**PRESIDENT'S MUSINGS APRIL 2015**

We celebrate the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign this month, very much aware of the part played by Navy in this epic, whilst not in any way detracting from the valor, determination and pure grit shown by the armies of the British Empire, and of France. When Jenny and I visited the Dardanelles in 2005, we wanted to explore not only the sites at which our ANZAC's fought so splendidly, but to have an overview of the whole campaign. We spent a day in the Cape Helles area which held great interest, particularly at V beach, where in 1915, the sea was colored red. It was coloured red by the blood of the 'Munsters,' the 'Royal Dublins' and 'Hampshires', absolutely slaughtered by the Turks on that first day as they vainly endeavored to disembark through large ports cut in the sides of a converted collier the River Clyde. Gangways had been built so that the troops could reach the lighters which were to form a bridge to the beach. However the carnage was so terrible that the attempt was discontinued, and the troops remaining in the ship could only land safely under cover of darkness.

Whilst in the Cape Helles area, Kenan, our guide, took us to a Turkish Museum which featured the Naval aspects of the campaign. Although the captions are only in Turkish the pictures and drawings tell the story, as they indicate just where the allied ships were on March 18th 1915 when 18 British and French battleships, guarded by other warships commenced their bombardment. We viewed the entrance to the Dardanelles straights from the Cape Helles Memorial, a 33 metre high cenotaph which commemorates the British Empire's part in the Gallipoli Campaign. Looking across the straights towards Kum Kale, it was it was easy to imagine how impressive those ships would have looked! On November 3rd 1914 a RN squadron had successfully bombarded the forts at the entrance to the Dardanelles. On February 19th Admiral Carden's fleet attacked in earnest with a day-long bombardment of the enemy's main forts at the straight's entrance, but at night fall they had to withdraw because of heavy weather. On February 25th the bombardment was resumed and by 1600 the forts at the entrance had been silenced. Royal Marines were put ashore on the 26th and entered three of the forts where they found 70% of the guns still serviceable. On the 27th another landing party blew up six guns in the Cape Helles area. It's estimated that between 20-30 guns were destroyed collectively at the landings at Sed-el-Bahr and Kum Kale.

A formidable array of defences still remained, including the heaviest guns protecting the narrows, where it was thought there were some of 14" caliber. Additionally there was a large mine field to contend with. Attempts by both British and French Mine sweepers to sweep the straights failed dismally under a hail of shells. After day and night attempts to clear a passage through the 373 mines guarding the straights, the task was aborted. Carden resumed his efforts to blast the Forts out of action. With 16 battleships he concentrated on the major forts guarding the 8 kilometer Narrows but by March 11th, there was virtually a stalemate. On March 18th 1915, Admiral Carden planned to carry out a do or die attempt on the Narrows forts. Unfortunately Carden collapsed from fatigue and strain two days before and had to relinquish his command.

On March 18th the attack took place under the command of Admiral de Robeck. It began at 1130 with four modern battleships standing off at 13,000 metres firing at the forts in the Narrows whilst older ships, screened by destroyers and minesweepers fired from closer range. The 18 capital ships involved came under reasonably accurate fire from the forts, heavy howitzers and field artillery concealed in the gullies and folds of the land on either side of the straights. Within two hours there was a notable reduction in fire from both the forts and the howitzers. In two of the forts it was observed there were explosions in them. Encouraged by this, de Robeck ordered the four older French battleships and two British ships for close-quarters bombardment. Just before 1400 the forts were practically silent and the French ships were recalled to be replaced by a British close-attack squadron of older battleships with their heavy guns. Disaster struck when the French squadron turned into a bay which had been used previously for manoeuvring during the previous bombardments, earlier in March.

