Bert Facey’s autobiographical *A Fortunate Life* has been described as, ‘[a] true classic of Australian literature, his simply written autobiography…an inspiration. It is the story of a life lived to the full — the extraordinary journey of an ordinary man’.¹ In 1981 Peter Shrubb found the book ‘a rich pleasure’; twenty-six years later, it was included in Gleeson-White’s *Australian Classics*.² One field of thought suggests that *A Fortunate Life* is only partly autobiographical, much of it consisting of stories acquired over the years, in the tradition of a master story-teller passing on yarns acquired by many fire sides. Jan Carter wrote that Facey’s ‘family knew these tales well before they read the book. The stories were told and re-told as family history for six decades or more’.³ Wendy Capper identifies many characteristics of traditional, oral story-telling and folktale in Facey’s writing, without criticising their relationship to the facts of his life.⁴ Others have been less accepting. Carolyn See, in an article published in *The New York Times*, wrote that ‘Joan Newman of Curtin University at Perth, has it in for Mr. Facey’s book…She thinks his memoirs of his outback life are one big lie, right down to the title’.⁵

⁴ Capper, “Facey’s A Fortunate Life,” 266-81.
One reviewer wrote that:

One of the most chilling parts of the book is his descriptions of the landings at Gallipoli on 25th April, 1915. What gives it even greater impact...is his earlier description of the night in Lemnos Harbour, while they were awaiting their orders. The juxtaposition of the beauty of that night followed by the destruction and terror of the next was powerful.6

But there are problems. A comparison of the history of Facey’s battalion, his service record and his biography reveal anomalies. Bert belonged to D Company of the 11th Battalion, the first infantry battalion raised in Western Australia for overseas service after the outbreak of what would become the First World War. His service record reveals that he did not join the battalion until after the Gallipoli Landing, a battle he describes at some length. ‘Thus’, historian Chris Roberts recently wrote, ‘his account has to be fabricated’.7 Facey’s service number, 1536, adds further doubt — could a man with such a high number have fought in the first battle of a battalion of one thousand men?

Facey also describes actions rarely mentioned outside the Australian Official History, including his part in the fighting on Silt Spur on 28 June and at Leane’s Trench in July and August 1915. The Australian Official History reveals that only A and C Companies of the 11th Battalion took part in the fighting on Silt Spur, suggesting Bert, in D Company, did not.8 In addition, when I first read Facey’s account, soon after its publication, I thought Facey had gone too far in claiming his battalion had captured Leane’s Trench on the night of 31 July / 1 August. Was not the capture of Lone Pine, nearly a week later, the first occasion since the Battle of the Landing (referred to from now on as ‘the Landing’) that either side had taken and held such a position?

These inconsistencies bring into question whether Facey’s biography is fact, fiction or a combination of both, and if the latter, in what balance? The issue becomes one of verification. Facey’s narrative is too large for the minute examination of every event he describes. Would detailed analysis and comparison of the Gallipoli chapters in A Fortunate Life with the 11th Battalion’s experience in the Gallipoli campaign, verify and support Facey’s story or reveal its weaknesses? The answer to this question may say a great deal about the veracity of the

8 C. E. W. Bean, Official History of Australia in the War: The Story of ANZAC, vol. 2 (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941), 292, 303, 305.
remainder of the book. It may also indicate whether Facey’s account of the landing should be added to the history of that confused battle, or assumed to be little more than a summary of others’ experiences.

Using primary and other sources, this article will analyse Facey’s Gallipoli experience and compare it to that of the men who served in the same trenches during the same months. Re-building the story from such sources reveals details that may have slipped through the cracks of broader histories and, perhaps surprisingly, swings the pendulum of doubt back in Facey’s favour.

**landing**

Facey missed the initial recruitments of 1914 and enlisted on 4 January 1915, becoming a member of the 3rd Reinforcements for the 11th Battalion. His enlistment papers reassuringly confirm two facts from the book — his height being exactly six feet, and his poor literacy: the ‘A’ for Albert is written in lower case, but is the same size as the capital ‘B’ for Barnet and ‘F’ for Facey. The 2nd and 3rd Reinforcements sailed from Australia some months after their battalion but rejoined them on the Greek island of Lemnos. The 11th Battalion lived aboard ships in the island’s Mudros Harbour from 5 March until the eve of the Landing. In *A Fortunate Life* Bert describes joining them there. ‘Some time after’ his arrival at Lemnos ‘twenty-four replacements for the Eleventh Battalion’ were ‘taken to one of the transports’. Bert ‘was attached to No. 4 Platoon ‘D’ Company’.

The 11th Battalion Unit War Diary for this period is extraordinarily brief and surprisingly devoid of detail, but the unit’s structure has since been established. Facey’s membership of D Company is confirmed by his service record, but there was no ‘No. 4 Platoon’ in D Company. D Company consisted of Platoons 13-16, which presumably means that Bert belonged to No. 16 Platoon (the ‘fourth’ platoon in the company). This is significant as it means that Facey’s experiences can be specific to the movements of a single platoon, rather than the larger ambit of the Gallipoli Campaign. Moreover, a member of this platoon, Tom Louch, later wrote a memoir of his wartime experience. Such a minor point of confusion as the naming of a platoon evidences the problems of interpreting

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9 Service Record, A. B. Facey, Series B2455, National Archives of Australia.
personal accounts — if not so easily explained, this error could devalue Facey’s account in the eyes of historians. As it is, it highlights that such perceived errors do not necessarily invalidate an account.

The 11th Battalion belonged to the 3rd Brigade, which was selected as the covering force for the ANZAC Landing, meaning they would be the first to land on 25 April. Their role was to clear the beaches for the remainder of the force and move inland to seize certain objectives. Facey records being woken on the night of 24/25 April 1915 and being told that:

we were to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey...when the ship stops you will be called to the side and lined up...A destroyer will come alongside and you will climb over the side...onto the deck...When the destroyer has enough men it will...go towards where you are to land. Close to shore...You will climb into the rowing-boats...you are to get ashore as best you can and then line up on the beach and await further instructions.¹²

This passage is of interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, the level of detail suggests the narrator was present, and, making allowance for Facey’s simple ‘story-telling’ tone, most of the instructions reflect the reality of the Landing arrangements as we know them. The simplicity of this passage supports the view that the Australian soldiers were ‘lambs to the slaughter’. Their orders appear trite and hurried to a reader unfamiliar with the Landing: however, the battalion had in fact been receiving briefings and practicing disembarkation for some time.

The following morning ‘[a]ll went well’, wrote Facey:

until we were making the change into rowing-boats. Suddenly all hell broke loose; heavy shelling and shrapnel fire commenced. The ships...returned fire. Bullets were thumping into us in the rowing-boat. Men were being hit and killed all around me...I was terribly frightened.¹³

Bert’s D Company landed with the second wave of the covering force and it is well documented that this wave came under small arms fire getting ashore. Their exposure to shelling and ‘returned fire’ by the navy are more contentious. The Official History states that the first Turkish shell burst fifteen minutes after the first troops landed.¹⁴ By this time Facey might be expected to have been

¹² Facey, A Fortunate Life, 253-54.
¹³ Ibid., 254.
ashore, as was Tom Louch of his platoon. Two other facts cast doubt on Facey’s account— one Turkish source states that only one Turkish gun fired at this juncture in the Landing, suggesting the shelling was unlikely to be ‘heavy’, and the Royal Navy was prevented by darkness from covering the initial wave with its guns. To complicate matters, the Official History records elsewhere that the guns of the battleships began to fire about two minutes after the first Turkish shell exploded over the troops, soon after the landing of the first troops from the destroyers and there is also evidence in Turkish sources that their single gun may have opened fire earlier than appreciated by the Australian Official Historian, C.E.W. Bean. The apparent anomalies in these statements lie in the difficulties of establishing an accurate chronology of events and the fact that it was not possible to land all 2500 troops of the destroyer tows simultaneously, with many men having to wait for the second ‘lift’. It would appear there is enough imprecision in the evidence to provide Facey a ‘benefit of doubt’ — if, as Bean notes, the first Turkish shell exploded soon after the first destroyer tows reached the beach, and if Facey landed later, perhaps he was shelled; perhaps those helplessly exposed to enemy fire for the first time did feel as though ‘all hell broke loose’. Facey’s account may be inaccurate, but this does not mean it is fictitious.

