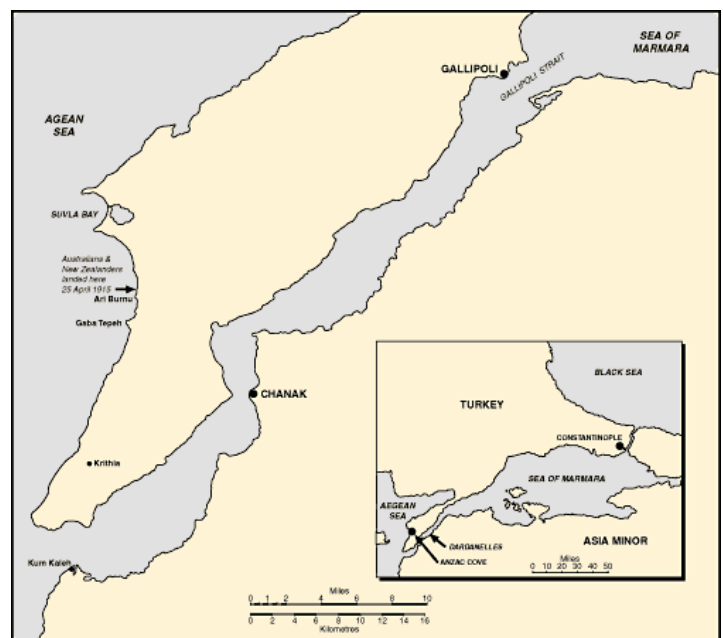


Was the Gallipoli Campaign doomed from the start? Part 1 Churchill's Plan

In 1914 many British people had believed that the war would be a relatively short one. A popular idea was that the war would be 'over by Christmas'. However, by early 1915 the war on the Western Front, in France and Belgium, had become a stalemate due to the development of trench warfare. From the Belgian coast to Switzerland a network of trenches, protected by barbed wire, artillery and machine guns made it nearly impossible for either side to breakthrough and win a decisive victory.

Some military leaders, known as 'Easterners' began to believe one way of helping to end the stalemate of the trenches would be to attack Turkey, one of Germany's allies in the war. In 1915 Winston Churchill held the important job of First Lord of the Admiralty, giving him control of the Royal Navy. Churchill believed that it would be possible to use warships to force a way through the narrow Dardanelles Straits, which would then allow Allied troops to attack Constantinople (Istanbul). It was hoped that this would lead to the collapse of Turkey and allow supplies to flow through the Black Sea to Russia.

Many other commanders, known as 'Westerners' believed that this was risky plan. They argued that the army could not spare the number of troops needed to successfully land on the Gallipoli Peninsula in order to deal with the Turkish defences. Churchill was determined that his plan should be tried. In January 1915 the government gave its backing and the War Minister Lord Kitchener promised to support the attack using available British, Australian and New Zealand troops.



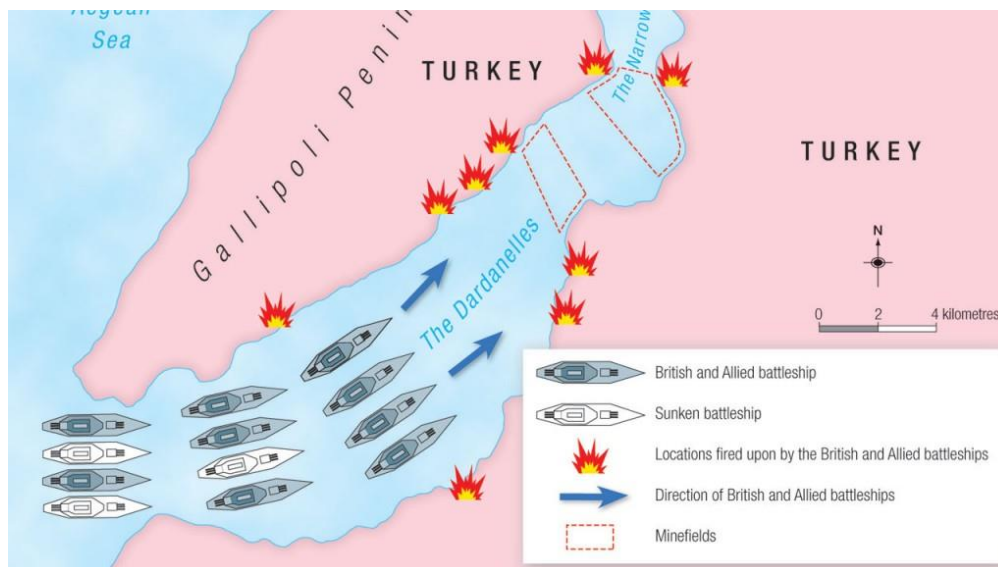
The Australians and New Zealanders were in Egypt waiting for orders to sail for France. Instead they were to be sent to Gallipoli. Churchill also decided to use the Royal Naval Division as part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF). The French also agreed to take part in the scheme contributing both ships and men.

Part 2: The navy attacks February-March 1915

The Dardanelles Straits are 65km long and 7km wide. To get through them the British and French fleet would have to deal with a number of problems. Firstly the Turks had built a series of forts on the Gallipoli Peninsula, which would need to be destroyed as they could use their guns to bombard the Allied ships. The Turks also had a series of mobile artillery batteries which again could do the damage to the ships. Finally mines also protected the peninsula – any ship hitting these risked sinking.

The Allied naval commander, Sir Sackville Carden, began his attack on 19 February 1915. He sent 42 warships, including a new battleship, the Queen Elizabeth into the Dardanelles. The warships were also accompanied by 21 trawlers, which had the job of sweeping the mines laid in the straits. Although some of the Turkish forts were put out of action the Allied ships suffered a number of losses. A second attack on 25 February also failed although Royal Marines did manage to capture two of the key Turkish forts.

On 18 March a third huge naval attack was launched. Carden had a nervous breakdown just before that attack and was replaced by Sir John de Robeck. Again the results were disastrous. Three allied battleships were sunk when they hit mines. One of the ships, the Bouvet sank in just 15 minutes with the loss of 639 men.



It was clear that the navy alone could not take control of the Dardanelles. Churchill and Lord Kitchener took the decision to use troops to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula.