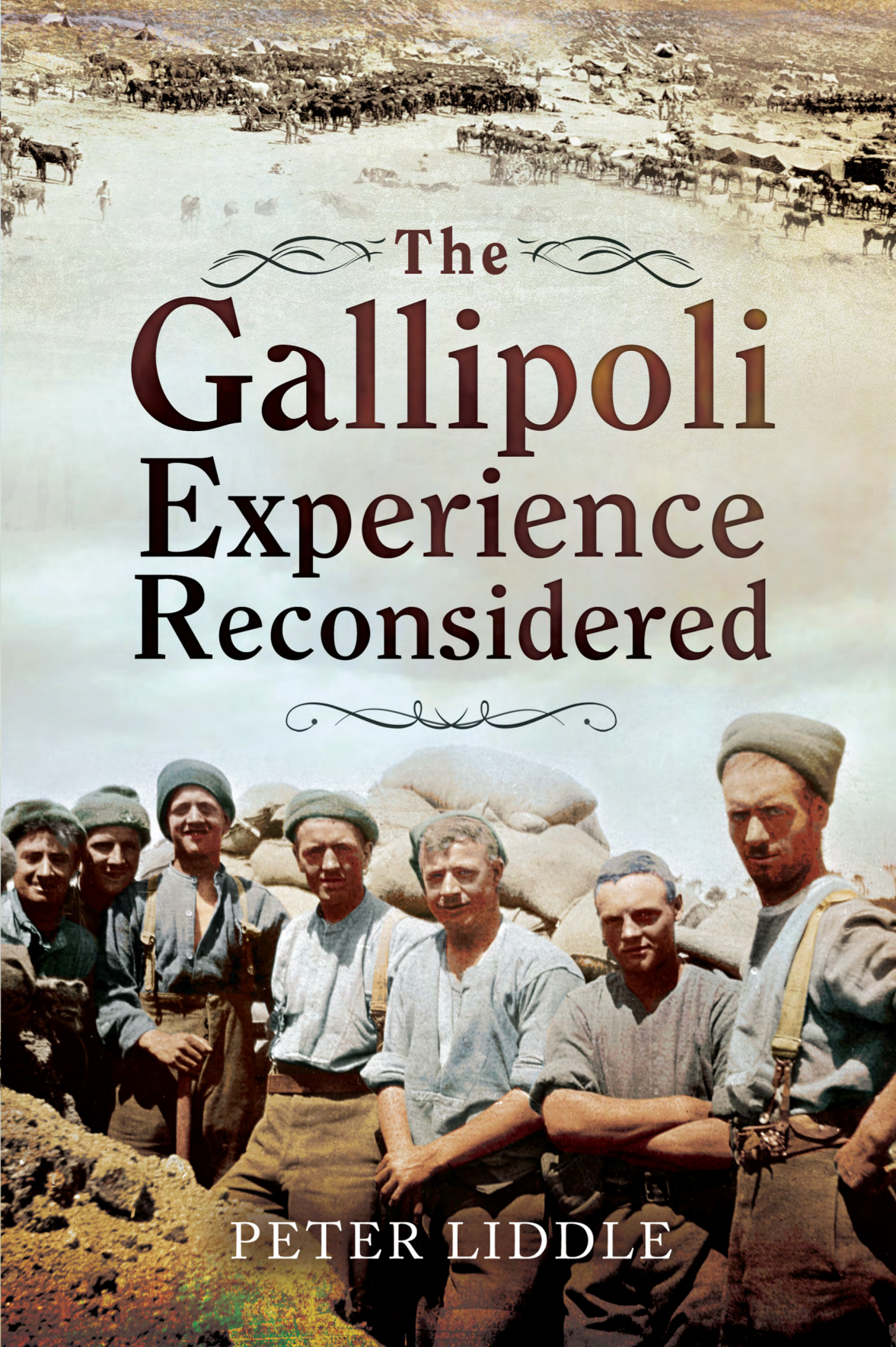
The
Gallipoli
Experience
Reconsidered
PETER LIDDLE

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**Peter Liddle**

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# Acknowledgements

First, I renew my thanks to all those who made the forerunner of this book possible when it was published in 1976 – Gallipoli veterans and their families in all corners of Britain, in Australia and New Zealand, in France, in Germany, in Newfoundland and in Turkey. I have clear memories of interviews, of documents, of generous hospitality and, more particularly abroad, of help given by people in all stages of life to enable me to plan logistically to meet 'men who were there' and research in documentary collections. In a collective sense the Gallipoli Association in the United Kingdom, recently founded when I began my research, was invaluable in contacting British veterans and still today admirably keeps alive a consciousness of the importance of the campaign.

Second, Sunderland Polytechnic, now Sunderland University, was in so many ways supportive of the work I was undertaking in trying to rescue evidence of personal experience in the Great War, with Gallipoli being the initial focus. The enormous privilege of a sabbatical year and financial assistance, augmented by the Priestman Trust and the British Academy, enabled travel to be undertaken which otherwise could only have been wistfully imagined.

Third, with regard to the original research, I acknowledge appreciatively the help of staff in all the archives listed in the unpublished sources for this book. I cannot recall a single instance of disappointment in this respect and now I would like to add my thanks to Richard Davies and staff in Special Collections, the Liddle Collection, Brotherton Library, the University of Leeds, to Gavin J. Edgerley-Harris, Curator of the Gurkha Museum in Winchester, and to Mrs A.J. Tottle, a museum assistant there, to Larysa Bolton at the Manchester Regiment Museum in Ashton-under-Lyne, to Celia Green at the Regimental Museum of the Royal Welsh Regiment in Brecon, Colin Parr concerning the Dorset Yeomanry Regiment in the Keep Military Museum, Dorchester and the Wingfield Digby photograph collection there, Ian Martin at the Museum of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, Berwick, Colonel Mike Glover and Sarah Stevenson at the Museum of the Lancashire Fusiliers in Bury, and Lynda Powell, at the Museum of the Green Howards in Richmond, Yorkshire. Some of these museums, despite the evident achievements of staff and volunteers in display to the public, in conservation and in the excellence of service to researchers, are run on a shoestring – in one extraordinary case without that shoestring. Our order of priorities in times of financial constraint will never win universal agreement but in important affairs, our defence as a nation most notably, we have an embarrassingly poor record of leaving things until it is almost too late. It may be ineffectual for an historian to challenge national, regional and local authorities by suggesting that the

failure to show interest in, and respect for, our past, is no way properly to manage our present nor sensibly prepare for our future, but is this not the case?

I thank John Prust for access to his personal collection of photographs, and most particularly Matthew Richardson, in the Manx Heritage Centre, a former colleague and long-time friend, for shrewd advice and for providing me with material which would otherwise have been beyond my reach.

