

2015/6/2: Gallipoli – the forgotten theatre of war

Gallipoli – the forgotten theatre of war

The Battle for the Dardanelles 1915 to 1916

Andreas Stupka

In the course of the present remembrance and retrospection of the First World War, the Turkish theatre of war is scarcely considered in the German speaking region. Whereas there is a vast amount of English literature on this topic, especially in Australia and New Zealand, this front strip remains underexposed in our area. This short essay is supposed to close this gap and to represent the greatest amphibian landing operation in world history by then. In order to be able to understand how this operation came about one must look at the political-strategic circumstances the Ottoman Empire was confronted with, as well as from which military-strategic position Turkey felt obliged to join in the war on the side of the Mid Powers in November 1914. The military operation can be subdivided into four phases, the first of which represents the failed breakthrough attempt of the British Navy and the opening of the strait. The second step was the landing of troops on the Gallipoli peninsula in April 1915, which soon became static warfare. With the British August-Offensive followed another attempt to get dynamic again, but this failed as well. Finally the British had to recognize that the front could not be upheld, and so – from December 2015 onwards - they started the last phase: removal. This overwhelming victory of the Turkish armed forces, however, was caused, among other things, by massive German military assistance, which also is to be demonstrated here. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire must be rated among the losers of the First World War, and in the Dictate Peace Treaty of Sèvres, and later on in the milder Treaty of Lausanne it was clipped down to the Turkey of today. The consequences of this can be still seen today. So one can understand the arising Ottomanophilia especially under the present president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as the Turkish policy of exertion of influence on the former Ottoman dominions, which is becoming more and more noticeable. Thus, the time of both Kemalistic restraint in all foreign political affairs and the secular line of Atatürk's Turkey seem to have come to an end. On the contrary, modern Turkey again bethinks the Ottoman heritage and its Islamic traditions which had found their temporary end with the fall of the sultan in 1920 and with the abolition of the caliphate after the First World War. The Turkish soldier had been tremendously under-estimated, and for this reason this theatre of war has been belittled still today. Up to this day, thus the Turkish national pride of this victory does not like to admit that the Turkish-German comradeship-in-arms actually had considerably contributed to success. In Germany the heroes of Gallipoli have been unappreciated for unknown reasons, neither. This might be the reason why especially in the German speaking region this important front strip of the First World War as well as the first great amphibian landing operation in world history seems to have been forgotten.