

The mystery of Gallipoli and occupation

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HAKKI ÖCAL *



What is referred to as the Gallipoli Campaign in the textbooks all over the world is the only major Ottoman victory of World War I. In our country, it is always referred as “*The Çanakkale Zaferi*” and regarded as a defining moment in our history; it was the final surge in the defense of the motherland as we knew it crumbled on other fronts.

The Gallipoli Campaign took place on the Gallipoli peninsula at the northern bank of the Dardanelles. Intending to secure the Dardanelles Strait, Britain and France launched a naval attack followed by an amphibious landing on the peninsula, with the aim of capturing the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (*modern Istanbul*).

It was an ill-fated assault that led to half a million casualties. Turks lost 200 thousand people. Not only the entire student cadres of military schools perished in 322 days; but many engineering faculties, medical schools even high schools lost all their graduating classes.

The British naval commander Admiral Sackville Carden, in his telegram to Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, stated that the fleet would arrive in Constantinople within 14 days. But, a year and 300 thousand soldiers and officers, 14 battleships and 2 submarines later, the British and French commanders had to sound

the “*general recall*” to protect what remained of their forces on 18 May 1915.

Thus, the adventure spearheaded by Churchill to “*control the Turkish Straits and occupy Istanbul*” ended on that fateful day. Evacuation began in December 1915, and was completed early the following January.

Yet it had not ended there: this combat formed the basis for the Turkish War of Independence, which resulted in the declaration of the Republic of Turkey eight years later. President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rose to prominence as a commander at Gallipoli. Australia and New Zealand created their national consciousness fighting against the last Empire of the world. Even today the grandchildren of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (*ANZAC*) come to Gallipoli to commemorate the fallen between 17 February 1915 and 9 January 1916.

Now please fast-forward your mental timeline; almost 3 years later:

On the first 10 days of November 1918, the quasi-military junta of the Committee of Union and Progress that had been running the Ottoman government since 1908, abolished itself; its members fled to their patron states in Europe; and they left the doors open behind them. On 13 November 1918, pieces of Allied navy passed through the Dardanelles and anchored right in the face of the imperial palace at the Istanbul harbor—without firing one single bullet!

If the story of Gallipoli is a study in Turkish heroism and bravery, the historical analysis of the Committee of Union and Progress and their so-called revolution of constitutional monarchy would shed light on the mystery of how Turkey found itself from the gallantry exhibited in Gallipoli to the occupation of Istanbul.

* Advisor to the President of Ibn Haldun University and faculty member at the Department of Media and Communication.