Gallipoli: The War at Sea: An Overview

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The British naval campaign in the Dardanelles offers an alternative view of how the First World War might have been fought if Britain had not been entangled in a Continental Alliance. It also illustrates some of the enduring strategic and tactical lessons of naval warfare at a time when the protagonists of the traditional battleship as the epitome of naval supremacy were beginning to come under pressure from the gradual emergence of effective air and underwater craft.

On the 10th August 1914 the German battlecruiser *Goeben* and the light cruiser *Breslau* arrived at the entrance to the Dardanelles Straits hotly pursued by the British Mediterranean Fleet. This symbolically forced the Turks to decide whether their future lay with Great Britain and the Entente or Germany and the Central Powers. In truth there was nothing much left to decide as German diplomacy had attained a stranglehold on the Minister of War Enver Pasha and the 'Young Turk' grouping that had come to power in Turkey in the 1908 coup d'etat. The *Goeben* passed through the Straits and which were the closed to the British. War was inevitable and although delayed was duly declared by Turkey on 31st October, 1914

The British Empire was built on a fairly simple long-term strategy of using naval power defensively to prevent any invasion force in getting across the Channel. Offensively it was used to concentrate what limited military power was available at the decisive point - wherever that might be across the whole globe - to achieve maximum strategic effect at minimal cost in resources. Direct military involvement in European continental wars was an anathema to be avoided wherever possible - usually by the sort of diplomatic manoeuvring which earned Britain the title of 'perfidious Albion'. In the First World War this slightly elegant detachment was shattered by the commitment to France.

Nevertheless there were those (particularly the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill) who retained a belief in the ability to use naval power in a more traditional British manner to somehow breakthrough the stranglehold posed by the Western Front. The entry of Turkey into the war appeared to offer a vista of glittering prizes and the key was inevitably seen as the Dardanelles Straits. If these Straits could be forced then Constantinople and the Bospherous were the real objectives of the putative campaign. The fall of Constantinople was presumed to inevitably lead to the end of effective Turkish participation in the war with incalculably beneficial effects for Britain throughout the East and Balkans; whilst the control of the entrance to the Bosphorus offered access to the agricultural resources of Russia and a means of funnelling in the munitions she so desperately needed.

The problem was that the forcing of the Straits had long been recognised as an extremely difficult operation of war. They were narrow, long, with a powerful four knot current flowing

from the Sea of Marmora to the Aegean with hills on either side. In short they were ideal for the deployment of fixed and mobile gun batteries, torpedoes and mines in a system of integrated defence where each component prevented the destruction of the other without unacceptable casualties. The Straits had been breached by Admiral Duckworth in 1807 but the problem then had been what to do on reaching the Marmora - the only means of supply lay behind them still dominated by the coastal batteries - and after a period of dithering a somewhat ignominious retirement had followed. One hundred years later the General Staff had examined the problem in 1906 only to conclude that,

> *Military opinion looking at the question from the point of view of coast defence, will be in entire agreement with the naval view that unaided action by the fleet, bearing in mind the risk involved is much to be depreciated.*

This reflected the abiding if simple principal of naval tactics - that in any action between naval units and shore fortifications the balance of power usually lies with the side that will not sink if badly damaged. For successful operations to be undertaken then it was essential to use the army to overcome the fortifications in close co-operation with the navy.

Unfortunately in 1914 the chances of a successful operation in the Dardanelles had been greatly diminished when the allies had bombarded the outer forts of the Straits defences on 3rd November. This had drawn attention to the unprepared nature of the Turks defences; they were considerably improved and developed with German assistance. Thus the possibility of surprise which adds so much to the effective wielding of strategic naval power had already been gratuitously abandoned.

In December 1914 there came a bombshell when the Russians requested tangible assistance to relieve Turkish military pressure on their hard pressed army in the Transcaucasian area. For various reasons this had to be taken seriously and in the rush to oblige basic principles were abandoned. An attack on the Dardanelles was the obvious point of effective pressure - but the requisite manpower could not be spared from the continental war against the 'main' enemy on the Western Front and newly formed wartime units were not yet fully trained.

