

The region of today's Çanakkale, namely the Dardanelles, or Hellespont to give it its historical name, played a significant role throughout the history. Studies show that life began in the Dardanelles in the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. The Dardanelles is a narrow body of water, and at certain points it is only 1,5 km wide. Generally, it is 60 km long and between 1,5 and 6 km wide<sup>1</sup>.

As a strait between Marmara (and Black) Sea and Aegean Sea, Dardanelles can be considered a boundary between Asia and Europe. The campaign of Xerxes in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC against Greek city-states and also the attack of Alexander the Great on Persia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC clearly show the importance of this strait. After the Lydian, Persian, Greek and Roman administrations, Turkish campaigns to the region began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and Ottoman Turks conquered it in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Dardanelles had greater significance, since defending İstanbul was critical to the defence of the Dardanelles. Therefore, after the conquest of İstanbul, the fortification of the region started. Mehmed II built two fortresses in the narrowest point of the strait, one on the Anatolian side and one on the European side, facing each other. The one on the European side is called Kilitbahir (The lock of the sea); and the one on the Anatolian side is called Kale-i Sultaniye (The Sultan's Fortress). These fortresses were strong and their artillery was so effective that they could close the strait to enemy ships. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, two more fortresses were built, again one on the European side (Seddülbahir-barrier of the sea) and one on the Anatolian side (Kumkale). In the following centuries, the fortresses were strengthened and many bastions were built to defend the strait<sup>3</sup>.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the leading powers in the world had gone into a big rivalry over colonies in Asia, Africa and America. There were also working industries those powers had to feed, and thus they needed large quantities of raw materials. This rivalry compelled them to seek alliances with different powers at different times. Germany established an alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy. Britain also signed an alliance treaty with France in 1904 and with



Russia in 1907. With certain changes in time, these alliances constituted the poles of the world war. After many events, as it is known, the summer of 1914 brought the war<sup>4</sup>.

As it was impossible for the Ottoman Empire to escape the war, it also tried to make alliances with the powers mentioned. The Ottomans tried to join forces with Britain or France, but with little success. Therefore, with the Germans intending to spread the war to larger areas and with the Turks intending to compensate for their previous losses, the Ottoman Empire entered the World War on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary<sup>5</sup>.

The Ottoman Empire had to fight against different powers on different fronts. The struggle against Russians in the Caucasus, against Britain in Palestine, and also against Britain and Arabs in Yemen were keeping the Ottomans busy over a large area. However, that was not all as the Allied Forces had even more reasons to expand military operations.

British Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill advocated an attack on Dardanelles as it would bring many strategic, diplomatic, military and economic benefits, he believed. For him, after a victorious campaign, İstanbul would fall under the control of the Allied Powers; and the connection of Turkish corps with their European allies would be cut. Accordingly, the Russians in the Caucasus would relax; the Allied forces would support Russians by passing İstanbul straits; and Russian grains would be carried to Europe<sup>6</sup>.

According to a British military historian, General Aspinall Oglender, in order to overcome the enemy, they needed to use the Russian population. Accordingly, they required an army, arsenal and money to support the Russians. Thus, they could win against Germans. All this forced them to pass the Dardanelles. Apart from these, there was also a competition between the British and the Russians regarding seizing the control of İstanbul Strait. Whoever arrived at İstanbul first would hold an advantageous position. All these conditions led to the decision to attack the Dardanelles<sup>7</sup>.

For these reasons, the Allies opened the Gallipoli front. They decided to attack first with naval forces. The commander of the fleet was British Admiral Carden. The fleet of the Allies included 14 battleships, 5 cruisers, 16 destroyers, 1 flattop, 5 submarines, 21 mine crafts from the British side; 4 battleships, 6 destroyers, 1 flattop and 2 submarines from the French side.

On the Turkish side, Cevad Paşa was the commander. They planted approximately 400 hundred mines in the Straits. They also fortified the bastions and fortresses along the Gallipoli Peninsula, on the Anatolian side and the Straits.

The attack of the fleet started on 19 February 1915. They bombarded the south of the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Anatolian side of the Dardanelles. From February to mid-March, the Allies bombarded; but Turkish fortifications could not be destroyed. On the contrary,

1 Coğrafi yapı, Çanakkale Belediyesi, www.canakkale.bel.tr/icerik/1941/cografi-yapi/ [access: 1 IX 2018].

2 Çanakkale Tarihi, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Çanakkale Valiliği, www.canakkale.gov.tr/canakkale-tarihi [access: 1 IX 2018].

