

In the shadow of Gallipoli? Amphibious warfare in the inter-war period.

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Within the field of popular history there is a general acceptance that the losses incurred by the landing forces at Gallipoli convinced most military officers in the inter-war period that opposed amphibious landings were not possible in conditions of modern war. This view is usually accompanied by statements congratulating either the US Marine Corps or the Japanese armed forces for refusing to accept this assessment and for developing the equipment and doctrine required to overcome enemy defences at the beach thereby spearheading the development of amphibious warfare as a modern military capability.

Typical of such views are the following:

*This dismal experience [at Gallipoli] made a profound impression on military thinking...the general conclusion was that large scale amphibious operations against a defended shore, especially conducted in daylight, were almost certain to be suicidal.*¹

*Although some American marine and naval officers viewed the operation differently, the disaster at Gallipoli caused a general belief among all military planners that massed amphibious assaults were impossible.*²

For many years such ideas were accepted as established fact and are often considered sufficient explanation for the lack of a significant amphibious capability in Britain at the outbreak of war in 1939. This view is reflected in the work of both Arthur J. Marder and Stephen Roskill, two of the most respected naval historians of the last century.³ As recently as November 2000 Professor Robert O’Neill stated that Britain ‘*abandoned amphibious operations after the Gallipoli debacle*’.⁴

Other writers, such as David MacGregor, have argued that although Gallipoli did not entirely discredit amphibious operations it nevertheless had a profound effect on thinking about such operations. Indeed, MacGregor claims that, rather than thinking too little about amphibious warfare in the inter-war period, the British thought too much about it and in doing so they were led into unwarranted pessimism. He

¹ P.A. Crowl, and J.A. Isley, *The US Marines and Amphibious War – Its theory, and its practice in the Pacific*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951) p.20

² J.A. Lorelli, *To Foreign Shores. US Amphibious Operations in World War II*, (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 1995) p.9

³ A.J Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran. Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace, 1915-1940*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) p.52. S. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, Vol.1, (London: Collins, 1968) pp.539-540.

⁴ . Robert O’Neill, ‘*The Development of Amphibious Warfare*’ The Hudson Lecture, Oxford University, 16 November 2000.

concludes that British planners assumed that opposed landings in daylight were extremely hazardous and that as a result amphibious operations would have to be kept small and simple and would take place only in the dark or at dawn in order to secure tactical surprise. This, he explains, is why the British were so poorly prepared for the large-scale opposed landings that were conducted in World War Two.⁵

There is an element of truth in this. Amphibious operations were certainly neglected in Britain between the wars and great strides were made in both the United States and Japan. However, more recent research has demonstrated that significant progress was also made in Britain despite the shadow of Gallipoli.⁶ By the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939 the British had developed the basic doctrine and equipment that they would need in the difficult years that followed. That this is often overlooked is a reflection of the fact that amphibious operations received a lower priority in Britain than in either America or Japan. However, this had less to do with Gallipoli than to assumptions about the nature of future conflict and likely opponents. Whereas both Japan and the United States could postulate convincing scenarios where amphibious forces might prove vital this was not the case in Britain before 1940.

Amphibious Warfare and the British 1918-1939

Much of the traditional literature devoted to this topic suggests that the British abandoned amphibious warfare after their chastening experience at Gallipoli and did not seriously study amphibious operations until the outbreak of World War II. In large part this reflects a reliance on the work of Fergusson and Maund both of whom were closely involved with amphibious warfare during the war.⁷ Fergusson had been an officer in the Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) while Maund was a founder member of the Inter-Services Training and Development Centre (ISTDC). The ISTDC and COHQ, established in 1938 and 1940 respectively, laid much of the essential groundwork for the successful employment of amphibious warfare by British forces in World War II.

Both Maund and Fergusson were in an advantageous position to offer insight into this process. Fergusson's book, *The Watery Maze* is an unofficial staff history of COHQ and he was given access to all of their files during his research. *The Watery Maze* and Maund's book, *Assault from the Sea*, are valuable sources but both tend to under-play the amount of progress that had been made prior to 1938 and in doing so they provide a false impression of views towards amphibious warfare in the inter-war period and of the impact of Gallipoli. In particular, Maund's book lays a great emphasis on his own achievements, causing one observer to entitle a book review, '*Sic Transit Gloria Maundi*'.⁸

⁵ D. MacGregor, 'The Use, Miss-use and Non-Use of History: the Royal Navy and the Operational Lessons of the First World War', in *The Journal of Military History*, Vo. 56, October 1992.