The idea of reconsidering the original *Men of Gallipoli* came from my more recent publishers, Pen and Sword. Rupert Harding of Pen and Sword has given me every help. I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge and have appreciated the opportunity. I am happy to express my gratitude to Pen and Sword editor Stephen Chumbley for his eagle-eyed, sound observations throughout his examination of the text.

Finally and more personally, when *Men of Gallipoli* was written thirty-seven years ago, my then wife, Sheila, and our children, Steven and Alison, had 'lived' with Gallipoli. Sincerely I thank them for their support and forbearance – 'beyond the call of duty' comes uncomfortably to mind. Now, in this new book, I have been blessed in the presentation of the text by my wife, Louise, who, over many years, has made so many tasks achievable and so much happiness assured.

To all those who have helped me I remain grateful. It is my hope that this reconsideration of the campaign captures the essence of the Dardanelles/Gallipoli experience and that it makes fair judgements. The book is dedicated in affectionate respect to the memory of so many Gallipoli men who became friends.

Peter Liddle,
Mickley,
North Yorkshire.
December 2013

# Introduction

Within my work to rescue personal experience evidence of the First World War, my first concentrated attention was drawn to the Gallipoli Campaign. My books on Gallipoli, three in all now, grew out of that special focus and commitment to the experience of the men who served on the Peninsula or in the surrounding waters. From 1967 I had been endeavouring to track down these men in the United Kingdom, in France, Australia, New Zealand, Eire, Newfoundland, and in Turkey, Germany and Austria. Quite apart from the intense fascination of meeting Gallipoli men, research in each country seemed to offer rich food for thought; the reporter in Australia who as I arrived at a State airport terminal greeted me with the challenge in unmistakable accent: 'Gallipoli, yes, where Churchill sent the expendable colonials!' Then in France, amidst the warmth of a gathering with senior naval officers who had served as young men in the Dardanelles, the chill in the air when, thoughtlessly, I turned to ask about their experience in the Second World War.

The research took me to France four times, to Australasia and to Turkey. With the help of agencies, notably the Gallipoli Association in Britain, and individuals, I managed to contact 650 or so veterans who provided me with original diaries, letters and photographs, as well as recollections of their service. A complete list of these men appears at the end of the book.

From the first, my intention was to build an archive for posterity of the material being collected and then to use it in a book which would faithfully portray the experience of the young officers, soldiers and naval ratings serving on and around the Peninsula. Both intentions were in due course accomplished; the book, *Men of Gallipoli*, was published in 1976, the archive became, in 1988, the Liddle Collection of First World War Archival Materials in the Library of the University of Leeds.

For the book, I additionally consulted personal and official documents in archives in Britain, France and Australasia, and, as would be expected, official histories, biographies, monographs, unit histories, journal articles and published autobiographical accounts.

The research was an exciting, enriching experience and I have, for example, satisfying memories of confirming the authenticity of a Marseilles citizen's dramatic story of escape from the sinking French battleship *Bouvet*, with his 1915 evidence in a dusty file in the French Naval Archives in Paris. On a Tasmanian farmstead, in an elegant Parisian flat, in a South Shields council house and even on an otherwise empty Pacific beach in New Zealand, conversation with men who were at Helles, Anzac or Suvla in 1915 brought me close, I felt, to their experience.

Of course, there were and always will be academic problems in using recollections. But when all account has been taken of the fallibility of memory, there is still the stark newness and intensity of the experience of active military service in a man's impressionable youth, and this deserves, on occasion even demands, consideration. To contest that 1915 in the Dardanelles – and of course on other fronts – left an ineffaceable impression on many, would not just be mean-spirited but, again and again, easily disproved by corroborative evidence from the time.

The examination I was assisted in making of the Peninsula and of Kum Kale in 1972 helped in placing the material I was gathering into a topographical context. Despite afforestation at Anzac and farming at Helles, it was relatively easy to be carried back in eye and mind to 1915. A map shows Achi Baba's height to be insignificant, yet actually seeing its shouldered bulk dominating the view from the cliffs above any of the Helles landing beaches, leaves one in no doubt of its vital importance as a strategic objective. Then the contorted Anzac landscape illuminatingly reveals a forbidding stark face from the sea off Ari Burnu, and the Suvla bowl or amphitheatre, seen from the shore or from the heights of the Anzac beachhead, takes on an evocative aspect from which any account of the events of August 1915 derives added import. To see the still exposed position at the Nek or the slightly raised shingle bank below Seddel Bahr castle and then, in the heat of the summer, the dried Salt Lake and the tinder-like scrub under a burning sun, helps to dissolve the years which have passed since the soldier diarist made his record of the historic events in which he was engaged.

So much for the range of sources from which *Men of Gallipoli* was drawn, but what about its academic justification? Can it be claimed convincingly that Gallipoli provided a sufficiently different soldiering experience with regard to circumstance and performance to justify a detailed concentration on the service of the individual there? Well, I think there are grounds for considering that Gallipoli offered and demanded quite distinctive soldiering, however many similarities there may be with the fighting in France and to an extent in Macedonia, Mesopotamia and Palestine. Patently the naval officer and rating have no parallel 1914–18 service remotely to compare with that of the Dardanelles. Tsingtao, Tanga or Zeebrugge/Ostend, may come to mind, only to be summarily dismissed as quite different again.

Gallipoli was the only major 'alternative' campaign which held any possibility of a quick dramatic victory. In both the documentation and the memories of those who took part there is ample evidence of an anticipation of great events. The sheer might of the naval commitment which the soldiers first glimpsed as they entered Mudros harbour was an inspiring sight engendering a consciousness of involvement in the challenge of a major enterprise. For most men it was to be their first experience under fire, precipitating a maturity which would leave its mark. Following the drama of the landings there were to be further tests, generally fruitless and costly assaults on entrenched positions in the tradition being established on the Western Front, but there were also distinctive operations, such as the seizing of Gurkha Bluff on the left flank at Helles, the night advance up the unreconnoitred Anzac gullies in August, or the aggressive mining activities so unlike the slow gestation of similar activity in France.

There does not, for example, seem to be any parallel on another front to the sheer concentrated ferocity of the hand bombing at Quinn's or Courtney's Post in May or to the prolonged fighting from entrenched positions where at some points only a sandbagged barricade separated the opposing troops. Such conditions actually led to the construction and regular use of catapults. For an August attack at Anzac, troops even dug assault tunnels to reduce further the narrow but fearsome no man's land over which they were to charge, a tactic almost two years ahead of its employment in France.

There was individual enterprise like that of John Simpson Kirkpatrick with his donkey at Anzac, transporting wounded men unable to walk to the dressing station, the night-time reconnaissance of no man's land to the North of the Anzac beachhead to help plan the August outflanking move to strike for the heights, or that of the silent forays by Gurkhas to secure grim evidence of the sudden death of a Turkish sniper.

