

EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH: THE BATTLE OF GALLIPOLI

25 April 1915 – 9 January 1916

Background

By November 1914 the movement of the opposing Entente and German armies on the Western Front was slowing to the stalemate of trench warfare. The Ottoman Empire had secretly joined Germany's Central Powers alliance on 2nd August 1914, hoping to use the war as a means of reasserting control over their former territories in Egypt and the fragile Balkans region.

On 26th January 1915, they had launched a surprise attack into the Khedivate of Egypt – a semi-autonomous state of the Ottoman Empire ruled under British occupation as a British Protectorate. The Ottoman aim was to seize control of the Suez Canal, cut off Britain from her Empire, and re-establish direct rule there. At the same time, Jihadist Sennusi Arabs launched a guerrilla campaign out of Libya in support of the Ottoman Army. The Ottoman Armies had hoped their arrival would trigger a local Egyptian Arab uprising under the banner of Islamic Jihad in support of their military attack, but it never emerged.



Britain saw the entry of the Ottoman Empire as an opportunity to break the deadlock on the Western Front, by quickly knocking them out of the war, linking up with Russia, and encircling the Central Powers on all sides. Winston

Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty believed the Dardanelles could be forced by naval power, allowing Constantinople to be easily captured. With the Ottoman Empire out of the war, he argued that Greece and Italy would be encouraged to join the war on the Entente side. The remaining Central Powers would be fully encircled and cut off from outside support.

The French and British navies tried to batter the Ottoman shore fortresses into submission with heavy bombardments from their powerful guns, and they were very nearly successful, but in one disastrous day on 18 March, three capital ships were sunk and several others badly damaged when they struck sea mines in the straits. The naval attack was called off, and replaced with a land invasion on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



NAM. 1965-10-209-9 Church service on HMS 'Queen Elizabeth', 1915.

Which British Empire & Allied Troops Were There?

The Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was commanded by General Sir Ian Hamilton. It consisted of:

- UK – Royal Navy, Royal Naval Division, British Army (10 Divisions)
- Australia – Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Aust 1st & 2nd Div)
- New Zealand – Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (New Zealand and Australian Division)
- India – 29th Indian Infantry Brigade (including the 1/6th, the 1st/5th and the 2nd/10th Gurkha Rifles)
- Newfoundland* – The Newfoundland Regiment
- Egypt & Palestine – Zion Mule Corps
- France – French Navy, French Army, Foreign Legion, French Colonials
- Prior to joining Canada as a tenth province in 1949, Newfoundland had been an independent Dominion in its own right since 1907.



NAM. 1976-05-52-79 Photograph of Indian soldiers in trench, Gallipoli, 1915.

Who Were They Fighting Against?

The Ottoman Empire's Fifth Army, commanded by German *Generalleutnant* Otto Liman von Sanders. He was assisted by the Ottoman General Mehmet Esat Bülkat, and the German General Hans Kannengiesser, but one of the Ottoman forces best commanders was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in charge of the Ottoman 19th Division.

Overview

The Battle of Gallipoli (25th April 1915 – 9th January 1916), or the “Gallipoli Campaign”, was actually a series of several battles fought over eight and a half months in first two, and later three different parts of the Gallipoli Peninsular. These included:

- The Naval operations in the Dardanelles Strait (19th February – 18th March 1915);
- The Landing at Cape Helles (25th April 1915) and the subsequent Battles of 1st Krithia (28/4/15), 2nd Krithia (6-8/5/15), 3rd Krithia (4/6/15), Gully Ravine (28/6-5/7/15), and Krithia Vineyard (6-13/8/15);
- The Landing at Anzac Cove (25 April 1915) and the subsequent Battles of 1st Anzac Cove (25/4/15), 2nd Anzac Cove (27/4/15), 3rd Anzac Cove (19/4/15), and No.3 Post (28-30/5/15);
- The Landing at Suvla Bay (6–15 August 1915) and the subsequent Battles of Sari Bair (6-21/8/15), The Nek (7/8/15), Lone Pine (6-10/8/15), Chunuk Bair (7-19/8/15), Scimitar Hill (21/8/15), & Hill 60 (21-29/8/15).



An initial attempt was made to land British forces on the tip of the Gallipoli Peninsular (Cape Helles) and the ANZACs mid-way up the Western coastline. The ANZACs were supposed to move across and capture the middle of the

peninsular to prevent reinforcements from arriving from the north, whilst the main British force captured all of the powerful defensive fortresses along the Dardanelles coast. From there, an advance up the peninsula to the Ottoman capital Constantinople could be made.



NAM. 1965-10-209-14 'V' Beach from the 'River Clyde', Dardanelles, 1915.

The ANZACs were landed too far from their intended position, and found themselves coming ashore at the base of sheer cliffs, which took longer to scale than intended. This allowed the astute field command of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to keep the ANZACs pinned to their coastal toehold. Additionally, Ottoman reinforcements flooded south and prevented the British forces from their intended advance. Atatürk realised the precariousness of his situation ordering the men of his 19th Division: "I do not order you to fight, I order you to die. In the time which passes until we die, other troops and commanders can come forward and take our places". Over the next few weeks the British made several attempts to push north in the Krithia area, but failed to break out. At Anzac Cove, the Ottoman forces made several attempts to dislodge the

ANZACs, but they stubbornly refused to be moved, clinging determinedly to the cliff tops.