⁶ . see Richard Harding, 'Learning from the War: The Development of British Amphibious Capability, 1919-29' in *The Mariner's Mirror* Vol. 86, No.2 (May 2000) pp173-185 and D Massam, *British Maritime Strategy and Amphibious Capability 1900-1940*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1995)

⁷ L.E.H. Maund, *Assault from the Sea*, (London: Methuen, 1949) B Fergusson, *Watery Maze – The Story of Combined Operations*, (London: Collins, 1961)

⁸ Robert Heintz Jr., in *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 1951.

More recent research has demonstrated that the British made great strides in the development of amphibious warfare despite their experiences at Gallipoli. Research by Donald Bittner, David MacGregor and Kenneth Clifford has shed new light on this period although all have been criticised for drawing inappropriate comparisons between the British and the American experience.⁹ One source of this criticism has been David Massam, whose own study of British approaches towards amphibious warfare in the period between 1900 and 1940 currently provides the best analysis of this topic.¹⁰ Massam demonstrates that, contrary to accepted opinion, Gallipoli neither distorted nor discouraged British thinking about amphibious warfare. Indeed, if anything, despite the losses incurred at V Beach and elsewhere on 25 April 1915, the experience of Gallipoli encouraged the military to accept that opposed landings were tactically viable, something that was doubted prior to this time.

Massam argues that Gallipoli was a positive experience for the British, resulting in improved relations between the services. The operation also proved that major amphibious operations were possible. The best illustration of this was the serious preparations undertaken for a '*Great Landing*' on the coast of Belgium in 1916-1917. This landing was designed to outflank the German trenches in Flanders, posing a threat to their rear areas and facilitating a breakout that the land forces had been unable to achieve alone. By contributing to the seizure of the U-boat bases at Ostend, Bruges and Zeebrugge the landing could also make an important contribution to the war at sea. In Massam's own words:

The history of the Belgian coastal plans throughout 1916-1917 makes it clear that there was no determined backlash against amphibious operations in the immediate aftermath of the Gallipoli campaign. Schemes involving the landing of between one and three divisions of infantry later supplemented with artillery and tanks, were repeatedly approved by the Admiralty and General Staff: by the naval and military commanders from whose commands the forces would be drawn: and by the commanders entrusted with the operation.¹¹

One scheme called for the landing of a division in three brigade-sized columns on a three-mile front between Nieuport and Ostend. The landing would be in conjunction with a land offensive from the Allied lines southeast of Dunkirk. The columns would land from three specially constructed pontoons measuring 540 ft by 30 ft. These pontoons would be pushed by pairs of *Prince Rupert* class monitors armed with 12-inch guns, with an additional 14-inch gun monitor in reserve. A 100 ft long wooden raft would be secured to the front of each pontoon with the aim of achieving a dry landing for the troops. Each pontoon would also carry three tanks, artillery, wagons, hand-carts and bicycles. The emphasis on transport showed that commanders appreciated that securing the beach was only the first stage of the operation prior to exploitation inland. The Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service would provide air cover and the maritime force would provide gunfire support. The

⁹ D.F. Bittner, 'Britannia's Sheathed Sword. The Royal Marines and Amphibious Warfare in the Inter-War Years – A Passive Response', in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 55, July 1991. K.J. Clifford, *Amphibious Warfare Development in Britain and America from 1920 – 1940*, (New York: Edgewood, 1983). D MacGregor, op. cit.

¹⁰ Massam, op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid. p.75

monitors were particularly well suited for this role. Motor launches would provide smoke cover for the assaulting force and arrangements for accurate navigation were worked out. Trials with the landing pontoon were carried out in England and showed that a speed of 6 knots could be achieved in ideal conditions. However, these trials were conducted in calm weather. It is doubtful whether the bulky and cumbersome combination of monitor-pontoon-raft could have affected a safe landing in any kind of seaway or under fire from German shore batteries.¹²

Despite this, the failure to undertake the operation owed more to the conservatism of Douglas Haig than to reservations about its tactical viability. Haig believed that the allocated forces could be used more effectively on the land in a conventional manner and was reluctant to open up a new front in Belgium. As a result, plans for the landing remained tied to an advance on the land that, in the event, never took place. It is possible to present this as a major lost opportunity. However, the primitive means of landing the assault wave, the heavy fortifications and defences on the Belgium coast and the presence of German reserves all suggest that the operation would have encountered significant opposition and may not have achieved all of its objectives.¹³ Nevertheless, provisions for landing a balanced military force with support from maritime and air assets show that many of the problems of Gallipoli had already been identified, unfortunately technology had not yet provided all of the solutions.