On March 6th the plucky Turkish minelayer NUSRAT had laid a string of 20 mines running parallel to the shore, unbeknown to the allies. The French battleship, BOUVET had sustained damage previously, and upon striking one of these mines, she had capsized and sunk within 2 minutes. Approximately 660 of her crew were lost. Battle cruiser HMS INFLEXIBLE was hit twice by fire from the Turkish forts and late in the afternoon she hit a mine on her starboard bow which caused severe damage. Casualties were three officers and thirty men killed, with thirteen being wounded. Fortunately she was saved by being run aground at Tenedos and eventually she made her way to Malta for repairs. Pre Dreadnought battleship HMS IRRESTIBLE struck a mine shortly after INFLEXIBLE, and suffered further damage from a second great explosion, which was thought to be caused by another mine. Turkish batteries got her range and were dropping shells all around her with occasional hits. HMS OCEAN, another Pre Dreadnought Battleship was ordered to take IRRESTIBLE in tow, however she also struck a mine and moments later was hit by heavy shell fire. Both IRRESTIBLE and OCEAN were abandoned, still afloat, their crews being taken off by other ships who came to their rescue. The next morning it was concluded that both ships had sunk. The attack was unfortunately not continued on the 19th and consequently the attempt to achieve success by using sea power alone was abandoned.

We spent several days on the peninsular staying at Eceabat with 'T J' and his Australian wife Bernina, known as 'B', at their hotel. 'T J' was our guide in the ANZAC sphere of operations. Being at ANZAC and being able to take my time at the various sites, fulfilled an ambition held since childhood.

We are justifiably proud of the exploits of our submarine AE2 and the pivotal role she played in the ANZAC saga on Sunday 25th April 1915, however the British submarine attacks had commenced on December 13th 1914, following the first bombardment by an R N Squadron on November 3rd. LCDR Norman Holbrook RN's submarine, BII had entered the straights, avoiding five lines of mines and torpedoed the Turkish battleship MESUDIYE. Holbrook was awarded the VC. The French submarine, SAPHIR negotiated the Narrows on January 15th 1915, but ran aground and was subsequently lost. On April 17th, British submarine E15 was caught in a current and ran aground directly under the guns of a Turkish battery!!

Our submarines AEI and AE2 were part of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force that captured the German Pacific Headquarters at Rabaul on September 13th 1914. The next morning, AEI departed to patrol off Cape Gazelle with HMAS PARRAMATTA. At 1520 PARRAMATTA'S Master at Arms saw AEI move off into the haze. She disappeared without a trace and was lost with all hands. *Our Speaker at our May meeting, Tim Smith, is* *Director Maritime Archaeology of both the search team seeking to find and protect the wreck of AEI, and the AE2 project.*

After the German New Guinea campaign AE2 sailed with the second convoy of AIF troops which departed Albany on December 31st 1914. On the voyage AE2 was towed by HMAS BERRIMA and reached Suez at the end of January 1915. AE2 was then attached to the British squadron engaged in the Dardanelles campaign and on April 24th her commander LCDR Henry Stoker was ordered to force a passage through the straights and enter the sea of Marmora. She failed on her first attempt a tried again at 0230 the next day. Stoker decided to travel on the surface as far as possible and was undetected until 0430 when she was caught by search lights and came under fire. Diving she found herself in a mine field with mines scraping the hull-until she drew near to the narrows at 1800.

AE2 successfully torpedoed a nearby Turkish gunboat PEYKISEVKET, close to the Turkish fortifications. She ran aground twice, but fortunately the guns of the Forts couldn't be depressed enough to hit her. Extricating herself skillfully from this perilous situation she evaded the Turkish vessels chasing her and pressed on. At 0900 on April 26th she entered the Sea of Marmora where for the next four days she continued to attack and be attacked without success. On April 29th AE2 met the British submarine E14 and the two vessels arranged to meet the next day. As AE2 surfaced at the rendezvous point on April 30th the Turkish torpedo boat SULTAN HISSAR approached her. AE2 immediately dived, but she lost trim and went out of control, broaching the surface twice. SULTAN HISSAR scored a hit in AE2's engine room and she was mortally wounded. Stoker ordered all his crew on deck and AE2 was scuttled. All hands were rescued and spent the next three and a half years as prisoners of war. Four of the crew died in captivity.