3 V.Engin, A.Muzaffer, *Tarihin akışını değiştiren savaş: Çanakkale 1915*, İstanbul 2016, p. 28-30.

4 O.Sander, *Siyasi Tarih. İlkçağlardan 1918'e*, Ankara 1989.

5 V.Engin, A.Muzaffer, *Tarihin akışını değiştiren savaş...*, p. 24-26.

6 *Ibidem*, p. 37.

7 N.Babüroğlu, *Çanakkale*, İstanbul 2017, p. 25-27.

Turkish artillery damaged the Fleet, and the resistance of Turkish corps was remarkable. On 18 March, the Fleet of the Allies launched a huge attack to the Strait. The destroyers would demolish Turkish bastions; mine crafts would sweep the mines along the Straits, and the Fleet would pass from Straits to Istanbul. The fleet consisted of 18 warships and they carried 250 pieces of artillery. Before the attack, Commander Carden was replaced with Admiral de Robeck<sup>8</sup>.

In the morning, the Fleet started heavy bombardment. However, Turkish artillerymen fought bravely and damaged some of the warships. In the afternoon, the French ship Bouvet, and Britain ships Irresistible and Ocean sank after hitting mines in the Straits. The Fleet lost an important part of its power and also psychological advantages. They had to retreat. It was the Turks' victory.

After the defeat, the Allies understood that the naval force alone would not be successful in this operation and they had to carry out an amphibious operation with naval and ground forces. So, they started recruiting soldiers from Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand and Southern Asia. They moved them to Egypt and Lemnos Island for preparations. There were almost 75,000 of them. The Turks established the 5<sup>th</sup> Army for the defence of the Dardanelles. German General Liman von Sanders was appointed as the commander. Turkish forces comprised 6 divisions<sup>9</sup>.

On 25 April, the Allied invasion started. They mainly focused on the west of the Peninsula (Arıburnu) and the south (Seddülbahir). There were also pretend invasions in various parts of the region. Turkish divisions and brigades also concentrated on Arıburnu and Seddülbahir. The infantry and the artillery resisted despite insufficient reinforcements. Mustafa Kemal also fought well with his brigade. Therefore, the Allies were unable to succeed in this attack.

After the 25 April invasions, the Allied Forces and Turkish troops engaged in constant combat in various parts of the Peninsula from April to October. Trench warfare followed and in some parts the distance between two fighting sides was less than 20 m. As a result of this bloody combat, each side suffered heavy losses.

But the Turks knew that they were fighting for the mainland; and the Dardanelles was the key point that they did not want to give to the enemy. This was the motivation behind their fight and resistance. On the other hand, the Allied Forces included many soldiers from different countries. They were far from their homes; and as time went on and they could not achieve success, they were demoralized and disappointed. The public opinion, especially in Britain, started criticising the campaign. The decision was to be made: either reinforcing the campaign with new troops or retreating.

The Army Commander General Ian Hamilton was replaced with General Monro in October. He came and visited the Peninsula and saw that the Allies had to retreat as the winter was coming and the Turks were still resisting. One hundred and twenty thousand Allied Forces began to retreat in December. By the middle of January of 1916, they withdrew all the forces from Gallipoli.

The Campaign lasted nine months. Both Allied Forces and Turkish forces had recruited 500,000 soldiers. Despite different numbers suggested by various sources, it seems that the Turkish side had at least 100,000 casualties and 150,000 injured soldiers, whereas the Allies had 60,000 casualties and also 150,000 injured soldiers<sup>10</sup>.

In Gallipoli the world had seen one of the bloodiest and the most violent battles of the world history. The battlefield of Gallipoli has been telling its own story for decades.

The Battle of Gallipoli is named so because of the Gallipoli Peninsula. However, there are two districts in the peninsula; the one in the south is called Eceabat, and the one in the north is called Gelibolu (Gallipoli). But the battlefield and historic site is today within the boundaries of Eceabat. It is accepted that the Phoenicians built it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC Its historical name is Maydos. During the reign of various Ottoman Sultans, it was fortified with fortresses and bastions. Those fortresses and bastions played key roles in World War I and the Gallipoli Campaign. Therefore, the most violent fights occurred in this region<sup>11</sup>.