After the war there was considerable interest in amphibious operations. Writers such as Charles Callwell, George Aston and Julian Corbett all reaffirmed their pre-war view that amphibious operations were an important and valuable strategic tool. The chastening experience of Gallipoli did not discourage such interest. In a reaction to the stalemate and carnage on the western front a number of writers sought to identify a different approach to warfare, emphasising a more indirect approach that included the use of maritime and amphibious forces. The most noteworthy of these was Basil Liddell-Hart who developed the idea of the *Indirect Approach* and the notion that there has been a particular *British Way in Warfare*¹⁴. Despite this Liddell-Hart did not write about amphibious warfare in any detail until after 1945. Few writers actually examined the detailed tactical problems of future amphibious operations. One of the few who did was J.F.C.Fuller.¹⁵ Unfortunately Fuller's work was visionary rather than practical, envisaging an independent and decisive role for amphibious tanks that remains beyond the bounds of technology today.

After the war a Dardanelles Committee was established, with Commodore F.H. Mitchell as its president, to '*Investigate the Attacks Delivered on and the Enemy Defences of the Dardanelles Straits*'. The report of the committee, submitted in October 1919, drew a number of conclusions of relevance to future amphibious operations. It emphasised that, while the 1913 *Manual of Combined Naval and Military Operations* proved of great value in preparing the plans for the landings, the operation was undermined by the lack of an organisation with responsibility for

¹² B. Friend, 'Landing Craft Through the Ages – Part II', in *Warship*, vol. 46, April 1988. pp 32-47

¹³ For details of German defensive preparations on the Belgian coast see Public Records Office, Kew (henceforth PRO): ADM 239/27.

¹⁴ . Basil Liddell-Hart, *The British Way in Warfare*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932).

¹⁵ J.F.C. Fuller, 'The Development of Sea Warfare on Land and its Influence on Future Naval Operations', in *RUSI Journal*, Vol. LXV, 1920 pp.281-298. J.F.C.Fuller, *On Future Warfare*, (London: S Praed, 1928).

providing the personnel and material required to carry out the operation. There was clearly insufficient understanding of the principles outlined in the *Manual* and the operation was favourably or adversely affected according to the degree to which they were observed or neglected. In its conclusions the Mitchell Report noted the value of specialist landing craft, the need for secrecy at all levels, the requirement for tactical loading of the landing force and the importance of air power. The weakness of naval gunfire support at Gallipoli was noted, and the committee recommended that the matter should be the subject of experimental and development work to improve future performance¹⁶. The military lessons of the Gallipoli landings were therefore identified at an early stage. Key areas of interest and concern were identified and recommendations for future study were made. In the years that followed this work would be built upon in a series of theoretical and practical studies and exercises that would continue to identify problems and would begin to formulate solutions.

An example of the investigative work of the Mitchell Committee can be provided by their investigation of command relationships. There had been considerable debate over the desirability of unified command (i.e. a single commander) or joint command (i.e. co-equal naval and military commander) in combined operations.¹⁷ There had been some speculation that the existence of a unified command at Gallipoli might have led to the more effective coordination of the naval and military effort. The Committee investigated the issue and concluded that

A close study of the campaign...fails to reveal any instances to lead to the conclusion that the course of events would have been materially altered or more favourable results achieved had the control of sea, land and air forces been vested in one commander.

Recognising that the issue was an extremely complex one, the Committee recommended that it should be subject to further study. Indeed, they recommended that the three services should receive a common groundwork in staff training in order to provide the best basis for arriving at a solution to '*this complex issue*'. This was typical of the work of the Mitchell Committee. The Gallipoli campaign was examined for the lessons that could be learnt and in order to identify areas where further study was required. By identifying issues such as command relations, specialist equipment and the coordination of inter-service assets the Committee successfully identified the key areas requiring further study and in doing so they laid the essential foundations for the development work that was to follow.

Building on the work of the Mitchell Committee the requirements for successful amphibious operations were examined by the Staff Colleges who joined forces each year to complete a joint theoretical combined exercise where, according to one commentator, '*they used much ink and consumed much gin*'.¹⁸ The Gallipoli landings provided an obvious source of information and experience and many officers at these discussions were veterans of that campaign. The lessons derived from these discussions were incorporated in an updated version of the pre-war *Manual of*

¹⁶ PRO:AIR 1/2323, *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Attacks Delivered on and the Enemy Defences of the Dardanelles Straits* (Mitchell Report)

¹⁷ Prior to 1951 the British military referred to amphibious operations as 'combined operations'.

