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Researching Gallipoli: The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project

an address¹ to the Institute on 26 February 2008 by
Associate Professor Harvey Broadbent²
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Director, Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project



Little is known from primary historical sources about the Turkish conduct of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, which the Turks refer to as the Canakkale campaign. This knowledge gap is about to be filled by the Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project, which Harvey Broadbent, the project's director, describes herein.

In 2004, during the writing of my book *Gallipoli, the Fatal Shore*³, the idea for the Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project came to me. The book, and the project which followed the book, are the results of over 20 years of interest in and work on the Gallipoli Campaign, especially from the Turkish side. This preoccupation is due to three periods in my life – my living in Turkey back in the late 1960s; studies at university into Turkish language, history and culture in the 1970s; and my work as a documentary maker at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in the 1980s and 1990s.

So what led me to the idea for this 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, in 2003, during the research for the book mentioned above, I arranged access 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, and reveal all that is left to learn and understand about the campaign. Further, all this new information would belong to Australia as well as Turkey⁴.

The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project

We know a substantial amount about Gallipoli from the Australian and British historical documents, but we know far less from Turkish documents. The project seeks, therefore, to fill that gap by 2015, the centenary of the Gallipoli Campaign.

The project gives us a chance to go to primary sources. Charles Bean’s two volumes on Gallipoli in his official Australian First World War history use many primary sources for his account of the Anzac experience. But he did not have major access to the primary sources of the enemy. None of the major books about Gallipoli that have followed Bean 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 is about it

¹Attended by 110 members and guests

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³Harvey Broadbent (2005) *Gallipoli – the fatal shore* (Penguin Group: Australia).

⁴Of course, it would probably fire up the ‘Brits’ a little as some British historians and commentators have accused Australia of hi-jacking the Gallipoli story.

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