

Introduction - R.A.N's First Submarines

After the formation of the Royal Australian Navy, initial plans for Australian submarines were for three British "C" Class boats but only two of the improved "E" Class were authorised. At a submerged displacement of 810 tons and speed of 10 knots both submarines were commissioned at Portsmouth on 28th February 1914. They were named AE1 and AE2, and the 'A' in their name standing for Australian.

AE2's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Henry Stoker was born in Dublin on 2 February 1885, and joined the Royal Navy at the age of fifteen. By 1914 he was an experienced submariner and was chosen to command AE2, one of the two new submarines built at Barrow-in-Furness for the new Royal Australian Navy.

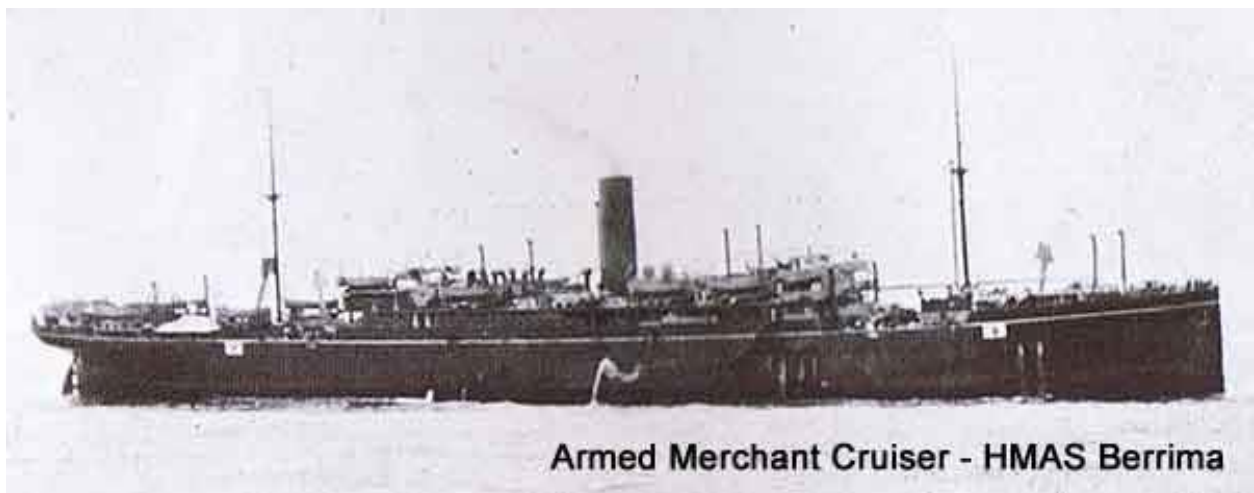
Despite the fact that the submarines of this era had never managed to sail more than 200 miles without breaking down, the intrepid Stoker and his mixed crew of Australian and English ratings, in company with the other Australian submarine, AE1, set sail for Australia on 2 March 1914. Beset with minor problems during their delivery voyage from England AE1 and AE2, after an incredible journey lasting 83 days, of which 60 were at sea, the two submarines made their entrance into Sydney harbour on 24 May 1914. They were the first submarines to travel such a distance. It was just three months before the outbreak of World War 1 which was a baptism of fire that was to see both these boats lost, one in action and one lost, of unknown fate, without a trace.

Firstly, at the outbreak of the war, AE1 and AE2 were assigned to operations in New Guinea waters . One month later AE1 was gone. On 14 September 1914 AE1 was on patrol with HMAS Parramatta off Cape Gazelle, New Britain. At the end of the patrol she was sighted by HMAS Parramatta apparently heading into harbour, but she never arrived.

After the loss of AE1, AE2 was offered for use in the war effort by the Admiralty. She sailed under the tow of HMAS Berrima from Australia to the Middle East on 31 December 1914, and arrived as the preparations for the Dardenelles (Gallipoli) campaign got underway.



