

World War I: The 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli (1915-1916)

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The Battle of Gallipoli, or the Battle of Çanakkale, was fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Forces of the First World War (1914-1918) on the Gallipoli peninsula from April 25, 1915 to January 9, 1916. This battle was initiated by Britain and France, who organized a naval attack aimed at capturing the Ottoman Empire's capital, Constantinople (modern Istanbul). The Ottoman Army was commanded by Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938), while Winston Churchill (1874-1965) led the Royal Navy, which included soldiers from Australia and New Zealand in addition to those of the UK and France.

Churchill's goals were very ambitious, as he was convinced that "the invasion would give the British a clear sea route to their ally Russia and knock the fading Ottoman Empire, the "sick man of Europe"...out of the war, which would persuade one or all of the neutral states of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania to join the Allies". While Churchill was well-aware that the invasion of Gallipoli would be costly, he believed that this high price was worth paying, given that victory would eliminate Turkey as a factor in the war. He predicted that an "army of 50,000 men and sea power" would be enough to eliminate "the Turkish menace". Young Churchill was able to convince the British Cabinet of the merits of the mission and they eventually agreed to send naval forces. Also, despite some initial hesitation, the French government also supported the British plan as designed by Churchill.

In addition to Britain and France, the imperial army sent to battle in Gallipoli was also comprised of soldiers from New Zealand and Australia, who joined on account of their loyalty to the monarchy despite gaining independence as British colonies 14 years prior to the onset of the First World War. Thus, in late November 1914, soldiers from both Australia and New Zealand, who thought they were headed to England for training, were instead deployed near Cairo in Egypt. Then, in April 1915, they were ordered to go from Egypt to a new destination, the Gallipoli peninsula.

Unfortunately for Churchill, his assessments and predictions proved to be wholly inaccurate and unreliable, as the Allied Forces were not able to achieve any of their objectives. In fact, Allied Forces evacuated the Gallipoli peninsula after only eight months of fighting, with Churchill resigning his post well before this withdrawal. In the end, even though Ottoman forces were able to repel the invading Allies from Gallipoli and retain control of the region, both sides suffered tremendous casualties as a result of the fighting as well as widespread disease. To be more precise, at the conclusion of the Battle of Gallipoli, Allied Forces suffered "250,000 casualties, including some 46,000 dead," while the Turkish army "estimated 250,000 casualties, with 65,000 killed."

The Ottoman victory in the Battle of Gallipoli turned out to be one of the most significant events in the history of contemporary Turkey, with lasting impacts that extended well

beyond the physical battlefield. In addition to allowing the Turks to retain control of Constantinople and the surrounding region, it also facilitated Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's rise to prominence. Shortly after leading his forces to victory in the Battle of Gallipoli, Atatürk assumed the leadership of Turkey as its first president and, in the 1920s, implemented a series of reforms designed to facilitate the transition to Occidental patterns and lifestyles in Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Battle of Gallipoli represents one of the great defeats suffered by the Allied forces during the First World War. Despite its disastrous results, this conflict played a symbolic role in developing a sense of national identity for both Australia and New Zealand. In fact, every year, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) commemorates April 25th, the date of the original landing, as a national day of remembrance to honour the thousands of casualties that were incurred in Gallipoli. This year will mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli and, in order to commemorate its centennial, more than 8,000 Australians will gather at memorials in Turkey so as to honour the bravery of those who lost their lives in this region. Furthermore, Prince Charles and Prince Harry will also be in Turkey to "represent the royal family at the centenary Anzac dawn service in Gallipoli". Not surprisingly, there are some security concerns about the commemoration ceremony that will be held in Gallipoli on April 24 and 25, given the significance that it holds for Turkey as well as the planned attendance of the British Royal Family members, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key, and over 8,000 Australians. In response, "[i]t's expected there'll be 4000 Turkish jandarma and national police present — an increase of 40 per cent on previous years — as well as the coast guard and at least 1000 soldiers from the 2nd army corps."

It is evident that military strategists learned many lessons from the Gallipoli campaign in terms of warfare tactics, which they developed, refined, and implemented during World War II. For instance, "the successful evacuation led to the development of American amphibious warfare tactics practiced in the Pacific during the Second World War." Unfortunately, aside from some new military tactics and strategies, traditional and contemporary imperial nations appear to have learned little else in the way of an evolved sense of morality and ethics to curb their expansionist behaviour and imperialistic ambitions. Sadly, many atrocities have been committed around the globe since the end of the First World War, including World War II, as well as many other regional wars and invasions that have led to the destruction and destabilization of entire nations, particularly on the Asian and African continents. The atrocities of 20th and 21st century reinforce Hegel's claim that:

"peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it. Each period is involved in such peculiar circumstances, exhibits a condition of things so strictly idiosyncratic, that its conduct must be regulated by considerations connected with itself, and itself alone. Amid the pressure of great events, a general principle gives no help".

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