Facey recalled the beach being swept by machine guns as he landed, and, many dead already when we got there...wounded men were screaming for help...the Turkish fire was terrible and mowing into us...We all ran for our lives over the strip of beach...Men were falling all around me. We were stumbling over bodies — running blind. The sight of the bodies on the beach was shocking. It worried me for days.

A photograph taken of Anzac Cove after sunrise shows only one body, as opposed to Facey’s ‘many’, on the beach. The majority of the 11th Battalion did not land in Anzac Cove but to its north, beyond a headland known as Ari Burnu. Here, according to other witnesses, machine guns and rifles enfiladed the beach. It is likely that one of these guns, if present, was knocked out before Facey landed. However, on the beach Facey had crossed, Turkish riflemen, and possibly using a machine gun, fired on the men. This is evidenced by numerous reports of casu-

15 T. S. Louch, “Memoir,” Ellam-Innes Collection, Mount Lawley, Western Australia, undated, 14.
17 Bean, The Story of ANZAC, I:278; and Şefik Aker, para. 37.
19 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 254.
20 Photograph Collection, Australian War Memorial, AWM P00035.
21 T. S. Louch, quoted by N. Steel, P. Hart, Defeat at Gallipoli (London: Papermac, 1995), 61.
alties there: Louch’s section-mate, ‘Crerar was killed as he reached the shore’.\textsuperscript{22} Bandy Turner, B Company, landed nearby and refers to Ben Bailey being ‘shot dead on the beach; I saw him lying there shot through the head’.\textsuperscript{23} Although there is some dispute that Turkish machine guns fired on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade’s landing, it is likely there were more casualties on this section of beach than in Anzac Cove.\textsuperscript{24}

Facey adds, ‘I am sure that there wouldn’t have been one of us left if we had obeyed that damn fool order to line up on the beach’.\textsuperscript{25} This anecdote contributes to the folklore of the Australian landing and implies that the troops were victims of ‘damn fool’ orders and military incompetence. Most 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion accounts do not refer specifically to this order. Instead they refer to a rapid inland push to seize their objectives. This does not mean Facey’s comment is untrue. Before the Landing, Colonel E. G. Sinclair MacLagan had issued a special order to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade. It included an instruction to ‘[t]ake every chance of reorganiz-ing’ but ‘under cover if possible’.\textsuperscript{26} Louch recalled being instructed to ‘lie down under cover and await orders’.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, Ted Mofflin of B Company left an account explaining that upon boarding their boats (in a pre-arranged order), the plan was that ‘No. 1 boat’ would land:

\begin{itemize}
\item on the right and No. 6 on the left…wade ashore…on the left form section and that would bring us into one straight line on the beach, and lie down. Then wait for the whispered orders to be passed along to…fix bayonets…and advance.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{itemize}

This, supported by some others of the destroyers tows, provides some important data missing from Facey’s account that serves to substantiate it; namely, that there was a logic behind the order to line up on the beach. Mofflin’s reference to ‘whispered’ commands implies this order was based on the eventuality of gaining the beach undetected by the enemy — a fervent hope of all involved. In other words, Facey’s comment may be correct, but the order may not have been as ridiculous as it sounds. Facey continues:

By midday we had moved a distance forward by crawling along, and… running…moving forward in small groups, sending scouts ahead to find new

\begin{itemize}
\item Louch, “Memoir,” 14.
\item Bean, \textit{The Story of ANZAC}, 269.
\item Facey, \textit{A Fortunate Life}, 254.
\item W. C. Belford, \textit{Legs Eleven, Being the Story of the 11th Battalion (AIF) in the Great War of 1914-1918} (Perth: Imperial Printing Coy Ltd., 1940), 59.
\item Louch, “Memoir,” 14.
\item E. W. Mofflin, “Letter to Nesta and Family, 1915,” Army Museum of Western Australia, 12.
\end{itemize}
positions...Many of the officers were dead.29