In these circumstances the Admiralty asked Admiral Carden, in command of the Mediterranean fleet, whether he considered the Straits could be forced by ships alone. Carden was naturally cautious in his reply of 5th January stating that he did not think that the Straits could be rushed but that extended operations with a large number of ships might be successful. After what would seem to be inadequate consideration this proposal was put to the War Council in London who in their infinite wisdom ordered that:

> *The Admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula, with Constantinople as its objective.*

The Admiralty had a large number of Pre-Dreadnought battleships which although no longer fit to take their place in the 'line' with the Grand Fleet in the North Sea, were thought fit for the

operation in hand. In addition the super-dreadnought HMS *Queen Elizabeth* was sent to finish her sea and gunnery trials during the operations. These units were to be joined by a French fleet in the Aegean Sea. Despite the concentration on the navy's role over the next two months the necessity of sending at least some troops to 'garrison' the presumed conquests of the fleet caused extreme confusion in London. At the centre of this was the chronic dithering of Lord Kitchener as to the availability or otherwise of the last regular division remaining in reserve, and so piecemeal additions were made to the land forces who were placed under the command of Sir Ian Hamilton. These troops were in no way prepared for an out and out landing on a hostile coast.

By February the Turkish defences of the Dardanelles consisted of three distinct zones. The Outer Defences at the entrance, where the Dardanelles met the Aegean, were formed by two permanent forts on each of the European and Asiatic coasts. The bombardment in November 1914 had made plain the vulnerability of these forts and they now played only a limited part in the overall plan of defence. The next ten miles between the entrance and Kephez Point, running on the Asiatic shore along the edge of Erin Keui Bay, were protected by the Intermediate Defences. Central to these were nine line of mines laid across the uppermost two miles of this area and, after a tenth line had been laid towards the end of February, the total number of mines in this field reached nearly 400. Complementing further permanent gun positions, the approach to these mines was protected by batteries of mobile howitzers and field guns stationed along both coasts. The purpose of these lighter calibre guns, which could have only a limited effect on large, armour plated warships, was to harass and prevent if possible the sweeping of the mines by smaller, unprotected vessels. To safeguard the mines during the night a number of powerful searchlights had also been placed along both coasts. Additionally, in order to confuse any ships attempting to find the mobile guns amongst the plentiful cover offered by the rugged land behind the shorelines, the Turks had also constructed a series of dummy batteries which fired black smoke. Beyond Kephez Point the promontories of Kilid Bahr on the European coast and Chanak on the Asiatic constricted the Dardanelles into the Narrows which ran for seven miles as far as Nagara Point. This area was protected by the Inner Defences which consisted of eleven forts each equipped with several heavy guns, together with more mobile field guns. However, many of the heavy guns were old and their range was limited. From Nagara Point to the Marmora the Straits of the Dardanelles were relatively unprotected.

Issued on 14th February, Vice Admiral Carden's final orders for the naval attack outlined a plan based on seven main phases to advance the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron from the Aegean to the Sea of Marmora.[i] Phase 1 of Carden's plan entailed the reduction of the Outer Defences. Initially this was to be done by the ships from long range fire using their heavy, primary armament. Once the guns in the forts appeared to have been silenced, the ships were then to move in to close range and continue the bombardment with their lighter, secondary armament before levelling a final onslaught to overwhelm what remained of the guns on land. Throughout, the rate of fire was to be carefully controlled, both to conserve ammunition for the subsequent phases of the attack and to minimise wear on the guns.

The attack against them began shortly before 10.00 on 19th February and the first ship to open fire was the battleship HMS *Cornwallis*. Her gunnery officer was Lieutenant Harry Minchin.

> *Five of us were lined up at about 5 - 7 miles from the Dardanelles in various positions & the signal was made to commence operations. We were told off for Fort 4 on the Asiatic Shore, at 12,000 yards. I was up in the crows nest, at a height of about 150 feet or so, so I got a good view. At any rate I gave the order to fire the first gun of the whole proceedings & scored a jolly good hit first go. The rate of fire was very slow, about one round every minute, as we were outside their range. This lasted for the forenoon. In the afternoon us & the Vengeance got closer, at about 8,000 yards to 5,000 yards & the Vengeance was then under quite a heavy fire. So we rushed in to support her & fairly blazed at the fort, every gun in the ship going off together & doing two rounds a minute at least from every gun. We blew No.1 fort to a perfect inferno, rocks & smoke, flame, dust & splinters all in the air together. We then got under fire from another fort, so we switched onto her then & never in my life have I had such a ripping time. We weren't hit, although we had a few close shaves. I think our rate of fire must have put them off their stroke. 3,000 lbs of shell a minute bursting all round one must be a bit disconcerting, you know.*[ii] **Lieutenant Harry Minchin RN**

