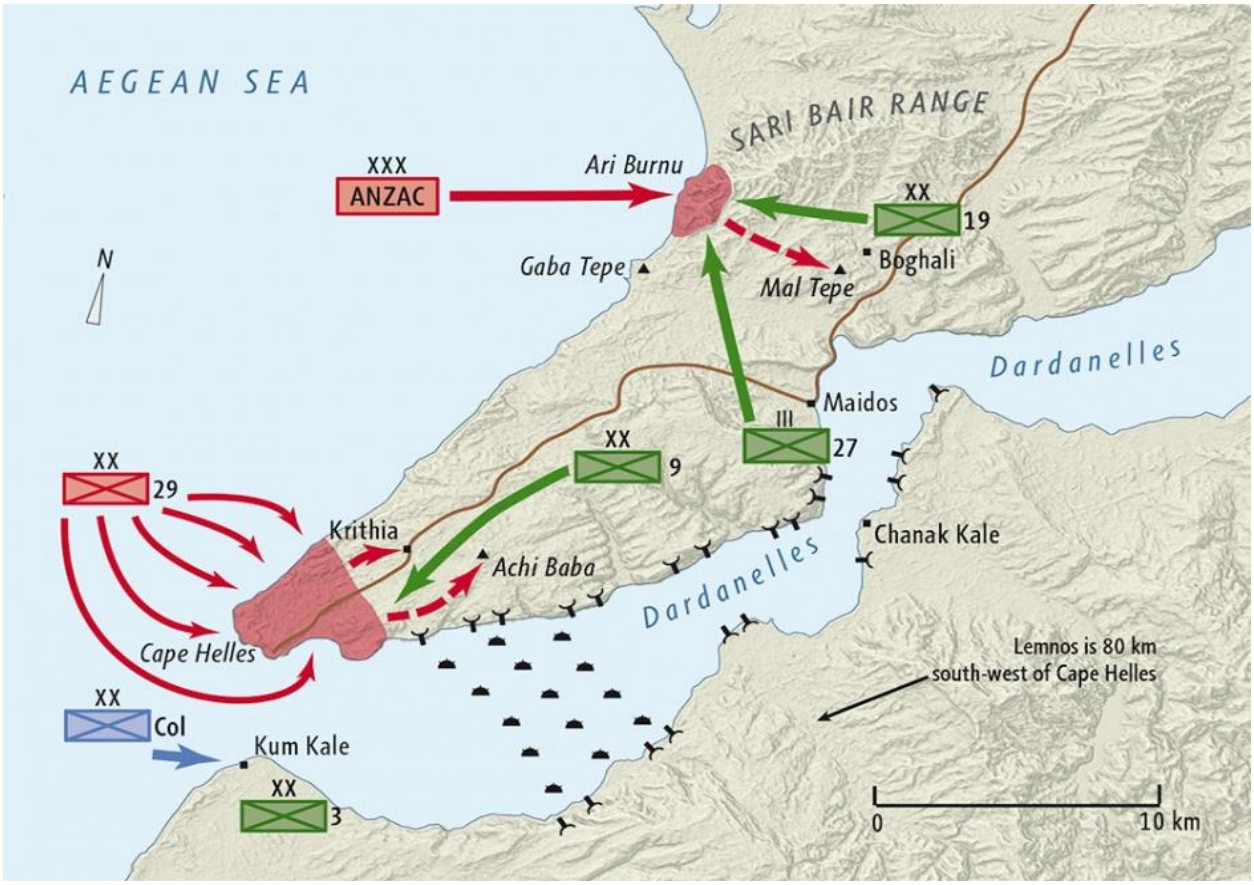
GALLIPOLI



This map shows the Allied invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula, in April of 1915.

In 1915, the Allies launched a plan to force a passage through the Dardanelles Strait, attack the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (Istanbul), and knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war. Initial attempts by British and French warships to clear the underwater mines and coastal batteries (shown as gun symbols on both sides of the straits) protecting the straits failed.

Rather than concede defeat, the Allies dispatched the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula and destroy the Ottoman defenses holding up the naval operation. On 25 April, the British 29th Division landed at five beaches on the southern tip of the peninsula (shown by the five red arrows around Cape Helles) and tried to capture the heights of Achi Baba (shown by a broken red arrow). At the same time, a French colonial division launched a diversionary attack at Kum Kale on the Asiatic side of the straits (shown by blue arrow).