It is scarcely surprising that the geographical conditions which so dominated the campaign, strategically and tactically, should also determine trench living conditions. With Achi Baba, Sari Bair and the encircling hills at Suvla standing as a constant challenge, at once depressingly unreachable and demonstrably near, the Allied soldiers were confined to beachheads, relatively small at Helles, almost ridiculously so at Anzac. Not even the Mesopotamian seasonal river flooding or the Bulgarian barrier of the Grand Couronne so circumscribed freedom of Allied movement. Each occupied sector of the Peninsula was open to shell-fire; rest areas, or being 'out of the line in reserve', must have been terms defying acceptance by the soldier arriving on the Peninsula following service in France.

The land held by the British and French at Helles was, at its widest point, little more than two miles across, and the distance from the front line at Helles to the extreme point of the Peninsula, Cape Tekke Tepe, was just over three miles. At Anzac the crescent-shaped wedge was still more restricted, particularly from the front line to the rear. At Suvla, sufficient of the plain was won to secure a greater degree of space, but concealment of men, material and tactical movement was even less possible, as the tiny hillocks were too low to hide any movement from the W Hills, still less from observation from Chunuk Bair. Within these three confined areas, attack and defence had to be planned and carried out, supplies accumulated and distributed, communications maintained, troop movements made, bomb factories and tactical schools run, field dressing and casualty clearing stations as well as field hospitals set up. Even a primitive airfield at Helles, of course under observation and shell-fire, was constructed. A narrow-gauge railway, water-purifying plants, bakeries, cookhouses and plans for a funicular railway at Anzac, are further evidence of an altogether remarkable situation.

For men on the Peninsula, mail was irregular, parcel contents often spoiled, and, despite sea-bathing, no one could keep clean. There was no proper leave, and, to re-affirm, there were no real base areas for rest, relaxation and recuperation. Shell-ruined Armentières in France, or even Summerhill camp in Salonika, held possibilities utterly beyond the reach of the Peninsula and while the islands of Imbros or Lemnos afforded safety, they were without recreational facilities. It might be appropriately

mentioned here that monastic seclusion from women was the lot of all who set foot on the Peninsula. Neither sight nor sound of an Amiens red light district, still less an authorised brothel, not even a countrywoman at a well to attempt conversation with, nor, for the wounded before evacuation, a nurse. There is significance in the late-August entry of a published Western Front diary: 'Whenever I get depressed … I keep repeating to myself, "Thank God I didn't go to the Dardanelles".'[1]

Permanently living in dugouts or trenches was something to which one simply had to become accustomed, but the summer heat and the impossibility of burying the dead who fell in no man's land produced a plague of flies gorged from their feeding grounds of corpses, open latrines, mugs of tea and runny jam on bread. The resultant dysentery or enteric fever was a curse comparable to that of malaria in Salonika and unparalleled in scale by disease on any other front except East Africa. Certainly on no front did such suffering occur as a result of suddenly severe weather conditions as at Suvla and Anzac in the November storm. In addition to all this, it was Gallipoli, on 25 April, and to some extent in August, which shared with Mesopotamia the melancholy distinction of illustrating most clearly the woefully inadequate medical arrangements to deal with the wounded. There was small compensation for these miseries in the unusual degree of informality in Peninsula service life. Away from the front line, there was freedom to bathe, though frequently under shelling, freedom to scrounge or to visit friends in other units. Individual or collective cooking enterprise, from parcels getting through unspoiled, was not infrequently an alternative to Army rations deficient as the latter were in variety, imagination and dietary need, and, it must be said in extenuation, by the exceptional difficulty of supplying and cooking for large numbers.

Viewed from a wider perspective than that of its being a distinctive personal experience, the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign was of enormous and lasting significance. A combined operation involving a British and a French naval squadron and including the most powerful modern battleship afloat, carried out seven separate landings with five divisions of troops from Britain, France, North and West Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The scale of the initial landings was an operation unmatched in the Great War and 25 April 1915 was a day of epic drama fit to rank with any day in the history of twentieth-century British warfare except perhaps 6 June 1944. It might be added that as far as British political and military planning was concerned, Norway in the Second World War in 1940, Sicily in 1943 and of course on a greater scale, Normandy in 1944, illustrate how far lessons from unforgotten Gallipoli had or had not been learned.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the campaign is the richly varied ethnic background of the Allied troops involved. There were English, Scots, Welsh, Irish, Australians, New Zealanders including Maoris, Newfoundlanders, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Punjabis, Jewish Palestinians mostly by origin from Russia, a small number from what was then Ceylon, and Frenchmen, men of the varied races of the French Foreign Legion, and Algerians, Moroccans and Senegalese. Their different languages and cultures, their prejudices and their ideals, their varied military training and experience, had to be fused to serve a common military purpose.

For Australians and New Zealanders above all, Gallipoli earned a singular distinction; and 25 April, the day when Australian and New Zealand troops first saw action as separately identified units, despatched by the instruction of their own Governments, was later chosen as the day on which these two nations commemorate the service and sacrifice of their armed forces in two world wars.[2] Bill Gammage, in *The Broken Years*, wrote: 'Anzac provided a glorious focus for specifically nationalist sentiment; it was a peculiarly Australian achievement which until then had been lacking and in the eyes of contemporaries it made Australia a nation at last with international recognition, national heroes, a national day and a worthy tradition. It established an ethos which seemed to express the best of both nation and Empire, and this inevitably reduced the imperial attachment of Australians.'[3] For Australia and New Zealand, it is universally recognized that their emergent nationhood had been forged in the crucible of Gallipoli.

If this were not enough to make special claim for soldier service on the Peninsula, then there is Gallipoli's legendary reputation for being a ruinously ill-judged venture, for scandalously incompetent military leadership and for the hapless heroism of some troops and slothful inadequacy of others. Of this reputation and the degree to which it can be substantiated, much more later.

*The Gallipoli Experience Reconsidered* follows *Men of Gallipoli* in emphasising the individual rather than his unit or his nationality, but leans toward an awareness that the evidence, unless specifically stated otherwise, is likely to have representational validity in both respects. Endeavouring to let those who participated in a campaign speak for themselves is sometimes described as 'history from the bottom up'. I am not entirely comfortable with such a description because nothing happens in military matters without an order from above. The chain of military command stretching from a commander-in-chief descends to the very bottom reaches of its length activating a lance-corporal of a platoon to supervise his men doing whatever they have been ordered to do. The soldier's consciousness of his officers may indeed be limited to the officer in command of his platoon, or perhaps as high as his battalion's commanding officer, but soldier and officer are both following orders from above and this to all intents and purposes will determine their experience. Top and bottom are not to be separated so easily and I have tried to bear this in mind as well as the fact that Generals – and Admirals – were themselves following instructions, those of their political masters.

