRA), a position only formally created in 1912, but he lacked the staff and communications to effectively control or coordinate his guns. The communication means were visual (semaphore, heliograph or lamps) which were dependent on line of sight and weather conditions, mounted orderlies or staff officers who could be killed or incapacitated relaying information, and telephone cable which while useful between the battery observation officers and the battery, especially in static positions, was not necessarily practical to control the divisional artillery during mobile operations; moreover they were susceptible to being cut by shellfire and traffic.

With no firm ruling on how their artillery brigades were to be deployed or controlled divisional commanders were left to their own devices. Some allocated their field artillery brigades to infantry brigadiers and ignored the CRA. Others tended to deploy and control the artillery as they deployed infantry brigades, and yet others kept their artillery as a reserve under the CRA until the battle developed, confusing fire reserves with gun reserves. Consequently, they went to war with a variety of

views on the issue. While both Australia and New Zealand had artillery brigade headquarters, training was concerned with the technical proficiency of gunners and battery deployments during annual camps, and command and control of batteries on operations appears not to have been addressed, let alone resolved.

Constrained by their respective Defence Acts neither the TF nor the CF could not be mobilised for overseas service. When war erupted, therefore, the authorities had to call for volunteers. It was a case of starting largely from scratch, although matters were partially alleviated with Australia's No 1 Permanent Battery, becoming the 1st Australian Field Artillery (AFA) Battery of the newly raised AIF, providing some level of proficiency in gunnery, while certain of the CF batteries volunteered almost to a man. Across the Tasman, about half the gunners in the NZEF had previous military training.

Australia raised three field artillery brigades, each of three batteries, and New Zealand raised one. Each of the batteries, however, had four 18-pounder guns rather than the six in a British field battery. Additionally New Zealand contributed a four gun battery of 4.5-inch Howitzers. The 1st Australian Division, therefore, went to Gallipoli with three field artillery brigades, but lacked the howitzer brigade and 60-pounder battery that were standard in the British infantry division, while the New Zealand and Australian (NZ&A) Division contained only those guns provided by New Zealand.

Despite the number of volunteers from the compulsory training schemes joining the AIF and NZEF batteries their level of training did not impress LTGEN Sir William Birdwood, GOC ANZAC. Viewing them, he remarked 'Their artillery too is very indifferent ...' and later '80 per cent of my Australian and 50 per cent of the NZ artillery have never yet seen a gun fired.' His BGRA recollected they were 'practically untrained ... Very few officers had ever shot a battery.' With only three months to improve, and a shortage of ammunition, the focus was on improving gun crew's proficiency. Combined arms training, and command and control of the divisional artillery in a war of manoeuvre they were expecting on Gallipoli was neglected.

At Gallipoli the 1st Australian Division's task was to seize the Sari Bair range. Landing immediately south of Anzac Cove, the 3rd Australian Infantry Brigade was to seize a covering position along Third Ridge from the range to the coast, followed by the 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade passing through to seize the heights further up the range. ANZAC would then advance east and cut the Ottoman north-south road communications.

The divisional artillery's tasks were not mentioned in the orders and instructions; they simply outlined the communications for naval fire support, and the number of horses and rounds per field gun to be disembarked. The 7th Indian Mountain Artillery Brigade, an ANZAC Corps Troops unit comprising two batteries each with six 10-pounder mountain guns, was to land immediately after the 3rd Infantry Brigade and take position on the 400 Plateau to support the covering force. The field guns would follow later with no specified task.

Foregoing a preliminary bombardment, the initial fire support was to be provided by the 2nd Naval Squadron, and several means of controlling the naval fire were implemented. HMS *Ark Royal* sent an aircraft aloft to observe, but it was limited in its ability to communicate with the ships, while HMS *Manica* provided a tethered balloon from which observers could communicate with the ship by telephone. Ashore, two flank radio stations were established to take fire tasks from the forward brigades and communicate them to the ships, while two army forward observers were designated as observation officers for the naval gunfire, employing telephone cable to link their observation posts with the radio stations. As a means of identifying the forward troops, the infantry carried red and yellow flags, which were to be waved slowly to and fro to request naval gunfire, and cease when

the fire was effective; the accuracy of which under this arrangement can only be imagined. Problems with identifying the location of forward troops made accurate naval gunfire difficult, while the flat trajectory of naval guns, together with the calibre of the heavier pieces, added further complications. Only if the ships could see the target, and the distance between the enemy and friendly troops allowed it, could the required effect be achieved. In the event, the only naval gunfire support fired on the 25 April was from HMS *Bacchante* firing on the single Ottoman field gun at Gaba Tepe.

