

Gallipoli and Swimming

The 1915 landing at Gallipoli has assumed a mythological place in the Australian story. Despite defeat it is a national "coming of age" story, when for the first time Australians and New Zealanders saw themselves as other than "mother country colonials".

In the same way swimming has a place in the concept of Australians as outdoorsy, physical types (despite much obesity-related evidence to the contrary!). The Australian Crawl is the name given to the swimming stroke most commonly used today (the 'front crawl')

Sometime between 1870 and 1890, John Arthur Trudgen learned the front crawl from Native Americans during a trip to South America. (The exact date is disputed, but is most often given as 1873.) However, Trudgen mistakenly used (in Britain) the more common sidestroke (scissor) kick instead of the flutter kick used by the Native Americans. This hybrid stroke was called the Trudgen. Because of its speed the stroke quickly became popular.

The Trudgen was improved by the Australian-born son of swimming teacher, "Professor" Richard (Fred, Frederick) Cavill, champion swimmer Richmond (Dick) Cavill (1884–1938). While he and his brother "Tums" developed the stroke independently, they were later inspired by Alick Wickham, a young Solomon Islander resident in Sydney who swam a version of the crawl stroke that was popular in his home in the Roviana Lagoon. This modified Trudgen stroke became known as the Australian crawl.

So, combine the Gallipoli legend, and the Australian predilection for swimming, and what happens?

"Swimming in the sea was popular with the men at Anzac particularly as their daily water allowance left little for washing either themselves or their clothes. As the weather turned hot, the beach sometimes looked like a holiday resort. The Turks began lobbing shells into the sea amongst the bathers, but the men continued to swim there. " - from Patrick Carlyon, *The Gallipoli Story*. Penguin 2003

Jack Buntine, a Gallipoli survivor said in an interview:

"Taking risks in life is recommended; after all, you might be killed crossing the road - but the risks that Buntine took demonstrated a devil-may-care attitude. "Oh, we used to go swimming' at Gallipoli and they would be shootin' at us. You'd see bullets goin' in the water around you - but they didn't worry me. Johnny Turk was not going to stop me swimmin'."

Below: Beach scene, Anzac Cove



Below: Soldiers swimming from barges, Anzac Cove. As we see below, those soldiers included the British Commandeer of the Australian And NZ troops, Lieutenant Genral William Birdwood.



Below: Birdwood swimming at Anzac Cove, May 1915. "General Birdwood enjoyed a swim when possible. In the water, naked like everyone else, he was sometimes mistaken for a lowly private. Journalist Phillip Schuler wrote that one day a canvas pipe from a water-barge fell into the sea. The barge-man, not recognising the general, yelled at him: 'Well lend a fellow a *&^%* hand to get the *&^%\$^ thing up.' Birdwood did not punish the barge-man for his rudeness. Rather, he helped out and later delighted in re-telling the story." Patrick Carlyon, Penguin 2003.



Below: The beach at Anzac Cove.

