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## **From Foes to Friends: 90 years of Australian-Turkish Relations since Gallipoli**

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**In 2002 at Anzac Cove**, 15 minutes or so before the Dawn Service, I was videotaping a group of shivering Australians in a tour group I was accompanying, when from the depths of the darkness I heard a Turkish voice above the general subdued conversations going on around me. The voice was repeating “Hoş geldiniz, Anzaklar,” (Welcome Anzacs!) then I saw the man, who was accompanied by a friend, come into the dim light nearby. He was in his early sixties or thereabouts and he then said “Anzak oğlusu var mi?” (Is there a son of an Anzac here?). I interpreted the request for him, for I knew in our group alone there were three children of original Gallipoli veterans. It was **Dick Edmonds** from South Australia, who stepped forward. His father had landed on the first morning almost 89 years to the minute. I helped the two men converse and the Turkish gentleman revealed his father, too, was above Anzac beach 87 years previously to the minute. It seemed the fathers of these two had most likely been facing, and maybe firing on each other on that first Anzac Day. The two sons of originals embraced each other and their eyes moistened as they both experienced a cathartic moment, which for each of them provided a closure of sorts on something unreconciled in their lives until that moment. It was both marvellous and tragic. Marvellous that some kind of resolution was taking place, tragic that it should have been necessary in the first place. They had shared in a common experience and they have tried to maintain contact since then.

So it *may* be a cliché to describe Australian-Turkish relations as being forged in the conflict at Gallipoli, but Gallipoli is certainly a common point of reference for Australians and Turks on which to build a relationship. And Gallipoli has indeed come play an important part in the bi-lateral relationship of the two countries. Both countries

see nothing but advantages in the warm relationship that has evolved. This relationship, I believe is also different from many relationships between countries because it is not a *substantial trading* relationship, nor a mainstream geo-political *strategic* relationship, but it is a relationship that has developed from contacts between, in the first place, *ordinary* people in Turkey and Australia (and New Zealand) and filtered *upward* to government level, rather than between governments and then filtering down. Up to now, it is has been a people-led relationship. And again it is the Gallipoli connection that has done this. Also in 2002, I saw for the first time after several Dawn Service visits, a large contingent of Turkish spectators.

“Why are you here?” I asked them.

The most common answer was:

“Because we want to find out why all these Australians and New Zealanders have come all this way across the world to visit this place in our country?”

The numbers of Turks visiting Gallipoli (or Canakkale as they call it) on 25<sup>th</sup> April and other times has continued to grow since 2002. Now busloads of Turkish children are driven in to visit the battlefield most weekends of the year. This is mainly because now, I am informed, the Canakkale Savaslar (The Gallipoli Battles) have been put prominently on the national school curriculum in Turkey, and it has been proscribed that every Turkish child must visit the battlefield once in their school life. Turkey has now reacted to an interest in the Gallipoli Campaign engendered by Australians and New Zealanders. Australian governments have done the same, ever since Bob Hawke took back the 50 odd surviving Gallipoli veterans to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990.

However, the question is: do Turks and Australians have anything else but Gallipoli in common as a bond? There is immigration of course, and this colloquium will be exploring the extent of its impact. Then on the other side is the constant popularity of Turkey, beyond Gallipoli, as a **destination** for Australian tourists. But nothing really compares to the common bond of the Gallipoli Campaign and its commemoration over the years.

Many people know the now famous words of Kemal Ataturk inscribed on a memorial at Anzac Cove, built by the Turkish Government in 1985 as a gesture of reconciliation. The words say in part...

“Those heroes that shed their blood ...rest in peace....You the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.”