It is a soldier's lot to do what he is told. He will grumble but he will do it, and even when he is ordered to do something which seems against all sense, for a host of reasons he will still obediently try to do it. I might add here that while those reasons will include army discipline and training, may well include unspoken ideals of regimental pride, regional or national patriotism – God, King and Country – the collective requirement of not letting one's comrades down will be pre-eminent. If predictable costly failure were then to ensue, bitter resentment on occasion found virulent expression in letters, surprisingly escaping censorship, proof of the censor's fallibility, over-work or, just possibly, of his own angry agreement.

Briefly to return to the question of High Command, I have tried to keep all matters of senior authority in mind, dealing with them as seemed fitting for this book without letting it draw me towards an attempt to write 'a history of the campaign with some idea of what it was like to go through it'. This has been done often, sometimes notably well, by Robert Rhodes James, long ago, and recently by Peter Hart in his superbly informative, richly descriptive and challengingly judgemental *Gallipoli*. What was required of the men who were there, what did they record at the time of their experience, and what outstanding recollections did they retain; this is at the heart of *The Gallipoli Experience Reconsidered* but it requires throughout an informed awareness of the context in which the men's service is being measured.

My thinking about Gallipoli did not stop with the publication of *Men of Gallipoli* in 1976. I prepared an illustrated book on the campaign in 1982, *Gallipoli; Pens, Pencils and Cameras at War* – I have to say this book was rather poorly presented – and then still more evidence and reflection in chapters of several books in which I had tried to distil the essence of First World War active service experience. I made another research visit to the Peninsula, thought about the conclusions of other historians, and put forward further considerations in various forms.

It had been exciting in 1976 handing the manuscript over for publication when so much of the evidence I put forward I had unearthed myself, but now, not far short of forty years later, it is also exciting and satisfying to know that the structure, information, assessments and writing of this new book are, in my judgement, much improved on that of its progenitor.

The law-courts of history never pronounce a final verdict and what is attempted here in the context of this book with regard to matters of enduring contention – the Dardanelles/Gallipoli concept and execution – has no such unachievable goal. It is simply to be as fair to political and military High Command as I have striven to be to the men on shore, on deck, there at the time.


1. The Aegean and the Western and Central Ottoman Empire.

# Prologue: Gestation and Political Responsibility

No one reading the deliberations of the British War Council late in 1914, or from the memoirs or biographies of the men there conferring, can have any doubt that the deepest anxiety and perplexity were afflicting those charged with delivering a successful outcome to the war. The Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, uniquely, in this position, a soldier, and as such both deferred to and resented by the politicians filling all the other ministries and posts in the War Council, is quoted in a colleague's memoirs, starkly stating of the deadlock in France and Belgium: 'I don't know what is to be done, this isn't war.'[1] With Britain's key minister for the strategic direction of the war at a loss, arguments were put forward for a complete change of focus away from Belgium and France. One such project was for a British landing on the German island of Borkum, drawing the Allied-sympathetic Danes into the war and an attack on Schleswig-Holstein, this new threat to Germany being vastly augmented by a projected Russian landing on the German coast. Landings on the Belgian and even the neutral Dutch coast were considered, and a plan to tempt the Greeks into a military landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula allowing the Royal Navy to make its way through the Dardanelles to the Sea of Marmara and so to Constantinople. Another idea, associated with Kitchener himself, was for a landing at Alexandretta on the Eastern Mediterranean coast, designed to sever the Ottoman Empire's rail link south to Baghdad. Success here would at once cut the Turks from Syria, remove any threat to the Suez Canal and render vulnerable Ottoman control of the oil-rich Arabian Gulf.

An attack approaching Austria-Hungary's southern flank through a landing at Salonika in still-neutral Greece, or from a port on the Dalmatian coast, was a consideration too, the pet project of Lloyd George, in the early nurturing of both his inveterate opposition to British Generals on the Western Front and his budding ambition to take control of the direction of the war effort by capturing the British Premiership.

Such ventures, even in the strategic dilemma being faced, had flaws outweighing their attractions. What gave a different, indirect strategy, more chance of acceptance was a combination of circumstance and persuasive theoretical argument. The idea of an attack at the Dardanelles potentially leading to a naval threat to Constantinople itself, possibly removing by revolution the Ottoman Empire from the war, was first put to the War Council by Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, on 25 November. He advocated the move as the best way of frustrating immediately any Turkish designs on Egypt and the Suez Canal. He had stated, and it was generally understood, that a considerable body of troops would be needed to take full advantage

of the Navy's destruction of the defences of the Narrows and threat to the Ottoman capital. There were simply not the troops available for so ambitious a plan but the ensuing weeks of continued frustration in France and Belgium were to generate such a measure of strategic desperation that the idea was revived just immediately before a serious war emergency arose for Russia on her Armenian front with Turkey, an appeal being made for Allied aid in distracting the Turks from concentration on this front. In such a way was Churchill offered a liberating opportunity to race in with a modified Dardanelles project – and then off to take advantage of it like a latter-day Italian moped bag-snatcher.

The persuasive theoretical argument had been advanced by the Secretary to the War Council, Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, just before the Russian plea arrived. On Boxing Day, Hankey, addressing the predicament facing the War Council, prepared a memorandum on the strategic options available. He expanded widely and convincingly on that directed towards the Dardanelles. In essence he put forward that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire would answer the immediate problem of aiding Russia on her Armenian front, and open the Black Sea for Russian wheat to reach Britain and France and for Entente arms and munitions to reach Russia, sustaining her war effort. There was much more: Serbia might be assisted against an impending onslaught by the Central Powers; by success against the Turks, Italy, Bulgaria and Romania, might be drawn into alliance with the Triple Entente; Greece, whose army would be needed, might be drawn in as well; Egypt and the Suez Canal would be made secure, and the oil fields of the Gulf too. Further afield, the German/Turkish diplomatic, propaganda and military threat to India would be expunged. As a final, and it has to be said, even more optimistic bonus, British naval power could be brought up the Danube to threaten the very heart of the Habsburg domains.

It is easy to see this as a house of cards subject to the slightest tremor, but we do no justice to Hankey if we were to ignore the War Council's all-consuming preoccupation with a strategy alternative to that of the costly commitment, without prospect of end, to the Western Front. It was at this stage that the new circumstance intervened and brought opportunity available for seizure. Under dangerous pressure from the Turks on the Caucasus front, Grand Duke Nicholas, on 2 January 1915, appealed urgently for help from Russia's Western allies for some military demonstration against the Turks which might help to forestall imminent disaster.