AE2's enduring legacy is that she was the first to penetrate the straights and enter the Sea of Marmora, thus fulfilling her orders from Commodore Roger Keyes RN to sink any mine laying ships she saw in the Narrows and, as the landings were due at dawn the next day, 'to generally run amok' around Cannakale and cause maximum disruption to the Turks. That she 'generally ran amok' can never be doubted. The only criticism we can level at the recent TV Mini Series, Gallipoli, screened on Chanel 9 was the scene where General Sir Ian Hamilton is handed a note from Lieut. General Sir William Birdwood, the ANZAC Corps Commander. In his note Birdwood conveyed the opinions from his commanders on the spot recommending evacuation, and sought a decision from Hamilton as to whether they withdrew or stayed. In the TV series no mention was made of AE2's signal of her success, influencing Hamilton's message to the ANZACS to 'dig dig dig etc.; so we need to set the record straight and give Stoker and his crew their due credit!! A signal from AE2 to Keyes, sent from a position well north of Nara Burnu towards the Sea of Marmara was instrumental in Hamilton sending the following message to Birdwood,

***'There is nothing for it but to dig yourselves right in and stick it out.***  ***It would take at least two days to re-embark you as Admiral Thursby will explain to you. Meanwhile, the Australian submarine has got through the Narrows and torpedoed a gun boat...you have got through the difficult business, now you have only to dig, dig, dig, until you are safe.' (****Hamilton, quoted by Rhodes James, 'Gallipoli', London 1999, p130)*

After the war Stoker was told by Admiral Keyes of the dramatic effect the news had had as General Sir Ian Hamilton was pondering the fate of the ANZACS on Gallipoli.

One Australian soldier ashore that night claimed later that the following message was posted at Gallipoli: ***Australian sub AE 2 just through the Dardanelles. Advance Australia.*** *(Tudor Jenkins, quoted in Michael White's. 'Australian Submarines: A History',Canberra,1992,p 58)* Charles Bean did not mention any such notices being erected, but he did record in his diary that the news of AE 2's breakthrough arrived at headquarters on Gallipoli at about 0230 on 26th April 1915.

***First Lieut of AE 2 was Geoffrey Haggard RN .After the war he married and settled in Victoria. His very proud daughter is Jenny Smyth, the wife of the late Commodore Dacre Smythe, one the foundation members of the NHS of A, Victoria Chapter. Our 'Shrine of Remembrance' now has greatly expanded Galleries of Remembrance which are really out -standing and a great attraction to Melbourne town. A display is dedicated to LCDR G Haggard, in which are displayed his Officer's cap and other artifacts. Our own LCDR Mac Gregory RAN has a display in which his Officer's cap ,Mid- shipman's dirk are displayed. Also included are the binoculars he was using whilst serving as Officer of the Watch in HMAS CANBERRA I at 0143 on that fateful morning 9th August 1942 when the 'Battle of Savo Island' took place, and we lost CANBERRA and 84 Officers and men. Of particular interest this ANZAC day is that they have' Devanha's ' life boat. This boat was used to ferry our boys to the beaches of Gallipoli on April 25th 1915. The Gallipoli boat is displayed in all its glory, with a a special interactive feature showing pictures of the men of ANZAC being displayed as a back drop. Truly it is the 'star of the show'.***

**Don't miss viewing the IWM London 's WWI Centenary Exhibition at the Melbourne Museum. Book now WWIEXHIBITION.COM.AU or Ring 1300 364 001.**

**Join us for 'A History of the Royal Australian Navy, Volume I'. This is a video produced by our Navy Video Unit Sydney in 2008) .Our meeting is on Monday April 27th,starting at 1800 with a lovely supper. Our May Speaker is Tim Smith, Executive Director of Heritage Victoria, and his subject is 'Australia's Heritage at Sea. A sincere thank you is due to Captain Martin Holmes for entertaining us with his account of his 'adventures' with the British Army in Germany after the War. Thanks Martin!**

***These web sites provided source material for my research of the Naval Campaign in the Dardanelles 1914-1915: www.anzacsite.gov.au/5environment/submarines/ae2.html : www.naval-history.net/WWIBattle1503Dardanelles1.htm www.royalmunsterfusiliers.org/k5ships.htm www.gallipoli100.com.au/site/About\_Gallipoli.asp :www.anzacsite.gov.au/2visiting/turkish\_stop.html : anzacsite.gov.au5environment/timelines/100-events-gallipoli : en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval\_operations\_in\_theDardanelles :www.awm.gov.au/unit/U50786/***

**Enjoy your ANZAC Day.**

YOURS **AYE!!**

**REX WILLIAMS**