Put there in 1985 at the time of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they may have been, but the words refer back to an earlier episode in gestures of conciliation between the two countries as former enemies in the First World War conflict. The words were actually written down in 1934 by President Kemal Ataturk (and it is not to be forgotten that he was perhaps the most successful Turkish divisional commander during the Gallipoli Campaign) and spoken by Sukru Kaya, the Interior Minister in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, on the occasion of the 18 March 1915 Dardanelles Naval victory commemorations. Then in April they were delivered to an Australian delegation visiting the Gallipoli Peninsula for Anzac Day. There are in fact some reports emanating from Turkey, which state that Ataturk sent the message as a conciliatory response to concerns expressed by the families of dead Anzacs that his government was not giving enough attention to the gravesites.<sup>1</sup> Ataturk obviously placed importance on good relations with the former enemy at Ariburnu as he did with many foreign interests in the 1930s. His foreign policy was based on the maxim “peace at home, peace abroad”, which many commentators on Turkey’s Republican history have attributed to his reaction against the disasters brought on his country during the latter days of the Ottoman Empire, particularly the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, and his conviction that peaceful coexistence had to be paramount to avoid similar problems in the future. (Turkey indeed stayed largely neutral during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, only entering at the last moments, reportedly to be able to claim membership of the new United Nations). Ataturk’s main concern in the 1930s was domestic unity as he developed a republican system. The last thing he needed or wanted was trouble abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Mete Tuncoku, *Canakkale 1915, Buzdagin Altı (The Body of the Iceberg)*, Turkish History Association 2002, pp168-169

But reconciliatory gestures such as the “your sons” speech can be traced back even further, to 1919 in fact, with **Charles Bean’s re-visit to** the Gallipoli battlefield as head of a group of researchers. This was *The Australian Historical Mission to Turkey* sent to trace the events of the campaign for the official history amongst other things, including reporting on war graves. There had been concern expressed also during the latter stages of the First World War that the war graves at Gallipoli had suffered neglect and interference. This timing for a re-visit to the Gallipoli Peninsula was as close as was possible to the campaign itself, only two months or so after the end of the Great War. Bean called the visit his “mission” and as Bill Gammage points out in his Foreword to the 1990 edition of Charles Bean’s 1948 book *Gallipoli Mission*, Bean’s return to Anzac was a journey ‘of the heart’. Gammage observes further that the word “mission” can mean ‘diplomats sent to a foreign country, or envoys sent with a message, or preachers sent among unbelievers. Each of these could describe some part of Bean’s work in Turkey.’<sup>2</sup>

An important part of the mission to Turkey in 1919 was the obtaining of Turkish accounts of the campaign—the beginning of understanding the other side of the conflict. To assist Bean and his mission the Ottoman government in Istanbul attached a support group of Turks under the direction of the former commander of the famous Ottoman 5<sup>th</sup> Army 57<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Gallipoli, **Zeki Bey**. An affection of sorts is apparent in Bean’s references to Zeki Bey. For example, Bean describes Zeki as ‘our Turkish friend’ and later refers to ‘our little friend’s personality’<sup>3</sup>. Zeki Bey proved to be an invaluable source of information for Bean in piecing together and fleshing out the Gallipoli story, for without his input of at least Turkish version of the events, Bean’s volumes the Gallipoli Campaign in the official history would not be as praiseworthy thorough as they are.

As I have stated, concerns about the state of the war graves was also a factor in sending the Gallipoli Mission to Turkey. Bean also had instructions to report on the Gallipoli graves “from the Australian aspect” and to advise ‘as to what may best be done

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Gammage in Charles Bean’s *Gallipoli Mission*, ABC Books, 1990, p.v

<sup>3</sup> Bean, *op cit*, p. xviii, see also pp.125–30 and portrait drawing after p.153

to fulfil Australian sentiment in the permanent memorial of Australian dead there'<sup>4</sup>. This concern re-surfaced in the 1920s, as **Australians began to visit Gallipoli** on personal pilgrimages, even to the point in some quarters of demands that the graves at Gallipoli be brought to Australia.<sup>5</sup> This resulted in the 1934 delegation already related. But other battles than Gallipoli became the iconic struggles for Turkey as the new Republican nation emerged from its War of National Salvation between 1919 and 1923. Gallipoli belonged to the 'ancien regime'—the Ottomans. It was the battles of the Kurtulus Savasi, the War of Salvation against the occupying Greek army, such as Sakarya and Afyon, that became the iconic struggles for the new nation.