Kitchener was all too aware that his New Armies were far from fully trained and certainly unready for deployment to an active service front. He had but a single Regular Army division 'spare', held in readiness for Western Front emergency, and, not incidentally, he had infuriated Sir John French, in command of the British force there, with his stated conviction that victory was not be won in France until the New Armies were ready. Kitchener knew he could send no soldiers to the aid of Russia, but called upon Churchill at the Admiralty to see whether naval assistance might be offered. The two men agreed that a naval demonstration might be made at the Dardanelles with the implication that this might lead to a direct warship threat before Constantinople.

From idea to initiation, matters now moved with a speed rendering inappropriate any comparison to the germination of seeds. How ironic it is that the Turkish threat to Russia which created the opportunity snatched so imaginatively by Churchill – though some would say so foolishly – vanished swiftly in Russian counter-attack!

Churchill organised from the Admiralty an immediate enquiry of the Officer in Command of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, Sir Sackville Carden, whether he were to judge that bombardment of the forts at the Dardanelles would allow ships to proceed through the Narrows, emphasising that 'the importance of the results would justify severe loss'. Churchill used Carden's cautious response that success could not be expected from a sudden strike, but that the Narrows 'might be forced by extended operations with a large number of ships' to plan an attractive proposal for the War Council. Carden's battleships were old pre-dreadnoughts, no longer considered suitable for combat with the German High Seas Fleet in the North Sea. The word 'expendable' had not been used in Churchill's signal but the implication was clear.

It must be stated that the issue of whether the First Lord's proposal were to have been deliberately deceptive in its attraction has earned the scornful derision of some historians but a rejoinder might be that they themselves underestimate the Allied crisis and enjoy the benefit of hindsight in the laceration of their culprit.

George Cassar, in his fine book *Kitchener's War*, has identified a meeting arranged by Churchill, almost certainly on 12 January, with Kitchener, Fisher, the First Sea Lord, and with Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Arthur Wilson, as the occasion when Churchill's case for a purely naval assault on the forts at the entrance to the Dardanelles and then those of the Narrows, was endorsed. Churchill's persuasive advocacy the following day at the War Council was but a formality, considered Cassar.[2]

The military economy of the proposition put forward by Churchill, based on Carden's plan progressively to demolish the forts using old battleships, won acceptance of the idea from Fisher, and then that no troops were called for, removed the likelihood of Kitchener's opposition. Kitchener himself, at the War Council on 13 January, was to add a third argument in favour of the scheme, in that if success were not visibly within reach, the operation could be considered as a demonstration and at that stage called off without loss of face. However, a naval success, continued Churchill at the meeting on 13 January, and the appearance of British warships off the Golden Horn at Constantinople, were likely to stimulate internal revolution, taking the Ottoman Empire out of the war and leading to the realization of potentially massive benefits – all danger to Egypt removed, direct assistance to Russia now possible, and Balkan countries in all likelihood won from neutrality to the Allied cause. Fisher, predictably unpredictable, stifling his doubts and his resentment that his Baltic assault predilection was not shared, seemed strikingly to endorse Churchill's proposal by offering the Navy's newest superdreadnought, HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, whose 15in guns could be calibrated on the Turkish forts.

The War Council left its own legacy to what is now almost a century-old debate on the Dardanelles/Gallipoli concept with its conclusion on 13 January that 'the

Admiralty should prepare a naval expedition to invade and take the Gallipoli Peninsula'. The 'invading' and the 'taking' of even so small an area of land as the Gallipoli Peninsula, by the Navy, unsupported by troops, have been terminological hostages to fortune ever since.

In such a manner the gamble at the Dardanelles was authorised by the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, by Lord Kitchener, by Sir John Fisher and their colleagues on the War Council. Significantly, if further evidence were needed of the Allied bewilderment facing a war without prospect of victory, and then enthusiasm at seeing a way forward after all, the French Cabinet too, was within a short time to back the idea with French naval support, and later military, despite the colossal demands being incurred in holding the German advance into France and attempting to hurl it back.

With regard to Anglo-French unity in the direction of the war during Kitchener's time at the War Office, it might appropriately be added that Kitchener was never free, neither by obligation nor instinct, from his acceptance that Britain must do all she could to take a greater share of the Western Front burden as yet borne so inequitably by France. However, an early biographer stated that: 'Left to himself (he) would have selected, as all his friends knew, some point in the Near East, and would have launched an attack with every man and gun and shell which could have been begged, borrowed or stolen from the Western Front.'[3] If his biographer, Reginald, Viscount Esher, were right here, it is surely still more inexplicable that Kitchener ordered no such study of the means to achieve military success in the alternative area chosen.

Returning to the gamble now agreed, a not unreasonable contemporary analogy to the War Council's desperate dilemma encouraging a venture into the unknown, might be drawn from a range of circumstances; a hard-up family's project for emigration, agreed under persuasion by all the senior members; a potentially advantageous but risky business enterprise for those with drained capital, similarly endorsed; less happily comparable, a criminal conspiracy, handshake-sealed; such enterprises leaving all those involved awaiting success, the sharing of benefits and credit for the concept, but then, later, faced instead by failure and the perceived self-protective necessity to distance oneself from the idea in the first place. From puzzlement to temptation, attraction, commitment, and then, with disaster the unanticipated result, the undignified rush for disentanglement, best achieved, it would seem, by the shovelling of manure onto those left without spade or overalls. Churchill, of course symbolically without spade or overalls, was in due time to be subjected to the judgemental manure liberally directed at him but was of the conviction that some was thrown by those who had let him down and who deserved the derision in full measure too.

The concept as outlined above was to evolve, not remain fixed like a chilled cadaver for autopsy, but first we can deal almost summarily with the issue of responsibility for the gamble being risked on 13 January. With Churchill and, in a sense, Hankey, was Kitchener responsible? Of course he was. Asquith, the Prime Minister? By definition. And all the members of the War Council who endorsed the Dardanelles

conclusions of their meetings at different stages before and during the campaign, were they all responsible? Indeed they were and the French Government too. If collective responsibility might have brought collective credit, it certainly confers collective blame, no matter the subsequently attempted shameless evasions.

What about responsibility as the nature of the venture changed, the Navy failing to deliver the goods, as will be related below, and Churchill declaring he would not be held responsible if at a decisive juncture troops were needed and were not made available? On 9 February at the War Council, Kitchener promised that if the Navy were to require assistance at a later stage, troops would be made available, but when Churchill pressed for them, the War Minister's response, on 24 February, offered rebuke to Churchill and delight to generations of historians. He enquired of Churchill his purpose in the gathering together of troops for an operation to be carried through by the Navy.