The early signs of success from the long-range bombardment were soon shown to be deceptive. When the ships closed in the Turkish gunners revealed they were simply waiting for their targets to approach and fire began. Despite the effect on international opinion of the announcement in London of the beginning of the attack, in the Dardanelles it was clear before nightfall that the actual achievements of the first day had been very limited. The hope that the weight of the ships' gunfire would be as successful against the forts as the German howitzer fire in Belgium in August 1914 proved to be forlorn. The flat trajectory of the naval shells was incapable of matching the success of the high arching howitzer shells, and because of this the ultimate effect of the fire, although equally as heavy in weight, was much less severe. In addition the naval shells were armour piercing with delayed fuses intended to achieve maximum devastation inside the superstructure of an enemy ship. But against land forts this delay often meant that the shell buried itself in the fortifications before exploding and spent its destructive force with little success. Shrapnel shells might have proved effective against the crews of the Turkish guns but stocks were limited and the gunnery officers of the ships were inexperienced in using this type of ammunition.

Carden had intended to resume this phase of the attack on the following day but bad weather developed overnight and operations had to be suspended. This enforced delay was intensely frustrating as it allowed the Turks valuable time to recover from the first attack and repair the limited damage that it had caused. It was not until the 25th February that the four modern guns of the outer forts were silenced, the forts abandoned by the Turks and the entrance to the Straits swept of mines. Over the next few days Royal Marine demolition parties were successfully landed to complete the destruction of the guns.

Phase 2 of Carden's plan involved the sweeping of the minefield at the entrance and the reduction of the Intermediate Defences. With the first part of this phase completed immediately after the end of Phase 1 on 25th February, the second part began on the following day. The fire of the ships was turned from the forts at the entrance to those along the shore between there and Kephez Point. But as the ships moved forward they found the fire of the mobile guns, carefully hidden on the shore, to be more of a hindrance than the permanent works. Over the first ten days of March, despite regular attempts to destroy them, the fire from these guns persisted. Although Gibson could frequently locate the field guns from his station in the foretop, he found himself unable to convey this knowledge to the gunners below.

> *Could see flashes & smoke of guns but very hard to get gunlayers to see any sufficiently prominent mark to lay on anywhere at all ... The country is so alike nothing remarkable stands out & as from the guns the batteries are as a rule invisible, an aiming mark must be given for layers to aim at, the spotter then spotting the fall of shot onto the desired place. It was very hard to get the aiming mark.*[iii] **Commander Worsley Gibson RN**

On 5th March a new approach was adopted for which great hopes were held. The *Queen Elizabeth* took up a station off Gaba Tepe and shelled the forts around Chanak across the intervening ground of the peninsula into the unprotected rear areas of the forts. The Royal Naval Air Service seaplanes were unfortunately a great disappointment, suffering from serious mechanical failures and an inability to gain sufficient altitude in order to spot the fall of shot over the Peninsula. Nevertheless the huge 15" shells bursting out of the blue appeared to cause significant damage and on the next day the operation was repeated. When the *Queen Elizabeth* appeared off Gaba Tepe for the second time a Turkish battery, which had been moved into position there, opened fire on her. Although it caused no damage, she was forced to move away from the coast before opening fire and the impact of her fire was consequently much reduced. The lack of any real effect of the experiment was confirmed when, the following day, the *Queen Elizabeth* entered the Dardanelles to attempt firing directly at the forts - and they opened fire on her as if nothing had happened. The previous days' bombardments had apparently had no effect. The failure of the RNAS to provide effective air spotting can be laid down to the unreliability of the seaplanes, a lack of practise in the whole process of aerial gunnery spotting, and a failure to conserve what few efficient flying hours each seaplane could contribute for such an important experiment.