¹⁸ Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, p.36

Combined Naval and Military Operations, 1913. On the suggestion of the War Office, a committee was set up to complete a draft chapter on combined operations based on a report of the 1919 joint staff college exercises. This committee first met in June 1920 and published the revised chapter in 1922. In 1925 an official *Manual of Combined Operations* was published and revised and updated editions were published in 1931 and 1938.¹⁹ The 1938 edition of the *Manual* was completed by an inter-service Drafting Committee appointed in 1936 and responsible to the Deputy Chiefs of Staff.²⁰

The study of the problems of modern amphibious operations was not entirely theoretical and was not confined to the Staff Colleges. Although the British did not conduct regular and coordinated amphibious fleet exercises comparable to those undertaken in the United States in the late 1930s, numerous joint exercises were conducted in Home Waters, the Mediterranean and off the coast of India.²¹ These exercises were often limited in scope and the result of ad hoc local arrangements. However, the Admiralty encouraged the use of such exercises as a practical means of examining problems and initiated a number themselves. The reports from these exercises contributed greatly towards the general accumulation of knowledge and made an important contribution to the evolution of doctrine and equipment.

One specific area where progress was made was within the field of naval gunfire support. Experience during the Gallipoli campaign had made the Admiralty aware that they needed to improve the efficiency of their shore bombardment.²² Thus, naval gunfire support was practised at a number of bombardment ranges. Firing practice was conducted with the fall of shot corrected by forward observers and by aircraft. A Bombardment Manual was produced and issued to the three services. According to Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, this preparation paid good dividends, leading to the successful employment of HM Ships in this role in World War II.²³ As Vice-Admiral Commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron, Dreyer had conducted amphibious exercises on an annual basis. In one such exercise troops from the 2nd battalion, Queens Own Cameron Highlanders were landed in the Moray Firth in ships boats from the battle cruisers HMS *Hood*, *Renown* and *Repulse* and from four accompanying destroyers. Once their military load had been disembarked the warships provided gunfire support in accordance with a pre-arranged plan.²⁴

One of the most important lessons of the Gallipoli landings was the requirement for modern landing craft to land the assault wave.²⁵ A number of large purpose built 'X Lighters' had been developed by the Navy in World War I and these contributed to the landings at Suvla Bay in 1915. The search for a more suitable landing craft

¹⁹ PRO:ADM 186/117, *The Manual of Combined Operations 1938*.

²⁰ I Speller, *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945-1956*, (London: Palgrave, 2001) Chapter 1. PRO:DEFE 2/782A.

²¹ For example see, PRO:ADM 203/89, *Combined Naval and Military Landing Operations*. PRO:ADM 203/74, *Combined Exercise, Kasid beach 1925*. *Report on Combined Operations, Malta 1935*; *Report on Combined Operations, Singapore 1934*; and *Report on Combined Operations, Hong Kong 1938* all held in the Joint Services Command and Staff College library.

²² PRO:AIR 1/2323, Mitchell Report

²³ Admiral Sir F Dreyer, *The Sea Heritage. A Study of Maritime Warfare*, (London: Museum Press, 1955) p.263

²⁴ PRO:ADM 203/89.

²⁵ PRO:AIR 1/2323, Mitchell Report

continued after the war and this requirement was consistently emphasised in exercise reports. In the 1920s an inter-service Landing Craft Committee was established to study the design and number of craft required to conduct a landing on a hostile shore.²⁶ Their first attempt at a landing craft was the Motor Landing Craft (MLC(1)) completed in 1926.²⁷ This craft was not a success and was followed in 1928 by the MLC(10). The MLC(10) was a flat-bottomed craft powered by a water jet. It could embark 100 troops or a twelve-ton tank, discharging them directly onto the beach via a steep bow ramp. The water jet gave it a relatively slow speed of only five knots and the boat's flat bottom and bow ramp made it rather unseaworthy, handicaps that are common in modern amphibious craft. By 1934 the MLC had been thoroughly tested in a series of exercises and the design proved satisfactory. Two more vessels were procured and these were joined by six more, ordered as a result of the 1936 Abyssinian crisis.²⁸

It is clear that the British did not abandon the study of amphibious operations after Gallipoli. Indeed, the problems and difficulties identified at Gallipoli provided the starting point for the examination of possible solutions. As noted above, some authors have suggested that this distorted British approaches to amphibious warfare leading to the rejection of major opposed landings such as those conducted in 1915. British approaches have been criticised for concentrating on the difficulties of opposed landings and for having a consequent emphasis on speed, surprise and night landings in order to reduce resistance at the beach. This is often assumed to be a reaction to the losses incurred at Gallipoli. In reality this is not a fair representation of the doctrine laid out in the *Manual of Combined Operations*.