If this passage is read as a general description of the fighting, it does not appear to match the established version, as the advance of the front lines had ceased by early-mid-morning. Despite this, costly to-and-fro fighting continued in some areas, such as the dominating hill known as Baby 700, and perhaps this is what Facey is describing. Only two 11th Battalion officers were killed (or perhaps missing) on the morning of 25 April: Captain W.R. Annear and Lieutenant M. Reid, although others were also wounded. Reid was in Bert’s company, and perhaps Facey’s account describes movements on Battleship Hill forward of Baby 700 where Reid was fatally wounded. If so, Facey’s timing is out. Facey’s officer, Lieutenant C.F. Buttle, was neither killed nor wounded at the Landing, but fought on Battleship Hill. Exaggerated perceptions of casualties, particularly among officers, were not uncommon among men fighting in isolated, often leaderless, parties on 25 April. By nightfall, Facey’s:

small group had moved into a gully which later became known as Shrapnel Gully...one of the hottest spots...On each side were very high hills and on the hills were the Turks, including many snipers. They...had a clear view of the whole valley.30

Shrapnel Gully was the main thoroughfare to the Australian and New Zealand front lines; in other words, it lay behind the ANZAC lines from early to mid-morning on the first day. This passage is confusing, though Facey is correct in pointing out that in the early days of the campaign some Turkish riflemen did occupy vantage points and sniped effectively down the valley.

A reference to fighting on 26 April also appears at odds with the known story. ‘All the second day we advanced slowly along the valley’.31 There appears to be no correlation between this comment and events in Shrapnel Gully after the morning of 25 April. An unverifiable possibility is that Facey is referring to a different valley — in the early days more than one valley appears to have been known as ‘Shrapnel Gully’. Some of Facey’s company who had fought on Battleship Hill until they were pushed back in the mid-morning of the first day, later fought in a gully to the north of the main ANZAC lines.32 Perhaps Facey was with these men.

29 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 255.
30 Ibid., 255.
31 Ibid., 257.
32 Sergeant G. F. Mason, interview by C. E. W. Bean, Australian War Memorial, AWM 2DRL301 Book 31.
Facey wrote at length of the ingenuity of the Turkish snipers and the Australian response to them. ‘We lost many of our chaps to snipers…some…had been shot from behind’.³³ It was discovered that Turkish riflemen:

were sitting and standing in bushes dressed all in green … the second day … we…form[ed] into three groups of about ten men…To draw the fire they had four dummies…tunics stuffed with scrub and with Australian hats on the top… two groups would move in from the sides and attack the Turks with bayonets.³⁴

Initially, Facey’s account of Turkish snipers present in Shrapnel Gully, a crowded thoroughfare behind the ANZAC lines, and his methods of dealing with them, seems far-fetched. Yet, photographic evidence exists of Turks camouflaged with bushes and of ‘dummy’ soldiers being used to attract enemy fire.³⁵ There are also many references to Turks hiding beneath bushes and Australian troops being shot from behind in the early days of the Landing. Facey’s description of the methods used to eliminate snipers could have been an aggregation of stories from throughout the campaign, but, remarkably, a letter written after the war by his company commander, Major J. S. Denton, to the Official Historian, may support his account. Denton, who was positioned on Second Ridge on the inland side of Shrapnel Gully, wrote that in the first days ashore, ‘[w]e suffered the snipers…from all sides until we organized a beating party’.³⁶

‘By nightfall on the third day’, Facey continues:

we had established a temporary firing-line linking up from the sea and circling half a mile or more inland…We continued moving up to the head of Shrapnel Gully and kept after the Turks on the hills…On the fifth day we dug ourselves in, making a temporary firing-line at the southern end of the Gully…We were getting sniped at from this ridge…We built a sand-bag protection for extra cover.³⁷

This description is difficult to reconcile with the geography and history of the Shrapnel Gully area as it was known. One remote possibility is that Facey is referring to a dangerous forward position later known as Wire Gully, which was occupied by some of his platoon in the early days of the Landing.³⁸

