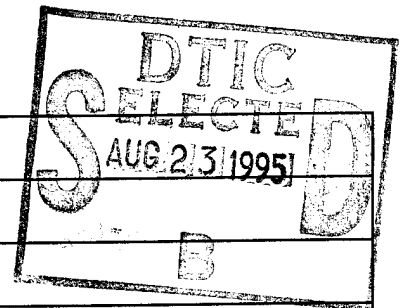


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GALLIPOLI

--OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP--

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

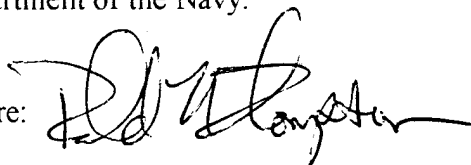
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ABSTRACT of

Gallipoli--Operational Leadership: Another Perspective

The key to operational art lies with the Commander. Superb leadership skills, including high moral character, courage and competence, joined with an understanding of the fundamentals of operational design will foster success, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Operating with foreign nationals in a combined operation necessitates the leader being sensitive to his subordinates' customs, culture and interests to ensure unity of effort and/or command. The determined efforts of the Turkish defense forces on Gallipoli, under the command of a German General, are used to highlight the importance of operational leadership to the effective application of operational art to any campaign or major operation. Superior leadership enabled the Turks to withstand the strenuous assaults of the Allies for over ten months. The unusual command relationship employed by the Turks at Gallipoli provides valuable insights to today's combat leaders thrust into similar types of situations with either the United Nations or in other combined operations.

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"Then let them imagine the hills entrenched, the landing mined, the beaches tangled with barbed wire, ranged by howitzers and swept by machine guns, and themselves three thousand miles from home, going out before dawn, with rifles, packs and water-bottles, to pass the mines under shell fire, cut through the wire under machine gun fire, clamber up the hills under the fire of all arms, by the glare of shell-bursts, in the withering and crashing tumult of modern war, and then to dig themselves in a waterless and burning hill while a more numerous enemy charge them with the bayonet."

--John Masefield, 1916¹

Gallipoli Again, Why?

It had appeared to be *so simple* to the War Council in London, during the early days of January, 1915. With some luck and a few old battleships, the Dardanelles could be forced, Constantinople threatened and Turkey would gladly leave the war. The best supply route to Russia would be reopened and the Balkan states could feel free to join the Allies. If the plan failed, all that would be lost was some old ships already scheduled to be scrapped. Plans, however, tend to have a life all their own and this one would continue to enlarge in scope, even as the original rationale and constraints were superseded by other events. By January, 1916, over half a million men from both sides would become casualties for something that had appeared to be *so simple* in January of 1915.

While there have been hundreds, and even thousands of articles and books about the Dardanelles campaign of 1915, it has remained a centerpiece of analysis and study for those seeking to understand the operational level of warfare. All the elements of war planning, fighting, sustaining, and terminating were present and the mistakes made by the participants would serve as lingering reminders of what could become of the most well intended of plans. As additional relevance to today's war fighters, this campaign, for the first time in the modern era, experienced all the technical improvements of contemporary warfare from large scale amphibious warfare to submarines and airplanes.

The majority of analyses of Gallipoli have focused upon the Allied failures in planning and execution. This undertaking tended to highlight only Allied efforts and

diminished the effects of the highly unpredictable interaction of combat. It also implicitly or explicitly assumed that the campaign, as originally envisioned, would have succeeded had the Allies executed, any of a number of critical actions, in a more forceful or coordinated manner. Obviously, this train of thought thoroughly minimized the remarkable and, for the most part, unexpected performance of the Turkish defenders.

What caused these undernourished, ill equipped and barely trained Turks to sacrifice themselves defending the peninsula? Why would their performance here, so out of character with their countrymen's efforts in other areas, be so tenacious, bold and determined? These defenders would produce an impact to the larger war effort far beyond the bounds of this relatively small and desolate peninsula. The argument will be that it was the leaders that made the difference and this improvement ensured that the latent, outstanding warrior abilities of the native Turks were employed effectively, for possibly the first time in the recent history of the Ottoman Empire.

