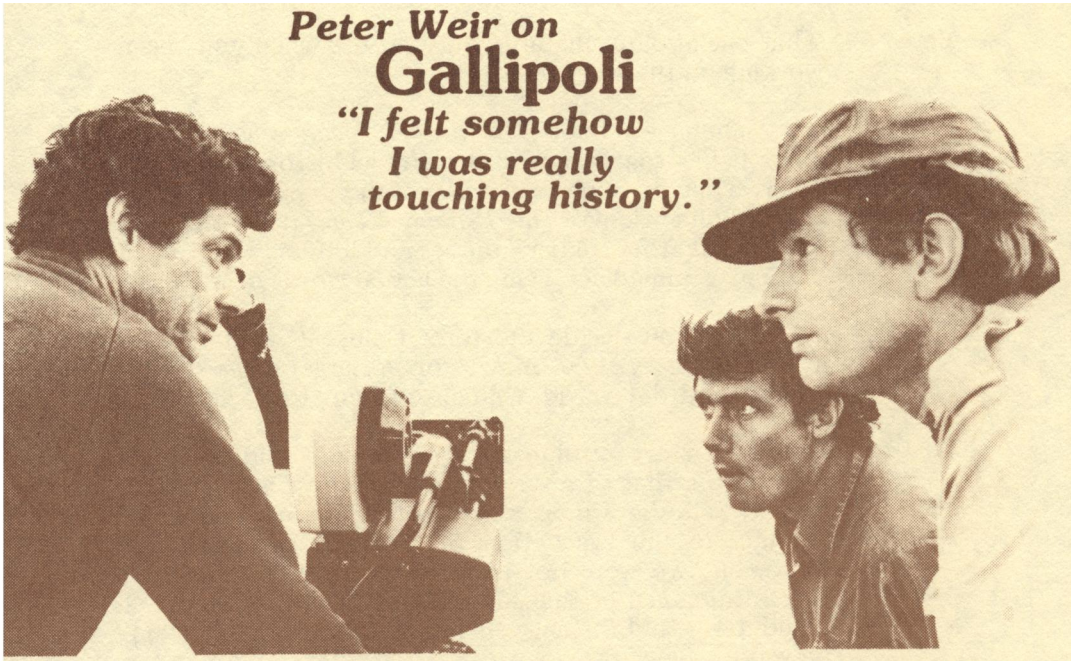

Gallipoli (Paramount Pictures, 1981). Directed by Peter Weir. Produced by Robert Stigwood and Patricia Lovell. Screenplay by David Williamson, from a story by Peter Weir. Art Director: Herbert Pinter. Director of Photography: Russell Boyd, A.C.S. Film Editor: William Anderson. CAST: Mel Gibson (Frank Dunne), Mark Lee (Archy), Bill Hunter (Major Barton), Tim McKenzie (Barney), David Argue (Snowy), Robert Grubb (Billy), et al. Stills and text courtesy of Paramount Pictures Corporation. Seen above (left to right) Russell Boyd (at camera) David Williamson, and Peter Weir.

Q. When did you first have the idea for *Gallipoli*?

WEIR: In 1975, after I'd finished *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. At that time I was thinking of a story set in France, dealing with the big battles of 1916-17, then someone said to me why not make the film about Gallipoli, it's the obvious one.

The following year I went to London for the opening of *Picnic* and thought I should take a look at Gallipoli on the way. I went to Istanbul, hired a car and drove to the battlefield, an extraordinary experience. I saw no one in two days of climbing up and down the slopes and wandering through the trenches, finding all sorts of scraps left by the armies: buttons and bits of old leather, belts, bones of donkeys, even an unbroken Eno's Fruit Salts bottle. I felt somehow I was really touching history, that's really what it was, and it totally altered my perception of Gallipoli. I decided then and there that I'd make the film.

Q. What background material did you use when you began working on the story idea?

WEIR: Bill Gammage's book *The Broken Years* was of enormous help, together with the official history by C.E.W. Bean. They became the basis of my research and of David Williamson's. *The Broken Years* is a collection of excerpts from soldiers' diaries and letters, which has a particular immediacy being the actual words of the men.

Q. When did you decide the form Gallipoli would take—a documentary-style movie or a large scale "epic" canvas, and did David Williamson help to decide this?

WEIR: I wrote a story outline and gave it to David and that became the first of a series of drafts. Our first approach was to tell the whole story from enlistment in 1914 through to the evacuation of Gallipoli at the end of 1915, but we were not getting at what this thing was, the burning center that had made Gallipoli a legend. I could never find the answers in any books and it certainly wasn't evolving in any of our drafts, so we put the legend to one side and simply made up a story about two young men, really got to know them, where they came from, what happened to them along the way, spent more time getting to the battle and less time on the battlefield.