Landing in darkness around 4.30am, the 3rd Infantry Brigade swept aside the Ottoman platoon above Anzac Cove, punching a gaping hole in the light Ottoman screen. Almost immediately, Colonel Sinclair-MacLagan, the brigade commander, put the brakes on the advance, ordering the brigade to halt and dig in along Second Ridge 900 metres inland, and 1600 metres short of the objective which lay undefended ahead of them. Returning to the beach he then diverted the 2nd Infantry Brigade away from the main range to the lower slopes of Second Ridge. Thus the whole *raison d'être* for the landing, seizing the Sari Bair range, was abandoned, turning the landing from an offensive operation into a defensive one, and handing the initiative to the Ottomans.

Constrained to a narrow, cramped beachhead of roughly 400 acres (161 hectares), and overlooked by the Ottoman positions, the beachhead had a marked effect on the artillery. Its shallowness and broken terrain offered limited guns positions, little room to manoeuvre, and restricted the number of guns that could be landed - resulting in 40% of ANZAC's field guns being sent to Helles to support the British. Further, the superior ground held by the Ottomans gave their gunners a distinct advantage, especially in counter-battery fire.

Problems arose with disembarking the artillery, with little control being exercised. The first Indian mountain guns, 26th (Jacob's) Battery, arrived around 10am, well after the 1st Division's three infantry brigades had landed. Taking post on the seaward edge of the 400 Plateau it came into action around noon, but by 2.30pm they were forced out of action by the Ottoman mountain guns firing from superior positions on Third Ridge. Several field guns had come ashore during the day, only to be turned back on the orders of MAJGEN William Bridges, GOC 1st Australian Division, partly because of the lack of suitable gun positions, and partly because he feared they might be captured. Eventually one gun of the 4th AFA Battery landed around 4.00pm and went into action at 6pm. The second mountain battery, the 21st (Kohat), only came ashore around 6pm. Thus for most of the day the Anzac infantry fought largely unsupported by their own artillery.

Guns began coming ashore on the 26th, but there was confusion and poor control resulting in no real order in landing them as complete brigades. Landed at 3am, one gun of the 1st AFA Battery went into action, but was re-embarked that evening. By 6am one section of the New Zealand Howitzer Battery had landed, with the second section arriving by 12pm. The 7th AFA Battery landed at 8am, eventually going into action immediately behind the infantry line, followed by the 8th AFA Battery, which although having one sub-section loaded on lighters at 2am, did not get ashore until 2.30pm. However, when a section of the 3rd AFA Battery was disembarked at 12.30pm, it was sent back to its transports by the CRA, as were one section each of the 2nd and 5th AFA batteries. Two more guns of the 4th AFA Battery and the other two from the 5th AFA Battery had better luck and stayed ashore. Finding positions for the artillery proved difficult, it wasn't until 8 May that the 1st Australian Division had 20 guns ashore, being the last ones landed - four Australian and one New Zealand field batteries having been sent to Helles during the first week in May because of a lack of gun positions at Anzac.

Having anticipated a war of manoeuvre, the ANZAC artillery was stuck with fighting on a confined, static front, presenting a host of difficulties. With limited gun positions, they took what they could find, often without regard to battery cohesion, leading to command and control issues. Some were positioned on Plugge's Plateau and MacLagan's Ridge above Anzac Cove, in direct view of

the infantry firing line clinging to the seaward edge of Second Ridge 900 metres away. Others occupied concealed positions at Shell Green, and several were pushed forward immediately behind or into the infantry front line in direct fire positions. Here the 7 AFA Battery, located on the infantry firing line and having fuzed their shrapnel shells at zero, did fearful execution on the night of 26 April, destroying a local Ottoman attack.

Command and control problems plagued the gunners. Early on divided control of the guns caused difficulties. It took time to lay telephone cables, thus initially, a rudimentary communication system linking only separate segments of the Corps artillery existed. On 3 May the BMRA 1st Australian Division Artillery noted, 'The necessity of [the] Artillery of [the] whole line of defence being under one control or at least all HQ being close together is very apparent and has been [the] cause of difficulty all through - there is no one person who knows what all guns are doing or can do ... Better communications between [the] batteries and [the infantry is] most necessary to prevent delay[s] caused by request[s] for fire coming through Aust[ralian] Div[ision] and NZ and A Div[ision] also [unreadable] to Div[isional]:Art[illery]: - There are too many sieves.'

The same day COL Talbot Hobbs, CRA 1st Australian Division, wrote 'It is regretted that the artillery up to this time have not been able to give more assistance to the infantry' He then listed the factors contributing to the problem: the unsuitability of the field guns in the terrain, observation and communication difficulties due to telephone lines being interrupted and broken; difficulty in distinguishing the enemy's trenches from their own due to their closeness; the inability of the field guns to search gullies; and Ottoman counter-battery.