³³ Facey, A Fortunate Life, 257.
³⁴ Facey, A Fortunate Life, 257-58.
³⁵ Photograph Collection, Australian War Memorial, AWM G00377, P00859.
³⁷ Facey, A Fortunate Life, 259.
³⁸ Hurst, Game to the Last, 49.
The preceding analysis demonstrates that there are dangers in superimposing the generalities of aspects of the battalion’s experience onto an individual and expecting to obtain an accurate and reliable picture of the individual experience. Time and again Facey’s account does not seem to match the known picture of the Landing, yet deeper research and analysis of primary sources has a habit of producing facts that support his story. In addition, Capper argues that, partly as a consequence of Facey not learning to read and write until after the campaign, his account should be read as a story that evolved in the oral tradition, characterised by a different approach to that of a literary culture, and, ‘To some extent many of the episodes…may be thought of as transcriptions of oral tales’. Equipped with an awareness of the problems of recollection, narration, omission, chronology, juxtaposition, and condensation, and armed with the scraps of evidence provided by the ‘men on the ground’, a re-interpretation is allowed to emerge that adds credibility to a superficially unconvincing account. Alternatively, Facey’s narrative could be interpreted as a compilation of second hand information by someone who was not present, an aggregation of anecdotes acquired from the survivors of Baby 700, Battleship Hill and Wire Gully. In other words, a story.

Similar analysis can be applied to Facey’s other experiences at the Landing, but the prime reason to question his account is that his service record states that his battalion did not take him on strength until 7 May 1915, nearly two weeks after the event. There is evidence that some of the 2nd and 3rd Reinforcements joined the battalion before the landing. The unit history states this happened on 10 April, and Lieutenant C. Gostelow, an officer who joined the unit at this time, confirms this in his diary. To accept Bert’s story we need to accept that there is a mistake in the official record. Another 3rd Reinforcement, W.A. Telford, wrote to his wife in late May 1915 that ‘I didn’t come ashore until the Wednesday (28th April)’, adding that this was:

just when they started re-organizing and it wasn’t too pleasant…has anyone seen so and so, yes, someone would reply. He was killed near me on so and so ridge, or he was killed in the boat, or…was missing.

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39 Capper, “Facey’s A Fortunate Life and Traditional Oral Narratives,” 281.
40 Belford, Legs Eleven, 56; and, C. Gostelow, Diary, private collection, Perth, Western Australia (1915).
The detail about re-organizing and the enquiries about missing friends confirm the period of 28-30 April. The significance of this is that Telford’s service record shows that he was not taken on strength by the battalion until 2 May.

There is a likely reason for the discrepancy, given the obvious pressures of the time. The battalion’s administration was probably overwhelmed or a low priority. Facey’s date of arrival, 7 May, was not recorded until 9 May, suggesting overwhelmed administration and a source of error. Of interest is the fact that Telford’s letter includes a brief description of the Landing; he may have gained this information from his brother and others who landed on 25 April. His account contains the minor misconceptions or distortions common in second hand accounts and those similar to those in Facey’s.

Les Whiting, of the 2nd Reinforcement, later wrote a memoir in which he describes arriving at Lemnos and trans-shipping, ‘to the SS Suffolk which had 11th Battalion on board, the old boys had not heard a shot fired…several days here brought us to Saturday 24 April…landing made next morning at dawn’. Whiting repeated this in an article published after the war in one of the Western Australian newspapers, probably the *Western Mail*, when he wrote of:

joining the old 11th on the Suffolk at Lemnos a couple of weeks before the Landing…one of the old 11th sang out “It’s about time you blighters woke up!”

This feeling…disappeared altogether after Sunday, April 25, 1915.

In another article, Whiting wrote of an argument between two of his 11th Battalion comrades, ‘Nick’ and ‘Tweedie’, about whether ‘lords, dukes, and other high-bred people would fight better…than the common folks’. This conversation took place ‘on the troopship Suffolk whilst we lay at Lemnos’ after an address by ‘Tipperary’, the battalion CO, Lieutenant-Colonel James Lyon Johnston. Johnston’s address is well-documented in other sources as taking place aboard *Suffolk* in the days immediately preceding the Landing. Whiting continues:

Nick got his third and fatal handout at Villers-Brett on the night of 24-25 April 1918. He must have got his ticket at almost the same hour that three years

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42 Hurst, *Game to the Last*, xvi.
46 Belford, *Legs Eleven*, 63-64.
previously he had landed on Gallipoli.47

‘Nick’ Carter’s service record states that he was not taken ‘on strength’ until 28 April, yet these narratives clearly state his participation in the landing.

