The Australian Flying Corps (AFC) was still in its infancy when the first Australians went ashore at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915. Although a Half-Flight had been dispatched to join the concurrent campaign against Turkish forces in Mesopotamia (Iraq), no units or individual AFC personnel were available for the Gallipoli landings. Ground fighting at the Dardanelles very likely inspired several soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force to subsequently transfer to the evolving air arm—among them future air marshals George Jones and Roy Drummond, and Captain Sir Ross Smith—but the campaign itself offered few opportunities for members of the Australian services to experience war in the air. One who did, however, was Captain A.H.K. Jopp of the 1st Australian Division.

Because Britain’s Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, was reluctant to send Royal Flying Corps aircraft to support operations at Gallipoli, this role fell initially to a single squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), later expanded to two RNAS wings totalling more than 50 aircraft. While there were sufficient navy pilots (including Charles O. Gilmour (1892-1940) from Somerset, Tasmania), at first there were few trained observers for directing naval gunfire. This shortage was made good by selecting volunteer midshipmen from the Navy and artillerymen from the Army. As a result, Captain Keith Jopp took to the skies over Gallipoli for the duration of the campaign in aircraft of the RNAS.

When World War I started, 24-year-old Jopp already had six years’ service in the Militia, serving with the Royal Australian Artillery in Sydney. Eight days after recruitment for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) began on 10 August 1914, he enlisted as a Lieutenant. At Brisbane late the next month, he embarked from Brisbane with the 7th Field Battery in the troop transport Rangatira. In Egypt he volunteered for service with No 3 Squadron, RNAS, led by the now-legendary Commander C.R. Samson. As observer, he spotted for the ships’ guns engaging Turkish defensive positions and the logistical network delivering vital supplies to the peninsula.

On 30 August 1915 Jopp was flying with Samson, by then commanding No 3 Wing, while observing for the monitor M-15 during the bombardment of Akbashi Liman where two enemy steamers were unloading supplies. From a height of 6000 feet Jopp watched as the monitor’s first shot fell 800 yards short of the target, and the second fell on the beach nearby. Jopp sent corrections to the monitor and the range was found. As the next shell splashed into the sea, a terrible panic ensued in the harbour as loading was abandoned and workmen fled to the hills. The ships began to make for the Asiatic shore, but from a range of 18 000 yards the monitor managed to hit one steamer with its eighth shot, despite the intervening hills. The next shot hit the second steamer. One vessel sank while the other was engulfed in fire. As a result, the Turkish command ordered that daylight work at the port was to cease except on important occasions.

In addition to directing gun fire from the air, Jopp also participated in bombing both strategic and tactical targets. On 24 November he took part in a raid on the Ferejik rail junction where the Salonika-Constantinople railway joined with the branch line from Dedeagach. The attack resulted in damage to the permanent trackway.
causing severe disruption to supply lines. When one of these missions discovered a large encampment of enemy troops at Kara Bunar, Jopp served as the observer in the aircraft subsequently dispatched to bomb this target. They dropped a 112-pound bomb that demolished three tents, while a further bomb killed a large number of men seeking shelter in a nearby ravine. As a result, the camp was abandoned soon afterwards.

Although infrequent, aerial combat was also a part of Jopp’s experience as a flyer. On 10 August Flight Commander Richard Bell-Davies, RN, and Jopp in a Henry Farman aircraft encountered a German machine over the Anzac position. The opposing pilot did not see the approach of Bell-Davies’ aircraft, and he was able to get close behind him. Jopp was armed with a rifle and began firing at the aircraft. On the fifth shot the pilot looked around before his aircraft went into a vertical dive and escaped. Australian troops watching below cheered, as they thought the enemy had been shot down. On another occasion Jopp was up in a Henry Farman spotting for the monitor when he saw an enemy aircraft. His pilot was again able to approach fairly closely behind the enemy’s tail before being discovered. Despite the aircraft diving to 20 feet above the ocean, they were able to remain with their quarry as Jopp attacked their aircraft all the way back to its base at Galata. Once again, their efforts met with no success.

During these missions Jopp also came under enemy fire which on one occasion succeeded in forcing his aircraft down. During a reconnaissance mission over the Suvla Bay area with Samson, their Maurice Farman aircraft was hit in the engine by a piece of shrapnel. Samson managed to get the aircraft down on the only piece of suitable land, just south of the salt lake at Chocolate Hill (Yilgin Tepe). The magneto was found to have been completely destroyed, but the engine also suffered further damage when the Turkish artillery began to bombard the field. As a result, further damage to two cylinders was done by fragments, but the airframe itself and the crew were otherwise unharmed. Samson and Jopp rode to the landing pier at Kura Chesme, where they caught the mail trawler back to the air base on Imbros.

Following the successful evacuation of the allied beachheads established at Anzac, Suvla and Helles, No 3 Wing was sent back to England and its members on temporary assignment returned to duty with their various services. Captain Jopp returned to the artillery of the Australian 1st Division. For his services during the Gallipoli campaign he was mentioned in dispatches. Not long after the AIF arrived in France in 1916, he was promoted Major, mentioned in dispatches for a second time and awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Throughout his time at the Western Front he was plagued by bouts of malaria contracted in either Egypt or on Gallipoli. Eventually he was released from active duty, returning to Australia in October 1917. After the war Jopp took up residence in Durban, South Africa.

• An Australian artillery officer, Captain Keith Jopp, played an important part in the air war during the Gallipoli campaign.
• The Australian Flying Corps was engaged in a concurrent campaign against Turkish forces in Mesopotamia.
• Captain Jopp’s story illustrates that, even in the earliest days of World War I, air power was demonstrating the multi-role versatility that was to transform modern warfare.

Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the change in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.
— Giulio Douhet, ‘The Command of the Air.’