It was decided to allot guns to sections of defence, whereby they would not be allowed to fire in any other section without special permission. By 8 May, the four defence sections were defined, with the Australian artillery taking the southern two, aligned with the two field brigades, and the New Zealander's taking the northern two. However, the guns in each division were better positioned to support the neighbouring division, but organising such support was difficult. Eventually, recognising the value of enfilading fire, New Zealand guns in the north provided fire support to the 1st Australian Division on the 400 Plateau in the centre, while Australian guns to the south did the same for the NZ&A Division's infantry in the north.

Dividing the area into sections provided the command and control framework for the remainder of the campaign. The tactical control of the divisional artillery remained under the CRA, however, infantry commanders made their requests for fire direct to the artillery brigade headquarters supporting them, and in ordinary circumstances these were met without reference to the divisional artillery headquarters. Additionally, artillery brigade headquarters had charts showing the dispositions and arcs of fire of all guns in the Anzac beachhead, together with information on the targets the various artillery units could engage. When fire was required from the guns in another section, the artillery brigade commander communicated his requirements through the divisional artillery headquarters. Rolling out telephone cables steadily improved communications, and hence command and control of fire. By mid-May all batteries, AFA brigade headquarters and the divisional artillery headquarters were linked, and tied in with the mountain guns, the New Zealand divisional artillery headquarters, and the naval observation officer, while direct lines ran from the respective infantry brigade headquarters to the AFA brigade supporting it. This gradually expanded as more artillery units deployed to Anzac, and by August an extensive system of telephone cables had been laid, with built in redundancy, linking the 1st Australian Divisional Artillery headquarters not only with the artillery brigades under command, but also with fixed observation stations and the 1st NZFA battery, which by then was established on Russell's Top and provided enfilade fire across the 1st Australian Division's front line on the 400 Plateau.

While communication between the artillery and infantry brigades within defence sections rapidly improved, coordination for support between the divisions still persisted. On 19 May the BMRA 1st Australian Division Artillery recorded 'there is still a lack of coordination between [the] NZ Art[illery] and our own try as we will we cannot get them to cover our centre from their position on [the] left.' The problem may have been the circuitous route of communications through three headquarters made switching targets quickly a difficult process; on one occasion a request for fire support did not reach the proper observing officer in the other division until the next day.

Gun positions were improved and tactics devised as the Anzac gunners strove to minimise the effect of Ottoman counter-battery fire. Faced with having to push guns up with the infantry firing line, alternate gun positions were prepared for each piece, requiring more telephone lines and adding to control difficulties. As the Anzac position developed, new positions were located further to the rear enabling these guns to provide most of the fire support, with those in the forward line firing only in emergencies. To respond to the Ottoman counter-battery fire, the Anzac batteries covered one another. Thus when one was fired on by an Ottoman battery, the enemy guns were engaged by another Anzac battery, and so on, which proved effective, demonstrating the communication system and control of fire worked well, while a mobile section, linked to the telephone system, operated along the newly constructed Artillery Road firing from different positions.

Faced with an unexpected and difficult situation the Anzac gunners displayed considerable innovation as they adapted to their environment to provide effective fire support to the infantry, and to counter the Ottoman batteries firing from superior ground to their front, and enfilade positions on the flanks.

The lessons for today extend back to the roots of the Australian and New Zealand artillery before the war. The most obvious is the need for thorough training before a force is committed to operations, and not only the technical training within batteries. Technical proficiency must be accompanied by tactical proficiency, and the whole command and control system must be trained and exercised in a variety of operational scenarios if fire support is to be rendered effectively and quickly.

To ensure effective and appropriate training is undertaken, well considered doctrine needs to be in place. Yet it must be flexible enough to cover a range of operational scenarios, such that the gunners are not confronted with an unexpected operational environment they need to adapt to on the run. In developing it, robust and continuing debate is required based on pragmatic assessments of the conditions under which the artillery are likely to fight, rather than adhering to preconceived ideas and emotive issues. But this debate must occur within an all arms fraternity so that the needs of the supported are considered, and the other arms are fully conversant with the capabilities of the artillery, and how they are able to support them. Ensuring the artillery remains a relevant and effective force in future operational environments is a matter for gunners to continually address.

From the campaign itself is the need for innovation and adaptation to the operational environment. While well considered doctrine covering a variety of operational scenarios will provide a sound basis for meeting various contingencies, it won't cover everything, and new challenges will crop up. The ability of today's gunners to adapt to new operational challenges will be crucial in providing effective fire support under any conditions.