

Gallipoli campaign



PART ONE

Although it was a failure as a military campaign, Gallipoli was where the legend of the Anzacs was born. Some suggest it was where Australia came of age as a nation. Gallipoli united our forces at the front and united Australians in grief, it showed that our soldiers could stand up to the horrors of modern warfare and display courage, friendship, humour and ingenuity under fire. The soldiers at Gallipoli were only ordinary men but through a quirk of history they have been elevated to the level of heroes and are seen by many as the ideal of what it is to be Australian.

World War I 1914-1918

World War I was the greatest conflict the world had ever seen. It was a fight between the Central Powers; Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey; and the Allies; France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan and from 1917 the US. It also involved many colonies and dependencies of these major powers. In the aftermath of the war Germany and her allies were made to take the blame for starting by their "militarism" (aggressively using the military for political and economic reasons). But both sides took part in a buildup of arms, struggle for colonies and markets and creating a fragile balance of treaties and alliances, implicating everybody in failing to avoid conflict. In the end all it took was one act of terrorism, a Serbian assassinating an Austrian archduke, to set in motion a chain of events leading to a major war.


The commanders




Lord Horatio Kitchener (1850-1916)
British Secretary of War, one of the few people who believed that the war would last longer than a few months. He reluctantly agreed to the attack at the Dardanelles advanced by First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. He only granted Hamilton 50,000 men instead of the requested 150,000 thinking that the Turks would soon be beaten. He failed to understand the difficulty of the task. After visiting the trenches he recommended withdrawal.




General Ian Hamilton (1853-1947)
A veteran of Afghanistan (1878) and the Boer Wars (1881 and 1899-1902) he was selected to lead the 50,000 troops supporting the naval attack on the Dardanelles. He was unprepared for the resistance from the Turkish troops. He remained optimistic of victory despite the major setbacks. He was replaced as commander in October 1915.




Lt. General Sir William Birdwood (1865-1951)
British officer in charge of the Australian-New Zealand troops at Gallipoli. Although not a gifted tactician, he was a good motivator who talked to his men and understood their character, strengths and weaknesses. He was against evacuation of troops from Gallipoli, believing retreat could be disastrous to the men and the prestige of the Empire. When evacuation was ordered he helped plan the successful removal of 80,000 troops.



General Otto Liman Von Sanders (1855-1929)
The German Inspector General of the Turkish army. He played a crucial role in repelling Allied forces, bringing German military expertise. He reorganised the Turkish defences and drilled the Turkish troops to German standards. He used troops more efficiently than Turk officers who often relied on human wave tactics.

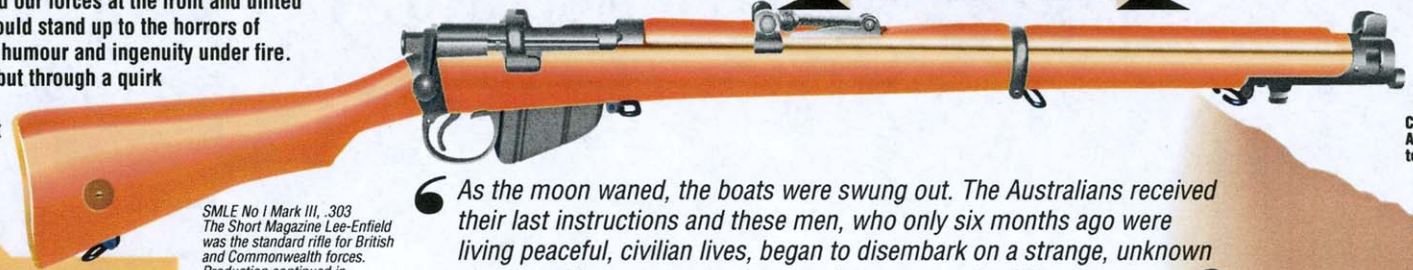


Enver Pasha (1881-1922)
The Turkish minister for war. After a disastrous loss of the 3rd Army at Sarakamis in 1914, he saved his reputation through the defeat of the Allies at Gallipoli. Although in charge of Turkish forces, his main role in the victory was creating an alliance with Germany, giving his army German military expertise and German technology. Combined with Turkish tenacity, this made the difference in the face of invasion.



Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938)
Mustafa Kemal commanded the 19th Division, the Turkish troops directly opposed to the Australian and New Zealand troops, at Gallipoli. He arrived at the front during the invasion to see men running away and encouraged them to stay and fight. Mustafa Kemal emerged as a hero for his role in repelling the invasion. He would later become the father of the modern nation of Turkey, and was given the name Ataturk.

SMLE No 1 Mark III, 303 The Short Magazine Lee-Enfield was the standard rifle for British and Commonwealth forces. Production continued in Australia until 1957



As the moon waned, the boats were swung out. The Australians received their last instructions and these men, who only six months ago were living peaceful, civilian lives, began to disembark on a strange, unknown shore, and in a strange land to attack an enemy of a different race.

— Ashmead Bartlett (1881-1931), journalist.