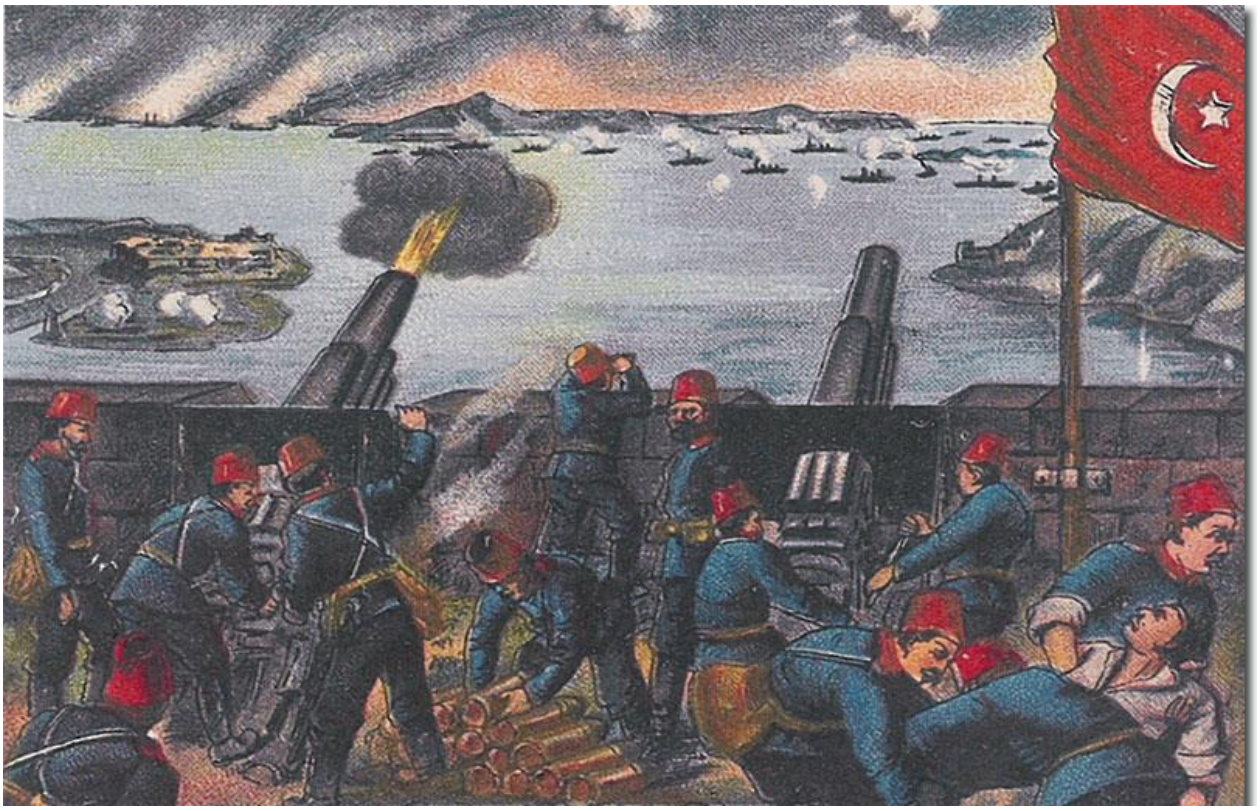
The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) made a separate landing around 20 km to the north of Ari Burnu (later known as Anzac Cove). Their job was to secure the Sari Bair Range, culminating in the capture of Mal Tepe (shown by a broken red arrow), a hill overlooking the main north-south road along the peninsula (shown as a brown line on the map). Defending Gallipoli and the Asiatic side of the straits were units from the Ottoman Fifth Army (shown as the green boxes on the map).

By 28 April, the two sides had fought themselves to a standstill. While the British and Anzacs had managed to establish beachheads at Cape Helles and Ari Burnu (indicated by the shaded red regions), they had not achieved their other objectives. The Ottoman defenders had been unable to push the invaders back into the sea. It was a stalemate.

