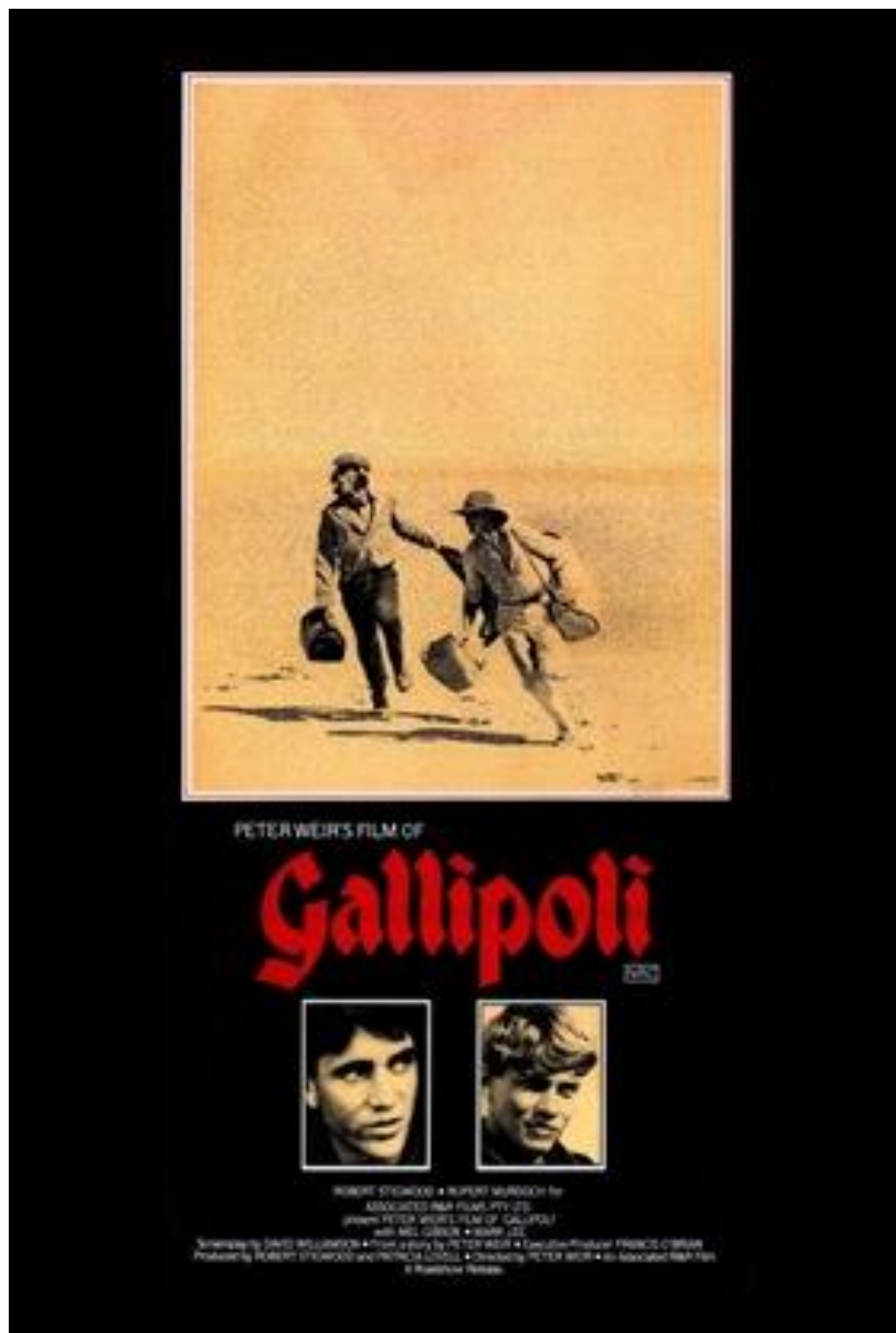


“He took us to Gallipoli: Recollections of the Film Gallipoli.”