AE2 Alongside at Garden Island, Sydney - Inset: CO Harry Stoker



Armed Merchant Cruiser - HMAS Berrima

AE 2 In The Middle East

Lieutenant Commander Harry Stoker in Submarine AE2, had written orders to penetrate the Dardanelles, the narrow and relatively shallow channel linking the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. He was to '...take measures necessary to block enemy traffic' and, if he succeeded in reaching Chanak (opposite Gallipoli), he should try to sink any mine-dropping vessels and 'run amok generally'.

At 2.30am on the April 25 Stoker and his crew moved into the Straits at periscope depth creeping past the Turkish searchlights. They were sighted and fired upon at 4.30am and spent the next hour moving blindly through the minefield listening to the mooring lines of the mines scraping against the hull. At 6am Stoker saw a small cruiser, at a range of 300 yards he fired a torpedo and then dived to avoid a destroyer attempting to ram them. The noise of the destroyer passing close overhead was temporarily blotted out by the noise of the torpedo hitting.

AE2 and her crew continued, playing hide and seek with the forts and ships guarding the Narrows. Whenever they surfaced they were pursued by enemy craft trying to ram them and battered by fire from the 100 plus guns lining the cliffs along the Straits. In a last attempt to shake off the enemy Stoker decided to lie on the bottom of the sea for the rest of the day. All day they heard the sound of ships passing overhead searching for them.

At 9pm the AE2 rose from ocean floor to recharge her batteries and to radio her success to the fleet, a signal that was to influence the course of events at Gallipoli. When, the commanders in charge of the assault on Gallipoli received it they were reviewing their perilous situation. On hearing of AE2's successful penetration of the Narrows the Commander-in-Chief General Sir Ian Hamilton, sent out his now famous message:

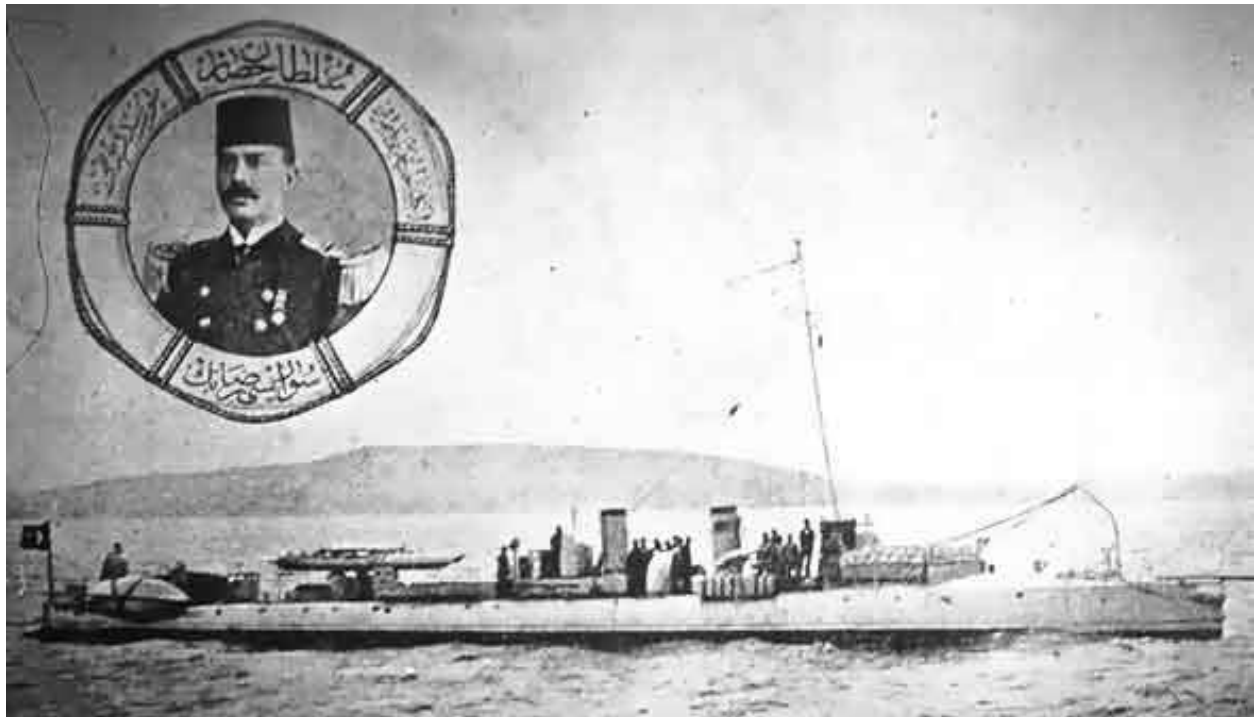
"Your situation is indeed serious, but dig yourselves right in and stick it out. The Australian submarine has got up through the Narrows and torpedoed a cruiser...dig, dig, dig until you are safe".

