Gallipoli centenary 2015

War Memorials Trust

On this sheet you will learn:
- Key information about the battle of Gallipoli
- How the battle is remembered

Introduction

This sheet outlines information about the Gallipoli campaign, which took place in 1915, and aims to help you understand and commemorate this key event of the First World War and the different countries that were involved. This information may be useful for general information about the First World War but also if you or your group are specifically commemorating the key battles of that conflict in their centenary years.

What happened at Gallipoli?

The battle of Gallipoli took place between 25th April 1915 and 9th January 1916. By the end of 1914 fighting on the Western Front had reached stalemate. In late 1914 the Ottoman Empire had entered the war and now posed a threat to Russia, Britain's ally. Looking for a way to break this deadlock and secure a supply path through the Dardanelles to Russia, Britain and France sought to secure the Gallipoli peninsula with the eventual aim of capturing Constantinople. This, they thought, would knock Turkey out of the war as well as opening up a new front which, it was hoped, would divide the German forces and therefore provide some relief to the Western Front.

On 19th February 1915 British and French warships moved towards the mouth of the Dardanelles, but defence was heavy and progress was slow until a breakthrough attempt on 18th March. On this day allied ships attacked, but several of them struck mines and sank. This day was considered a significant victory for the Turks and ended hopes of a decisive naval attack.

Following this, British, French, Commonwealth and ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops turned their attention to a land invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula, and this was scheduled for 25th April 1915 under the command of General Sir Ian Hamilton. Several landings were planned, with different troops landing in different places, but various difficulties hampered progress and over the following months there was little meaningful gain but high numbers of casualties. These problems included poor planning and command and a lack of geographical knowledge of the region, which led to confusion and lack of co-ordination between the different landings. Furthermore the inhospitable conditions in the area such as the hot climate and difficult terrain led to widespread sickness and hardship, which accounted for a large proportion of the total casualties.

Both sides suffered during the campaign and towards the end of 1915, after months of stalemate and with the campaign's objectives still not achieved, Hamilton was replaced by General Sir Charles Munro who quickly called for the evacuation of the Allied troops. The last troops left in January 1916 after an evacuation that could be described as the most successful part of the campaign, carried out with very few casualties.

How is Gallipoli remembered?

Gallipoli was one of the major campaigns of the First World War and is one of the events of the conflict being commemorated by government organised events during the war's centenary years. In 2015 descendants of those who fought in the campaign are invited to join various commemorative services, including at the Cenotaph in London and at Gallipoli itself. But how is the campaign now regarded and remembered?

ANZAC Day

While the Gallipoli campaign is regarded as a military failure for the Allies, like other battles of the First World War it is remembered for the immense bravery and sacrifices of all those involved. In particular it has become a crucial part of Australian and New Zealand culture and legend, with ANZAC Day (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) still marked on 25th April, the day the Gallipoli landings began. Gallipoli, which involved more ANZAC troops than any previous conflict, has come to be regarded as the 'birth' of Australia and New Zealand as independent nations and an event that epitomises the 'ANZAC spirit' of bravery, comradeship and endurance.

ANZAC Day was officially established as a day of national commemoration in Australia and New Zealand during the 1920s, but was marked in various ways from 1916 onwards. One year to the day after the Gallipoli landings ceremonies were held in Australia and New Zealand and a commemorative march took place in London. The anniversary was also marked by Australian and New Zealand soldiers still fighting on the front line. Now, the day usually sees memorial services taking place at dawn (the time of the original landings) and commemorative marches and services at war memorials. Following the Second World War ANZAC Day also commemorates those who had fought in that and other conflicts, in the same way that 11th November has become a day to commemorate the fallen of both World Wars. Interest in the day declined in the post-Second World War period but saw a resurgence, particularly among young people, from the late 1980s onwards.

Memorials

There are various war memorials around the world that commemorate Gallipoli, and many of the thousands of casualties are individually commemorated on the local war memorials we have in the UK. The accompanying photo sheet shows some of the UK's memorials commemorating Gallipoli. These include a memorial stone in Battersea Park which features a plaque with a map in relief showing key locations on the Gallipoli peninsula, and the Gallipoli memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. In addition to these, the Australian and New Zealand memorials at Hyde Park Corner commemorate servicemen and women from those nations who fought in the First and Second World Wars. The Australian war memorial consists of a curved wall on which the areas of conflict where Australian service men and women have fought appear, and Gallipoli is one of these.

Summary

- The battle of Gallipoli took place in 1915 on the Gallipoli peninsula.
- Its aim was for the Allies to secure a path through the Dardenelles to Russia and defeat Turkey.
- The first landings took place on 25th April 1915. Following months of fighting the remaining Allied troops were evacuated in January 1916. The battle was a failure for the Allies.
- Gallipoli is remembered for being the 'birth' of Australia and New Zealand and independent nations and ANZAC Day is still marked on 25th April.
- 2015 is the centenary year of the campaign.