The Leaders

A member of the ruling triumvirate that seized power in January of 1913 by a coup d'état, Enver Pasha slowly and steadily increased his power as the war progressed until he was, in fact, the center of the Turkish government. As the War Minister, Enver was responsible ultimately for not only the defense of Gallipoli, but for Turkey's overall war effort as well. Ruthless and despotic at times, Enver possessed an overabundance of patriotism and dreamed of returning the Ottoman Empire to the heights of its glorious past.² While he had a reputation as being pro-German, Enver was never excessively deferential to the Germans. He remained above all else, a Turk, and his actions must be measured against that standard.³ In particular, Enver harbored an abiding dislike of Mustafa Kemal. This fact ensured, more than any other, that his place in history was minimized. Nevertheless, this action was not altogether undeserved, because of Enver's cruel and demonic behavior.

Enver Pasha's handpicked army commander on the peninsula was German General Liman von Sanders, who was also in charge of the German military training mission to the Ottoman Empire. This most important decision was all the more surprising considering the personal animosity that was exhibited between these two powerful men, prior to Gallipoli. This German General's efforts on behalf of a foreign country was likewise diminished after the war for he was caught between a detested dictator and the future, beloved founder of the republic of Turkey. However, it was his steady and somewhat remarkable leadership that proved to be pivotal to the undoing of the best endeavors put forth by the Allies.

Finally, there was Mustafa Kemal. He was not only the founder of the Turkish republic after the war, but was its first president. Yet during the Gallipoli campaign, he was just a divisional commander under von Sanders' leadership. In fact, Mustafa was having great difficulty in obtaining any combat assignment at the onset of the war despite a solid combat record, because of his political disagreements with the current government and, in particular, Enver Pasha. General von Sanders' timely and critical decision to accept Mustafa, despite his political baggage, was another key, if not the cornerstone, to the Turkish success at Gallipoli. In the longer term, of course, Mustafa's place in history was started by his heroics in this campaign.

In a modern context, it has become more routine to assign officers to a wide variety of assignments, specifically within the realm of United National operations. In Somalia, Cambodia and elsewhere, the chain of command has been filled with a variety of highly competent officers from a host of countries. An appreciation of General von Sanders' difficulties in functioning within a foreign chain of command will have relevance to the commanders of today.

Why Operational Leadership?

Widely recognized as the key, if not the most important element of operational art, leadership translates theory and planning into reality. Without the commander, operational art exists in a vacuum without purpose or a means to employ it. Lieutenant Colonel Banish stated it even more forcefully, "More than any other factor, superior leadership determines the successful outcome of campaigns."⁴ In the case of Gallipoli, the highly unusual command structure cries out for further investigation. Further, in terms of operational art from the Turkish perspective, the defensive posture of the Ottoman forces in Gallipoli decreased the significance of the other facets of operational design. The Turks, by necessity, were reactive until the opportunity arrived to fix the Allied forces in place.

To establish a framework of reference, operational leadership must be broken down into its two major component parts. These parts are the internal character and the external actions of the commander. The first are the personality traits and leadership skills of the commander. The other involves the more practical elements of the operational art that must be selected by or flow from the commander. These latter decisions include the command and control structure, military objectives, enemy center of gravity and operational scheme or idea.⁵ The Commander's personality and leadership skills are inculcated, well before the battle, but how he exercises the operational art is influenced heavily by the operating environment and the strategic objective he must achieve.

Any number of highly skilled authors have attempted to describe the secrets to becoming a successful leader at any or all of the respective levels of warfare from the tactical to the strategic. General Lawton Collins argued, however, that there was little to no difference between the leadership required at the small unit to that of the large one.⁶ His focus was upon the internal traits and skills of the commander rather than the external environment or span of control. That said, the vast majority of writers and

military professionals agree that a "Good Leader" must be of high moral character. The attributes assigned to define this high moral character include self-discipline, self-confidence, boldness, decisiveness, competence, trusting and trustworthy, and courageous, both physically and morally, to name just a few.⁷ In short, the leader's character sets the standard for those under his command.

