

Researching Gallipoli: The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives

Research Project

Address given by Harvey Broadbent, Director of the Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project, Macquarie University at the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales, on 26 February 2008.

During 2004, during the writing of my book *Gallipoli, The Fatal Shore* the idea for the *Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project* came to me. The book and project, which followed book, are the results of over 20 years interest in and work on the Gallipoli Campaign, especially the Turkish side. This preoccupation is due to three periods in my life – my living in Turkey back in late sixties, studies at Manchester University into Turkish language, history and culture in the seventies, and my work as a documentary maker at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in the 80s and 90s. (*Producer: Gallipoli, The Fatal Shore, 1988, The Boys Who Came Home, 1990, and Ten Days of Glory 1990, and Associate Producer for Revealing Gallipoli 2005*) So what enthused me about the idea of developing to the project?

It would be easy to think that, after 90 years and many publications, we have the full picture of what transpired on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915. That was my general view until I arranged access in 2003, during the research for the book, *Gallipoli, The Fatal Shore*, to the Turkish General Staff Military Archives in Ankara, Turkey. Almost immediately my view changed. Sampling a few documents, I came upon one with a signature I recognised instantly – that of Enver Pasha, the Ottoman War Minister. On 16 June 1915, Enver had sent the document to German Admiral Guido von Usedom, Commander of the Straits, ordering him to attempt a decapitation of the allied army:

Please find map rendered and provided by our trusted ally, which I attach. It is of Kefala Harbour on Imbros, where the ship that carries General Hamilton's Headquarters is anchored. I request you to carry out a bombing raid there with an aircraft, and moreover, if practicable, to bomb his ship. There is also a copy of the Fleet Headquarters.

Minister for War

Enver

As I researched further, it became clear that the Turkish archives hold a store of such information that could lead us to re-assess our most famous military campaign.

Such a research project would be of national significance. It would provide a special legacy for our nation, reveal all that is left to learn and understand about the campaign. And all this new information would belong, initially to Australia as well as Turkey. (Later of course it would find its way to Britain, but might add fire to the argument of some British historians and commentators, who have accused Australia of hi-jacking the Gallipoli story).

We know a substantial amount about Gallipoli from the Australian and British historical documents but we know far less from Turkish documents. The project's main aim to fill that gap by 2015, the centenary of the Gallipoli Campaign. This project gives us, then, a chance to go to primary sources. Charles Bean's two volumes on Gallipoli in his official Australian First World War history and Aspinall-Oglander's British account use many primary sources for accounts of the Anzac and British/French experience. But they did not have major access to those primary sources of the enemy, especially those of daily operations. None of the major books about Gallipoli that have followed Bean since have had that access-either. Canadian historian, Tim Travers, had limited

access in 2001 for his book *Gallipoli 1915*, and I had one month in the same archives in 2003 for my book. That about accounts for Turkish primary sources. Bean *et al* had to rely mainly on secondary sources, many of which were related several years after the campaign.

An Australian 'home' for the Project has now been established at Sydney's Macquarie University in partnership with the Australian War Memorial. We have gained the assistance of a Turkish University, the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, and The Turkish General Staff Archives. 5 Year's initial funding for the Research Project approved from 2007 has come from the Australian Research Council via a Linkage Grant with the Australian War Memorial.

The Turkish sources of interest include a large original documents collection in The Turkish General Staff Archives, published and unpublished diaries and memoirs of Ottoman officers, unpublished diaries and memoirs, the Turkish General Staff Official History (which is rather cursory), the Press Archives, held in Library of Grand National Assembly and the Red Crescent Archives. Published Diaries and Memoirs include those of Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) and other Gallipoli Officers e.g. Esat Pasha (III Corps Commander), Lt-Col. Shefik (Aker) (Cmdr. 27th Regiment, 5th Army), Major Halis, (Cmdr. 3rd Battalion, 27 Regiment, 5th Army) and an officer at Lone Pine, Mehmed Fasih (in an English translation , *Bloody Ridge*)

The broader aims of the project are to:

- ❖ Research Gallipoli documents in the Turkish General Staff Military Archives in Ankara, Turkey
- ❖ Acquire and research other Turkey- based Gallipoli documents
- ❖ Translate relevant documents into English

- ❖ Publish selected documents with interpretations by 2015 in a major publication.

The Turkish General Staff Military Archives are known by the acronym ATASE (Askerlik Tarih Arşivler ve Stratejik Enstitü) and hold catalogues of files for most Ottoman Army conflicts. The Gallipoli files are found in the First World War Catalogue (4 volumes). The files are catalogued according to Ottoman Army sections e.g. First Army, Fifth Army etc. Research is made slower because the Gallipoli files are not separated from other files relating to Ottoman 5th Army in the First World War. Files contain many and different numbers of documents, so the archivists first check all documents in a requested file. Then if they release them to the researcher they scan them to a CD-Rom and deliver to the researcher for transliteration into modern Turkish from a computer screen.

As the documents all appear in old Turkish, written in the Arabic script, Ottoman Turkish language specialists are needed as the researchers. They have to transliterate the documents into modern Turkish, which uses the Roman script. Then translations to English can be made. Gallipoli documents in Turkish General Staff Archives consist of written documents such as signals, daily reports, intelligence reports, supply requests and the like and maps. They are catalogued, which helps, under headings such as “Operations”, “Supply” etc

To assist matters an *English Language Catalogue* was produced in 2003 by this author, which is catalogued by type, e.g. Operations, Supply, Intelligence, War Ministry etc. together with a short content description and dates of document in the file folder. The implications for research of this are:

- ❖ Extremely large volume of files exist to be researched
- ❖ A team of Ottoman Language specialists is required

- ❖ Several years work is required to select relevant files, transliterate into modern Turkish and then translate them into English

The project has been running for a year now and some early results can be described.

Intelligence-related documents

One of the most intriguing results is information about Turkish and German intelligence-gathering operations. The files suggest these activities focussed on discrete sources of information: aerial reconnaissance; ground observations and infiltration of enemy positions; prisoner-of-war interrogations; and foreign embassy communications. There are likely to be other sources.

Aerial reconnaissance reports have provided surprising facts. First is the amount of reconnaissance carried out, with some files showing daily flight reports and drawn reconnaissance maps. Second is the thoroughness and effectiveness of the information gathered. Third, the reports give us clues about the *modus operandi* of the Turks and Germans, both in their use of military aviation – then still in its infancy – and in the organisation of their relationship as allies in the field.

Operational documents

The documents are revealing from many other perspectives, too. They are rare *first-hand contemporary* accounts of operations and notes on the strategic thinking and decision-making of the Ottoman commanders. They offer to provide an understanding of Turkish activity in seminal episodes such as the Turkish attack of 19 May, and the feint at Lone Pine. We are beginning to develop informed ideas on the calibre of Turkish and German organisation, command, and soldiering, and to acquire fuller details of responsive actions taken by the Ottoman army. The archives also enable us to make a much stronger assessment

of likely Allied success. Our research thus far shows that Ottoman confidence was generally high on the peninsula but that there was continued concern for the vulnerability of the Dardanelles Straits.

The documents also allude to other aspects of operational details such as morale, the effect and use of heavy artillery by both sides, the effects of cultural and religious phenomena on the conduct of soldiers from both sides, and their attitudes to factors such as authority, discipline, hardship, and suffering. In a nutshell, the Turkish archives are demonstrating the Allies' woeful underestimation of the Ottoman Army at Gallipoli and are providing in sharp relief a fresh picture of the erstwhile enemy.



C. Turkish General Staff Archives

Turkish Officers in the field at Gallipoli: An example of photographs being revealed by The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project.