An examination of the 1938 *Manual* demonstrates that rather than being distorted by the experience of Gallipoli, it was actually a well-founded document. Like its counterpart in the United States, the British *Manual of Combined Operations* provided a remarkably good guide to the type of amphibious operations that would be conducted between 1939 and 1945. The *Manual* certainly noted the difficulty of conducting opposed landings and recommended landing where there was limited opposition. To suggest otherwise would have been foolish. However, it also noted that in certain circumstances opposed landings may be necessary and that only in 'exceptional circumstances' could an operation be planned in the certain knowledge that the landing would be unopposed. The *Manual's* suggestions for overcoming opposition on the beach; heavy naval gunfire support, close air support and the coordinated employment of infantry, tanks and artillery in the assault wave mirrors that which was employed to good effect in Europe between 1943-1944. Similarly, the *Manual* accurately predicted that small scale or lightly opposed landings might secure tactical surprise by landing at night, but that landings in the face of serious opposition would have to be conducted in daylight in order to coordinate the full range of supporting arms.²⁹ It is clear that while Gallipoli provided a useful source of practical evidence and acted as a starting point for the study of amphibious operations, the output of such studies did not lead towards the conclusion that opposed landings were

²⁶ PRO:ADM 203/73, *Requirement for Landing Craft*

²⁷ This craft was also known as the Beach Motor Boat.

²⁸ D K Brown, *The Design and Construction of British Warships 1939-1945. The Official Record. Amphibious Warfare Vessels and Auxiliaries*, (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1996) pp. 40-1

²⁹ PRO:ADM 186/177, *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p.134, 141-158.

impossible. Rather, the British attempted to find ways of making such landings less difficult and less costly than had been the case in 1915.

The key difference between the United States and Britain at this time was the question of priority. The development of an amphibious capability in America was driven by the recognition that amphibious operations would be necessary in any future war against their most likely major opponent. The same circumstances did not apply to Britain. Prior to 1940 it was difficult to devise any scenario where major amphibious forces would be required for a future conflict in Europe. The British Army was expected to fight alongside the French in France while the German coast remained a deeply uninviting area for any kind of amphibious operation. The requirement for amphibious operations on the scale of the 1944 Normandy landings could not have been foreseen before the war. In the 1920s the Admiralty did consider an offensive strategy for war against Japan, using amphibious forces to take forward bases or to re-take Hong Kong. Neither of the other two services were keen on this approach. In the face of their opposition, and with new threats emerging in Europe, the Admiralty abandoned the forward strategy in the 1930s in favour of a defensive approach based on the reinforcement of a fortified base at Singapore.³⁰ Consequently, during the inter-war years there appeared to be little immediate requirement for amphibious capabilities

Another significant brake on the development of amphibious capabilities in Britain was the lack of any organisation with an institutional imperative to develop them. The Army was largely concerned with Imperial policing duties and the requirement of modern land warfare. Likewise, the RAF was intent on developing an independent air arm and showed relatively little interest in inter-service cooperation. The primary concern of the Navy was the maintenance of an effective battle fleet and the struggle for the control of the Fleet Air Arm. Budgetary pressure and institutional preference meant that the Navy concentrated on maintaining its core capability, that of securing sea control, over other, secondary, tasks such as amphibious operations. The Royal Marines, one organisation that might have had a desire to support amphibious operations, did not receive responsibility for this mode of warfare until after World War II. In any case as an integral part of the Royal Navy administered by the Board of Admiralty the institutional position of the Royal Marines was relatively weak and was not equivalent to that of the US Marine Corps. Despite repeated calls for the creation of a permanent Royal Marines [amphibious] Striking Force, and the occasional employment of marines in this roll on exercises, no such force was maintained.

The study of amphibious warfare was placed on a firmer footing by the establishment of the Inter-Services Training and Development Centre (ISTDC) at Eastney in 1938. The Centre was established in response to proposals that originated from the Royal Naval Staff College at Greenwich. Although originally tasked with studying the problems of all inter-service operations the ISTDC concentrated on amphibious warfare and in 1940 it came under command of the newly created Directorate of Combined Operations. Building on the solid work already completed in this field the

³⁰ Christopher M. Bell. *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy between the Wars*, (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2000) chapter 3.

ISTDC studied the practical and theoretical problems of amphibious operations, refining doctrine and promoting the development of landing craft. Under their guidance prototype landing craft were developed that could land infantry (LCA) and tanks (LCM) and a support landing craft (LCS) was built to provide assaulting forces with close support in the final run-in to the beach.³¹ In addition to this, large 10,000-ton *Glen*-class passenger carrying cargo ships were identified as suitable for conversion to Landing Ship, Infantry (LSI) and they were earmarked for this role should war break out.³²

Unfortunately, the ISTDC could only examine and advise. It pushed for the construction of a purpose built landing craft carrier vessel, but the project came to nought due the reluctance of the Admiralty to divert scarce resources to what was seen as a low priority. In June 1939 the centre reported that without increased resources the British would be unable to land a brigade-sized force on a hostile shore within six months. This prompted the purchase of 18 LCA, 12 LCM and 2 LCS but it did not lead to a general reversal of policy.³³ It would take a dramatic and unforeseen change in strategic circumstances (the fall of France) to bring this about.