As mentioned Turkey remained neutral during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War until the last days and Australia became pre-occupied with survival in the war in the Pacific. Gallipoli and the First World War became a distant memory for both countries. Post war concerns based on the enormity of the effects of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War eclipsed commemoration of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and the 1960s brought further distancing with a new post-war generation of children growing up and reacting to the world with anti-war sentiments. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the campaign in 1965 attracted a small contingent of veterans to return to Anzac Cove for a dawn service, but it was essentially a low-key affair. It was not until the late 1970s in Australia when Australians, prompted by an increased sense of an independent spirit engendered in the Whitlam days, began to demonstrate a re-kindled interest in their own history with Gallipoli beginning to play a prominent role again. Bill Gammage's Gallipoli best-seller, *The Broken Years*, and Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* (1981) were particularly influential. Journalist and writer, Tony Wright, also attributes the ABC documentaries, produced by this speaker, especially for Australia's bi-centenary in 1988, as playing a large part in re-igniting public interest in Australia in the Gallipoli story.<sup>6</sup> In one of those documentaries we noted that up to on average 30 young Australasians were finding their way to the battlefield each day in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bean, *op cit*, p. 12

<sup>5</sup> Tuncoku *op. cit*

<sup>6</sup> Wright, Tony. *Turn Right At Istanbul*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2003, pp 107-108

<sup>7</sup> *Gallipoli, The Fatal Shore*, ABC-TV, 1988

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I should state here that it was my intention in the production of those TV documentaries , and the later books, to bring the Turkish Gallipoli story much more to the fore in Australia than had occurred previously.

In 1990 the Hawke Government marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign by financing to the tune of \$10 million a major national commemoration in Australia around Anzac Day, the center piece being the return of over 50 original Gallipoli veterans for a nationally televised Dawn service from Anzac Cove. The Turkish Government was heavily involved in coordinating the events, receiving heads of state from Australia (Bob Hawke), New Zealand (Geoffrey Palmer), Britain (Margaret Thatcher) and Turkey (Turgut Ozal) at Anzac Cove. For the first time visitors to the Dawn Service at Anzac Cove were in the thousands rather than hundreds. Television pictures were transmitted live to Australia from Anzac Cove and Lone Pine by the ABC. We had five hours of live television programming from Gallipoli that day.

After 1990 **Dawn Service** attendances at Gallipoli grew year by year reaching over 10 000 by the end of the 90, and climbing to peaks around 17 or 18 thousand. Around 2000 it was also possible to notice more and more Turkish visitors arriving to share in the commemoration. By then, too, the Turkish authorities had begun to erect new statues and memorials alongside the long standing Allied ones, marking the Turkish sacrifices at Gallipoli. Perhaps the best known are the statue of Mustafa Kemal on Chunuk Bair, placed prominently next to the New Zealand memorial, sometimes, I have noticed, to the discomfort of Kiwi visitors. Then there is **the Turkish soldier carrying a wounded Anzac**, and the gigantic figure of a Turkish 57<sup>th</sup> Regimental soldier in aggressive and stolid defensive attitude on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ridge. The Turkish side was finally getting its memorials and sending out messages at the same time. I would suggest that this would not have happened if the Anzac phenomena I have outlined had not occurred. It can be argued therefore that Australia has contributed to Turkey realising the importance of the Gallipoli Campaign in relation to its own destiny as a nation.