The issue of British and French troops being deployed to the Balkan region had already been raised inter-governmentally in relation to attempts to persuade Greece to enter the war and concern about how to aid Serbia, and it might be said too that Kitchener was recognizing what had on 25 November been acknowledged that an attack on Turkey at the Dardanelles would at some stage need troops. However, the conclusion to the deliberations of 13 January quite specifically referred to the Navy and Admiralty alone. Churchill would shove relentlessly at the door of troop commitment but it was unlatched by Kitchener.

Some days before the commencement on 19 February of the naval bombardment at the entrance to the Straits, Churchill, urged by consensus at the Admiralty, began the lobbying of Kitchener for the troops he had indicated he would make available. Kitchener responded positively and at the War Council of 16 February he ordered the dispatch of the 29th Division east to the island of Lemnos, leased by the Greek Government as a base for operations in the area. Kitchener also announced that the Australian and New Zealand troops in Egypt would, if necessary, be deployed there too. The French, who had warships under British overall command preparing for the bombardment, then followed Kitchener's example with the commitment of a division for the Dardanelles. Regrettably, Churchill, who was to quarrel fiercely with Fisher – not entirely Churchill's fault here however – now interfered in matters wholly within Kitchener's responsibility, and their working relationship was soured. There was going to be more than enough for Churchill 'legitimately' to quarrel with Kitchener over very soon as the latter changed his mind over the 29th Division's availability for the Dardanelles, though fortunately for Churchill this reversal was itself reversed. Again it is the American historian, George Cassar, who, in his excellent biographies of both Asquith and Kitchener, lays out graphically the occasions when the Prime Minister had to summon Churchill and Kitchener to his office in an attempt to broker agreement and even, on one occasion to Churchill's acute discomfort, to administer rebuke. The accounts read as if the meetings took place in the Headmaster's study in an endeavour to get the Head's two Senior Prefects to work together for the good of the School.

While it may be reasonable to charge Asquith with a lack of dynamic leadership at the War Council, we might remember the drain on his energies in keeping some of his most important ministers from behaving like fighting cats, or, in Fisher's case on a celebrated occasion, like a sulking, uncontactable prima donna on the eve of a performance. All this, and Lloyd George's duplicitous scheming has scarcely been mentioned! If anyone were due a sugar-lump of sympathy before his dose of criticism, it is Asquith.

Asquith was no natural leader in time of war. By inclination and by reason of his circumstance as a wartime Premier, he was reliant upon Kitchener, his appointed Secretary of State for War, and in accord with the latter's assessment that the fulfilling of Britain's Western Front responsibility must not be risked. But, with his keen analytical mind, was he not too easily persuaded to look for answers in the Near East, as, temporarily, did Kitchener? Asquith may be criticised too for presiding over rambling War Council discussions, most notably that of 13 January, the critically important formal meeting even accepting Cassar's account that the unminuted meeting of principals, probably the previous day, had made the Dardanelles a 'done deal'.

Churchill held to his conviction that great gains would accrue from a success in the area but had he not won acceptance of his plan by deluding his colleagues from their previous generally agreed understanding that troops would be needed at some stage? By a balancing irony, had not Kitchener always known that though prospects for victory in France might look depressingly distant, it was in France where Germany would have to be beaten and there really were insufficient troops available for effective deployment elsewhere? It seems that he was swayed into accord by Admiralty confidence that the Navy could do the job, especially with the presence of the 15in guns of *Queen Elizabeth*, and that the naval attack merited his support, the troops merely there for securing the gains achieved.

Kitchener had, however, associated himself with a military expansion of the idea and ordered no staff study of what might be required and whether it were available or needed for France. Were there the men, howitzers, guns, ammunition, medical and other support services for a campaign in the Near East? With a British attack planned for early March on the Western Front at Neuve Chapelle, a major French offensive too, and reason to anticipate a German attack somewhere along the British line, could France and Belgium really be put on the back burner for speculative gains at the Dardanelles?

In fact it was Churchill's impetuosity in proclaiming by Press communiqué, without sanction from the Prime Minister or the War Council, that the first day of the bombardment on 19 February had gone well, thus announcing the deed to the world, which rendered cessation of the action in the event of naval failure out of the question. The communiqué was not just without higher authority, it was decidedly optimistic. The embarrassed members of the War Council were committed to seeing the venture through and it was also now generally realized that this meant, with all surprise jettisoned, military expansion of the project. Whether Churchill were endeavouring to influence Balkan countries to throw off their neutrality (or at least

leanings towards the Central Powers), or whether Churchill were positioning himself to seize the laurels of success, is a matter for debate but he shares with no-one else responsibility for this decisive action with its momentous consequences.

At the War Council on 24 February Kitchener reacted to the changed circumstance with impetuosity to match Churchill's in stating that if the Navy could not force the Straits unaided, the Army should see the business through. His following phrase was ironically prescient: 'The effect of a defeat in the Orient would be very serious.' Churchill, a prime mover indeed, but he had no authority over the Army and here is Kitchener's unequivocal sanction.

To move back six weeks or so and from the War Office to the Admiralty and the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, Fisher's mind, even in its mood swings, super-heated personal attachments, enmities, and resentful turning away from the Baltic, was surely, when in its sub-eruptive moments, concentrated to the exclusion of almost everything else, on the priority of the North Sea, husbanding the resources of the Grand Fleet and bringing the High Seas Fleet to battle. Churchill may have made a grand gesture to a distinguished sailor in drawing him out of retirement at the age of seventy-four – and, in Fisher's case, a popular response in accepting the appointment – but the Navy had so far disappointed the nation. Even with some achievements there had been embarrassments, defeat at Coronel and the shelling of Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough not least. Fisher, senior in age, had his reputation to recover and protect, Churchill, senior in office and with identifiable personal embarrassments too, like the Antwerp enterprise, had his reputation to re-make. The political marriage of these two great figures was scarcely made in Heaven.

Fisher initially stifled his doubts, and boomed his approval for the Dardanelles. Later he sat in official meetings in sulky silence while informally growling his disenchantment. He claimed that, from Jellicoe to the Admiralty charwomen, everyone knew of his opposition. This opposition grew into simmering fury as the Dardanelles scheme developed. As early as 19 January he wrote to Sir John Jellicoe, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet: 'and now the Cabinet have decided on taking the Dardanelles solely with the Navy using fifteen battleships and thirty-other vessels and keeping out their three battlecruisers and a flotilla of destroyers – all urgently required at the decisive theatre at home! There is only one way out and that is to resign! But you say "No" which simply means I am a consenting party to that which I absolutely disapprove. I don't agree with one single step taken.'[4] This letter, one of several on the same theme, illustrates his equivocal position. Resignation, withdrawal of it under persuasion, threats to resign – how on earth was that to be managed by the First Lord and the Prime Minister? With difficulty, is an inadequate assessment. The tragic influence of the split between Churchill and Fisher over Dardanelles policy stands as a factor limiting what chances there were of success in the critical months until Fisher's resignation on 15 May.

