

Contributions of medical students at the Gallipoli in World War 1

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Gallipoli, Turkey, a peninsula situated in a strategic position between Europe and Asia, was captured by Suleyman Pasha in 1354 from the Byzantine Empire (Fig. 1; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suleyman_Pasha_\(son_of_Orhan\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suleyman_Pasha_(son_of_Orhan)); <http://www.pedalsesi.com/tr/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=4789>). Today, the Gallipoli campaign, which is the most tragic part of World War 1, has a special place in the remembrance of many nations including Turkish, British, French, and Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs). Ottoman Empire permitted German warships Goeben and Breslau, which were trying to escape from the British fleet, to enter the Straits of the Dardanelles and then the two ships bombarded the Russian harbors of Odessa and Sevastopol on the Black Sea coast following the transfer of the two ships to the Ottoman Empire which were renamed “Yavuz” and “Midilli”, respectively (http://wapedia.mobi/en/Gallipoli_Campaign, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_Goeben) [3]. As a result, the battle, known as the Çanakkale Wars in Turkey, took place at Gallipoli peninsula from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1916, during World War 1 (http://wapedia.mobi/en/Gallipoli_Campaign) [3]. During the 8-month abortive campaign to wrest the Dardanelles from the control of the Turks and to support Russia, the attempt of the Allied Powers failed, with more than half a million young people dead or wounded on both sides at Gallipoli [3, 4]. Afterwards, it has been suggested that the most important factor that is often overlooked in explaining the Allied failure at Gallipoli is the very strong motivation of the Ottoman Turks to defend their soil and their faith [6].

At first, the Allied Powers wanted to attack the Dardanelles from the sea and then cross it, but they were badly defeated on March 18, 1915 and suffered a heavy loss of battleships [3]. When the Allied Powers landed on shore on April 25, 1915, they were backed up by the ships’ artillery [3]. Currently, it is widely accepted that the Gallipoli peninsula witnessed the bloodiest confrontation of human history [3]. The Lieutenant–Colonel Mustafa Kemal, the commander of Turkish forces at Gallipoli, said his most famous order to the 57th Infantry Regiment, when the 19th Division had a critical role in the campaign at Anafartalar:

“I do not expect you to attack, I order you to die. In the time which passes until we die, other troops and commanders can come forward and take our places.” (Fig. 2; <http://www.turkeyswar.com/campaigns/gallipoli4.htm>, http://wapedia.mobi/en/Gallipoli_Campaign) [2, 3].

Tragically, all soldiers of the Turkish 57th Infantry Regiment lost their lives in action and, today, there is no 57th Regiment in the modern Turkish army as a sign of respect (http://wapedia.mobi/en/Gallipoli_Campaign).

A recent study has revealed that, when war broke out, all students from every class at the Medical School of Darülfunun, Istanbul, were drafted into the army during the general conscription in the Ottoman Empire and their training was interrupted for more than a year [5]. In 2005, based on a detailed survey of archive records, Özlen [5] also reported that eight physicians were killed in the Gallipoli campaign. According to popular account, however, all of the Turkish medical students who participated in the Gallipoli campaign as volunteers died in May 19, 1915 and the Medical School of Darülfunun had no student to graduate in 1921 [4]. More recently, in a similar study, Cotter [1] has also reported the contribution of the unqualified students of Otago University Medical School, Dunedin, New Zealand, in their

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Fig. 1 A map showing Gallipoli peninsula and the Dardanelles, which is a narrow strip of water separating Europe from Anatolia. Reprinted from www.pedalsesi.com/tr with the permission of Mr. Ender Alıncıoğlu and Mr. Hüseyin Keçe from DB Atlas Map Service, Turkey (<http://www.pedalsesi.com/tr/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=4789>)



first, second, and fourth years who joined the ANZAC medical corps, and two of the 51 students had died in the war at Gallipoli (one a third year student and another one a first-year student). In the Gallipoli campaign, the third year

students volunteered as stretcher bearers in the expeditionary force [1]. Obviously, medical students from both sides mainly had the ambition to voluntarily participate in the activities for curing and helping the soldiers and save their lives, as this was the main reason for their existence in the front. However, exceptional circumstances related to the war prevented them to reach their objectives. There are many publications regarding medical students who fought at



Fig. 2 Colonel Mustafa Kemal with officers and staff of the Anafartalar group, Gallipoli Peninsula, 1915. Reprinted from www.Turkeyswar.com with the permission of Mr. Altay Atlı (<http://www.turkeyswar.com/campaigns/gallipoli4.htm>)



Fig. 3 This photograph (also used as cover picture) was taken looking back from the captured Turkish trenches at Lone Pine towards the Australian jumping-off trench in September 1915 [AWM C01685]. Reproduced from www.anzacsite.gov.au with the permission of Mr. Beau Cooper from Australian War Memorial (http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/2visiting/walk_08lonepine.html)

Gallipoli for their country, including the tragic story of Private George Risdon Grimwade, who was hit by shrapnel pellets while on guard duty at a water tank and died within minutes in 1915, from Melbourne, Australia (<http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/2visiting/cemeteries/shrapnel.html>) [7]. As illustrated in Fig. 3 (http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/2visiting/walk_08lonepine.html), there is no doubt that the Gallipoli campaign resulted in heavy losses of medical students for both sides, although the information available about the medical students who lost their lives in this war is limited in the archives.

At present, the Gallipoli campaign is perceived as a defining moment in the history of the people in Turkey, while the campaign is often considered to mark the birth of national consciousness in Australia and New Zealand. Although it is understandable, according to the spirit and norms of XIX century, that a battle contributed to the birth of the sense of fatherlands, the enormous number of casualties from both sides naturally challenge the value of the “war”. The humanitarian understanding of our age was long ago shared by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was not only a soldier and a statesman but simply a human. In 1934, as an answer to the parents of ANZAC soldiers, he gave the following post-war historical message with his intimate words:

“Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives. You are now living in the soil of a friendly country, therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies¹ and the Mehments² 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.” (Fig. 3) [3, 6].

Although almost a century has passed since the Gallipoli campaign, the 25th of April as ANZAC Day remains the most significant commemoration of military casualties in Australia and New Zealand, while the battle at Çanakkale in World War 1, where almost every Turkish family lost a son or even a daughter, become part of the heroic story of “Atatürk”, the father of the Turks. Even today, schoolchildren continue to listen to stories of bravery at Gallipoli, especially in Turkey, Australia, and New Zealand.

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¹ “Johnny”—a symbolic name for an ordinary British/Australian/New Zealand soldier.

² “Mehmet”—a symbolic name for an ordinary Turkish soldier.