



Peter Hart, *Gallipoli*, London: Profile Books 2011. pp ix + 534 Maps & Illustrations. ISBN 978-1-84668-159-2. £25

My first reaction when I saw this book was, ‘Do we really need yet another book about Gallipoli?’ A quick glance at the contents was enough to convince me that yes, we most certainly do when the subject is tackled in such an authoritative and forthright manner. When lecturing, Hart does not mince his words, nor does he here. Gallipoli, we read, ‘*was a lunacy that could never have succeeded, an idiocy generated by muddled thinking.*’ There was, ‘*cavalier disregard for the elementary principles of war*’, redeemed only by the ‘*incredible heroic resilience displayed by the soldiers*’ and here Hart is not making a narrow nationalistic point. The individual (be he attacker or defender) swept up in these extraordinary events, is placed right at the focus of this excellent study, which shows perhaps more clearly than any other treatment, precisely what it was like to have fought on that beautiful, but tragic, battlefield.

As is usual for Hart’s work, *Gallipoli* contains a great many personal accounts, drawn from a wide range of sources. They do not merely amount to a rehash of those used in his *Defeat at Gallipoli*, co-written almost twenty years ago with Nigel Steel; instead they are new and used skilfully to highlight particular points or to carry the narrative. We are not reading the work of the historian as copy typist, but that of someone who has immersed himself in the complexities of this campaign for more than two decades and who is demonstrating his ability to choose material which enhances his text and is not simply there as a substitute for original and thoughtful analysis. He is to be commended for his even handed use of anecdotal material from both sides and for the way he gives credit where it is due – praising the endurance and bravery of the victorious Turkish defenders and giving due prominence to the performance of the French forces who, arguably, had the most difficult task of all, but still fulfilled it with skill and dash.

Few of those who conceived, authorised or conducted the campaign emerge with much credit, though Hart is careful to criticise not just the usual suspects, but to point out, for example, the shared culpability of the entire British War Council for approving a totally harebrained scheme, which was then inadequately resourced – partly because the necessary resources and capabilities were still lacking in 1915 - and poorly planned and commanded because of inadequate staff work and the limitations of those in key appointments. His description of the various battles is vivid and endlessly fascinating. The action unfolds with compelling pace and clarity, gripping the attention of the reader throughout and allowing the fortitude and gallantry of the men of Anzac, Helles, Kum Kale and Suvla to shine through.

His overall judgement is that the costly campaign was doomed from the start; a completely pointless waste of resources, which achieved nothing and simply held back the Allied cause. He could legitimately have added that the damage began almost at once, when Joffre’s plans for coordinated thrusts in Champagne and Artois in March 1915 foundered on the earmarking of the British 29th Division for Gallipoli and its replacement with the sub-standard, largely untrained, 46th Territorial Division. The consequent inability of the British army to relieve the French IX Corps to reinforce the French Tenth Army is one of the great ‘what ifs?’ of 1915. Possibly the two massive offensives might still not have developed the synergy Joffre hoped for, but it is undeniable that the task of the German Supreme Army Headquarters would have been rendered far more difficult and it would have been much harder, for example, to find the



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210 mm heavy howitzers and their ammunition which played so large a part in holding the attacks in Artois the following May.

Finally – and this is more of an observation than a criticism - Hart has made such an immense effort to draw on fresh material and to give due weight to testimony from French and Turkish sources, that it is a pity that he did not check to see what was readily available in German. In addition to popular accounts published during the interwar period, Volume 9 of the Official History *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918* contains some useful material and the *Reichsarchiv* also produced a real gem in the shape of Volume 16 of the *Schlachten des Weltkrieges* series *Der Kampf um die Dardanellen 1915*. It is well known that this series is of very variable quality, but this particular book was written by Dr Carl Mühlmann, a retired major and a former member of the German Military Mission in Turkey. As a result it is crammed from start to finish with the very sort of insight and detail which Hart deploys with such skill in this book. Its exploitation would have made a first class book, which I recommend highly, even better.

Jack Sheldon