

World War I and the British Empire: The Gallipoli Campaign, The Untold Story

‘The first casualty of war is truth’

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The truth about Gallipoli has, unlike its victims, been buried deep. Historians like Peter Hart who describe it as “an idiocy generated by muddled thinking”¹ are justified in their anger, but not their conclusions. The campaign was conceived in London as a grotesque, Machiavellian strategy to fool the Russians into believing that Britain was attempting to capture Constantinople for them. The paradox of its failure lay in its success. Gallipoli was purposefully designed to fail.

A secret cabal of immensely rich and powerful men – the Secret Elite – was formed in England in 1891 with the explicit aim of expanding the British Empire across the entire globe. They planned a European war to destroy Germany as an economic, industrial and imperial competitor and, to that end, drew France then Russia into an alliance termed the Entente Cordiale. Their massive land armies were needed to crush Germany. France would be rewarded with Alsace and Lorraine, while Russia was conned into believing she would get Constantinople.² Thereafter, seizing the Ottoman capital became a “widespread obsession, bordering on panic” in St Petersburg.³

Had Britain encouraged the friendship of Turkey in 1914, the disaster of Gallipoli would never have happened.⁴ The Turks generally disliked the Germans and their growing influence,⁵ and made three separate attempts to ally with Britain. They were rebuffed on each occasion.⁶ They also pleaded in vain with the French to accept them as an ally,⁷ and protect them against their old enemy, Russia.⁸ Poor fools. The French and British alliance with Russia was at the expense of the Turks, not an alliance with the Turks to save them from Russia. Britain and France planned to carve up the oil rich Ottoman Empire. To that end, the Turks had to be pushed into the German camp and defeated.

In July 1914 the majority of the Turkish cabinet was still well disposed towards Britain,⁹ but their faith was shattered by the seizure of two battleships being built for them in England. As an essay in provocation it was breathtaking.¹⁰ “If Britain wanted deliberately to incense the Turks and drive them into the Kaiser’s arms she could not have chosen more effective means.”¹¹ Winston Churchill (a loyal servant of the Secret Elite) seized the dreadnoughts because they were “vital to Britain’s naval predominance.”¹² The truth ran much deeper.

Back in February, Russia laid plans for her Black Sea fleet to take Constantinople by landing

127,500 troops and heavy artillery from Odessa. Arrival of the dreadnoughts from England would destroy this plan.¹³ Russia's Foreign Minister Sazonov issued a thinly veiled warning to London on 30 July: "It is a matter of the highest degree of importance that... these ships must be retained in England."¹⁴ Fearful that Russia would renege on her commitment to war should the ships be released, the Secret Elite withheld them. It kept Russia on board and helped drive Turkey into the German camp (they signed a treaty on 2 August), but it created a major problem. How to prevent the Russian Black Sea fleet from seizing Constantinople? Two German warships provided the answer. On 4 August, while off the coast of Algeria, the battle cruiser *Goeben* and attendant light cruiser *Breslau* received orders to head for Constantinople.

Vastly outnumbered (73 to 2) by French and British warships, the escape of the German cruisers to Constantinople, 1,200 miles away, is described as a "fiasco of tragic errors" by "fumbling" British Admirals.¹⁵ The British Admiralty supposedly had no idea where they were heading, but the reality was very different. On 3 August, Kaiser Wilhelm telegraphed King Constantine to say that both warships would be proceeding to Constantinople. This information was transmitted to London,¹⁶ and to the British naval mission in Athens.¹⁷ Naval Intelligence in London had intercepted and decrypted the actual encoded message from Berlin to *Goeben*: "Alliance concluded with Turkey. *Goeben* and *Breslau* proceed to Constantinople." The Admiralty knew,¹⁸ but relayed information to the Mediterranean fleet that "was either useless or inaccurate."¹⁹ *Goeben* and *Breslau* were allowed to escape in order to neutralise the Russian Black Sea fleet. Foreign Secretary Sazonov was outraged that the Royal Navy had failed to prevent it.²⁰

The Ottoman Ambassador in Berlin summed it up perfectly: "Considering the displeasure and complications which a Russian attack on Constantinople would produce in England, the British navy having enabled the German ships to take cover in the Sea of Marmora, has, with the Machiavellianism characteristic of the Foreign Office, foiled any possibility of action by the Russian Black Sea Fleet."²¹ Safe arrival of the *Goeben* rendered a Russian amphibious operation well-nigh impossible,²² and the British Ambassador at Constantinople admitted that their presence served British interests, since "they protected the straits against Russia."²³

On 9 September Admiral Arthur Limpus, head of the British naval mission in Turkey, was recalled. Turkey, although still neutral, closed and mined the Dardanelles. In late October *Goeben* and *Breslau* bombarded Sevastopol and other Black Sea ports. Infuriated, Tsar Nicholas insisted on war with Turkey and the seizure of Constantinople for Russia. British and French fears that he would make peace with Germany if Constantinople was denied him gave the Tsar overwhelming diplomatic leverage, and it was agreed that Turkey must now be brought into the war.²⁴

War Declared & the Secret Elites Initiate Gallipoli Campaign

On 2 November Russia declared war on Turkey. Britain and France followed suit three days later. "November 1914 brought a kind of holy war fever to the Russian Foreign Ministry."²⁵ With over one million Russian casualties for no gain, anti-war protests and

revolution stalked the streets of Petrograd. In London, fear of Russia signing a peace treaty with Germany loomed large. How was Russia to be kept in the war with the promise of Constantinople, without actually allowing it? The solution, an attack on Gallipoli, was fraught with pitfalls. The Tsar had to be tricked into believing Britain was generously responding in his hour of need by mounting an all-out effort to take Constantinople for Russia.

The Gallipoli campaign supposedly arose from an urgent call for help from the Russian commander-in-chief Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolaevich on 31 December. Would Britain create a diversion to relieve pressure on Russian troops fighting in the Caucasus?²⁶ This widely held view is wrong. The suggestion came not from Nikolaevich, but from the British military attaché at Petrograd, Sir John Hanbury-Williams. Intimately linked to the Secret Elite and their leader Lord Alfred Milner,²⁷ Hanbury-Williams was frequently in close contact with Nikolaevich. He expressed anxiety about Russia's domestic morale, but never even mentioned the Dardanelles. It was Hanbury-Williams who planted the idea of a British demonstration against the Ottoman Empire.²⁸ Next day this was presented to the British War Council and magically transformed into a desperate plea for help from Russia.

Having already decided their strategy to keep the Russians out of Constantinople, the Secret Elite now cleverly made it appear that the idea came from Russia. It was all pre-planned, "long before any kind of military imperative in the Ottoman theatre was apparent."²⁹ The Secretary of the Committee for Imperial Defence, Maurice Hankey, proposed a solution that met all requirements, and it is no coincidence that Hankey was himself a member of the Secret Elite.³⁰ The Gallipoli campaign would be mounted as a sop to the Russians, but set up to fail.

Days later the military dynamic changed. The Turkish 3rd Army was decimated in the Caucasus and, irrespective of whose suggestion it had been, there was no need whatsoever for any British intervention to help Russia. Nonetheless, on 20 January Britain informed Russia that she would undertake not just a demonstration, but a complete operation to penetrate the Dardanelles and Gallipoli. The Russians desperately wanted to take part, but were told to concentrate all efforts against Germany on the Eastern Front. The Secret Elite moved into top gear. An objective that required long months of careful preparation was rushed ahead at breakneck speed with disregard for the basic prerequisites for success.

Churchill assumed command and chose men for their ineptitude rather than ability. He turned to Vice-Admiral Sackville Carden, recently appointed commander of the Mediterranean Squadron after years in a desk-bound job, as superintendent of the Malta dockyards. Slow and ineffective,³¹ Carden was tasked with drawing up a plan for a naval attack on the Dardanelles, and relaying it to Churchill within days for presentation to a War Council meeting.³² On 15 January Carden was informed that *his* plan had been accepted³³ and that he would be in command. What had happened? The 'plan', rapidly cobbled together on the back of an envelope by a second rate officer, was to be used as the blueprint for the Gallipoli campaign. The reluctant Carden was given no option other than to get on with it,³⁴ and was effectively set up to take the blame when it failed. For fail it must.