How much of the story of ANZAC, and of the whole war, would have been different, if the AE2 had not sent that radio signal at that time?

On April 26 AE2 proceeded on the surface up the Straits, Stoker and his crew entered the harbour of Gallipoli and finding no ships worthy of attack proceeded to the Sea of Marmara. There AE2 continued to harass enemy shipping, firing and charging at craft. Enemy vessels attacked her on a number of occasions necessitating crash dives and

hours of concealment on the bottom.

On April 29 Stoker and his crew met the British submarine, E14, the second submarine to pass through the Dardanelles. They arranged to meet at 10am the next day Kara Burnu Point. But the bay was occupied by enemy forces and as AE2 surfaced she came under attack. AE2 suddenly surfaced in Artaki Bay about a mile from a torpedo boat. The crew hurried to dive again as the torpedo boat drew closer.



Above and Below - AE2's Captor - Turkish Torpedo Boat 'Sultanhisar' The Sultanhisar was a 93 ton Turkish torpedo boat that was responsible for the demise of AE2 and the capture of her 32 crewmen who were taken prisoners-of-war. The canons of the Sultanhisar successfully penetrated the hull of the submarine without causing human injury.



The submarine sank quickly to a 100ft, its depth limit and the crew fought again to raise the vessel. 'Within seconds (of rising to the surface) the engine room was hit and holed in three places.' Stoker ordered all hands on deck, and assisted by his first officer, Lieutenant Haggard, opened all the tanks to flood AE2 and sink her.

The torpedo boat rescued and took prisoner the entire crew. They spent the next three and a half years in a Turkish prison camp.

AE2 - Her Mission In Turkey - by Dr Mark Spence

The AE2 made its way to the Dardanelles to assist in a campaign to take Constantinople, and ease pressure on the Caucasus. Hiding in the Sea of Marmara at the end of the Dardanelle Straits was the Turkish fleet, reinforced by the German GOEBEN and BRESLAU. After some unsuccessful attempts by British and French allied submarines, the AE2 successfully penetrated the straits.

The story of her journey through the straits is a harrowing one. There were rips and currents to contend with, and narrow constrictions. Twice she beached herself in sight of guns belonging to various forts spread along the channel. The Captain, Lieutenant Commander Henry Stoker, describes the continuous sounds of the rattings and scrapings on the hull of the mooring wires held taut by mines overhead. On two occasions a loud thud could be heard - possibly mines themselves that had been dragged onto the sub's hull, miraculously not detonating.

Finally, she penetrated into the Sea of Marmara but the Turks knew of her presence. The AE2 radioed their success to the command ships outside, and this was at the end of the first day of embarkation of Anzac troops on the beaches at Gallipoli which had been a disaster with heavy casualties.

It was thought that Sir Ian Hamilton would withdraw the troops, but the news of the success of AE2 was seen as an "omen" and instead, he encouraged the troops to hold their places and "dig, dig, dig until you are safe".

Meanwhile, the AE2, while successfully crippling one vessel, narrowly missed a couple of others, and had several torpedoes fail to operate. Nevertheless, her mere presence must have had a severe debilitating effect on enemy shipping.

