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GALLIPOLI HERITAGE SURVEY UNCOVERS WAR SECRETS

A Sydney-based archaeological team has just returned from a survey of the underwater battlefield of ANZAC Cove in Turkey, after discovering new shipwrecks from the Gallipoli campaign.

Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly, said Project Beneath Gallipoli completed the first ever scientific survey of the 1915 campaign.

“The joint Australia-Turkish team of 12 experts located and dived a number of new historic shipwrecks from the eight-month battle – sites not previously visited by divers or archaeologists”, the Minister said.

The project headed by NSW Government Maritime Archaeologist and Deputy Director of the NSW Department of Planning’s Heritage Branch, Tim Smith, was made possible thanks to a $21,000 NSW Government grant and some private funding.

“The shipwrecks were examined during a detailed sidescan sonar survey of the seabed adjacent to the famous Brighton Beach, ANZAC Cove, North Beach and Suvla Bay,” Mr Smith said.

“One wreck in particular really brought home the agony of the conflict.

“Detected 1.3 nautical miles off ANZAC Cove in 55 metres of water, the wreck had only been known as an obstacle to local Turkish fishermen.

“When dived and recorded we confirmed it was a type of barge known through historic photos for carrying dead and seriously wounded ANZAC troops off the beach in 1915.”

The expedition team also proved that a known wreck in Suvla Bay was in fact the remains of the British Destroyer HMS Louis which ran aground in October 1915 and was destroyed by Turkish shell fire.

Mr Smith said that wreck had previously been identified as a vessel engaged in water supply, however our Australian team confirmed it to be a naval warship by its four Yarrow-type steam boilers.

Some of the other discoveries include:

- A shipwreck located in just a meter of water off the beach;
- British type .303 rifle ammunition;
- Remains of lead balls from the devastating Turkish shrapnel shells; and
- Remains of several pontoon wrecks believed to belong to the Royal Australian Navy’s Bridging Train – an engineering unit based in Suvla Bay and in charge of stores and water supply.
Other targets are likely to be identified as the sonar data is now analysed in detail back in Sydney.

Mr Kelly said the survey has provided a tremendous insight into the previously undervalued underwater component of the battlefield.

“The Keneally Government recognised the major importance of this overseas survey work and therefore was happy to be the major funding partner,” the Minister said.

“The independent team should be congratulated for initiating this critical survey and I understand it’s already planning a return to Gallipoli in 2011 to continue its important heritage mapping work, in the lead up to the 2015 centenary of the attack.

“This could prove a physical remaining footprint of the Royal Australian Navy on Gallipoli and a reminder of the last Australian troops to evacuate that battlefield in December 1915.

“The expedition’s results will now be collated into a report to be provided to the Australian and Turkish Governments.

The report will include an assessment of how best to manage these unique underwater archaeological sites in the future.”