Rear-Admiral Arthur Limpus, an eminently more experienced and knowledgeable man who had spent years in Turkey advising on all naval matters, including the defence of the

Dardanelles, was overlooked.³⁵ Here was the man “who knew the Turks and the Dardanelles intimately,”³⁶ yet Churchill shunned him because “the Turks might be offended” and it would be “unfair and unduly provocative” to place in command a man with an inside knowledge of the Turkish fleet.³⁷ Limpus “knew all their secrets,”³⁸ and more about the Dardanelles and the Turkish navy than any other naval officer, yet we are asked to believe that he wasn’t given command because it was considered ungentelemanly – “not quite cricket.”³⁹ Limpus had been sent to the Malta dockyards to sit at Carden’s old desk. Outrageous stupidity or cold calculation?

Limpus was opposed to Churchill’s plan,⁴⁰ stressing that the first stage must be an amphibious landing, not a naval attack.⁴¹ He was not alone in his opposition. In 1906, naval chiefs considered a naval assault too risky.⁴² Any attack on Gallipoli would “have to be undertaken by a joint naval and military expedition,”⁴³ and Churchill himself stated in 1911 that it was “no longer possible to force the Dardanelles.”⁴⁴ Rear-Admiral Carden was ignorant of the fact that any chance of success at Gallipoli was absolutely dependent on a combined naval and military operation. Without long, detailed joint planning, and a sufficient number of troops, it was impossible. Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, refused to make troops available and Carden was ordered to proceed with a naval attack.

The Russians were turning the screw. Pressure for immediate action influenced the War Council’s decision.⁴⁵ On 14 February, Sazonov stated that the time for moderation had passed. Tsar Nicholas agreed, informing the French ambassador that his people were making terrible sacrifices in the war without reward. Constantinople must be incorporated into his empire.⁴⁶ Sazonov implied to the British ambassador that he would resign, and be replaced by Sergei Witte, a pro-German sympathiser who would immediately seal a treaty with Germany.⁴⁷ All warnings against a purely naval attack were ignored. The navy’s objective was to “bombard and take the Gallipoli peninsula with Constantinople as the objective.”⁴⁸ After the disastrous failure the Dardanelles Commission asked, “How can a fleet take a peninsula? And how could it have Constantinople as its objective? If this meant... that the Fleet should capture and occupy the city, then it was absurd.”⁴⁹ It was all absurd.

Naval bombardment of the outer forts of the Dardanelles began on 19 February and ran for six days. It caused some damage but destroyed all hope of surprise and merely led the Turks to strengthen their defences.⁵⁰ The main naval attack took place on 18 March. On the previous day Vice-Admiral De Robek had to take charge when Carden suffered a nervous breakdown. It was no surprise. He was never fitted for the task and felt completely undermined by the Admiralty’s refusal to provide custom-built minesweepers. They were utterly essential but he was given only North Sea trawlers that could barely make headway against the strong 5-6 knot current. Eight powerful destroyers, which could have been fitted with sweeps, remained idle that fateful day while the officers sat playing cards,⁵¹ and only two out of a total of 387 mines were cleared.⁵² A fleet of 16 British and French battleships bombarded the coast, but were unable to penetrate the minefield and six battleships were sunk or disabled by mines. The *Bouvet* sank within two minutes with over 600 men trapped

inside. It was the disaster predicted as far back as 1906.

A Campaign That Could Never Succeed

Orchestrated chaos shrouded a campaign that could never succeed. Kitchener meantime had changed his mind and agreed to make troops available for a combined attack, but the naval assault had gone ahead before their arrival. Maurice Hankey, acting more as strategic adviser to the War Council than its Secretary,⁵³ stated, “combined operations require more careful preparation than any other class of military enterprise. All through our history such attacks have failed when the preparations have been inadequate.”⁵⁴ He listed ten points to be met if a joint attack was to succeed. Was he saying, “it will fail as long as we do not take the following measures”? According to the War Council minutes, Hankey’s plan was not even discussed.⁵⁵ In the event, every point he made was studiously ignored.

Military leadership, like naval, was barely functional. General Sir Ian Hamilton, a man in the twilight of his career who “knew little of the Dardanelles, the Turkish army or of modern warfare,” was chosen to command.⁵⁶ Scared of Kitchener, and hamstrung by his long-subservience,⁵⁷ he noted in his diary, “It is like going up to a tiger and asking for a small slice of venison.” During the Boer War he had witnessed Kitchener respond to an officer’s appeal for reinforcements by taking half his troops away.⁵⁸ The genial Hamilton, like poor Carden, was a scapegoat made to order.