For the command, the leader also retains the responsibility to decide critical operational decisions that truly affect the ability of his command to fight and win. Today, these types of decisions follow from the commander's estimate of the situation. This structured process was designed to produce a course of action that is suitable, feasible and acceptable.⁸ In other words, the result of this process is a comprehensive plan that accomplishes the mission with the forces and assets available under an acceptable level of risk. Within a formal structure or without, the commander has the responsibility to clarify the desired end state with his superiors, determine centers of gravity and to define his military objectives (including intermediate and final).⁹ All of these particulars are integral to the operational scheme or idea. In the end game of battle, the goal is to be inside of and faster than the opponent's decision making process and to provide the necessary leverage for subordinates to achieve victory. Solid preparation, coupled with creativity and flexibility enables one commander to outperform his adversary.

Of all his decisions, the commander's selection of a command and control structure will have a crucial impact upon his success or failure in battle. This structure includes not only the architecture, but the people as well. The fundamentals of command and control are simplicity, clarity, unity of command and delegation of authority.¹⁰ The ideal goal is centralized direction, while preserving decentralized execution. This is a simple enough concept, in and of itself, but exceedingly difficult to implement in battle. It presupposes a commander who is willing to delegate authority while retaining full responsibility for the ensuing success or failure.

In summary, the cornerstone of operational art is the leader. The leader must manifest high moral character and exhibit a thorough understanding of the principal elements of operational art. Gallipoli in 1915 illuminated these important concepts in a particularly valuable and interesting scenario.

Gallipoli

General Liman von Sanders arrived in Constantinople in December of 1913. As Chief of the German Military Mission, he and his assistants were to reorganize the army, control officer appointments, direct the military schools, and von Sanders was to have membership on the supreme war council.¹¹ Consistently, he put his mission's objectives above any German-Turkish rivalry or other political/diplomatic machination. The Military Mission's performance, prior to Gallipoli, not only improved the proficiency of the army, but earned substantial respect for the Germans in the capital and in the field. This was an important foundation to the successful integration of German officers into key combat positions, during the war.

As early as November of 1914, British Naval Forces bombarded the outer forts guarding the Dardanelles and ensured that the Turks were alerted to Allied interest in the straits. This piecemeal effort continued throughout the campaign. The Allies never confronted the Turks with a sustained, combined army/navy operation. This fact greatly simplified the defensive problem. A central feature to the Allied failure to fully appreciate the difficulty of forcing the straits was their strong belief in an inherent superiority to the Turks.¹²

The Turks spent the winter of 1914-1915 preparing defenses to guard the Dardanelles. By February of 1915, the Turks had assembled some 100 guns, including both mobile and fixed batteries, a minefield, searchlights, and torpedo tubes backed up by two divisions of infantry.¹³ Against this force, the Allies assembled a large fleet of battleships, semi-dreadnoughts and battlecruisers totalling some twenty-two ships of the

line plus lesser craft. From February 19 to March 18, the naval force attempted to break through the straits into the Sea of Marmara.

The naval effort failed, but not by much. By the end of the climatic battle of 18 March, the Turkish forts were out of ammunition and the minefields posed little threat, without artillery coverage.¹⁴ The way was clear to Constantinople, if the Allies renewed the attack. Unfortunately, after having suffered the loss of three warships, the Allies determined that an army assault on the peninsula was necessary. It was at this moment that the newly appointed land force commander, General Ian Hamilton, arrived on the scene. Since Hamilton's transports were not loaded for an opposed assault, the decision was made to proceed to Egypt to reload. Thus at the brink, the Turks were not only granted a month's respite, but fairly claimed a victory over the Royal Navy.

Even with the euphoria of a victory, Enver Pasha decided that he needed General von Sanders to command on the peninsula. The indications of an Allied invasion were too overwhelming to ignore. Enver swallowed his pride, since this decision had occurred during one of the more bitter disputes between Enver and von Sanders.¹⁵ General von Sanders, however, was pleased to take charge. A man of action, he continually sought combat command. He proceeded immediately to the peninsula and assessed the defenses.¹⁶

General von Sanders changed the defensive scheme and troop dispositions on Gallipoli from one of continuous fixed positions on the coast, where any landing would be met with token resistance, to one centered upon mobility and flexibility of response.¹⁷ This was not an easy task due to the rudimentary conditions of the overland lines of communication and his lack of aerial reconnaissance. Still, by the 25th of April and the great Allied landings, the General was satisfied that his forces were well prepared and placed to defeat the enemy.¹⁸ In fact, his only major surprise was the large number of simultaneous landings. His delay in attacking in force the main landings, at Gaba Tepe (Anzac Beach) and Cape Helles, was caused by his concern over the amphibious feint at

Bulair, which was to his rear. More importantly, once General von Sanders (by 26 April) recognized that Bulair was a fake, he aggressively reinforced the main assault beaches with all of his forces.¹⁹ This flexibility and boldness of effort was indicative of his leadership throughout the campaign. Once he was convinced of his course of action, he was willing to take substantial, calculated risks in the quest for victory.

