

**Jump TO Article**



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**Jump TO Article**

## LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

# ***Researching Gallipoli: The Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project***

an address<sup>1</sup> to the Institute on 26 February 2008 by  
**Associate Professor Harvey Broadbent<sup>2</sup>**  
Senior Research Fellow, Department of Modern History,  
Macquarie University  
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*<sup>3</sup>, 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 Turkey<sup>4</sup>.

### **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

<sup>1</sup>Attended by 110 members and guests

<sup>2</sup>E-mail: harvey.broadbent@hmn.mq.edu.au

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

<sup>4</sup>Of 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.

for primary sources. Bean *et al.* had to rely mainly on secondary sources.

An Australian 'home' for the project has been established at 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. Funding for the initial 5 years of the project, commencing in 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 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 the Library of the 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; Lieutenant-Colonel Shefik (Aker), Commander 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment; Major Halis, Commander 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment; 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; and
- publish selected documents with interpretations by 2015.

The Turkish General Staff Military Archives are known by the acronym ATASE (Askerlik Tarih Arlivler ve Stratejik Enstitü) and hold catalogues of files for most Ottoman Army conflicts, spanning some 600 years. 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 the Ottoman 5<sup>th</sup> 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 decide to release them to the research team, they scan them to a CD-Rom and deliver it to the research team.

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, and then pass the transliterated documents to other researchers for translation into English. Gallipoli documents in the 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.*

In 2003, I was able to produce an *English Language Catalogue* of the archives, which assists with file identification. This catalogue groups the files by type, *e.g.* Operations, Supply, Intelligence, War Ministry *etc.*, together with a short description of the contents and dates of documents in the file folder.

As an extremely large volume of files exist to be researched, a team of Ottoman language specialists is required. It will take this team several years to select the relevant files, transliterate them into modern Turkish and then translate them into English.

### **Early Results**

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 focused on discrete sources of information: aerial reconnaissance; ground observations; infiltration of enemy positions; prisoner-of-war interrogations; and foreign embassy communications. There are likely to be other sources as well.

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 operational documents are revealing from other perspectives. They include rare first-hand contemporary accounts of operations; as well as 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 with regard to the peninsula, but there was continued concern for the vulnerability of the Dardanelles Straits.

The documents also allude to other operational aspects 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 the attitudes of soldiers to factors such as authority, discipline, hardship, and suffering.



Turkish officers in the field at Gallipoli – an example of photographs being revealed by the Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project [photo: Turkish General Staff Archives]

## Conclusion

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. We are confident that the large gaps in our knowledge of the Turkish conduct of the Gallipoli campaign will be filled by the time of the campaign's centenary in 2015.

## Questions from the Floor

### Question 1: The Armenian 'genocide'

Some commentators have attempted to draw a connection between the so-called Armenian 'genocide' and the Gallipoli campaign. The 'genocide' clearly remains a sensitive issue for the Turks. Do the Turkish archives reveal a connection?

**Answer:** I am sure that one of the reasons the Turkish archivists check their files so carefully before they release them to our research team is to ensure that there is no reference in the released papers to sensitive matters of the type to which you refer. So it is unlikely that we would learn of such matters during the course of our research project. As to the broader issue that you raise, my understanding of the events is that the Russian Army locally defeated the Turks in the Caucasus in January 1915. The Armenians supported the Russians and, over the next couple of months as the Turks withdrew, Armenian partisans harassed them. The Turks took some retribution on the Armenians and it seems that the main event that the Armenians commemorate as the 'genocide' occurred on 24 April 1915. So, essentially, the 'genocide' and the Gallipoli landing on 25 April were contemporary events, although the first occurred in the east and the second in the west of Turkey and different Turkish armies were involved in each event. While some regard the Russian attack in the east and the Anglo-French attack in the west as a developing allied pincer movement against Turkey, we do not know of any other links between the events.

### Question 2: Principles of War

What lessons are likely to emerge from your research relevant to current operations of Australian forces,

particularly regarding the application of the principles of war?

**Answer:** I am not qualified to draw such lessons, which is why we have the Australian War Memorial as our partner. We will progressively hand over our work to them and they will bring in relevant experts to draw strategic and operationally relevant conclusions from the translated archival material. Indeed, one of the leaders of our project is Professor Robin Prior of the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra and his role on the team, as a military strategist, tactician and historian, is to tackle this task.

### Question 3: Prisoners of War

How did the Turks handle and treat the allied prisoners of war?

**Answer:** We have not received many archival documents on prisoners of war so far. Most of the relevant documents are in the Red Crescent files, of which I have only sampled one to date. We do know, though, that the Red Crescent was responsible for the welfare of prisoners of war as well as for the Turkish wounded. Prisoners from Gallipoli, after battlefield processing and interrogation, typically were transferred to Constantinople (Istanbul) for further interrogation and then were handed over to the Red Crescent. They were subsequently held in sparsely-guarded remote villages and camps in Anatolia and some were deployed on major engineering projects, such as the Berlin-Baghdad railway – building tunnels in the mountains on the Syrian border. Generally, the Turks complied with international conventions concerning prisoner welfare. There are already two books published from the Australian prisoner perspective and a PhD thesis is in preparation, which, *inter alia*, may be able to draw in our Turkish archival material.

**The Author:** Harvey Broadbent, Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Modern History at Macquarie University, specialises in Gallipoli studies, Turkish history and culture. He has an honours degree in Middle Eastern studies and speaks Turkish and French fluently. He has led adult educational tours to Turkey, England, Syria, Jordan and Greece; and has won awards for radio and television programmes that he has produced for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, including: *Gallipoli, the Fatal Shore; Victory in the Pacific; The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gallipoli Pilgrimage;* and *Turks in Australia*. He recently worked as historical advisor on a documentary film, *Revealing Gallipoli;* and is the author of the recently-published book, *Gallipoli, the Fatal Shore*, which marked the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that campaign. He is currently director of the Gallipoli Centenary Turkish Archives Research Project. [Photo of Professor Broadbent: Harvey Broadbent]