Summoned by Kitchener on 12 March, Hamilton was brusquely informed, “We are sending a military force to support the fleet now at the Dardanelles and you are to have command.” Hamilton was stunned, later admitting, “My knowledge of the Dardanelles was nil, of the Turk nil, of the strength of my own forces next to nil.” When asked if a squadron of modern aircraft with experienced pilots and observers could be made available, Kitchener testily replied, “Not one.” 150,000 men was the minimum required strength for the task, but Kitchener insisted that “half that number” would do handsomely.⁵⁹ No attempt was made to co-ordinate intelligence about the defences at Gallipoli, not even at strategic level.⁶⁰ Hamilton was given a cursory briefing, two small tourist guidebooks and old, inaccurate maps.⁶¹ Detailed reports from Admiral Limpus and Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cunliffe-Owen, another officer with considerable knowledge of Gallipoli, were kept from him.⁶² Hamilton set off within 48 hours, together with some inexperienced members of staff who did not even know “how to put on their uniforms.”⁶³ So much for detailed preparation.

The chaos continued. There was no discussion, no plan, no naval/military coordination. Indeed, it was a worse situation than preceded the naval operation.⁶⁴ Gallipoli was to be invaded with a mixed force of 80,000 men from Britain, France and the Empire. Raw Anzac troops and unseasoned French recruits were to be thrown into battle for the first time. Marshall Joffre, the French commander-in-chief, was profoundly opposed to the whole operation and initially refused to provide troops. Political expediency forced his hand.⁶⁵ A French army Colonel who had spent years in Constantinople also opposed the attack, but like everyone else with intimate knowledge of the area, its topography and defences, he was dismissed.⁶⁶ Lieutenant-Colonel Cunliffe-Owen, the British military attaché at Constantinople in 1914, who had personally conducted a detailed survey of Gallipoli, was

likewise deliberately overlooked. In London when staff were being scratched together for Hamilton's team, Cunliffe-Owen was passed over. His detailed reports on the peninsula were never shown to General Hamilton.⁶⁷

Kitchener agreed to the deployment of 18,000 men from the British army's 29th Division. Its commander, Shaw, had served with distinction at Mons and was considered a highly competent and "impressively professional soldier." Two days before leaving for Gallipoli, when continuity was all-important, Shaw was inexplicably replaced by Major-General Hunter-Weston. He immediately rejected his allocated ship because it lacked first class accommodation, and was transferred to the luxury liner *Andania*.⁶⁸ Major-General Shaw suffered the same fate as Admiral Limpus. A competent, knowledgeable man was rejected in favour of Hunter-Weston, a laughing-stock in the British Army,⁶⁹ spectacularly incompetent, and "one of the most brutal commanders of the First World War."⁷⁰ Ask yourself, what was going on?

Hamilton arrived to find his army scattered in confusion over much of the Mediterranean. Some battalion commanders couldn't trace their companies. Ships came from Britain with such poorly written orders that captains did not know their destination.⁷¹ On their arrival at Mudros, the ships were found to be loaded in a shambolic fashion, and had to be taken 700 miles to Egypt to be unloaded and repacked.⁷² Such was the lack of preparation that even the simplest questions could not be answered. "Was there drinking water on Gallipoli? What roads existed? Were troops to fight in trenches or the open? What sort of weapons were required? What was the depth of water off the beaches? What sort of boats were needed to get the men, the guns and stores ashore? What casualties were to be expected? How were they to be got off to the hospital ships? It was simply a case of taking whatever came to hand and hoping for the best."⁷³

An "Amateurish, Do-It-Yourself Cock-Up"

You couldn't make it up. There was a shortage of guns, ammunition, aircraft and, above all, troops. Hamilton's requests for additional supplies and reinforcements were either ignored or refused.⁷⁴ Gallipoli veteran Charles Watkins described the campaign as an "amateurish, do-it-yourself cock-up."⁷⁵ It was designed to be exactly that. The quality of preparation and leadership guaranteed it. General Ian Hamilton was the Secret Elite's Patsy-in-Chief, unwittingly abetted by the incompetent Admiral Carden. These were the men chosen to fail.