Gallipoli overview

While the Allies and Central powers were bogged down in a virtual stalemate on the Western Front in 1915, the Allied military command looked for a way to hurt Germany by knocking one of its allies out of the war and opening up a front in the east. They were also looking for a way of opening up supply lines to Russia, which was allied to Britain and France. First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill (1874-1965) devised a plan to force a passage through the Dardanelles, the strait that led to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. The naval assault would be accompanied, if necessary, by an amphibious landing of 50,000 men on the Gallipoli Peninsula, the northern side of the Dardanelles. The belief was that if the British navy threatened the Ottoman (Turkish) capital of Constantinople it would force the Turks out of the war, seriously weakening Germany, opening up a new front and a line of communication between the Aegean and the Black Sea.

The campaign began in February and March 1915 with naval bombardments of Turkish fortifications along the coast of the Dardanelles. This was meant to dislodge the Turks and allow the ships through or at least soften them up for a land assault. Unfortunately the bombardment alerted the Turks and the Germans to the possibility of an invasion and the Turks reinforced their scant troops in the region. On April 25th ANZAC troops (Australian New Zealand Army Corps) landed near Gaba Tepe, while British and later French troops would land at Cape Helles. Unfortunately the Anzac landing vessels missed their targets and the Allied troops were met by more resistance and better trained and equipped soldiers, than expected. The Allies continued to try to break the Turkish lines up until August but as the cold weather began to set in it was decided to evacuate.



Key to maps

- ▲ Hills
- Major fortifications
- Forts and Batteries
- Significant ANZAC positions
- Frontlines
- Minefield
- ANZAC trenches
- Turkish trenches
- Villages or settlements

THE LANDINGS
Troops landing near Gaba Tepe found themselves almost unopposed but confronted by unexpectedly steep hills because their boats had drifted too far north. Taken by surprise, Turkish commander Mustafa Kemal rallied his troops and waves of Turks began to try to dislodge the Australian troops. At two of the beaches in the south many soldiers were cut down by machine gun fire, while at some other beaches there was much less resistance.

AE2 penetrates the Dardanelles
One objective of the Gallipoli campaign was for Mediterranean Expeditionary Forces (MEF) to make it through the Dardanelles to the Sea of Marmara and beyond. Part of the plan involved sending submarines up the strait, passing 60km of water lined with Turkish defences and ships, to harass the enemy from behind the lines. Two submarines had already been lost when the Australian submarine AE2, captained by Lieut. Commander Henry Stoker RN, set out on April 25.

Periscope rifle: allowed soldiers to sight and fire a rifle from the safety of the trench. It was invented by Lance Corporal William Beech of NSW.

German "egg" hand grenade: similar to those used by the Turks. It could be hurled like a ball over 50m.

Jam-tin bomb: the Anzacs turned empty jam-tins, filled with bits of metal, bullets, explosives and topped with a fuse into hand propelled bombs.

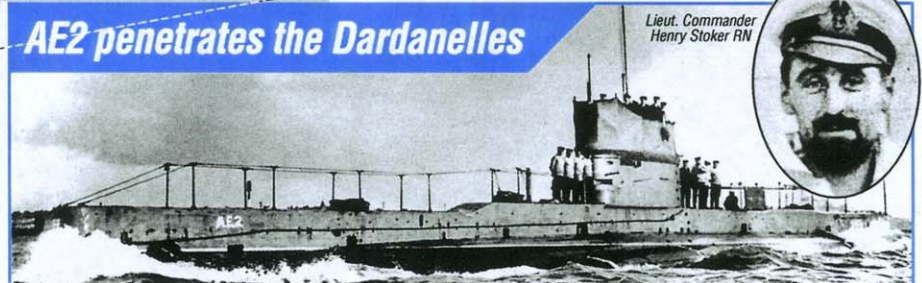
FIGHT FOR THE HEIGHTS

When the Anzacs came ashore and met the first wave of Turkish resistance, they managed to cling to the slopes of a high ridge known as Chunuk Bair. They were unable to take the hill and were pushed back. The Turks retained this commanding height and were able to defend it with machine gun fire. In an effort to capture the heights, on May 2 the Anzacs tried to take a hill on the path to Chunuk Bair known as Baby 700 because it was about 700ft (213m) high and yet a baby compared to another hill later named Battleship Hill. Birdwood ordered an attack but despite the loss of around 1000 men no ground was gained. They continued to try to conquer the highest points in other disastrous attacks, in August they tried to take Chunuk Bair, along with two other objectives Hill Q and Hill 971, which was to be accompanied by a diversion in the south. This resulted in a massacre at a place called The Nek and the costly battle at Lone Pine.

What went wrong



The Gallipoli invasion failed because of some mistakes that are easy to identify with hindsight. With the naval bombardment the Allies warned their enemy of a possible invasion, giving the Turkish time to reorganise their defences throughout the peninsula. The Allies also assumed that the Turkish troops would be sparsely scattered, poorly trained and equipped, easy to beat and that the campaign could be conducted quickly. The landings themselves were also mostly in areas where the defenders had a clear view of the invaders from the top of hills and cliffs and therefore had a distinct advantage. The idea of an amphibious landing had merit and it would prove to be a success in campaigns in World War II, but only with better training, reconnaissance, artillery and air support and the ability to put more fresh troops in the front line.



The AE2 made it past gunfire and warships and sank one ship, to make it out of the strait. The sub was able to avoid capture for four days, torpedoing ships until on April 30 it was holed by the enemy. The captain was forced to surrender and scuttle his vessel. When news of the AE2's victory filtered through it boosted the morale of the soldiers struggling ashore at Anzac Cove. The wreck of the AE2 was found by divers in 1998. Plans to raise it have faltered because of a lack of government funding.