By 1939 Britain had developed an appropriate theory of amphibious operations and this was enshrined in the *Manual of Combined Operations*. They had prototype landing craft whose design was in advance of any overseas equivalent. These craft were specifically designed to support the conduct of opposed landings. The LCA was fitted with light armour precisely for this role and the LCS was designed to provide supporting fire for the assault wave. Merchant ships had been earmarked for conversion as carrier vessels should the need arise and many of these vessels were to provide sterling service later in the war. The only major shortcoming was the lack of a specialist landing force trained and equipped for amphibious operations and available at short notice. It is hard to avoid the fact that on the basis of the strategic assumptions that prevailed in 1939 Britain did not need a large standing amphibious force. On this basis Massam claims that the British policy was inherently rational. They developed doctrine and prototype equipment in order to be ready to generate standing forces in the future should the requirement ever arise. The only key failing was the failure to fully appreciate the role that airpower would play in future operations. This was reflected throughout the Army and Navy and was thus general within those services and not specific to amphibious operations. Nevertheless, with the advantage of hindsight, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that for a country whose main strategic advantage lay in the possession of a powerful navy, the absence of a dedicated amphibious force able to respond quickly to unforeseen circumstances does appear misguided.

Amphibious Warfare in the United States and Japan

The armed forces in both the United States and Japan made significant progress in the field of amphibious warfare between the two world wars. These two countries

³¹ Landing Craft, Assault (LCA), Landing Craft, Mechanised (LCM) and Landing Craft, Support (LCS).

³² PRO:ADM 239/242, ADM 239/357.

³³ PRO:DEFE 2/1773, *History of the Combined Operations Organisation*. Fergusson, *Watery Maze*, p.42-3.

approached amphibious warfare from different starting points and developed different capabilities at a different pace. The Japanese built upon a history of successful amphibious operations in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) and in World War One against German possessions in China (Tsingtao) and the central Pacific. Their capabilities were developed between the wars and by 1939 the Japanese had the most modern and effective amphibious capability in the world. The United States had conducted expeditionary operations against Spanish forces in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898. In 1914 it conducted a minor landing at Vera Cruz, Mexico as part of a pacification operation but it did not undertake any amphibious operations during World War I. Despite this, in the twenty years after the war the Americans developed the embryo of what would become the most powerful and most successful amphibious force that the world has ever seen. In both cases the legacy of Gallipoli appears to have been a spur to development rather than a hindrance.

The Gallipoli campaign was studied extensively in the United States, notably at the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico. It is an indication of US interest in the amphibious operation at Gallipoli that the US Naval Institute Press published the first English translation of Liman von Sanders' memoirs in 1927.³⁴ Problems were examined and solutions sought.³⁵ In particular, the Marines identified the value of accurate and heavy gunfire support; the need for a naval air arm to support the landings; the necessity for detailed, flexible and coordinated planning; the importance of combat loading in order to achieve the rapid landing and build-up of military supplies, including artillery; and the need to land the initial assault quickly and on a broad front. The Marines also examined German landing operations against the Russian held Oesel and Dago Islands in the Gulf of Riga in 1917 and these studies reiterated the need for speed, vigour and resourcefulness when conducting amphibious operations.³⁶

The Japanese also studied the Gallipoli landings, indeed it would be strange if they had not.³⁷ Prior to 1922 they may have received information under the Anglo-Japanese Treaty but even if this were not the case they, like the Americans, would have had access to the various official histories, memoirs and articles devoted to this topic that proliferated in Britain and elsewhere after the war. Significantly, Gallipoli appears to have been used as an indication of the potential utility of amphibious forces rather than a sign of their supposed impossibility. Despite this the 'lessons' of Gallipoli were not the fundamental driving force behind the development and

³⁴ Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1927)

³⁵ For an examination of US amphibious forces during this period see A.R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991) K.J. Clifford, *Amphibious Warfare Development in Britain and America from 1920 – 1940*, (New York: Edgewood, 1983). General H.M. Smith, *The Development of Amphibious Tactics in the US Navy*, (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQ USMC, 1992) Crowl and Isley, *The US Marines*.

³⁶ General H.H. Smith, *The Development of Amphibious Tactics*, p.20. The archives of the Marine Corps University at Quantico have numerous boxes containing reports and studies dating from the 1920s and 1930s examining Gallipoli and the Baltic landings.