The film's original poster

In August 1980 I returned to Adelaide and started scanning the local papers for employment. Early one morning a few weeks later I saw an advertisement asking for 600 extras for the filming of Gallipoli and the advertisement contained a flat address. I got on the first available bus and the first thing the producer present, Patricia Lovell, said was:

Patricia Lovell “Are you willing to shave off that beard?”

Me: “Yes.”

Patricia Lovell: “Do you have any other qualifications for being in the film Gallipoli?”

Me: “My grandfather was a staff sergeant in the Light Horse.”

Patricia Lovell: “Right! You’re in.”

She then motioned to the makeshift barber’s chair and got the hairdresser to give me a quick, light shave and told me to finish the job at home and always be clean shaven. We chatted about the film, which she rightly felt would be a landmark in Australian history. They were already filming the battle scenes over near Port Lincoln as the real Gallipoli is covered with crosses, roads and cenotaphs. She then asked about my grandfather’s service. I had mentioned my grandfather almost as a joke for some straw to grab to get the job, but Patricia Lovell said that they liked such links for historical continuity and a sense of generational links. I then told her that my grandfather waited till after my uncle was born before enlisting in 1915, but this was erroneous, he enlisted in 1917 and sailed to Europe just after his wife became pregnant with my Uncle, served in the occupation forces in Germany and did not return until July 1919. I did not mention that by his own account he was demoted from staff sergeant back to gunner for getting stuck into the rum ration one night because he could not stand the war anymore and that he served in Europe, not Gallipoli. Oddly, I only recently found out that two of my Grandfather’s brothers were in the 7TH Light Horse Regiment and one went through experiences very similar to those of Archie and Frank in the film. This also happened to my mother’s uncle, Francis McNamara, an infantryman who arrived at Gallipoli in August 1915. Like Frank they were both working class city boys, very untypical for the light horse. My paternal Great Uncle James served at Gallipoli from May 1915 to September, when he was evacuated for a month with septicaemia, often caused by infected wounds or scratches. His regiment were not involved in the battle of the Nek, (which the film depicts) but in one very similar (and actually worse!) in the same days, at Battleship Hill. His record leaves it not totally clear if he survived because he was already in hospital, or was wounded in the battle. He was wounded or sickened enough to be evacuated for a month soon after that battle. As he was promoted from corporal to Sergeant Major a few days later he was probably a battle survivor. He returned to Gallipoli and served briefly

in Palestine, where he was demoted to private for offensive language to an officer. I remember him and wished I'd interviewed him.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART07965

George Lambert's 1924 depiction of the battle of the Nek and as it was filmed.





One of the few scenes actually filmed in Egypt. If they were interiors they were filmed in Adelaide

I rushed back and told my housemates how easy the job was, but only one, Gene Streete, an American with big hospital bills for his wife, took my advice. He is the dark sailor with the mutton-chop sideburns in the scene where the soldiers are drinking at the pub before embarkation. It seems little if any of *Gallipoli* was filmed in Perth. In the film's chronological order I have listed those scenes that I am in, where they were filmed and where they are meant to be.

Perth Railway Station: an Adelaide railway station platform really. Normal trains were running just out of camera range. I am one of the soldiers behind Frank and Archie as they arrive in Perth after being lost in the desert. This scene lasts a minute or two but took most of the day because fifteen takes were needed. Director Peter Weir was unhappy with smoke, noise and acting. Mel Gibson was unphased and very professional, doing the same scene again and again as his mother greets him and offers him a pastie. Finally this actress broke and she threw the pastie on the ground and yelled at Weir "All I am doing is offering him a pastie!" Weir just sighed and calmly said something about shooting being over. Only Frank's father appears in the film.

The pub scene before embarkation. This was an old Adelaide Hotel. I am the soldier on the far right chatting to the blonde civilian in the white shirt and waistcoat. In DVD

and television versions my longest scene is cropped to me just walking past as they leave in video versions. This was filmed several times as the smoke was not showing and a director's assistant was running round with this smoke filled compressor spreading smoke. I said this was very fine attention to detail and he said he had it easy compared to the costumes department, who had to make sure that buttons were not new and some must have grime in them. I thought this was a tall tale until Weir in a loud voice said "We need an extra for some dialogue, you?" I came over and he said "No you should be clean shaven." This was a late afternoon shoot, I had shaven that morning: one extra among thirty to fifty hasn't shaved and he notices. I said to Gene and the other extras "I just had a close shave with stardom." Initially Weir had an angry look on his face (as did his assistants) but then he laughed.