Whiting’s service record also shows that he was not taken ‘on strength’ by the battalion until 7 May, the same date as Facey, yet it seems extremely unlikely that he or Telford would have claimed they were on the peninsula earlier than they were. Telford had no reason to do so as he stated he was not present at the Landing on 25 April. After the war Whiting wrote a number of reminiscences for publication in the Western Australian press. It appears highly unlikely that a battle-scarred veteran like Whiting would have claimed to have taken part in a battle of such suffering and pride as the Landing had he not been there. His comrades and the battle’s veterans were still alive and would have resented it, and he wrote with them in mind. It is easier to accept errors in administration in times of great activity, strain, excitement, and difficult communications, than to believe that these men had falsely claimed they had taken part in the Landing.

Curiously, in the early 1990s Facey’s service record contained a letter, handwritten by Bert, to the Central Army Records Office. In the 1978 letter, Facey enquires about a campaign medal, presumably his Gallipoli Medal. He mentions being present at the Landing: ‘As far as I can remember we joined the battalion [at Lemnos] the day before the landing’.48 This letter does not appear today in the scanned digital version of Facey’s service record. Clearly Facey believed what he had written in A Fortunate Life — that he joined the 11th Battalion shortly before the Landing. He did not need to claim to have been present at the Landing to be eligible for this award. The remainder of the Gallipoli section of A Fortunate Life reads like Facey’s account of the Landing. It can be read critically or lyrically. The difference is that the main reason to view it critically is absent, as the author’s service record makes it clear he was on the peninsula with the battalion during this time. This in turn may add strength to his claim that he fought at the Landing, in that the events he described, when he was known to be on the peninsula, are similarly engaging and anomalous. The intention is not to examine the whole Gallipoli section in as much depth as the Landing, but two examples may illustrate the contradictions.

47 Whiting, “Blood Will Tell!”
48 Enclosure to service record, supra, n. 9.
silt spur

Bert's brother Roy arrived at Gallipoli with the 11th Battalion's 4th Reinforcements. On 28 June the Battalion was ordered to undertake an operation later regarded by its participants as 'the most unpleasant' endured 'by them during the war'. Bert claims he took part in this action, on an exposed ridge known as Silt Spur. It was here that he discovered, 'Roy had been killed…I helped to bury Roy and fifteen of our mates...We put them in a grave side by side on the edge of a clearing we called Shell Green'. Roy Facey and twenty others were killed on 28 June and are buried at Shell Green. Photographs of this burial have since come to light. As with most of Bert's Gallipoli narrative, much of his description of this action correlates well with the known version of events. But there are anomalies.

According to the Official History, the Silt Spur 'attack' was made by members of A and C Companies. Roy belonged to A Company, but D Company (to whom Bert belonged) apparently took no part in the action. Further investigation once again provides an explanation. D Company's Lieutenant Gostelow did take part in the operation and survived to tell the tale. After the action, Colonel Johnston wrote that A Company was on the, 'Right Flank “C”, in the Centre, “D” Company on the left…The left half of “D” Company remained in the trenches'. It could be assumed that if half of D Company remained in the trenches, the remainder must have advanced, as had A and C Companies. This assumption is supported by the casualty figures for the battalion which show that D Company suffered about half as many casualties as A and C, while B Company, held in reserve, had none. It therefore appears that the error lies in the Official History, and that some members of Facey’s D Company did take part in this action.

leane’s trench

On the evening of 31 July the 11th Battalion fought a remarkable action that resulted in the assault and capture of a Turkish position later known as Leane's Trench. Facey’s description of his part in this fighting is invaluable. It is a rare,
first hand account of trench fighting in a night battle rarely mentioned in works on Gallipoli. Facey recalled being ‘ordered to’ Tasmania Post where, “[w]e were all set to work digging tunnels…towards the Turks’ trenches…By the end of July we were ready to try and take the Turks’ position’. This account gives the impression the tunneling was conducted over a period of time by the 11th Battalion. In fact the 12th Battalion had undertaken a good deal of the work while the 11th was in ‘rest’, the latter moving into the line on 27 July. Despite this, Bert’s account is essentially correct, in that the tunneling was completed while the 11th Battalion occupied Tasmania Post.