Having experienced the nerve-shattering scraping and thumping of hawsers towed by Turkish vessels attempting to grab her, the AE2 was finally brought to the surface within a short distance of a Turkish gun-boat through just bad luck. She had hit a denser layer of water which made the bow buoyant, and inadvertently hit the surface.

The engine room was holed with bullets, which meant the submarine could no longer submerge. All 32 crew safely exited the craft to be taken prisoners of war, but only after Stoker took the necessary steps to send AE2 on her last and deepest dive and final resting place.

The outcomes of the Gallipoli Campaign

The AE2's penetration into the Sea of Marmara played a highly significant role in the outcome of the Gallipoli campaign. It was thought that Sir Ian Hamilton might have been about to withdraw the Anzac troops from the beaches considering the heavy casualties after the first day of troop embarkation onto the Gallipoli Peninsula. The news of the AE2's success roused the optimism of the commanding officers, and is probably what changed Hamilton's mind. He wrote to the troops:

"Your news is indeed serious, but dig yourselves right in and stick it out.
Meanwhile the Australian Submarine has got up through the Narrows and torpedoed a
gunboat at Chanak.....Dig, dig, dig until you are safe."

The success of the AE2 also paved the way for other E-class submarines belonging to Great Britain to also attempt the Dardanelles, a few successfully, bringing about a severe reduction in sea transport from Constantinople to the Peninsula, causing many disagreeable losses to the Turkish forces. As attempts by allied submarines had failed before AE2's success, it is unlikely that any other submarine would have been allowed to attempt the entry if the AE2 had failed.

by Dr Mark Spence.

Crew List Of AE2

Officers

Lieutenant-Commander Henry Hugh Gordon Dacre Stoker DSO. RN
Lieutenant Geoffrey Arthur Gordon Haggard DSC. RN
Lieutenant John Pitt Cary MID, RN

Ship's Company

Chief Petty Officer Harold Abbott DSM. RN No. 8268
Chief Petty Officer Charles Vaughan MID, RAN (Ex-RN) No. 8259
Chief Engine Room Artificer Class 11 Harry Burton Broomhead DSM. RN No. X278
*Chief Stoker Charles Varcoe RN No. 8275
Petty Officer Cecil Arthur Bray RAN No. 7296
*Petty Officer Stephen John Gilbert RAN No. 8053
Engine Room Artificer Class I Peter Fawns RN No. 8285
Leading Seaman Charles Holdernes RN No. 8270
Leading Seaman George Henry Nash RAN (Ex-RFR) No. 8056
Leading Signalman Albert Norman Charles Thomson RN No. 8271
Leading Stoker John Kerin RAN No. 7391
Able Seaman John Harrison Wheat RAN No. 7861
Able Seaman Benjamin Talbot RAN (Ex RN) No. 8221
Able Seaman Alexander Charles Nichols RAN No. 7298
*Able Seaman Albert Edward Knaggs RAN (Ex RFR} No. 7893
Able Seaman William Thomas Cheater RAN (Ex-RN) No. 7999
Able Seaman Lionel Stanley Churcher RAN (Ex-RN) No. 7970
Telegraphist William Wolseley Falconer RAN No. 1936
Stoker James Cullen RAN No. 2826

Stoker Horace James Harding RAN No. 7216
Stoker William Brown Jenkins RAN No. 2080
Stoker Charles George Suckling RAN No. 214X
Stoker Thomas Henry Walker RN No. 8289
*Stoker Michael Williams RAN. No. 2305
Stoker Thomas Wishart RN. No. 8277
Engine Room Artificer Class I James Henry Gibson RN. No. 8273
Enginy Officer Herbert Alexander Brown DSM RAN (Ex-RN) No. 8096
Stoker Petty Officer Henry James Elly Kinder MID, RAN No. 7244
EngineRoom Artificer Class 11 Stephen Thomas Bell MID,. RN No. 8272

* Died in Captivity.