In recent years leading Australasian and Turkish politicians have been making regular visits to the Dawn Service. Knowing the place of Gallipoli in the hearts and minds of Australians and these days Turks, there is now a good deal of kudos and political mileage to being associated with the Gallipoli Campaign. The media have played a leading role in making this so consistently ever since the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990.<sup>8</sup> Whether the media leads the people or vice-versa, I'll leave to sociologists to analyse, but nowadays the Turkish, Australian and New Zealand governments are heavily involved in the organization of commemorations and their contemporary relationship effectively stems from this connection. Last year, in 2005, there was controversy over the extent and the nature of road improvements around Anzac Cove. Less than effective communications between the two governments on the arrangements was seen as contributing to the 'kuffufle' (as it might be described in the TV program "Little Britain") (i.e. resultant mild disputations). The episode has underlined how important, politically, at least in the Australian government's view, the place of Anzac commemoration in the public mind has become. As a result, last year an officer from Australia's Dept. of Veterans' Affairs was attached to the Australian Embassy as a *permanent* presence to handle and develop arrangements for the annual commemorations at Gallipoli along with the Turkish authorities. Decisions are now being made about the nature and more focused organisation of the future commemorations at Anzac. The DVA made announcements last week about stricter control of the Dawn and Lone Pine Anzac Day Services due to the consistently high numbers of visitors in their thousands each year. The Bee Gees's music is not considered appropriate now!

Australia and Turkey are therefore, firm friends based on areas of common interests, which include the commemoration of Gallipoli. There is a resilience present in the relationship, which can survive minor such discordant notes such as blame for the road improvements at Gallipoli and variations in views about regional politics. This resilience was demonstrated by last November's state visit to Australia by Mr. Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, essentially in this country to show goodwill, gain global

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<sup>8</sup> Since 1990 there have been several live broadcasts on Anzac Day from Anzac Cove, five major film and TV documentaries, including two in 2005, ABC-TV's *Revealing Gallipoli* and Tolga Ornek's *Gallipoli*.

political support and increase trade between the two countries, and the recent announcement by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Mr Billson, that the Australian and Turkish governments had undertaken to conduct a joint archaeological and historical review of the Gallipoli Peninsular, identifying sites of significance.

Speakers at Gallipoli ceremonies often speak of Gallipoli as a watershed for both Turkey and Australia in their self-realisation as independent nations. Gallipoli provided both countries with the experience of conflict that gave confidence for the future. For Turkey Gallipoli was the **first military victory after years of failure**, led by men, such as Mustafa Kemal, Kazim, and Ismet who would become leaders of the new Turkey to emerge from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. For Australia, it was the blooding of the new nation—just fourteen years after Federation. Even though Gallipoli was a precursor to bloodier conflicts more costly in human life, for both countries, the campaign was a traumatic experience involving the consistent heavy loss of a their nations' fittest men—for Australia in a dubious conflict, for Turkey in desperate defence of their homeland.

In the post First World War world there were parallels in the development of both countries as they strongly sought, in their own way, that independent spirit that defines a national identity. National unity forged by the quest for national identity was as much a pre-occupation in 1920 and 1930s Turkey, led by Ataturk, as it was in post-Federation Australia. I believe most *informed* Australians and Turks recognize these similarities. In Australia, too, at a time when 'western' relations with Islam are under strain, Turkish-Australians, who are overwhelmingly Muslim of course, have been a positive force for tolerance and understanding in that they offer to Australians a none-extreme image of Islam. I believe, for those who came from Turkey, it is their grounding in the experience of *secular* government and *personal* religion—one of the legacies of Ataturk of course, that allows them to slot into Australian life without causing ripples. They exhibit a benign role in the Australian mosaic and this is another contributory factor that maintains the harmony of the relationship between Australians and Turks.

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Finally I should mention the latest manifestation of **the ‘Gallipoli’ relationship**. As a result of the research I have conducted for my documentaries and books on the Gallipoli Campaign I was able to establish in 2005 a partnership between Macquarie University and the Middle East Technical University in Ankara to establish a pilot program to begin the research of the last un-researched store of information about the Gallipoli Campaign—the documents relating to the campaign in Turkish General Staff Military Archives. The results so far are fascinating. We are now deep in the search for continuation funding and if we can achieve it, we will be able to provide the full story of the Turkish side of Gallipoli, and add generously to our understanding of the outcomes for Australia and its allies. So the story goes on as Australian-Turkish relations blossom further and mature.

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