On the main beaches, Mustafa Kemal and the average Turkish soldier rose to unprecedented heights of heroism in stopping the initial assaults. Singlehandedly, Mustafa was responsible for bottling up the Australians and New Zealanders into their death trap, north of Gaba Tepe. Although Anzac scouts reached the critical heights of the Sari Bair ridge, which was the key terrain feature on the southern half of the peninsula, Mustafa rallied his men and committed the army's reserves, upon his own authority, recaptured the heights and saved the Turkish position.²⁰ Everywhere, the illiterate, unpaid conscripts of the Empire fought with exceptional bravery. Of course, they were defending their home land and, for the most part, remained in their trenches, while the Allies attacked.²¹ This latter tactic was very useful in reducing casualties and was not fully appreciated by the higher commands, on either side, until later in the war.

This initial battle lasted for three days. The Turks attempted to drive the Allies into the sea and the Allies tried to advance out of the beachheads. Finally, exhaustion, lack of reinforcements, ammunition, and other supplies forced a lull in the fighting. This pattern, one to three days of attacks followed by rest and rearm, was repeated throughout the campaign.²² Action led to reaction and then stalemate, and success was just out of reach. Due to the Allies' lack of creativity, General von Sanders was allowed to rapidly reorganize and, by the first of May, he commanded seventy-five battalions against General Hamilton's fifty seven.²³ The Allies' inability to sustain an offensive enabled von Sanders to increase his force levels, despite incredible pressures upon his supply lines.

Throughout May and June, the two combatants continued to test each other, while suffering significant casualties. General von Sanders admitted that his failure to achieve a decisive victory at Anzac on 18-19 May was due to his own underestimation of the enemy.²⁴ At this point, Turkish attacks were reduced in order to conserve men, as well as to prepare additional defenses for a long rumored, new landing by the Allies. Once again, the Allies sacrificed operational security and indicated their intentions.

The August landings at Suvla Bay repeated many of the failures of the April landings. Allied commanders were out of touch with their subordinates at critical moments; objectives were not clear or pursued vigorously; and the initial advantage gained by surprise was lost as von Sanders reacted aggressively to the new challenge. Mustafa Kemal once again saved the heights of Sari Bair and General von Sanders appointed Mustafa as the sector commander to oppose the new threat from Suvla.²⁵ The Turks surmounted this new challenge and stabilized the front, but once more it required all of their reserves. The previous stalemate was reestablished and, over the intervening weeks, occasional attempts were tried by both sides to achieve a major breakthrough. Yet again, the defenders were just good enough and were in the right place at the right time.

In October, General Hamilton was relieved and the new Allied commander, General Monro, resisted further attempts to take the peninsula. The subsequent Allied evacuations in December and January were their best efforts of the campaign. Fully expecting thirty to forty percent casualties, the operation instead went well with no casualties. For once, the Allies used all the principles of operational art to their advantage and employed tight security, deception and rapid movement to achieve overwhelming surprise. The fact that this occurred in areas where the trenches were in some cases only ten yards apart was truly remarkable.²⁶ By January 9, 1916, the last Allied soldier was removed from the peninsula and the campaign was over.

Leadership Analysis

General von Sanders made it difficult to assess his character traits, because he left out his innermost thoughts from his memoirs. A classically trained German, von Sanders wrote a sparse account of his years in Turkey and left his record to be judged by others. Still, his actions spoke loudly of his character. Despite all the war time rhetoric and post war revisionism, his overriding professionalism and commitment were unchallenged.²⁷