The Embarkation. This was a night shoot at Port Adelaide docks. We had a meal and being one of the last served I made for the last seat, which had the occupant's heads back to me so I initially did not see who they were. This was the star's table and the vacant seat was by Mel Gibson, who faced me with a very angry glare and a snarl and tried to stare me down. "There are no other seats" I said, he sighed vexed and ignored me. Billy Hunter, who plays Major Barton and was sitting opposite me watching and smiling, said in a low voice "Christ you're game mate." I shrugged my shoulders and smiled as I ate, none too slowly but I didn't bolt my food either and then left without goodbyes.

Night shoots and shoots on water are proverbially difficult and when they combine trouble and delays are commonplace and that was what happened here. Getting the ship to the dock proved logistically difficult, then in the early morning hours the wharfies went on strike - something about pay rates or demarcation. This got everybody but Weir and the stars infuriated. After some time Weir returned cheerful and while we waited, he was like a scout song master, laughing as he conducted us into getting the patriotic song right. He was also amused when I wrecked a shot, the one where Major Barton farewells his wife while behind them troops walk up the gangplank.

Weir laughed in the middle of a take and yelled out "Cut! The phantom! The ghost who walks again!"

He told me to take off my jacket and seeing blood and bullet hole in the back I apologised as we had to dress in the dark and I was unaware that my costume was bloodstained. He just laughed, said it was alright and got an underling to get a kitbag for me to carry as concealment.

When the ship sails I am one of the four soldiers cheering from the bow. If you do not recognise me one of my sisters did not either.

The Ballroom. This ballroom is supposed to be in Egypt 1915, but in 1980 it was then the foyer to the Adelaide Railway Station, which was built in 1927. At the time of its construction the world was going through an Egyptian fad inspired by the Tutankhamen findings of 1922, which is why the setting looks so Egyptian. This scene of a few minutes in the film took 23 hours to shoot. That time included meals, costume changing and cleaning. Once again there was that incredible attention to detail. Fran, the model I danced and sat out with, showed me her dance card. In the past it used to be that women at dances had these cards which listed the scheduled dances and had blank spaces beside each, so that she could write in the name of her dancing partner. If she wished to reject a male's request she could politely refuse by saying her card was full or she was occupied for the dance he requested. There was no way the camera could have picked up such details, yet they were in. In this scene I appear in split seconds dancing with the red head who has her hair in a bun.

General Comments. I am not in the battle scenes. Some long shot scenes, the race to the pyramid and the football game were filmed in Egypt, but those in the bazaar were filmed on Adelaide sets built for the film. The shopkeeper who the boys threaten was Moshe Kedem, from my old drama department. In a television interview David Williamson described the problems they had with Egyptian authorities, which were considerable, so some scenes were filmed around Adelaide.

Meeting Mel Gibson. He started out in the mid 1970s as an Adelaide stage actor. I saw him in several stage plays and I also saw him once at a party, leaning stiffly against a wall, not mixing. On costume fitting day I was in line near him and not having seen his face for years, nodded as I wondered where I knew him from. He glared, screwed up his face and stormed off, arms taut. Mark Lee, who I initially thought was another extra, was pretty much the same. In their professional standards they were calm, patient and totally professional, but their behaviour is rather ironic as Gallipoli celebrates mateship. Oh well it is a movie convention that stars do not mix with extras, and there are good reasons for this. Even so accounts of Marlon Brando on the 1996 set of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, provide a contrast. He ate lunch with the extras, giving tips about working in film and by the accounts of extras, was impressive with his manners and his modesty.

Gallipoli From Peter Weir's comments on set he wanted to make a film which showed what a tragedy the war and the Gallipoli campaign were, and how that campaign shaped Australia's self-image. From the way money was spent way way over budget and the focus on meaning and accuracy and from what I heard on set, nobody thought it would be a commercial success, but they did think it would be a classic. They were right.

Garry Hill



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