Though written a long time ago, by a man himself with a mixed reputation in his trade as an historian, A.J.P. Taylor makes a chastening but broadly fair judgement in stating:

> It was a rush job from first to last. Once Churchill took up the idea, he exaggerated both the ease with which it could be carried through and the rewards which it would bring. There was no enquiry into the means available. Churchill merely assumed that battleships could force the Straits unaided. When this failed, he assumed that there was a powerful army available for Gallipoli and assumed also that this inhospitable Peninsula presented no formidable military obstacles. Beyond this, he assumed also that the fall of Constantinople would inflict a mortal blow on Germany. All these assumptions were wrong.[5]

There are phrases of blame here which cannot exclusively be addressed to Churchill, like the responsibility for ensuring that there were the military means available, but the driving force behind the widening of the original idea of the naval strike was indubitably Churchill.

Each member of the War Council can be indicted from the record of the meetings, and perhaps one of the most embarrassing pieces of evidence is the statement of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, on 8 January that the Turks would be paralysed with fear when they heard that the forts were being destroyed one by one.[6] However, as an illustration of matchless irony and the shameless perfidy of politicians, a private comment from Lloyd George to his secretary/mistress, Frances Stevenson, on 15 May, would be hard to beat: 'It is the Nemesis of the man who has fought for the war for years. When the war came he saw in it the chance of success for himself and has accordingly entered on a risky campaign without caring a straw for the misery and hardship it would bring to thousands, in the hope that he would prove to be the outstanding man in this war.'[7] Hankey's notes, it scarcely needs adding, record no opposition by Lloyd George in the meetings during which the vital decisions were taken.

Russian responsibility too should be noted: the decisive impulse towards Gallipoli had been a Russian request for help. There is in addition some irony in the thought that British success in the Dardanelles would have given Russia Constantinople, which British diplomatic, military and naval effort for a hundred years had striven to withhold.[8] Furthermore, Russia vetoed any idea of a Greek contingent being involved with the scheme as it might seem an inducement for their competing claim on the control of the waterway from the Bosporus to the Dardanelles. George Cassar observes that not only did the British and French fail to agree on the political objectives to be secured but they never seriously considered whether Russia could help and if so by what means.[9] The assistance in due course of the Russian cruiser *Askold* can scarcely be considered a major contribution to the Allied naval and military commitment.

French support for what was essentially a British concept seems at first remarkable, even attractively loyal, until the realization dawns that French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, most particularly with regard to Syria, coveted by France but under Ottoman overlordship, were of prime concern, so joint action in the area was the only way to ensure that Britain, traditional competitor as she was, secured no advantage

in the region. Nonetheless the French fell for Churchill's blandishments without consulting their Admiral in the Eastern Mediterranean, Boué de Lapeyrère, and without regard for their previously agreed primacy in this sea. A French source quite fairly outlines the Churchill logic: 'Churchill in his passion to succeed ignored advice which did not support his argument',[10] but no contrary advice came from the French before the military landings in April.

It was recognized that the pedigree of a British assault on the Straits was lengthy. Admiral Duckworth in 1807 had actually breached the Dardanelles but had been severely mauled on his return journey from an unyielding Constantinople. At the time of the Russo-Turkish War in the late 1870s there had been an examination of the problems associated with British involvement in the Dardanelles, and in 1907 a Joint Staff appreciation had seen too many obstacles in the way of a combined operation to offer much chance of a worthwhile success. The Admiralty had however qualified the joint assessment by accepting that such an operation might be forced upon them and that, if this were the case, they were not as gloomy as the War Office appeared to be about the prospects.

The project was raised again in September 1914 as a result of the equivocal Turkish diplomatic position and the escape of the German warships, *Goeben* and *Breslau* to the Dardanelles and then, by secret collusion between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, through to the Sea of Marmara and so to Constantinople. The British military attaché in Constantinople, Lieutenant-Colonel Cunliffe Owen, prepared a paper on the subject and was quite clear that the 'more directions in which Great Britain's energies are scattered, so much the better for German policy'.[11] He drew attention to the need for British-Russian co-operation and suggested that the Persian Gulf might be a better place to strike than the Dardanelles.

As a result of this memorandum the question of the feasibility of an attack was studied by the Director of Military Operations at the War Office, General Callwell. His opinion was that 'considering the strength of the Turkish garrison and the large force already mobilized in European Turkey, he did not regard it as a feasible military operation and that he believed this to be the War Office view'.[12]

The background to Churchill's own ideas on the Dardanelles is interesting. He had sent a memorandum to the Cabinet in 1911 which stated that: 'It is no longer possible to force the Dardanelles … nobody would expose a modern fleet to such perils.'[13] He had conceded at the War Council on 25 November 1914 that an attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula would be 'a very difficult operation requiring a large force',[14] and he had written to Fisher on 10 December 1914 concerning the latter's projected Zeebrugge landing, a project attractive to Sir John French too: 'I am shy of landings under fire … unless there is no other way.'[15] In the light of such evidence, Churchill's logic, judgement and memory seem exposed by his confident assertion at the War Council of 6 April 1915 that 'he anticipated no difficulty in effecting a landing'.[16]

Ashmead Bartlett seems to provide an acceptable analysis of the development of Churchill's thinking:

> It not infrequently happens that men of dominating imagination are apt to jump to the conclusion that successful accomplishment must follow as a natural corollary to a brilliant scheme which has suddenly germinated in their minds … Mr Churchill realized how far-reaching would be the result if Constantinople were captured, but there is little evidence that he ever carefully considered what forces were necessary to ensure victory or weighed the consequences of failure.[17]

In considering whether the Gallipoli idea were a 'strategic conception surpassing others in promise',[18] one must surely recognize that a proper evaluation of the practical problems involved in its execution should have been an essential part of such an assessment. Granville Fortescue wrote caustically that 'it is the lack of foresight shown by the mind that conceived the plan of smashing a channel through to the Black Sea which is appalling'.[19] J.F.C. Fuller separates and then links the factors involved with dismissive logic. 'As a problem of pure strategy it was brilliant. But without a powerful Greek army to back it, it was amateurish because England was not capable of fighting on two fronts and the British army was neither equipped nor trained to fight in a theatre such as Gallipoli.'[20] Of course both had the benefit of hindsight, Fortescue fuelled by the immediacy of the cost and shame of failure.

