

Chronicle

We have left the port at Lemnos and I'm lying in my bunk,
 while there's singing from the deck above my head.
 I emerge to gleaming moonlight, see the mountain's silhouette,
 and a flashing lamp that fills my heart with dread,
 while astern there sails another ship—I see its blackened shape
 as it rides the endless undulating swells—
 we are heading north, it's freezing cold, and now we kill the lights
 as we make our way towards the Dardanelles...

We have passed the point of Imbros and the mist is rolling in,
 with the eerie shadowed moon positioned low.
 It's as if they know we're coming, for a searchlight splits the night,
 then two others probe with iridescent glow.
 We are flanked by other ships in line on port and starboard sides—
 in suspenseful silence everyone is borne.
 A destroyer passes, leaves a wake of silver as she glides,
 and the pale horizon shows it's nearly dawn...

As the time to disembark grows near we quietly fall in,
 and the roll is called in urgent whispered breath;
 I am wondering which ones of us will make it through the night
 and whose destiny it is to meet with death.
 Now the thunder of the guns is clear and pellets whip the sea—
 with a calm and ordered purpose, quashing fear,
 as we disembark down ladders into waiting boats below
 we are struggling with our clumsy, heavy gear...

We are under heavy fire, noise immense—at last we land,
 finding harsh terrain of soaring cliffs and rock;
 but we're young and full of fervour, ready now to take our stand,
 and determined that the foe will get a shock!
 Now it's hailing lead—the beach is strewn with wounded, dying men,
 while stampeding hordes ignore impending doom;
 there are boats discharging more, a constant rattle from the hills,
 and the ships are roaring broadsides from the gloom...

We are ordered to advance today, and summon all our strength
 when the urgent cry goes up of, "Charge the Turk!"
 So we scream inside our respirators, dodge exploding shells,
 and despite our abject terror do not shirk.
 Overhead our planes are swooping low with great horrendous din;
 we proceed at speed with hand grenades and guns,
 but like skittles many boys are felled, their limbs flung everywhere—
 an appalling end for loyal ANZAC sons...

It is dark and we are crouched in dug outs quietly, subdued
after blazing strikes, bombardment by a throng
over flame-swept ground, through mass of flying earth and blinding smoke,
simply following the orders passed along.
There are calls for stretcher bearers—how the hell will they get through,
see to navigate each sheer and sandy slope?
We are thin and weak as kittens, and the suffocating fumes
of destruction are diminishing our hope...

We're existing here in hell with carnage scattered all around,
every one of us unmoving where we lie—
I was speaking to a soldier only half an hour ago
when I saw his face explode against the sky.
We have swarmed towards the enemy with slaughter on our minds
and our bayonets have slashed their yielding flesh,
while our wounded grow in numbers on this unforgiving land
as they beg for mercy, roll and wildly thresh...

I am sprawling with the rest of them in this disgusting trench,
where the rats are feasting now on grisly food.
It is filled with stagnant water and a foul and ghastly stench,
and I struggle to maintain my fortitude.
The mosquitoes and infernal omnipresent flies and fleas
meet in teeming clouds of black around my head;
it's no wonder that so many have been struck down by disease—
we await a truce to bury all our dead...

We are living in a realm of torment no-one could conceive,
while the Reaper stalks whichever way we turn
with the lack of food and water, snipers, sickness and despair—
not a chance of sweet respite for which we yearn.
There are men of skin and bone, their flesh a mass of septic sores
and our lives are now so savage, grim and plain—
so we hold on tight to humour, thoughts of those we love back home
to avoid the sorry plight of the insane...

We've been ordered to evacuate—tonight we'll leave this place!
In a ruse the enemy could not suspect
we have rigged the guns, continued playing sport to set the stage—
so they're unaware, unready to deflect.
But we're torn because our mates will sleep not knowing we have gone,
and for those who stay alive this knowledge kills,
for it's tough to turn our backs on countless known and nameless graves
marked by poignant mounds and crosses on the hills...

I am resting in a bunk again reflecting on the pain,
all the carnage we are leaving far behind,
and the so-called guts and glory of each bitter war campaign—
for the damage is to body, soul and mind.
When the noise of fighting ceases on this doomed and fatal shore,
will the birds return to sing, build nests and toil?
Or will gloomy clouds of darkness hover, nevermore to fade
while the cries of vengeance echo from the soil?...

Here I sit on this old rocking chair considering the past,
tracing faded words with wrinkled shaking hands.
Though it's years ago, such memories are truly meant to last—
for the legend that emerged forever stands.
Ah, Gallipoli! You ravaged us and stole so many lives
and deprived us of our innocence and youth;
but you cannot crush the spirit that was birthed upon your shores,
nor escape its recognition, pride and truth...

Now the war is long since over and I'm lying here alone,
while there's singing from the telly near my bed.
I emerge from ancient writings, glimpse the trees in silhouette—
then a sudden dazzling beacon shines ahead!
Through enfeebled eyes I comprehend a dim and blackened shape
riding undulating swells that pledge release.
There they stand, those proud battalions—time to sign my final page
and advance towards the everlasting peace.