Facey’s account of this battle compares well with the Official History. The Turkish position was taken as he described, and the fact that each company provided fifty men for the assault confirms that members of D Company took part. Moreover, Facey’s platoon commander, Lieutenant J.W. Franklyn, led one of the assault parties. Bert’s account however states that the victors were not relieved for some time and ‘by the sixth day were almost dead on our feet’. In reality, the exhausted participants of the fight were relieved by the 12th Battalion during the afternoon or early evening following the assault.

Facey and ‘a number’ of others ‘went back to our reserve trenches to have a well-earned rest’. He was woken:

Just before daylight…the Turks were back in the trench and were also in the tunnels…we were ordered to charge again…in broad daylight….The little strip of land that we had to cross was being swept by machine-guns and fire from all angles. Our casualties were heavy; nearly all the men to my left were killed.

Three 11th Battalion parties charged the recently re-captured position and all suffered heavily. As Franklyn led the second party, it is not impossible Bert was among them. Franklyn, only 18 years old, was one of the many killed. Facey was sent back to his original trench with a message that the Turks still occupied the tunnel they had captured that morning and ‘were throwing grenades’ from the entrance. ‘Our colonel…ordered me to take charge of the tunnel’. Facey

54 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 269-70.
55 Hurst, Game to the Last, 125.
56 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 271.
57 Hurst, Game to the Last, 144.
58 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 271.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 272.
describes how he built a sandbag barricade to trap the Turks who surrendered shortly after. Eight ‘Turks came out’.61

Whatever the truth is in this statement, what is documented is that Boer War veteran Private W.R. Smith had prevented the Turks advancing through the tunnel. Colonel Johnston watched ‘Combo’ Smith firing at the enemy as he: coolly and courageously kept at least six Turks at bay and erected a barricade keeping them at bay for some time until the tunnel was recaptured and the six Turks taken prisoner in it. His conduct was cool and gallant throughout.62

Smith may have single-handedly held back the Turks in the tunnel, but was later assisted by others in the trench. After the action, the brigadier wrote that ‘a number of men at once blocked’ the tunnel ‘with bags and defended it until retaken’.63 Perhaps Facey was one of them. While escorting the captured Turks to the rear, Facey witnessed an event that to him was one of the ‘miracles of the Gallipoli Campaign’:

We had…an Australian soldier in the lead…then a Turk, another Aussie, then another Turk, and so on…a shrapnel shell suddenly exploded about us, killing the first, second and third Turk and badly wounding the fourth. Not one of us Aussies was touched.64

Whether this happened as written cannot be established, but the event can in part be substantiated: MacLagan’s report confirms that ‘six prisoners’ had been taken, ‘3 of whom were killed by enemy shrapnel whilst being brought to HQ’.65

One issue, not yet discussed, is that in A Fortunate Life Facey seems to have been heavily involved in the Gallipoli experience of the 11th Battalion. The battalion had the apparently unrivalled experience — or ordeal — of fighting six battles in a little over three months at Gallipoli. Facey claims to have taken part in five of these battles. Given that only portions of the battalion made the attacks at Silt Spur and Leane’s Trench, and that hundreds of reinforcements had joined the 11th at Gallipoli, it is difficult to believe that Facey could have experienced as much as he had claimed. Yet, once again, the facts are on his side. Franklyn took part in both battles at Leane’s Trench. Had Louch not been wounded shortly before the second charge, he, a veteran of the Landing