³⁷ For an examination of Japanese amphibious forces during this period see Allan Millet, 'Assault From the Sea. The development of amphibious warfare between the wars', in Williamson Murray and Allan Millett (eds.), *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and M.J. Grove, 'The Development of Japanese Amphibious Warfare, 1874 to 1942', in *The Strategic Studies Combat Institute, The Occasional*, No. 31, October 1997

maintenance of capabilities and doctrine. The key factor was the appreciation by both countries that they would probably need to conduct amphibious operations in any future war and this was the driving force behind the development of both capability and doctrine.

By the end of World War One both Japan and the United States had identified each other as likely future adversaries. Geography dictated that any war between these countries would involve a significant maritime element and that amphibious operations would be required. The Japanese would need to conduct amphibious operations in order to seize US islands and facilities in the western and central Pacific, including the Philippines. Later plans included the requirement to seize European colonies in southeast Asia in operations spearheaded by amphibious forces. Planning proceeded on this basis. Conversely, planners within the US soon appreciated that in any future war against Japan amphibious forces would be required to re-take lost territories and to seize forward bases for naval and air forces. The stipulation in the 1922 Five Power Treaty forbidding the fortification of naval bases in the western Pacific made US facilities in the Philippines and elsewhere vulnerable to seizure by the Japanese, and Japanese possession of the former German territories in the central Pacific brought an apparent requirement to neutralise their facilities there.³⁸ This was recognised in appreciations of future requirements, most famously in Major Pete Ellis's Operational Plan 712 *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia* which was approved as the basis for future planning by the US Marine Corps (USMC) in 1921.³⁹

In the USMC the US had an organisation with both an interest and an ability to promote the cause of amphibious warfare. Prior to 1914 the USMC had established an Advanced Base Force (ABF) for the defence of advanced naval bases. The ABF, however, did not include any element designed to seize bases or to conduct opposed landings. After 1918 some senior officers within the Corps, notably the Marine Corps Commandant, General John Lejeune, pressed for the adoption of an amphibious role at least partially in order that the USMC should have its own unique role distinct from that of the US Army.⁴⁰ This role was not universally accepted but despite numerous difficulties by 1927 the USMC had formally assumed responsibility for '*land operations in support of the fleet for the initial seizure and defense of advanced bases*' and in 1931 the Navy General Board recommended that the primary role of the Marines was '*assisting the fleet in the seizure and initial defence of advanced bases*'.⁴¹ The concentration of the USMC on this role not only provided the US with a dedicated landing force with the creation of the Fleet Marine Force in 1933 but it also provided for greater focus and more continuity in this field than might otherwise have been the case. Amphibious warfare was carefully studied at the Marine Corps Schools and major fleet exercises were conducted with the US Navy, initially and rather falteringly in the 1920s, and then by the late 1930s on a large scale and on an annual basis. As a result in 1934 the first *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* was issued and this was revised and updated before being published in its final pre-

³⁸ Japan was also bound by the restrictions imposed by the Five Power Treaty but suspicion arose almost immediately that it was fortifying its possessions in the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall island groups.

³⁹ D.A. Ballendorf and M.L. Bartlett, *Pete Ellis. An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997). Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, pp.326-330

⁴⁰ Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, p. 325.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 328-330

war form in 1938 as *Fleet Training Publication No.167* (FTP 167). The doctrine outlined in FTP 167 was adopted by the Army and the Navy and was employed successfully through-out World War II.

The Japanese did not have an organisation equivalent to the USMC. The navy had its own marine force organised into reinforced battalion sized Naval Landing Forces but the Army retained primary responsibility for amphibious warfare. Unfortunately, there was little inter-service cooperation at the strategic level.⁴² The Army remained more interested in mainland Asia while the Navy concentrated on the requirements of major fleet action. At the tactical level there was more cooperation and the 1924 *Landing and Landing Defence Operations Manual* was updated in 1933 and 1941 and was issued to both the Army and Navy in its revised forms. Despite this the Navy did not begin to seriously prepare for amphibious operations in support of the existing national strategy until late 1940.⁴³

In contrast to both the British and Americans, the requirement to support operations against mainland China meant that the Japanese armed forces actually conducted a number of landings, notably at Shanghai in 1932 and 1937. These operations provided a spur to the development of equipment and techniques and influenced Japanese approaches in a more profound fashion than did Gallipoli. For example, as a result of the unsatisfactory operation at Shanghai in 1932 the Japanese Army ordered the *Shinshu Maru*, an 8,000 ton landing ship that, when it entered service in 1935, represented the first truly modern amphibious ship of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Likewise, experience in China suggested to the Japanese that it would be possible to secure unopposed landings when operating against mainland Asia or large islands such as the Philippines. That, in addition to the poor performance ashore of troops trained primarily for amphibious operations, led the Army to emphasise the achievement of unopposed landings and to discontinue the practice, begun in the 1920s, of routinely training specially designated divisions in amphibious warfare.⁴⁵ It was not a supposed lesson of Gallipoli that led the Japanese to neglect to prepare for strongly oppose landings, it was a reflection of recent experience and perceived requirements.