The Gallipoli landings went ahead on 25 April 1915 with the terrible slaughter and wounding of many incredibly brave young men, dispensable pawns on Imperial Britain's chessboard. Despite the fleet now having some thirty powerful destroyers equipped to sweep the mines, and many officers totally confident that the fleet could now get through, no further attempt was made to force the Dardanelles. The navy would play no further part other than ferrying the men ashore, taking off the wounded, and providing a safe haven off-shore for the likes of Hunter-Weston. Successful mine sweeping had always been the key to a successful naval assault, and with the new minesweepers and a clear run through to the Straits, the fleet could have greatly assisted the army with controlled bombardments of Turk positions from within the channel. It would, of course, also have been able to cripple *Goeben* and *Breslau*. For the above stated reasons, that would not be allowed to

happen.

For years knowledgeable men had insisted that a well planned and resourced *combined* naval and military attack was the only type of operation that might succeed, but never at any point in the entire Gallipoli campaign was a joint assault carried out. The elites in London ordered the shambolic attack by the navy when they knew it was bound to fail, and now ordered an equally shambolic attack by the army in the full knowledge that it too could never succeed.

Gallipoli was a lie within the lie that was the First World War. The campaign ended in military defeat, but geo-strategic victory for the British Empire. By late 1915, with Russian forces pushed back on the eastern front and any likelihood of their intervention in Constantinople gone, the British government began planning withdrawal from the corpse strewn peninsula. The last Allied troops were taken off on 9 January 1916, leaving behind 62,266 of their comrades. The majority of the dead on both sides have no known graves. Many of the 11,410 Australians and New Zealanders who died⁷⁶ suffered unspeakable deaths, deliberately sacrificed on the altar of British imperialism.

A Myth Obscures the terrible Truth

Over the last century, in both Britain and Australia, Gallipoli has been turned into a heroic-romantic myth,⁷⁷ a myth promoted by court historians and pliant journalists in order to hide the stark truth. It was a ruse, a sop to the Russians to keep them in the war in the belief that allied forces would capture Constantinople on their behalf. Put into the hands of incompetent generals and admirals, starved of troops, determined leadership, ill-equipped, ill-advised and certain to fail, the attack on Gallipoli as an integral part of the imperial strategy was a stunning success.

We are aware of at least one renowned Gallipoli historian and writer in Australia who agrees with our thesis. Like us, he proposes that “it was the intention of the British and French governments of 1915 to ensure that the Dardanelles and the Gallipoli campaign would not succeed” and was “conceived as a ruse to keep the Russians in the war...” He believes that while the proposition has circumstantial evidence to support it, there is “little or no documentary evidence.”⁷⁸ He is very unlikely to find it. As revealed in our book *Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War*, masses of crucial documents relating to the First World War were shredded or burned, or have been kept hidden away to this very day in a high security establishment at Hanslope Park in England. The individuals responsible for the war, responsible for Gallipoli, were many things, but they weren’t so stupid as to leave incriminating evidence lying around. Historians in Australia and New Zealand must stop protecting their comfortable careers and start acknowledging the terrible truth about Gallipoli. Peddling mythology as truth is an insult to the memory of those brave young men.

Just as in Britain, the Government of Australia seeks to be the guardian of public memory, choreographing commemoration into celebration,⁷⁹ ritually condemning war while the rhetoric gestures in the opposite direction.⁸⁰ The War Memorial in Sydney’s Hyde Park proudly exhorts, “Let Silent Contemplation Be Your Offering,” yet the deafening prattle of political expediency mocks the valiant dead with empty words and lies. Don’t be fooled. Those young men died for the imperial dreams of wealthy manipulators, not for ‘freedom’ or

'civilisation'. They died deceived, expendable, and in the eyes of the power-brokers, the detritus of strategic necessity. Remember *that*.

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To read exclusive extracts from their book *Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War*, including their latest research on Gallipoli, please visit the authors' blog at firstworldwarhiddenhistory.wordpress.com. *Hidden History* is available from all good bookstores and online retailers.

The authors contributed the article "The Secret Origins of the First World War" to [New Dawn Special Issue Vol 9 No 1](#).

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