SITREP - The August Offensives

Introduction
This paper sets out a short background on the lead up to the August Offensives - the landings; the stalemate period; the plan for the August Offensives; Ottoman intelligence; the formations and commanders involved and Turkish positions on the eve of the offensive.

The Lead Up to the Landings
After a tug of war between England and Germany about influence over Turkey, the Ottomans sided with Germany. The Ottoman Army had universal conscription since 1885. Turkish officers went sent to Staff College in Germany and the whole army was organised in line with the German army model. From 1913, after the Turkish defeats in the Balkan Wars, German military and naval advisors, headed by General Otto Liman von Sanders, set about reorganising the Ottoman Army. Inefficient commanders were replaced.

A combination of events, the commandeering of Turkish battleships being constructed in England and a request from Russia for assistance against Turkey, led Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, to persuade the British War Council that a bold stroke in the Dardanelles could force Turkey out of the alliance with the Central Powers.

After bombarding the outer forts in November 1914 the Allied fleet attempted to force the Dardanelles in February and March 1915 with a final assault on 18th March 1915, see Figure 1. All the attempts were unsuccessful.

The April Landings
After the failure of the naval attacks, ground forces were assembled. The British Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, appointed General Sir Ian Hamilton to command the 78,000-strong Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) that was to carry out the mission.
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The Mediterranean Expeditionary Force is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2 - MEF Orbat April 2015

Hamilton’s plan for the landings was for the 29th Division to land at Cape Helles at the southern end of the peninsula and for the Anzac Corps to land twenty kilometres north at Gaba Tepe. The first day objectives for the 29th Division was the feature Achi Baba (just north east of the village of Krithia) and for the Anzac Corps the high feature of Chunuk Bair on the Sari Bair range and the third ridge running south from the Sari Bair range. The forces at both landing points failed to reach their objectives. The 29th Division, despite outflanking landings, made little headway against entrenched Turkish forces. Even when reinforced with the French Division, and for the Second Battle of Krithia the 2nd Australian Brigade and the New Zealand Brigade, three attempts to advance through the village of Krithia and capture the Achi Baba feature failed.

At Anzac, the commander of the covering force, the 3rd Australian Brigade, on landing quickly decided to dig in on the second ridge rather than pushing on to the Third Ridge as ordered. That tactical error was compounded when commander 2nd Brigade deployed his force on the southern end of the second ridge rather than occupying the Chunuk Bair feature on the Sari Bair range. This changed the operation from an offensive action to a defensive action. Isolated groups of Australian troops were pushed back from The Sari Bair heights and from the Third Ridge over the course of the day.

The landing at Anzac reverted to a state of siege till the commencement of the August Offensives. In May the Turks attacked the Anzac position in great numbers only to suffer 10,000 casualties of whom some 3,000 were killed. A truce was arranged to clear corpses from no man’s land because of the health threat to both sides. Both sides had learned that infantry assaults with inadequate artillery support would result in stalemate after punitive casualties to the attackers. Casualties, mainly from sniper fire and artillery shells, continued to be suffered in this period of stalemate. By mid June Ottoman intelligence knew another assault from the sea was being planned but could not determine where on the peninsula or on the mainland it would fall.
The Plan for the August Offensives

The British and French forces at Helles could not break through or outflank the Turkish defences. Nor could the Australians and New Zealanders break out of their defensive positions along the second ridge. This led Hamilton to pursue a new plan to secure the Sari Bair Range and capture high ground on Hill 971 and Chunuk Bair, the original objectives.

The overall plan was for:

• a feint attack at Helles;
• a breakout by two columns north of the Anzac position to capture Hill 971 and Chunuk Bair;
• once the New Zealanders had captured Chunuk Bair they were to assault down the ridge across Battleship Hill and assault the Turkish entrenchments on Baby 700 from the rear;
• simultaneously the Australian Light Horsemen were to assault Baby 700 from Walker’s ridge across The Nek;
• a feint attack the evening before at the southern end of the Anzac position at Lone Pine to draw Turkish reserves away from the objectives on the Sari Bair range;
• supporting attacks against Turkish Quinn’s and German Officers Trench to remove the threat of enfilade fire across The Nek
• a supporting attack against the Chessboard;
• a landing at Suvla Bay by the British IXth Corps of Kitchener’s New Army to secure the Anafarta Hills north of the Sari Bair range and establish a firm base to support further operations.

