

The mystery of the only woman to land at Gallipoli

Gallipoli was an all-male business, but on the night of 17th November 1915 a small boat brought ashore the only woman on the Allied side to visit Gallipoli during the campaign. She walked up the hill from the beach and laid a wreath on a grave. Who was the woman?

Before answering that, we need to know who was the man in the grave. It was Lt. Col. Charles Doughty-Wylie. In the middle of the night, British and Irish soldiers who had landed on 'V' Beach on 25th April 1915 were sheltering beneath a sandy bank, not daring to step into the withering Turkish gunfire which had killed so many of their comrades. A brave officer was needed who could inspire the shocked troops into action again. Lt. Col. Doughty-Wylie leapt forward and the soldiers followed, driving the Turkish troops before them. But at the moment of success, Doughty-Wylie was shot and killed, along with his fellow officer Captain Garth Walford. Doughty-Wylie was buried the next day on the spot, and his grave is still there today. He and Walford were awarded Victoria Crosses for their gallantry.



Lilian Doughty-Wylie: *left*, in her nurse's uniform and *far left*, with her husband Lt. Col. Charles Doughty-Wylie VC, who was killed at Gallipoli. *Below*, Doughty-Wylie's grave with a wreath, possibly the one left by Lilian in November 1915. A French officer is paying his respects.



Doughty-Wylie was married to Lilian. She was a nurse, and was with the British troops in France when her husband died. They had met in 1900 in South Africa during the Second Boer War, when Captain Charles Hotham Montagu Doughty was wounded. Lilian nursed him, and they married four years later. The Doughty-Wylies were very familiar with Turkey: they had lived there before the war, when he was the British consul in Mersin on the Turkish south coast, and later running a hospital in Constantinople where they treated Turkish soldiers wounded in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. When he was required to fight against the Turks at Gallipoli, he refused to take a rifle into battle and apparently only took a cane! For this and his earlier medical work, the name of Charles Doughty-Wylie is loved and respected in Turkey to this day.

So how did Lilian come to be at Gallipoli in November 1915? She had left the Western Front and taken up a post as Matron in a military hospital on the Greek Island of Thasos, not far from Gallipoli. She must have persuaded someone to let her travel on a ship visiting Gallipoli and then arranged with the French army, which now controlled the area where her husband was killed, to let her go ashore and lay a wreath on his grave. She must have had friends in high places to be able to break the rules like this!



Gertrude Bell

However, there is still a mystery about 'the only woman to land at Gallipoli'. It may not have been Lilian.

From 1913 Charles had a love affair with Gertrude Bell, an archaeologist, traveller, writer and politician who was living in Ottoman Syria and Iraq. They exchanged passionate love letters right up to his death. Could she have been the mystery woman?



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