The historic site includes Eceabat city centre and 8 villages. According to statistic data, approximately ten thousand people live within its boundaries. The historic site covers the area of 33,000 hectares. The demarcation line runs along the Gallipoli district in the north, Aegean Sea and Gökçeada (Imroz) in the west, the Dardanelles strait in the east, and by Aegean Sea and Bozcaada (Tenedos) in the south. The highest point is the Hill of Kocaçimen which is 305 m high. The land is generally rugged. The plains of Anafartalar and Ece are flatlands<sup>12</sup>.

After the Republic of Turkey was established, Eceabat was connected to the province of Çanakkale. Several decades later, in 1973, the battlefield was announced as the Gallipoli Peninsula Historic and National Park. In 1994, a fire broke out at the historic site. As a result, the consecutive governments took further steps to ensure its maintenance. It turned it into a “peace park” that would show the history to visitors outdoors and that could also provide jobs for the villagers within the historic site. Since then the cultural and tourist activity at the historic site also increased.

In 2014, the government enacted a law establishing the Presidency of Dardanelles War and Gallipoli Historic Site. Today, within the historic site, there are 49 monuments, 44 Turkish martyrdoms, 20 Turkish monuments and inscriptions, 34 foreign cemeteries and monuments, 4 fortresses, 8 bastions with natural protected areas and archaeological sites<sup>13</sup>.

The important places of the battlefield; such as, the Monuments of Martyrs; 57. Infantry Regiment Martyrdom; Kilitbahir and Seddülbahir Fortresses; Namazgah and Hamidiye Bastions; French Cemetery and Monument; Lone Pine Monument and ANZAC Cemetery; Quinn's Post Cemetery and many others are

<sup>10</sup> V.Engin, A.Muzaffer, *Tarihin akışını değiştiren savaş...*, p. 206.

<sup>11</sup> *Tarihçesi*, Eceabat Belediyesi, <http://www.eceabat.bel.tr/tarihcesi> [access: 31 VIII 2018].

<sup>12</sup> S.Eser, *Gelibolu Tarihi Alan Rehberi...*, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

being maintained in their original places and situations based on historical events.

Since 2014, the aforementioned Presidency has been responsible for the historic site. The law referred to above states the mission of the directorate as “maintaining, developing, promoting, presenting and administrating the historical, cultural and spiritual values; and natural structure of Gallipoli Historic Site”. According to the law, it is illegal to erect buildings, set coal and fuel oil stores, and conduct mining and digging activities within the historic site. The maintenance and protection of the forests, including prevention of fires, is carried out jointly with the Ministry of Forestry and Waters. Residents of the region are allowed to perform agricultural activities outside of the archaeological sites; however they have to follow the rules of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Farming. The Presidency is also in charge of planning and projects on the historic site<sup>14</sup>.

The Presidency is attached to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Thus, the restoration activities within the historic site are coordinated with the Ministry. The Presidency's budget generates certain incomes to cover its spending:

- a share of the state budget;
- proceeds from services in the historic site;
- income from operation and activities;
- promotion and publications;
- sponsorship and donation etc.<sup>15</sup>

The Presidency is also responsible for official Remembrance Days organised annually on 18 March and 24 April. Representatives from Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries attend these events to commemorate the Gallipoli Campaign and their losses. These events take place in various locations within the historic site.

<sup>14</sup> Kanunlar, Çanakkale Savaşları ve Gelibolu Tarihi Alan Başkanlığı – T.C.Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, <http://catab.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR-127800/kanunlar.html> [access: 31 VIII 2018].

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

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Moreover, “The Presentation Centre for Çanakkale Legend” is an important part of the historic site. The building, with the area of 8,000 square metres, provides virtual platforms and 3D simulation techniques that portray the war in 7 languages. The website of the historic site is also accessible worldwide. From the website, online publications can be read, promotional videos can be watched, and the 360 degree virtual tour of each monument including detailed explanations can be accessed.

The Presidency, namely Turkey, takes full care of the Battlefield. Political and legislative actions are taken. Scientific methods are applied and modern technology is used for better application; as the Gallipoli Battlefield is the symbol of peace and should be well maintained.

Before concluding, I want to quote the words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to ANZAC soldiers and their mothers after the war was over.

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours... You, the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well<sup>16</sup>.

The Gallipoli is not only a battlefield, not only a historic site or not only a museum... Gallipoli is the symbol of the power of peace, tolerance, conscience and humanity. It serves, more than anything else, to encourage world peace among all people. ■

<sup>16</sup> These words are written in a monument and exhibited in a park in Sydney, too. *Atatürk'ün sözleri Sidney'in merkezinde*, Hürriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/ataturkun-sozleri-sidneyin-merkezinde-28241698> [access: 31 VIII 2018].

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