The overall plan is shown here in Figure 3:

Figure 3 - The Plan for the August Offensives
The order of battle of the Anzac Corps in August is shown here in Figure 4:

**Figure 4 - The Anzac Corps for the August Offensives**

The order of battle of the 1st Australian Division of the Anzac Corps for the August Offensives is shown here in Figure 5:

**Figure 5 - The 1st Aus Div for the August Offensives**

The order of battle of the New Zealand and Australian Division of the Anzac Corps for the August Offensives is shown here in Figure 6:

**Figure 6 - The NZ & Aus Div for the August Offensives**
The order of battle of the Anzac Corps’ Corps & Attached Troops in August is shown here in Figure 7:

**Figure 7 - The Anzac Corps’ Corps & Attached Troops for the August Offensives**

**The Plan for the Assaults from Anzac**

The plan was for two columns to break out north of Anzac then turn east and climb the spurs up to the Sari Bair range and capture the dominating features of Hill 971 and Chunuk Bair. The New Zealanders of the right assaulting column, on capturing Chunuk Bair, were to assault down the ridge attacking Baby 700 from the rear. Simultaneously the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade was to make a frontal assault on Baby 700 from Walker’s Ridge across The Nek. The routes to the objectives of the two assaulting columns are shown here in Figure 8:

**Figure 8 – The Objectives of the Northern Assaults from Anzac**
Command & Control

Command of the Offensive was given to Major General Sir A. Godley KCMG, commander of the New Zealand and Australian Division, see Figure 6. The commander of the Left Assaulting Column was Major General H. V. Cox, commander of the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, see Figure 7. The commander of the Right Assaulting Column was Colonel Johnston, commander of the New Zealand Brigade, see Figure 6.

The Left Assaulting Column

The left assaulting column had two components, a covering force and an assault force.

The left covering force, the 40th British Brigade, is shown here in Figure 9:

![Figure 9 – The Left Covering Force](image)

The task of the left covering force was to secure Demakjelik Bair, the left flank of the planned assault.

The left assault force is shown here in Figure 10:

![Figure 10 – The Left Assault Force](image)

The order of march of Cox’s left assault column was - 4th Aus Bde - 29th Ind Bde (part of Godley's corps reserve under command for movement) - 39 (BR) Bde. Cox ordered Monash to locate his Headquarters in the middle of the column.
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The 39th and 40th brigades were from the 13th (Western) Division, part of Kitchener’s New Army, which landed at Anzac in July.

The task of the left assaulting column was to capture Hill 971 and Hill Q.

**Right Assaulting Column**

The right assaulting column had two components, a covering force and an assault force.

The right covering force, the NZ Mounted Rifles, is shown here in Figure 11:

![Figure 11 – The Right Covering Force](image)

The task of the right covering force was to provide guides to both assaulting columns and to clear the Turkish outposts from the foothills and place picquets.

The right assault force is shown here in Figure 12:

![Figure 12 – The Right Assault Force](image)

The task of the right assault force was to capture Chunuk Bair between 0230 and first light 7th August. The force was then to assault down the ridge across Battleship Hill and attack Baby 700 from the rear whilst the Australian 3rd Light Horse Brigade (fighting dismounted) assaulted Baby 700 frontally from across The Nek at 0430.