The fact that Enver Pasha continued to use von Sanders as his primary military advisor throughout the war and, even as late as 1918, assigned the General to another critical combat command, indicated the depth of Enver's respect. General von Sanders' longevity stemmed from his absence from the dangerous world of Ottoman politics. In addition, he fully understood the strengths and weaknesses of the army and consistently endeavored to improve the first and minimize the latter. This, apparently genuine, determination and concern earned the grudging admiration of his subordinates and ensured their support under the harshest of conditions. Significantly, Mustafa Kemal, despite his great hatred of Germans in general, showed admiration of von Sanders' skills and continued to serve with him throughout the war.²⁸

In the various battles of Gallipoli, von Sanders continually showed a willingness to react to developing events with greater flexibility and clarity of action than his opponents. He kept calm, while events were changing rapidly, even if reports were unfavorable.²⁹ He admitted his own mistakes willingly and sought out the finest of his subordinate for positions of responsibility. He developed and executed courses of action that were risky, but acceptable due to his operating constraints and strategic objective. In short, he developed an environment that was bound to bring out the best efforts from his troops. While this was not remarkable, the Allies' difficulty in this regard magnified von Sanders' performance.

The major indictment against von Sanders involved the excessive expenditure of lives in attempting to push the Allies back into the sea. This charge, however, was

equally attached to almost every one of the major commanders in the first years of the war. To a man, commanders were very slow in recognizing the futility of frontal assaults into the teeth of a well entrenched foe. Luckily, the Turks could afford to be somewhat generous, since reinforcements were close at hand.

In terms of command and control, von Sanders was again able to outperform his adversary. His superb selection of personnel has already been noted. His command structure was thoroughly influenced by the autocratic regime. The advantage of having a dictator for a superior was, of course, instantaneous support. However, this support was also erratic and unproductive at times, but von Sanders counterbalanced it with a link to the General Staff in Germany. He was able to smooth out some of Enver Pasha's more insane commands through this channel and vice versa.³⁰ In addition, von Sanders was on the peninsula and in contact with his immediate subordinates as necessary, during the critical moments of the campaign. On the other hand, key Allied commanders remained at sea and out of touch with their subordinates and the flow of the battle, during those few climatic days when major breakouts were possible.

The Turks clearly benefited from the terrain and choice of objectives. The defenders were fighting to defend their country and they knew it. The mission was to push the Allies back into the sea. It was not so apparent what the Allied soldier saw as his objective. At times, the average Allied soldier was just attempting to eke out a place to survive. In addition, the terrain favored the defense with rough, steep ground that held little cover and only two or three commanding promontories.³¹ Throughout the campaign, the Turks retained the high ground and the obvious advantage.

The Allies certainly granted von Sanders an additional advantage by not attacking with a combined naval and land assault. After the failure of the navy in March, the army attempted to out flank the forts on the straits. While the navy supplied gun fire support and logistics, it was an army only operation. General von Sanders was allowed to seriously deplete his forces outside of the main battle areas on the peninsula, because he

was not pressured. This produced the necessary force imbalance to keep the Allies trapped within their beachheads.

In the end, the fight was between the soldiers of each belligerent. General von Sanders and his commanders were able to motivate and employ their men effectively, even if, at times, inefficiently. General von Sanders stated at the close of his description of the campaign that, "The tribute of tenacious and steadfast prowess cannot be withheld from the Turkish troops . . . They had held their ground in unnumbered conflicts with a brave enemy who ever renewed his attacks and was supported by the fire of his fleet."³² This level of commitment by the Turkish soldier seriously challenged the Allies' original assumption that a naval demonstration on Constantinople would lead to capitulation. Turkey's operational center of gravity was resident in von Sanders' Fifth Army and needed to be neutralized or destroyed. Given the terrain, interior lines, and reasonable supplies of men and material, it was not likely that the Allies could achieve any decisive advantage on the peninsula unless von Sanders made some blundering mistakes, which did not happen.

Conclusions

The campaign on Gallipoli was extremely exhausting for both sides. The Turks were in possession of the field of battle at the end, but the cost had been heavy. At the price of over 251,000 Turkish casualties,³³ the Turks achieved only a tactical stalemate. However, the Ottoman Empire garnered a badly needed strategic victory. The government was strengthened immeasurably and twenty badly needed, battle hardened divisions were released for use in other theaters. It was a scenario that the Allies could not afford, but it was their initiative that had set events in motion.