The invasion of Gallipoli, a peninsula squeezed between the Aegean Sea and the Dardanelles in what is now western Turkey, was conceived by Allied commanders as a lightning strike against the Ottoman Empire to bring about a quick end to the Great War, which had bogged down into a bloody stalemate on the Western Front. The Ottomans had signed a pact with the German Empire on August 2, 1914, shortly following the war's outbreak. As the Germans and their European allies, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, faced the Allies in trenches, the Turks engaged the Russians on the eastern front, bombarding Russian ports and sealing off the Dardanelles. Allied generals and politicians expected their operation in Gallipoli to be over in a matter of days. "A good army of 50,000 men and sea power—that is the end of the Turkish menace," declared First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill.

In February of1915, an Anglo-French Naval Squadron attempted to force a passage through the Straits of the Dardanelles in an attempt to seize them for the Allied cause and open up a much-needed supply route to Russia. Turkish minefields foiled this dramatic gesture. Turkish guns on the bluffs overlooking the straits also ravaged the Allied ships. The decision was therefore taken to seize the Gallipoli Peninsular by landing over 30,000 Allied troops on April 25, 1915. The Assault Force struggled ashore, but the Allied commanders could hardly have chosen worse terrain to attack. The craggy, dry, and mountainous terrain would prove every bit as formidable as the Turkish foes in their fortifications whose fighting prowess had been too easily dismissed. For eight months Imperial, British, and French troops endured merciless conditions. More men and resources were poured into the tiny toeholds claimed in that first invasion but ultimately it was all in vain.

By May, both sides were locked in a deadly stalemate, and a close-up, in-your-face war, as equally as brutal as anything on the Western Front, prevailed. In sections of the battlefield, the enemies faced each other from 200 or 300 yards away, but on the narrow ridges near Chunuk Bair, one of the highest points on the peninsula and a principal objective of the Allies, ANZAC and Ottoman soldiers were separated by just a few yards—close enough for each side to lob grenades and bombs into each other's trenches. Some soldiers erected barbed-wire netting on top to protect themselves from grenades. Troops on both sides dug deep bunkers. Most of the fighting took place from deep inside these bunkers, but soldiers sometimes emerged in waves—only to be cut down by fixed machine guns. The Turkish soldiers fought with a tenacity that the British—ingrained with colonial attitudes of racial superiority—had never anticipated. The dry, jagged landscape turned into a human slaughterhouse. To compound the suffering, the Allies had insufficient medical personnel in the field and few hospital ships, and thousands of injured were left for days in the sun, pleading for water until they perished.



Turkish defenses at Gallipoli, 1915.

The sinking of HMS Goliath by the Muavenet-iMilliye in Morto Bay on the night of May 13, 1915, was one of the most significant naval events in the Gallipoli campaign. The battleship sank in a few minutes, with the loss of 570 crew. Returning to Constantinople, the Turkish destroyer was greeted with great joy and ceremony and the Sultan rewarded her crew with medals and decorations.

As trench warfare bogged down the fighting armies, the architecture of the trenches became more elaborate. The ANZAC forces brought in engineers who had learned their trade in the gold mines of western Australia: They constructed zigzagging frontline corridors with steps leading up to firing recesses. A maze of communications and supply trenches ran up to the front line, becoming so complex that men could easily lose their way and become disorientated. Barbed wire was everywhere. Both the Allies and Ottomans also burrowed tunnels beneath their foes' trenches and packed them with explosives, often causing enormous casualties. Each side also constructed defensive tunnels to intercept enemy diggers, and battles sometimes erupted underground where the two digging teams confronted each other.

As the fighting dragged on, the corpses piled up in the trenches and ravines, often remaining uncollected for weeks. The dead rotted in the sweltering summer sun. "Everywhere one looked lay dead, swollen, black, hideous, and over all a nauseating stench that nearly made one vomit," observed Lt. Col. Percival Fenwick, a medical officer from New Zealand, who participated in a joint burial with Turkish forces during a rare ceasefire. "We exchanged cigarettes with the Turkish officers-all around us there were swathes of men who had fallen face down as if on parade."

Allied troops assaulting Turkish positions in close quarters combat at Gallipoli, 1915.

By August, the Allied commanders at Gallipoli were desperate to turn the tide. On the evening of August 6, British, Australian and New Zealand troops launched a major offensive. The attack started on a plateau called Lone Pine, where Australians launched a charge at Turkish positions 100 yards away. They captured their objective but suffered more than 2,000 casualties. The Turks counterattacked and retook the ground two days later.