**The Attack on Lone Pine**

The attack at Lone Pine was intended to be a feint to draw Turkish reserves away from the objectives on the Sari Bair range. The 1st Australian Brigade was allotted the task.
The orbat of the brigade is shown in Figure 13:

Figure 13 - The 1st Aus Bde Attack at Lone Pine

The intensive battle which lasted for four nights and three days resulted in the Australians holding the northern end of Lone Pine at the cost of over 2,000 casualties. The feint however did not deceive Liman von Sanders who ordered reserves from Saros and Helles to force march to the Sari Bair range once the Turkish commanders had decided not to continue the fight to regain the Lone Pine position. This was confirmed from the actions of the two Allied covering forces and the reports of their own (the 14th Regiment from Demakjelic Bair to Abdul Rahman Bair and Major Willmer’s detachment at Suvla – Anafarta) that the greater threat was coming immediately north of the old Anzac perimeter.

Supporting Attacks

A series of attacks were planned for the night 6/7th August. These attacks were intended to capture Turkish positions at the northern end of the Second Ridge and around the head of Monash Valley.

The first attack was an assault on German Officer’s Trench from Steele’s Post at midnight by the 6th Battalion of the 2nd Brigade (from Victoria). The composition of the force is shown in Figure 14:

Figure 14 – 8th Bn Attacking Force on German Officer’s Trench

The objective was to capture a Turkish MMG which enfiladed the Nek. The failure to do so was 'the first card to fall' in the failure of the remaining attacks.
The Plan for the Landings at Suvla

Additional reinforcements were provided by Kitchener in support of Hamilton’s plan for an Allied breakout from Anzac Cove. The main component of the reinforcement was IX Corps, based on the New Army units raised by Kitchener, and commanded by Lieutenant General Sir F W Stopford. As well, the 29th Division was transferred from Helles to IX Corps at Suvla.

The orbat of IX Corps is shown here in Figure 15:

![IX Corps Order of Battle August 1915](image)

The attached troops of IX Corps are shown here in Figure 16:

![IX Corps Attached Tps August 1915](image)

However the cramped beachhead itself at Anzac could not support the additional 30,000 troops. Thus a fresh landing site was selected further north on the Aegean coastline at Suvla Bay, with the aim of securing the Anafarta Hills and establishing a base for further operations.

Suvla Bay was large and ideal for the landing of a sizeable number of additional troops. Directly in front of the bay was the shallow Salt Lake, dry in August (but ill-suited for an infantry advance), and beyond that the flat Suvla plain that would serve for subsequent troop deployment and the establishment of a firm base.
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Enemy Positions August

In the middle of July, the Fifth Ottoman Army at the Dardanelles was reorganised by its German commander, Liman von Sanders. The Asian Group, consisting of three divisions supported by the Canakkale Gendarme Battalion, was positioned on the eastern side of the Dardanelles to cover von Sander's left flank. Six divisions were positioned on the south of the Gallipoli peninsula opposing the Helles bridgehead. Four divisions - the 5th, 9th, 16th and 19th - were defending at Anzac. At Sulva - Anafarta, near Anzac, Major Willmer's Covering Force consisted of four battalions, two of infantry and two of gendarmes with artillery and cavalry. Further north, the 4th Calvary Brigade defended the Tayfur region. The Saros Group covering von Sander's right flank was at Bolayir, Enez and Kavak and consisted of the 6th, 7th and 12th divisions of the 16th Army Corps.

By the end of July, Esad Pasha, commander III Corps, had placed the 14th Regiment as a covering force in the area north of Anzac with 1/41 battalion forward in posts along the foothills and the other two battalions on Abdul Rahman Bair to Hill Q. Sanders moved the 11th Division from the eastern bank of the Dardanelles to the hills near Anzac and combined the 11th Division with the 4th and 8th Divisions to form an Army corps under Faik Pasha.

On 4th August, Turks at Anzac noticed activity between Lone Pine and Gaba Tepe. Australians were digging new trenches parallel to their lines and new advance lines. The same process was reported at Cape Helles. British troops were building new piers on the beaches there. Meanwhile, the Turkish build up continued. The number of the Turks on the peninsula reached its highest figure, almost 150,000 men.

Author’s Note

The maps included in this article are from the following publication:

David W Cameron, Australian Army Campaign Series 10, The August Offensive at Anzac 1915, (Australian Army History Unit 2011)

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Lieutenant Colonel Peter Sweeney RFD (Ret’d)