The draft fell into place. By approaching the subject obliquely, I think we had come as close to touching the source of the myth as we could. I think there's a Chinese proverb—it's not the arriving at one's destination but the journey that matters. *Gallipoli* is about two young men on the road to adventure, how they crossed continents and great oceans, climbed the pyramids and walked through the ancient sands of Egypt, and the deserts of the outback, to their appointment with destiny at Gallipoli.

The end of the film is really all about that appointment and how they coped with it. I don't think we could have ever sat down in the early stages and got this—it took years of talking, writing, arguing, to finally get back to something incredibly simple.

Q. At what point did producer Patricia Lovell become involved with *Gallipoli*?

WEIR: I rang her in Cannes in 1979 and asked her to produce the film. She borrowed a copy of the script from someone, rang me back and that was it. We were to do

another film together. Twelve months later we approached Associated R & R Productions and got the go ahead.

Q. So then you had David Williamson and Pat Lovell involved. How did the casting evolve?

WEIR: I was very impressed with Mel Gibson after *Mad Max* and Pat was, too. So Mel was a mutual thought and not hard.

Q. Mark Lee as Archy?

WEIR: He came in for a photo call for a brochure on *Gallipoli*, I saw him and knew he had the special quality or qualitied that we had combined in Archy.

Q. You didn't worry that he hadn't been in a feature film?

WEIR: He showed a flair in his screen test that was more than borne out when we started shooting. He was inspired and gave more than I expected. I knew he'd have to work hard to hold the screen with Mel and he's done just that.

Q. I suppose the chemistry was vital?

WEIR: If they hadn't clicked, the film wouldn't have worked.

Q. How did you choose your locations?

WEIR: I had a team out doing surveys including the art director and first assistant who turned up the beach at Port Lincoln which we used for Gallipoli. They also found Beltana which we used for Archy's home in Western Australia. It was while flying to Beltana that we crossed Lake Torrens which was absolutely right for the West Australian desert.

Q. Why didn't you do the whole film in Egypt?

WEIR: Too complex getting Anglo-Saxon extras. We needed large numbers—we finished by using almost 4000 people.

Q. Why did you choose the Light Horse as the boys' regiment?

WEIR: Because they were the regiment that fought at the Battle of the Nek which we see at the end of the film. You only have to read the official account of that battle by Bean to gain a respect and admiration for the type of man in the 10th Light Horse, a type of Australian largely vanished from the country.

Q. You mentioned you went to Lake Torrens to shoot the sequence of the two boys walking across the desert on their way to Perth.

WEIR: Yes, it's strange to see these two young men off to a European war, walking through such a vast empty space. It had a fabulously abstract appeal to me, to hear them arguing about a war, and whether it's right or wrong to go, in the middle of all that blinding nothing. There are moments of that unreality throughout the film—the small boy blowing a trumpet on top of the giant enlistment wooden horse, the night landing, the sequence of the men swimming underwater at Gallipoli beach with the shells exploding all round them.

Q. Perhaps it was unreal. The fact those men wanted to enlist in a war they knew nothing about—travelling hundreds of miles to enlist—just to prove their patriotism or courage.

WEIR: To understand, you have to deal in paradox. "They were the best of times and the worst of times" and the film is about both these aspects.

Q. Then after the desert you went to Port Lincoln where I presume the mood of the film changed because of the enormous number of film extras?

WEIR: Yes, it was almost like planning a battle—we used 600 or 700 extras in some of the battle scenes. Each day, working with army advisers, we drilled our "soldiers," marching, presenting arms, cleaning weapons, etc. First couple of days you could see they didn't like it much, then slowly they began to change. Mark Egerton [assistant director] and I used to keep them informed of what the sequence was, reminding them of what the original men went through at that moment. Sometimes we handed out printed notes so they could get an historical summary of what actually happened. So really they were reenacting rather than acting. I'll never forget one night addressing the men from the boats, feeling a bit guilty because we'd keep them in the boats and wading through the surf for five hours while we filmed shells whizzing round them. I said: I'm sorry it's been five hours, you're released now and you might go home and get a bit of sleep." And one of the extras said indignantly: "Don't be sorry. We only spent five hours, the real ANZACS had to go up to the hills under fire, march an hour and a half, then try to sleep with only a thin blanket over them."