The Nek, a small plateau just below Chunuk Bair, came to epitomize the Allied folly—and would later be immortalized in the powerful final scene of Peter Weir's *Gallipoli*. At 4:30 a.m. on August 7, 1915, under dim moonlight, the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade, composed mainly of farm and ranch boys from the outback, sat in their trenches on this small patch of ground, waiting to attack. Allied howitzers at Anzac Cove unleashed a furious bombardment. But the barrage ended seven minutes ahead of schedule, a fatal lapse that allowed the Turks to retake their positions before the Australian infantry charge. When the first wave went over the top, the Turks opened fire with machine guns, and killed nearly every attacker in 30 seconds. "I was in the first line to advance and we did not get ten yards," recalled Sgt. Cliff Pinnock. "Everyone fell like lumps of meat…All your pals that had been with you for months and months blown and shot out of all recognition. I got mine shortly after I got over the bank, and it felt like a million-ton hammer falling on my shoulder. I was really awfully lucky as the bullet went in just below the shoulder blade round by my throat and came out just a tiny way from my spine very low down on the back."

Australian Light Horse charging to their deaths at Gallipoli,1915.

New Zealand troops were slaughtered by well-prepared Turkish defenders at Gallipoli,1915.

The second wave went over minutes later and again, almost all were killed. A third wave was shot to the ground, and a fourth. Later that morning, Major General Alexander John Godley, loathed by his troops, ordered the New Zealanders to follow; they too sustained massive casualties. The Australians and New Zealanders suffered 10,000 casualties in four days. Said Pinnock: "It was simply murder."

At the same time as the offensive, the British launched a major amphibious landing at Suvla Bay, a few miles north of Anzac Cove. The German general who commanded the Turks, Otto Liman von Sanders, once again brilliantly deployed Ottoman 5th Army troops to counter the attack. The Turkish 19th Division commander Mustafa Kemal moved his troops into position to hold the ridgeline. Unlike the Allied generals, who commanded troops from the safety of the beach or from ships anchored in the Aegean, Kemal stood with his men on the front lines, lifting their morale. He was hit by shrapnel and hailed as a hero. Nonetheless, the British never were able to break out of the beachhead.