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61 Ibid., 272.
62 Service Record, W.R. Smith, Series B2455, National Archives of Australia.
63 E. G. S. MacLagan, Report to 1st Division, 6 August 1915, 3rd Brigade War Diary, Australian War Memorial.
64 Facey, A Fortunate Life, 272-73.
65 MacLagan, Report, 6 August 1915.
and the first attack on Leane’s Trench, would have taken part. Notably the action in which Facey does not claim to have participated was the Gaba Tepe raid, in which D Company did not take part. What Facey claims he experienced may have been exceptional, but not impossible. Of his other experiences, Capper has noted the same: ‘It is perfectly true that much of what is here likened to folktale occurred by chance in Facey’s life…Deny it as we might’.

conclusion

Did Private Albert Facey (no. 1536) take part in the famous landing he describes in his down to earth style? The official answer would have to be ‘no’, as his service record demonstrates that he was not with the 11th Battalion at the time. If this is correct, his account, more vague and anomalous than the remainder of his Gallipoli reminiscences, is based on stories relayed to him when he joined the battle’s survivors on the peninsula. A knowledge of the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign adds further doubt to the authenticity of Facey’s account. Conversely, there seems little doubt Telford, Whiting, and Carter were on the peninsula at the times claimed and the fact that their service records appear to contain errors opens the door for the acceptance of Facey’s account.

Witnesses to an event can be expected to have different recollections of its details. This does not mean that eye-witness evidence is worthless, but that analysis is required to differentiate the strengths and weaknesses of accounts. This article has shown that primary sources can be used to establish a context in which to analyse Facey’s account of Gallipoli, and that analysis at this level of detail presents a picture different to that obtained from ‘official’ sources. Perhaps such detail provides, as described by Shrub, the ‘touch of truth’ that makes Facey’s experience ‘new again’. Many anomalies in Facey’s narrative can be explained by minor slips of memory, which are to be expected and not uncommon in related histories, or by acknowledgement that some of his comments are honest records of his perceptions. Therefore, Bert wrote that he was exposed to heavy enemy fire during his approach to shore because he felt he was. He was not the only one. His ‘story-telling’ tone may simply be due to his simple writing style and one inherited from, according to Capper, traditions of oral story-telling. If so, anomalies are entirely

66 Hurst, Game to the Last, 154-5.  
67 Capper, “Facey’s A Fortunate Life,” 281.  
68 Shrub, “Cobbett and Facey,” 42.  
69 Capper, “Facey’s A Fortunate Life,” 266-81.
understandable, given his age, education and life experience at the time.

The question of whether Facey experienced all the events he described or was told them by others, still remains. Even if Facey’s stories were ‘fashioned and polished’ over many years in their ‘telling and re-telling...until Bert could tell them just the way he wanted’, or were embellished with stories ‘doing the rounds’ at the time, neither the remainder of his service nor his literary contribution is negated.\textsuperscript{70} Saying that, there is undoubtedly a blurring between history and story-telling. Nevertheless, whether certain incidents occurred to Facey (or others), they are of value in that they performed a service by recording them when others did not or did not survive to do so. The rough aggregation of anecdotes and Bert’s simple style suited the Gallipoli myth in many ways. Indeed, his stories may have been influenced by the myth as they evolved in the telling and re-telling before he put pen to paper.\textsuperscript{71} As such they add to public perceptions of the campaign, but as this article has demonstrated, the smallest of details languishing in unpublished personal documents can reveal the kernel of fact behind the most unlikely anecdotes. Digging deeper into the experience of those who served in the 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion at that time and using them as witnesses, produces a history that supports Facey’s view of events, or at least shows his narrative is plausible.

Facey fought through much of the Gallipoli campaign. Detailed research and analysis of the 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion’s experience, constructed from a great range of primary sources, reveals a significant correlation of fact with Facey’s story. Evidence from 1915 supports the possibility that he could have served on Silt Spur and at Leane’s Trench. Did Facey land on 25 April? The secrets of history, the gaps in our knowledge and the impossibility of certainty in ‘balance of evidence’ demonstrates this to be a plausible argument. Facey was permanently injured by the campaign and left two brothers buried there. Regardless of the evidence of his service record, Bert Facey may have fought at the Landing; he may even have been one of the small band who fought briefly on Battleship Hill. If he did fight through those difficult days, it would do him a great disservice to imply otherwise.

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\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 269. \\
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 271.