

Digging in

The ANZACs in their first campaign fought magnificently against an unyielding enemy. Down the coast at Cape Helles, British and French troops faced the same ferocious opponents enjoying the favourable high ground. The Allies were pinned down on two beachheads, and in the summer heat, a brutal trench warfare began...

THE GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN

Gallipoli Peninsula, February 1915 - January 1916

With the war on the Western Front heavily bogged down in stalemate trench conflict, other avenues were sought to attack and undermine the Central Powers. When Britain's ally Russia asked for help in repelling the Turkish forces of the Ottoman Empire - fighting alongside Germany and Austria - a tantalising opportunity to outflank the enemy presented itself.

If the Dardanelles could be opened, allowing Constantinople to be captured, Turkey would be cut in two, severing supply lines from Germany. A divided Turkey faced elimination from the war and there would be relief for Russia, with a supply route to and from it opened up.

As a strategy, it made sense. In terms of execution, it was incredibly difficult to achieve. Detailed planning, a well-trained assault force with strong reserves, and an efficient, forward-thinking command structure were the minimum needed to secure a foothold on a hostile coastline and then push inland. Unfortunately, the Gallipoli Campaign had none of the above.

Winston Churchill championed the strategy in the war cabinet, urging a speedy naval assault. The might of British and French warships was considered sufficient to bombard and destroy the Turkish forts guarding the Dardanelles, opening up the Sea of Marmara and Constantinople. There was initial success, but bad weather slowed the mission. When mines inflicted heavy losses as the Navy tried to rush through the straits, it became clear that the peninsula could not be taken without a land assault.

Command of the expeditionary force was given to General Sir Ian Hamilton. He had British and French troops, but also Australians and New Zealanders, or ANZACs, who were largely untested in battle. Landings were made at Cape

Helles and what later became known as ANZAC Cove. However, Hamilton and his two beach commanders stayed at sea, too far from the action to communicate properly with their forces. This mismanagement led to many errors, particularly with the ANZACs, who faced little resistance at first but were not commanded properly, in order to exploit that advantage.

Another mistake was underestimating how doggedly committed the Ottoman Turks would be in defending their positions. Heavy losses were inflicted at Cape Helles, where five landings took place, but only three could be held. When attempts were made to press inland from there, the attacks were beaten back and Turkish reinforcements soon arrived to halt the belated ANZAC advance.

Over the next three months, grisly trench warfare set in. Disease in the cramped conditions became as deadly as sniper fire. Attempting to break out, Hamilton landed fresh troops at Suvla Bay. But again, poor leadership squandered the opportunity of the surprise attack and when Turkish resistance was mustered, that push inland was halted too.

At all three beachheads, the Turks held the advantageous higher ground. For the Allies, confidence in the mission was evaporating back home. In October, Hamilton was replaced by Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Monro, who quickly called for evacuation. Winston Churchill later witheringly summed up Monro's attitude by declaring: "He came, he saw, he capitulated." Yet with a bitterly cold November claiming frostbite victims, it really was the only course of action.

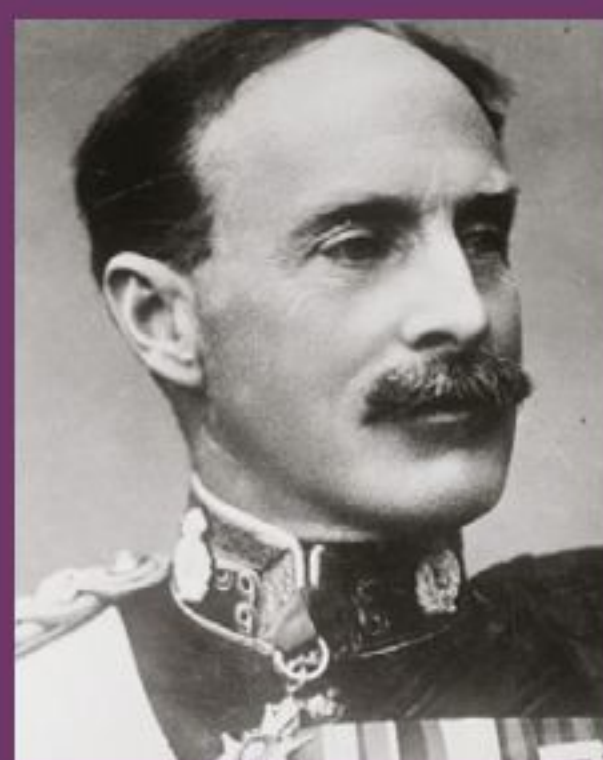
The campaign's final act, the evacuation itself, was superbly orchestrated with scarcely any addition to already grim casualty figures. It was the smallest of triumphs at the end of a truly disastrous campaign.