It may be claimed that the true Gallipoli concept involved naval action alone and that only over-cautious leadership and unfortunate weather conditions robbed Churchill's idea of the success it deserved. A.J. Marder has argued persuasively that the stakes were sufficiently high to justify a renewal of the naval attack in April once the new *Beagle* class destroyers were available for fast minesweeping.[21] But had the Allied squadron got through, it would then, almost certainly in a damaged condition, have had to deal with the German-Turkish fleet in the Sea of Marmara. If successful there, but with ammunition surely severely depleted and re-supply problematical, would internal revolution in Constantinople automatically have followed threat of bombardment? The likelihood of Constantinople being shelled into submission is questionable, and the fleet was not equipped for a military occupation.

There is no generally-accepted agreement on the likelihood of internal revolution bringing an end to the Turkish administration, despite American Ambassador Morgenthau's clear support of this view in his memoirs.[22] One is left therefore with uneasy speculation over the Allied ships, short of coal, oil, ammunition, food and water, having to withdraw. The return to the Aegean, with the Narrows unguarded by an Allied military force, would almost certainly have been fraught with hazard.

There are further practical matters which would appear to weaken the case for success being within reach of an assault by the Navy alone. The questionable effectiveness of naval gunfire against coastal forts is one major point which does not seem to have been sufficiently considered at the time. It was maintained that the new development in long-range naval gunnery rendered obsolete the long-accepted

dictum that ships were matched unequally against forts. It was anticipated that aeroplanes and balloons would compensate for the lack of adequate observation of fire effectiveness in long-range bombardment. Improved fire control and range-finding would assist in ensuring accuracy in firing at a stationary target from a ship as a pitching, rolling gun-platform. In the event the need for demolition by a shore party soon proved how limited were the results which could be expected from naval gunfire. The low-trajectory high-explosive shells, unless scoring – against the odds – a direct hit on a gun emplacement, either over-shot or merely plunged into the low, broad banks of earth which protected the guns of the forts.

The validity of striking at Turkey through the Dardanelles is probably a more finely balanced issue than its chief protagonists and antagonists declare, but, in 1915, planning and practical considerations had been insufficiently considered. As far as the involvement of the Army is concerned, the Gallipoli commitment was undertaken by the War Council at the very time when the Neuve Chapelle offensive on the Western Front was being planned. Success or failure there would require more of everything which was to be committed, men, guns, howitzers and munitions. The official historian of the Gallipoli campaign accepted that planning for offensives on two fronts was unrealistic. In his memoirs, Sir William Robertson, not of course an unbiased source in the debate over the Western or an alternative front, bemoaned the failure of politicians and soldiers to agree on the decisive front.

The French, even in their support of Gallipoli, had of course no doubt about which was the decisive front as far as they were concerned. Their Gallipoli Commander-in-Chief, General d'Amade, was informed within five days of landing on the Peninsula that despite his desperate need for ammunition 'the needs of the armies of the N.E. [Western Front] – always considerable and urgent – must take priority'.[23]

Examining the crucial question of troop deployment, Fuller cryptically comments that: 'No sooner had the Government made up their mind not to use troops than they decided to use them, and after they had arrived at this decision they decided to carry out the naval attack without them.'[24] The significance of this vacillating folly as Fuller saw it, was re-dissected by Paul Guinn. 'In retrospect it is easy to see that the contrasting views and consequent semi-deliberate misunderstandings on the function of troops at the Dardanelles were largely responsible for the manifest inadequacy of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) for the task it had actually to perform … were indeed responsible for the ultimate failure of the entire campaign.'[25]

Attempting to measure the degree of desperation in the War Council and trying as best one can to remove the benefit of hindsight – the first difficult and the second, nigh impossible – is challenging to the historian recognizing that he has some responsibility to offer objective judgement as to whether the Dardanelles venture were a viable proposition. Peter Hart has no doubt: 'One thing was certain: Germany would never be beaten by an ill-conceived adventure launched against Turkey. There was no back door to Germany; no easy route to victory; no Allies propping her up, the removal of which would trigger a sudden collapse. Germany operated on interior lines of communications and, even in the event of a Turkish defeat, would have

rushed reinforcements to the Austrians to make the Balkan mountain ranges all but impregnable.'[26]

It does indeed seem to the author of this book, that, as sanctioned on 13 January, there were too many unknowns to justify the endeavour, unknowns with regard to what the Navy could achieve against the obstacles in its way, and unknowns with regard to the likelihood of the benefits predicted from success. Altogether the in-built difficulties of the venture, the competence and obduracy of the Turks had been critically underestimated.

Plunging into the Sargasso Sea of speculation, success might have been achieved with some definite material benefit to the Allied conduct of the war, if, from the first, a combined operation had been decided upon, the necessary resources calculated, found to be 'spare' and made available, joint planning thoroughly undertaken, and some measure of surprise achieved. (I am turning a blind eye to the November 1914 shelling at the entrance to the Dardanelles ordered by Churchill!) However, I simply have to add a response to this flight of fancy: 'Would that the circumstance of war allowed the untroubled building of such castles in the air.'

Russian collapse might have been delayed in the event of a decisive Allied victory over the Turks. Austrian defeat might just have been accelerated, but scarcely by a united Balkan coalition comprised of such disparate, mutually-hostile elements. British food supplies would have been made a little more secure, but the idea of British naval power being exercised to any extent up the Danube is far-fetched. There were no suitable vessels to implement the idea, unless it were considered that Fisher's prized North Sea landing craft could have been used. There would have been a considerable economy of men and munitions through the closing of the Turkish fronts, but it is unsound to conclude that the newly available reinforcements for the Western Front would have led to a breakthrough there. Relatedly, the idea that Germany would denude to danger level her Western Front resources to support her threatened Allies thus opening the opportunity for the Entente to break through there, is simply unconvincing.[27]

Briefly to look at the other side of the Dardanelles/Western Front case, it is optimistic to pretend that the full Gallipoli landing force of 75,000 would have made a significant difference had these troops been used in the 1915 attacks at Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge or Loos. The enormous troop commitment to the Somme offensive in the following year was to win no breakthrough.

As it was planned and carried out, the attack on the Dardanelles with its subsequent land campaign had limited prospect of success and was launched with unrealistic hopes. A heavy price was to be paid for the pursuit of an elusive prospect. This is not to deny that there may have been at least some compensatory benefit emerging at a later date from the 1915 endeavour. The Turkish army was severely drained of its strength. Turkish successes in Mesopotamia and in Egypt and Palestine in 1916 could not be exploited. Exhaustion with consequent defeat was to attend their efforts to combat 1917 British reinforcements on those fronts. Nevertheless no sophistry can disguise the Allied naval and military defeat in the Dardanelles and on the Gallipoli Peninsula. By politicians and then commanders in the field, the difficulty of neutralising defence

of the Narrows and driving the Turk from the even so slight a finger of the Turkish homeland as the Gallipoli Peninsula, had been seriously miscalculated. The ships would attack and be withdrawn, the soldiers would be landed and, in due course, withdrawn too. Defeat could not be clearer.