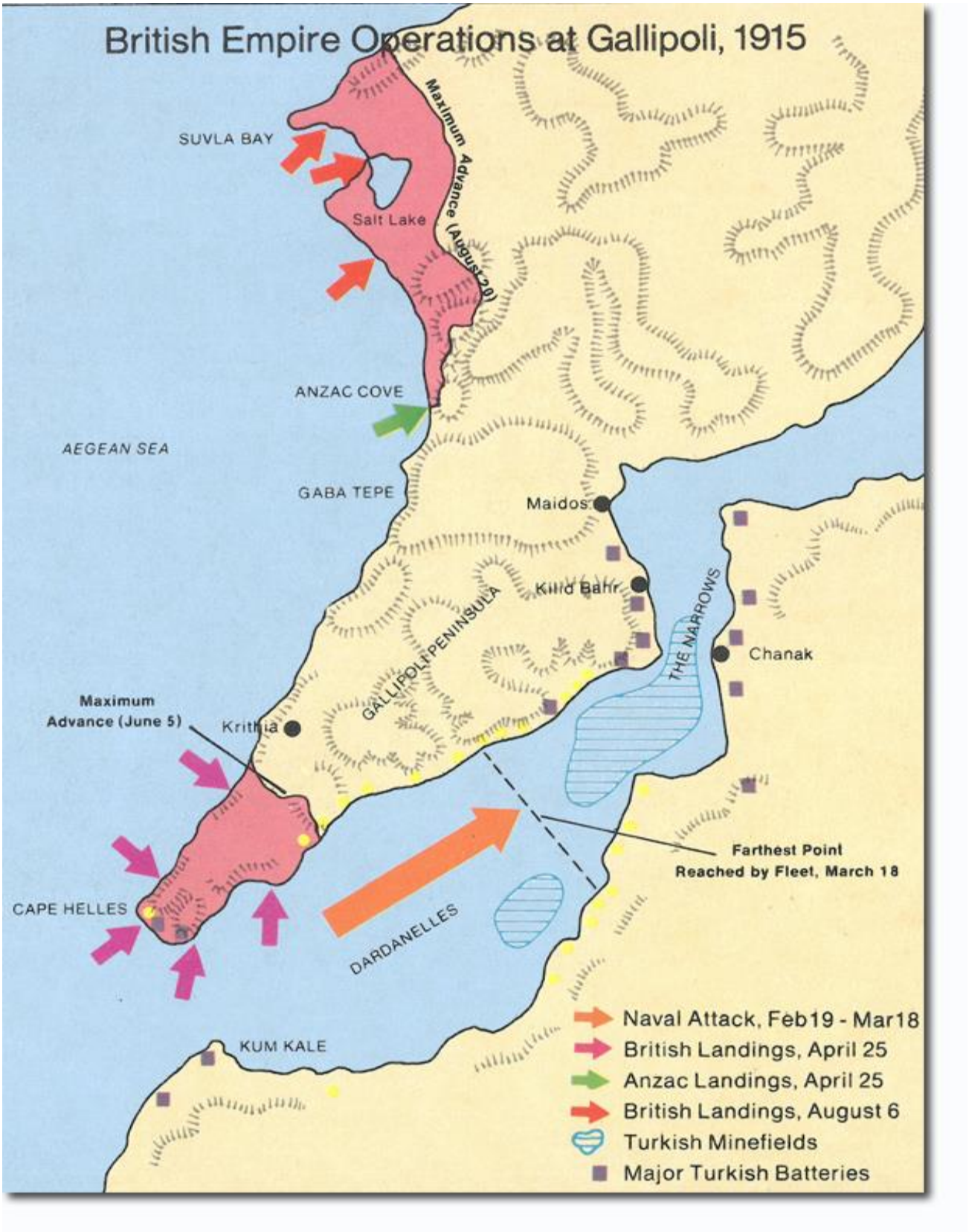
By December, with blizzards and frigid temperatures sapping morale, and Ottoman forces moving more artillery into position to bombard the trenches, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, ordered a nighttime withdrawal of the remaining 80,000 troops from Gallipoli. Using self-firing guns and other diversions, the Allied forces managed to board ships and sail away from the peninsula with little casualties.

Just five days before Christmas, in the early hours of Monday December 20, 1915, the last Anzac troops left Gallipoli in what Australian historian Joan Beaumont called an "elaborate deception".

In the end, Gallipoli was the most disastrous Allied defeat of the war to date. The architects of the Gallipoli Campaign intended to break the deadlock of Trench Warfare on the Western Front with a bold stroke and elan where the enemy least expected it. In reality, they ended up creating Trench Warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean in a manner that managed to outdo even the horrific conditions back in France and Belgium. British and Imperial troops suffered over 180,000 troops killed or wounded, their French allies took another 27,000. 28,150 Australian troops were casualties at Gallipoli, including 8,700 dead. Their Turkish foes suffered over 250,000 casualties.

The Ottoman victory at Gallipoli, however, proved to be the empire's last gasp. Known as "the sick man of Europe," it suffered punishing defeats in the Middle East at the hands of British and Arab forces, and collapsed in 1918. Its territories were parceled out to the victorious Allies. In November of that year, British and French warships sailed unopposed through the Dardanelles and occupied Constantinople.

The biggest loser of all from the failure of this campaign though did not even commit troops to the fight. Russia would not get the vital supplies and material it needed to continue to fight the war against the German and Austrian Empires. Tsarist Russia would soon start its convulsions that would end in Revolution and a total collapse on the Eastern Front. The Gallipoli Campaign was no mere diversion, it was a massive commitment of Allied resources whose disastrous failure worked to only prolonged an already horrific war.


British Empire Operations at Gallipoli, 1915
SUVLA BAY
Salt Lake
Maximum Advance (August 20)
ANZAC COVE
AEGEAN SEA
GABA TEPE
Maidos
Kilid Bahr
GALLIPOLI PENINSULA
THE NARROWS
Chanak
Maximum Advance (June 5)
Krithia
Farthest Point Reached by Fleet, March 18
CAPE HELLES
DARDANELLES
KUM KALE
Naval Attack, Feb19 - Mar18
British Landings, April 25
Anzac Landings, April 25
British Landings, August 6
Turkish Minefields
Major Turkish Batteries

Gallipoli, 1915.