By 1939 both the Japanese and the Americans had made considerable strides towards the development of a modern amphibious capability. Japanese capabilities were in advance of their contemporaries, largely due to the employment of amphibious forces in the war against China. The United States had an appropriate doctrine and a dedicated landing force. They had also identified civilian boats and vehicles suitable for conversion into landing craft.⁴⁶ As such it had the embryo of an amphibious force. It would, however, be a number of years before this potential became realised. In

⁴² Arthur J Marder, *Old Friends and New Enemies. The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy. Strategic Illusions, 1936-1941*, (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1981) pp. 289-292.

⁴³ Ibid. pp 327-328 Grove, 'Japanese Amphibious Warfare'. pp.35-37

⁴⁴ N. Polmar and P.B. Mersky, *Amphibious Warfare. An illustrated History*, (London: Blandford Press, 1988) chapter 3

⁴⁵ In 1926 the Japanese army general staff had identified three divisions as 'especially designated' for use in landings in the Philippines and these had received special instruction in amphibious operations. One of these, the 11th Division, performed poorly ashore near Shanghai in 1937. Millett, 'Assault from the Sea', pp. 67-9.

⁴⁶ The Higgin's Boat that became the ubiquitous LCVP and the Roebing amphibious tractor that became the LVT.

1939 the FMF was at only a third of its supposed wartime strength and while prototype modern landing craft had been identified, they had not yet entered operational service.⁴⁷ The experience of Gallipoli played a role in the development of these capabilities, but was not the most important driving force. As in Britain, the operation was studied and lessons were learnt but this alone did not bring a need for amphibious capabilities. The clear requirement to conduct amphibious operations in any future war against their most likely opponent drove both countries to develop their capabilities. These capabilities would have been required whether or not the landings at Gallipoli had taken place.

Conclusion

An examination of the period 1918-1939 demonstrates that the three main maritime powers, the US, Britain and Japan, all made considerable progress in the development of their amphibious capabilities. Gallipoli offered a mine of information and was closely studied. However, the experience at Gallipoli was only one factor in the development of amphibious capabilities. It provided an illustration of some of the tactical problems that could be encountered but did not fundamentally influence policy decisions about amphibious requirements. Much more important were assumptions about the nature of future conflict and the existence, or otherwise, of a dedicated body responsible for the development of amphibious capabilities.

Both Japan and the United States could postulate convincing scenarios where amphibious landings would be required in a future conflict, Britain could not. Inevitably this had an impact on the level of preparation. Moreover, whereas in the United States the USMC had an obvious interest in promoting amphibious preparedness no equivalent organisation existed in Britain or Japan. In Japan the existing services retained responsibility for amphibious warfare and this approach served their purposes well until 1942. In Britain those who advocated the establishment of some form of amphibious striking force were thwarted by a general lack of priority allied to a scarcity of resources.

By 1939 the British had developed the doctrine and equipment that would be required for future amphibious operations. The validity of both was proven in a series of successful operations. The establishment of the ISTDC and later of COHQ put the development of amphibious capabilities on a firmer footing and ensured that the British remained at the forefront of amphibious warfare. The first Landing Craft Tank and Landing Ship Tank were designed and built by the British. The British conducted the first major landing to seize enemy territory, Operation *Ironclad*, the seizure of Vichy French Madagascar in 1942. British forces played a vital part in the Allied landings in North Africa, Sicily and Italy and the majority of the forces landed from the sea at Normandy on 6 June 1944 were either British or Commonwealth troops and the majority of landing craft were operated by British personnel.

The 'shadow of Gallipoli' did not play the part in British policy that it has commonly been ascribed. Amphibious warfare was not discredited and it was not ignored. However, the failure at Gallipoli may have had an important impact on popular

⁴⁷ The planned wartime strength of the FMF was 25,000, almost 6,000 more personnel than existed in the USMC at that time. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, p.336.

perceptions and these in turn may have reinforced the factors that limited the development of amphibious capabilities. As Christopher Bell has noted, Gallipoli contributed to the '*low-esteem*' of amphibious operations during this period.⁴⁸ It is hard to quantify such an intangible effect but it is possible that in such a climate it was relatively easy to overlook the requirement for greater resources to be devoted to amphibious capabilities. In this way popular perceptions may have reinforced existing priorities. An Allied victory at Gallipoli may have fostered an entirely different view and this in turn may have reinforced calls for greater priority to be accorded to amphibious operations. This is a subject that would benefit from further study.

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⁴⁸ . Bell, *The Royal Navy*, p.128.