General von Sanders' efforts were indicative of what a professional commander can accomplish, outside of his own forces, if he understands the people and his mission. Throughout his five years in Turkey, von Sanders took his service to the Turks so

seriously and with such genuine dedication that it was hard to imagine how even a Turkish national could have performed it any more assiduously. The General's efforts were crucial to sustaining Turkey's strength during the war. He was able to serve so long, because he avoided entangling himself or the Military Mission in politics. Yet, he fought political battles as necessary to secure needed military reforms, supplies and, most importantly, influenced strategic/operational war plans and goals. It was apparent that his overriding, unbiased professionalism allowed him to succeed in surmounting this apparent dilemma. In a country well known for corruption, he was never tainted by scandal. In short, General von Sanders survived intact, because his military competence and high moral character were highly valued by the Turkish leadership.

A consummate leader at the operational level, General von Sanders consistently executed his plans faster than the Allies. Flexible and creative, the General provided an environment where subordinates were able to respond, as needed, to developing threats. If required, von Sanders showed a willingness to take very high, calculated risks in order to achieve his objectives. This boldness coupled with his enduring professionalism and the fact that he made few errors meant that the Allies were continually forced to initiate action instead of capitalizing upon Turkish mistakes. This was a costly and difficult proposition. While certainly no Hannibal, General von Sanders was better than most and good enough when it counted. What more was necessary?

The Gallipoli case highlights how important the Commander's performance is at the operational level of war. It can be argued that the ramifications of poor leadership at this level are substantial and, possibly, fatal to the campaign. While the war is rarely won in a single operation or campaign, it can certainly be lost. Superb leadership skills in conjunction with an understanding of operational art are the key to success. On another note, it is imperative to clearly understand customs, culture and goals of foreign nationals when operating with a combined force. Professionalism transcends geopolitical

boundaries. As the number of peacekeeping and enforcement operations continues to increase, the validity of these lessons from history will be self-evident.

Lessons Learned

Leadership is the heart and soul of war and cannot be ignored at any level of war. Operational leadership is the key to converting well thought out plans into reality and exceedingly critical in the execution phase. General von Sanders understood this and was able, to a greater degree than General Hamilton, to influence his war effort in directions that were beneficial to victory.

As a leader, it is imperative to understand your people. As a commander of foreign nationals, it is crucial to not only know your people, but their culture, politics and motivations. Solid professionalism combined with cultural sensitivity will transcend geopolitical boundaries. It will seldom be as complicated and difficult as that faced by General von Sanders.

Never underestimate the determination and fighting skills of your opponent. The Allies did and General von Sanders was able to capitalize. This can also become a fatal error.

If the objective is worth expending lives than commit the appropriate amount of resources. The Turks were fighting all out and the Allies were seeking an easy way out of the Western Front, while employing limited means. Alternately, plans tend to have a life of their own. Ensure that they don't get out of hand as this one did . . . it had appeared to be *so simple*.

ENDNOTES

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- ² Frank G. Weber, Eagles on the Crescent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 26.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ⁴ Werner W. Banisch, "Leadership at the Operational Level," Army, August 1987, p.50.
- ⁵ Milan N. Vego, "Operational Leadership," Unpublished Notes, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1995, p. 10.
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- ⁷ Matthew B. Ridgway, "Leadership," Military Review, October 1966, p. 41; Banisch, p.54; Vego, p. 3.
- ⁸ Milan N. Vego, "Commander's Estimate of the Situation," Unpublished Notes, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1995, p.2.
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- ¹¹ Harry N. Howard, The Partition of Turkey (New York: Howard Fertig Inc., 1966), p. 40.
- ¹² Benadotte E. Schmitt and Harold C. Vedeher, The World in the Crucible, 1914-1919 (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 98.
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- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
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- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ²⁰ Lord Kinross, Ataturk: A Biography of Mustafa Kemal (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1965), p. 89.
- ²¹ Moorehead, p. 132.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ²⁴ von Sanders, p. 76.
- ²⁵ Moorehead, p. 290.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁸ H. C. Armstrong, Gray Wolf: Mustafa Kemal (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1933), p. 46.

²⁹ von Sanders, p. 63.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 81-82, 112-113.

³¹ Sherman Miles, "Notes on the Dardanelles Campaign of 1915," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June 1925, p. 1040.

³² von Sanders, p. 104.

³³ Moorehead, p. 361.

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