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Completing the story of the Dardanelles and Gallipoli Campaign: The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project

I am sure that most people interested in commemorating and remembering with gratitude those who fell, those who were horrendously injured or suffered in other ways in the various conflicts in which British Commonwealth (to use a contemporary expression) or Dominion troops (when referring to WW1) took part, know the *general* turn of events that took place at the Dardanelles in 1915.

Self: Those folk who are acquainted with me, know that these events have become a strong focus of my professional interest first as a television documentary and program maker with the ABC over 22 years and now as an historical researcher and writer now working at MQU leading a research project into Turkish archival collections relating to Gallipoli—mainly military but also civilian archives. This long involvement with the events of 1915 led to the 2005 book.

During the writing of the book the idea for the present Turkish archives project came to me. As I said, the book and project is the result of over 20 years interest in and work on the Gallipoli Campaign, especially Turkish side. This preoccupation is due to three periods in my life—my living in Turkey back in late sixties, studies at University into Turkish language, history and culture in the seventies, and my work as a documentary maker at the ABC in the 80s and 90s. So to this current project: The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project. Why are we bothering? Don't we know enough about the campaign?

Slide 2

After all, it would be easy to think that, after 90 years and many publications, we have the full picture of what transpired at the Dardanelles in 1915. That was my general view, certainly about the Allied side, until I arranged access in 2003 to the Turkish General

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Staff Military Archives. 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:

Slide 3 Enver Quote

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 the Turkish archives hold a store of such information that could lead us to re-assess what is seen as Australia and New Zealand's most famous and significant military campaign. (No time to look into the reasons and debate on that issue).

Slide 4 Legacy

My belief was that, at the risk of firing up further those British commentators who have accused Australia of hi-jacking the Gallipoli story, such a research project would be of national significance here in Australia and certainly of military historical significance in Britain and France. It would further provide a special legacy for Australia and an important Australian contribution to British Commonwealth history in revealing all that is left to learn and understand about the campaign.

Slide 5 Introduction to Project

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- ❖ We know a substantial amount about Gallipoli from the Australian and British historical documents.
- ❖ We know far less from Turkish documents. Main Aim to fill that gap by 2015. Centenary

Slide 6 Bean's Mission and Books

What this project gives us then is a chance to go to primary sources. Charles Bean's two volumes on Gallipoli in his Australian WW1 History and Cecil Aspinall-Oglander's official British history of the campaign use many primary sources for their accounts of the Anzac and British experience. But they did not have major access to those primary sources of the enemy. (Zeki Bey) (CLICK)

None of the major books about Gallipoli that have followed Bean and Aspinall Oglander 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.

That's about it.

Slide 7 Project now under way

- ❖ So an Australian 'home' for the Project has been established at Macquarie University in partnership with the Australian War Memorial.
- ❖ Assistance of a Turkish University, the Middle East Technical University, Ankara and The Turkish General Staff Archives was established
- ❖ 5 Year's initial funding for the Research Project approved from 2007 from the Australian Research Council via a Linkage Grant
- ❖

Slide 9 Turkish sources: ALL HITHERTO UNTRANSLATED

- ❖ Large original documents collection in The Turkish General Staff Archives (ATASE)
- ❖ Published diaries and memoirs of leading Ottoman Army commanders and officers
- ❖ Unpublished diaries and memoirs: Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk)

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- *Esat Pasha (III Corps Commander)
- *Lt-Col. Shefik (Aker) (Cmdr. 27th Reg)
- *Major Halis, (Cmdr. 3rd Batt, 27 Reg)
- *Mehmed Fasih (Eng, trans
- ❖ Turkish General Staff Official History
- ❖ Press archives, held in Library of Grand National Assembly (?)
- ❖ Red Crescent

The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project: AIMS

- ❖ Acquire and research other Turkey- based Gallipoli documents.
(Extremely large volume of files to be researched)
- ❖ Translate relevant documents into English. Docs in Ottoman Turkish (Arabic script). Team of Ottoman Language specialists required.
- ❖ Publish selected documents with interpretations by 2015

Slide 19 Some early findings of interest.

INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS

One of the most intriguing is our understanding of the 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. These include descriptions and maps showing British and Anzac forces daily deployments as well as reports on the early nature of aerial bombing.

Second is the thoroughness and effectiveness of the information gathered. And Third, the reports give us clues about the modus operandi of the Turks and Germans, both in

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their use of military aviation – then still in its infancy – and in the organisation of their relationship as allies in the field.

Operational

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, and they provide an understanding of Turkish activity in seminal episodes such as the reactions to the initial landings and counter attacks, the major Turkish attack of 19 May, the battle for Gully Ravine and the village of Krithia, and the feint at Lone Pine. In contrast, most of Oglander's and Bean's Ottoman material was acquired later and from secondary sources.

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 various aspects such as operational details, 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.

The research project has now been running for a year. It is a slow process, particularly, as I mentioned, because the old Ottoman Turkish of 1915 was written in the Arabic script, which has to be deciphered then translated into English. In addition Turkish General Staff Archives are not the speediest of operators. Just one year on, however, stories are beginning to emerge from the documents that indicate that new

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perspectives and, most importantly greater understanding can be brought to the Dardanelles-Gallipoli story.

Thanks to you all for hearing me today and know it's for the one overriding purpose--- lest we forget.