GALLIPOLI

(Australian, 1981, 111 Minutes)

On April 25, Australia and New Zealand annually celebrate ANZAC Day, commemorating both the day in 1915 when their armed forces landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula and the symbolic beginning of their national identity. The Gallipoli campaign was an Anglo-French operation conceived by Winston Churchill to force the Dardanelles, knock Turkey out of the war, and open the path to supply the Russian Army. Some have argued that, in light of political machinations such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Gallipoli was more a needless and self-serving diversion designed to bolster British colonial interests in the Middle East. In any case, this first large scale attempt at amphibious assault was an organizational and tactical disaster.

Although the actual losses were relatively small by World War I standards -- Australia and New Zealand suffered about 10,000 killed -- the Gallipoli campaign holds special resonance in their national identities (similar to Passchendaele for Canada). Australian director Peter Weir (*Master and Commander, Witness, Dead Poets’ Society*) brought this feeling to film in *Gallipoli*. The film features Mel Gibson and Mark Lee in a compelling story of two friends caught up in a horrifying war in 1915. The characters move from civilian life to training to combat. Friendships and growth are symbolic of the coming of age of Australia. A subtheme in the film is the callous attitude of aristocratic British officers toward their “lesser” colonial troops. Although actual combat seems almost an afterthought, the conclusion is one of the most emotionally grinding, soul shattering experiences in film history.