NAM. 1990-06-215-9 Fortifications on the Gallipoli peninsula, 1915.

With the Allied troops unable to advance and increasingly suffering in the rising summer heat, an August offensive was planned with a third front opening at Suvla Bay, but this too failed to meet its objectives. The Australian attack at Lone Pine during this part of the campaign was meant to be a diversion. It proved to be the only *Entente* victory of the Gallipoli Campaign.

Outcome

The campaign lost momentum after the failure of the summer offensives. Additionally the Kingdom of Bulgaria joined the Central Powers on 14 October 1915. This placed pressure on Serbia. With Austria and Bulgaria now threatening Serbia, British attention was turned to opening a new front in Salonika to help them.

Bulgaria's decision also gave Germany a rail route through Bulgaria, allowing Germany to send heavy siege guns to Gallipoli that would decimate the crude trenchworks there. So in December the decision to evacuate was made.

Ironically the evacuation was one of the smoothest operations of the campaign. Heavy casualties were feared as they withdrew, but clever ruses were used to fool the Ottoman forces as troops slipped quietly away from the trenches. One such trick was the “drip-rifle” of Lance Corporal Scurry of the 7th Battalion, AIF which would slowly drip water into a tin, eventually making it heaving enough to pull the trigger, and causing the rifle to fire of its own accord – this made the Ottoman soldiers think more men were still manning the trenches as they evacuated than really were, and discouraging them from attacking.

The failure of the Gallipoli Campaign, which was intended to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war quickly, meant a long-winded three and a half year campaign had to be fought against them through Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria. The Ottoman victory in the Gallipoli Campaign was their only major success of the war.

Stats & Facts

The Gallipoli Campaign lasted for 8 months, 2 weeks and 1 day.

With very few casualties, 35,268 troops, 3,689 horses and mules, 127 guns, 328 vehicles and 1,600 tons of equipment were successfully removed during the evacuation.

During the Gallipoli Campaign, Lance-Corporal William Beach, 2nd Bn, AIF invented the periscope rifle to allow you to shoot over a trench parapet without raising your head above it.

The Zion Mule Corps was raised from amongst the 11,000 Jewish refugees living in exile in Alexandria, Egypt – many of whom were Russian Jews.



NAM. 1978-11-157-15-61 Anzac in the snow, November 1915.

During the summer months, many casualties were caused by sunstroke and flies spreading disease. As winter set in, the troops suffered from frostbite and exposure in the extreme cold.

Over half a million men fought in the ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign. It cost over 100,000 lives, and a further 230,000 casualties. The Ottoman Empire suffered 56,643 dead and 107,007 wounded, and the Allies suffered 56,707 dead and 123,598 wounded. Of the Allied dead, 34,072 were British, 9,798 were French, 8,709 were Australian, 2,721 were New Zealanders, 1,358 were Indian (including Nepalese Gurkhas), and 49 were from Newfoundland.



NAM. 1976-05-52-89 '5th Gurkhas', Gurkha Rifles in bivouacs (a temporary camp without tents or cover), Gallipoli, 1915

37 Victoria Crosses were awarded during the Gallipoli Campaign, including 23 to British soldiers, 9 to Australians, 4 to Irishmen, and 1 to a New Zealander. Six of the British VCs were awarded for actions during the landing of the 1st Battalion, the Lancashire Fusiliers on 'W' Beach, Cape Helles, who came ashore under heavy fire and suffered 700 casualties on that first morning. Their actions led to the famous expression "Six VCs before breakfast".

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs) was formed in Egypt in March 1915 specifically for the Gallipoli Campaign. Although Australian and New Zealand troops are referred to as Anzacs throughout the war, and subsequent mixed units sometimes had ANZAC in their title, the original ANZAC formation was disbanded after Gallipoli in February 1916.

The ANZACs were commanded by British Lieutenant General William Birdwood, whom they affectionately called 'Birdy' – unlike many British Generals who found the Australians unruly and ill-disciplined, he understood their mentality, and knew that by embracing their free-spirit and sense of

adventure, he made them better soldiers. Other British generals found the familiarity between Birdy and the Australians to be concerning, but Birdwood knew it helped him get the most out of his men.

The Gallipoli Campaign is considered to be the birth of national consciousness for Australians and New Zealanders, who started to feel a separate identity from Britain for the first time. William Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia from 1915 to 1923 said: 'Australia was born on the shores of Gallipoli'. Despite the Battle of Gallipoli being strongly associated with Australian and New Zealand soldiers due to its importance in their national identity, the majority of soldiers that fought there were British.

Winston Churchill took much of the blame for the failure of the campaign, and was demoted from his position as First Lord of the Admiralty. Sidelined, he resigned from Government as resumed his Army career, serving on the Western Front as a Major with the 2nd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, and later Lieutenant-Colonel, commanding the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers.