

The Gallipoli campaign

The Anzac landing on 25 April 1915 was one of two main assaults on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The First Australian Division and the New Zealand and Australian Division were to land near the promontory of Gaba Tepe, about half way up the peninsula, while British forces landed at Cape Helles, at its southern tip. The two forces were to converge on the central mass of the Kilid Bahr Plateau, which dominated the Dardanelles.

Key participants and formations/units

The operation was under the overall command of General Sir Ian Hamilton, the British Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The Anzac forces were commanded by Lieutenant General (LTGEN) Sir William Birdwood, the First Australian Division by Major General (MAJGEN) William Bridges, and the New Zealand and Australian Division by MAJGEN Sir Alexander Godley. The 3rd Brigade was commanded by Colonel (COL) EC Sinclair MacLagan. The Australian assault force – known as the covering force – was provided by the 3rd Brigade (a brigade of the period consisted of four battalions, each of about 1000 men).

The Commander of the Turkish forces in the area, the Fifth Army, was the German officer General (GEN) Liman von Sanders. The first troops the Australians met were from the 9th Division of this Army. COL Mustapha Kemal commanded the

Fifth Army's 19th Division, and later became the first president of Turkey, changing his name to Ataturk, 'father of the Turks'.

The first day – 25 April 1915

The Australians were to lead the Allied assault on the Peninsula, with the 4000-strong 3rd Australian Infantry Brigade providing the covering force and landing at about 4.30am. This landing would take place before dawn, while the British landing later in the morning would be covered by the guns of the Royal Navy.

The 3rd Brigade was landed from ships' boats initially towed by steamboats, then rowed to shore. Most of the troops were still in their boats when Turkish sentries ashore fired the first shots – men were killed and wounded in the boats and as they splashed ashore. It rapidly became apparent that the troops had been landed about a mile to the north of the intended beach. The reason for this drift north has never been adequately explained, but it resulted in the units being thrown ashore inter-mixed and on a smaller front than planned. Despite water-logged uniforms, thick scrub, steep slopes, unfamiliar terrain, confusion and inter-mixing of units, enemy bullets and, later, artillery fire, the 3rd Brigade stormed and took the first slopes. While they fought their way inland, the 2nd, and later the 1st, Australian Infantry Brigades landed behind them.

Unfortunately for the Anzacs, COL Kemal was exercising his 19th Division in the area where he heard of the landings and was ordered to take his regiment to intercept. Whereas GEN Liman von

Sanders believed the Anzac landing to be a feint, Kemal correctly deduced the importance of the Australian attack on the high ground, and took the entire 19th Division to beat the attackers to the crucial peaks. Throughout the day Turkish forces rushed forward from the surrounding area and forced back or annihilated the scattered advance parties of Australians.

By day's end the Turks held the high ground, but the Australians, now reinforced by members of the New Zealand and Australian Division, were determined to hold what they had captured. The Turks were equally determined that the Anzacs would advance no further, and both sides began digging defensive works.

During the night, while the troops in the hills fought back Turkish counter-attacks, MAJGEN Bridges and MAJGEN Godley argued for withdrawal of the force; this was denied and the Anzacs held firm.

The reasons for the failure of the attacking troops to hold all their objectives include:

- the confusion caused by the units landing mixed and in the wrong place;
- the incredibly tough and tangled nature of the ground;
- inadequate intelligence and preparation time;
- COL Sinclair-MacLagan's early decision to fight a defensive battle; and
- the aggressive and prompt response of the Turks, due largely to COL Kemal's swift assessment of the situation and inspired counter-manoevres.

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It is estimated that 16,000 Anzac troops were landed on the first day – over 2000 of whom became casualties.

The remainder of the campaign

For the successive months of the campaign, the Allies attempted to expand their toehold in Turkey. The main offensive was launched in August, and included fighting at Lone Pine, the Nek and Chunuk Bair. The Turks launched attacks in May and June and, despite terrible casualties, the Allies failed to break out, and the Turks failed to drive them into the sea.

In the absence of adequate food or rest, the soldiers sickened and weakened. The Peninsula was finally evacuated in December 1915 and January 1916. By the end of the campaign, the Allied forces had suffered over 141,000 casualties, including 44,000 dead. Australia had more than 28,000 casualties, including over 8700 killed; New Zealand suffered 7500 and 2700 respectively. Turkish figures are more difficult to determine, but it appears Turkey suffered about 215,000 casualties, including about 86,000 dead.

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