ALLIED FORCE

TROOPS 5 divisions rising to 16 divisions

CASUALTIES 215,000-250,000 (estimated)



GENERAL SIR IAN HAMILTON LEADER

Although a professional soldier with a long service record of campaigns fought abroad, Hamilton lacked knowledge of Turkey and its army.

STRENGTHS Strategically competent with a strong belief that his men would prevail.

WEAKNESS Remote from the action and reluctant to openly direct subordinate officers.



THE ANZACS KEY UNIT

A combined Australian and New Zealand force, the bravery and commitment of these men during the campaign burned deeply into both nations' psyche.

STRENGTHS Spirited and gutsy combatants resourcefully tackling their inhospitable conditions.

WEAKNESS Being their debut in warfare, they were untried in battle.



DECEPTION KEY WEAPON

During the evacuation, those remaining ran along trenches firing from different points and left 'drip rifles' to confuse the enemy.

STRENGTHS In darkness with sacking muffling boots, thousands were secretly evacuated.

WEAKNESS Had the enemy attacked, ANZAC Cove would have fallen quickly.

01 The naval assault

Allied battleship bombardment of the Turkish-held forts on both banks of the Dardanelles begins on 19 February. Poor weather, firm resistance and mines in the strait hamper progress. Under fire, mine-sweeping proves hazardous, but the waters are thought sufficiently clear to launch a multi-ship assault on 18 March. The aim is to force a way through the channel to take Constantinople, but a new line of mines lurks undetected...

02 Early losses

Three ships are sunk, three more are heavily damaged. The naval action is halted. As Admiral Fisher had argued before the campaign, a combined land and sea assault is required. An expeditionary force of mostly British, French and ANZACs is dispatched.

03 The enemy strengthens

Before the force can land, and with any semblance of surprise having long disappeared, the Turks bolster their numbers significantly. Under German General Otto Liman von Sanders, they are ferociously determined.

04 All at sea

The Allied force lands on 25 April. It is poorly trained for landing on beaches overlooked by steep cliffs, which offer the enemy ideal defensive positions. Worse still, the high command of the force remains at sea, unable to respond or give orders to the units as they scramble ashore.

05 Slaughter and chaos

At 'V' beach at Cape Helles, large numbers of men put ashore are cut down by machine guns on the cliffs. Elsewhere, other units land without resistance and, receiving no orders to press forward, simply hold their positions. The ANZACs actually land at the wrong beach, though still make progress towards the Chunuk Bair Ridge. Unfortunately, there they encounter a brilliant adversary, the formidable Colonel Mustafa Kemal, who halts their advance.





06 Deadlock After the haphazard, disjointed landings, the resistance faced is fierce. Attacks and counter-attacks across the craggy, ridged terrain achieve little except to swell the numbers of casualties. Both sides dig in.

10 Evacuation The final act of the campaign is the only part of it that goes well. Under cover of night, and using clever deception tactics, Suvla Bay and ANZAC Cove are cleared of men and artillery over ten days in December. Cape Helles is evacuated by early January. Official figures quote just three casualties for the entire withdrawal operation – a merciful conclusion to an ill-planned, ill-commanded, ill-fated endeavour.

09 Continue or curtail General Sir Ian Hamilton lobbies to battle on but is replaced in October by Lieutenant-General Monro. He recommends evacuation, but Kitchener waits, wanting to see for himself. Meanwhile, misery for the men is compounded when many suffer frostbite in a bitterly cold November. When Kitchener sees conditions on the peninsula, withdrawal is sanctioned.

07 Two beachheads, no progress Just as on the Western Front, it's trench warfare. Attempts are made to push forward from the beachheads at Cape Helles and Ari Burnu – later renamed ANZAC Cove – but all fail. Likewise, the stubbornly resistant Turks cannot force the Allies back into the sea. In the summer heat of May, June and July, putrefying corpses from both sides litter the battlefields. Disease, particularly dysentery, is the new enemy.



OTTOMAN EMPIRE

TROOPS 6 divisions rising to 16 divisions
CASUALTIES 250,000-300,000 (estimated)



GENERAL OTTO LIMAN von SANDERS LEADER

Von Sanders was made head of the German military mission to Turkey in 1913, commanding its army once it entered the war.

STRENGTHS Foresaw the importance of defences along the Dardanelles and strengthened accordingly.

WEAKNESS Deployed troops inadequately to meet a coastal invasion threat.



57th REGIMENT KEY UNIT

Following Kemal's command "I do not order you to attack, I order you to die!" it halted the ANZAC breakout from ANZAC Cove.

STRENGTHS The regiment fought tenaciously, holding the line with bayonets and valour.

WEAKNESS Poorly equipped and lacking ammunition.



NAVAL MINES KEY WEAPON

Seeking a 'Trafalgar' moment, the sea-based campaign to seize Constantinople via the Dardanelles ended after mines sank three ships and holed more.

STRENGTHS Undetected, one mine can cause fatal damage to a ship.

WEAKNESS An untargeted weapon that good mine-sweeping will easily neutralise.