

# Naked diggers seek relief from bugs

**Name:** Frank Boyes

**Date:** 1915-1918

**Unit:** 14th Btn, 3rd Brigade AIF

**Location:** Gallipoli, France

The sight of Australian diggers walking naked up the beach at Gallipoli would have caused great amusement had it not been for the seriousness of the situation.

And it must have had the Turks wondering what was going on, too.

Second Lieutenant Frank Boyes wrote of this event after the war but went on to explain why it had happened.

"We landed on Gallipoli in what we were wearing and continued to wear it day and night until the socks were the first garments to become unwearable, and they were cast out and we went barefoot in our boots," he wrote.

"We discarded our tunics during the day as the weather became hotter, and working and living in earthen trenches, while sometimes sweating profusely caused our pants and thick pure woollen shirts to become even worse than filthy."

"We got only sufficient fresh water, in fact, on some days barely enough to drink, so washing garments was out of the question, and so the only alternative was to get down to the beach and wash our garments and ourselves in the brine, which as far as our garments was concerned made little difference."

Lt Boyes said their turn for the beach trip occurred about once in 10 or 14 days.

"The Turks had a battery of guns, each of which we called 'Beachy Bill' which could land shells on any given spot of more than half a dozen men congregated for more than a few seconds. So, it might happen that one's trip to the beach was a 'washout'."

When the men reached the water's edge, they hastily undressed and washed and wrung out their pants, shirts and other garments, then spread them out on the shingle while they washed or indulged in a swim. Not having time to let their clothes dry properly because of the Turkish shelling and objecting to wearing wet clothes, they would put on their hats and boots and start off back up to the trenches, swinging a shirt in one hand and pants in the other to help them dry as quickly as possible.

"It was a man's world as there were no women or children within our boundaries to be considered and the Officers right up through to General Birdwood himself did not seem to worry about our dress or undress so long as we could and would fight the enemy when necessary."

"But, the sight of those men (I did it too) clad only in boots and hat walking back from the beach swinging their pants and shorts is a sight I have never forgotten."

Another sight never to be forgotten was to see men - naked or partly clad - seated in the sun with a garment spread over their knees, pressing intently at the seams on the inside of the garment. This was known as "chatting" and with some, was an almost daily occurrence.

"There were parasites which caused an abominable itch to which ever part of the skin where they operated," Lt Boyes wrote. "They lived and bred mainly in the seams of the inner garments and as there was no hot water or chemicals available for their control or destruction the field was open for them to multiply and flourish. The best control means available was to wear the clothing inside out and then there were no seams next to the skin for the pest to hide away in and breed. This I did with my flannel shirt, but I simple could not come at wearing my trousers inside out, even though many of the other men did. It simply looked too awful."

Lt Boyes said immersing the clothing in the sea water made no difference - indeed some men declared that it gave the pest increased vitality. When the troops left Gallipoli and went to France, there were facilities for washing and fumigating the clothing which made life more liveable. He declared

"We veterans of the 1st War were unanimous in declaring that the chats on Gallipoli ware harder to endure than all the Turks, tucker and all the other conditions combined."