Ominously the Turkish gunnery had markedly improved and damage to the ships and casualties amongst their crews, although not severe, became a regular feature of the operations. Despite the protection of their armour plating, the arching trajectory of the howitzer shells were often able to find vulnerable points in the ships' superstructure. When this occurred the resulting level of damage could be sometimes be considerable.

Working simultaneously with both the bombardment of the shore defences and the landing of demolition parties, the minesweeping operations also continued and, working both day and night, gradually advanced through the lower reaches of the Intermediate Defences. But, once again, from the outset, considerable difficulties were encountered. The failure of the ships to silence the mobile guns meant that the unchecked fire from the shore continuously hampered the sweeping, which was being carried out by former trawlers with civilian crews. The trawlers were able to make little headway against the current of around 4 knots that swept down the Dardanelles, and this significantly increased their vulnerability. In addition, and in order to be able to gain sufficient momentum to pull their sweeps through the minefields they were forced to position themselves above the field and then sweep back through it using the strength of the current to aid them. But still they were only able to reach speeds of about 5 knots, whilst naval minesweepers would have reached a speed closer to 12 knots. At the root of the problem was the actual system of minesweeping they were attempting to employ. This necessitated the trawlers working in pairs towing a two and a half inch cable behind them, which was meant to catch the mine's mooring wire. As their speed was to low to 'cut' the cable they had to then tow the mine to shallow water and sink it by rifle fire. This was an extremely difficult undertaking under heavy fire.

As a result of all of these problems attempts to sweep the minefields at the head of the Intermediate Defences by day were abandoned soon after the beginning of March but the same difficulties persisted at night. On 12th March Carden decided to bolster the civilian crews of the trawlers with Royal Navy personnel. A naval officer was placed in command of each trawler. However, these experienced men were still unable to overcome the trawlers' fundamental problem - lack of power. One of the senior officers temporarily appointed to the trawlers was Lieutenant Commander John Waterlow RN and on the night of 13th - 14th March he went up at the head of the flotilla in trawler *No.48* commanded by Lieutenant Pitts.

> *Shortly before we passed the first searchlight, which is on the North shore, by the mouth of what we called the "Swanee River" [Soghanli Dere], came the flash of a warning gun, then another and another. Pitts said quietly: "We should soon be in it now", and I breathed a prayer. Strange, but from this point on I felt much better. A little later a battery on the North shore opened a desultory fire, not very alarming, and the shot not falling very close to us. Then we passed a line of buoys. Pitts told me they were Turkish range buoys and marked the beginning of the hot zone. After this, searchlight after searchlight began to open on both sides, and the fire became denser and was delivered from both banks. For the first time I heard shell whistling over my head. Like everybody does I ducked but got over the desire to do that in a very few minutes. I asked the skipper how he liked it, and he said he'd rather be fishing! By the time we got into the minefield the fire was terrific. Both banks blazed incessantly, and with the glare of the searchlights, which never left us for an instant, it was bright as day. A veritable hail of shell fell all around us. As leader I got the thick of it (Pitts had told me it would be so) ... It was now that the Royal Naval Reserve Petty Officer proved himself. He had been standing quietly in the wheel-house, arms folded majestically*

> *across his breast above the cork life-belt, when the two trawler-men at the wheel lost their heads and began to cringe. Lieutenant Pitts sent them below, and the old Petty Officer took over the wheel and steered absolutely unperturbed. A 6-inch shell hit the funnel so close to my head that scraps of paint and smuts covered me. Another shell passed through the after cabin, where two or three of the men were, going in one side and out at the other without bursting, and hit no one. The noise was deafening and made one's head ache.*[iv] **Lieutenant Commander John Waterlow RN**

The minesweeping was proving much more difficult than anticipated and consequently taking much longer to carry out.

On 9th March Carden reported to London that the lack of adequate air support to spot for the ships was hampering the destruction of the forts and mobile guns and that he would be obliged to concentrate on slowly sweeping the minefield before he could begin his attack on the Inner Defences. At the Admiralty Winston Churchill, who had expected the plan to be nearing completion shortly after this date, was beginning to grow impatient. On 11th March he replied to Carden that, whilst he recognised that his cautiousness was justified by the negligible casualties to date,

> *The results to be gained are, however, great enough to justify loss of ships and men if success cannot be obtained without.... We do not wish to hurry you or urge you beyond your judgement, but we recognise that clearly that at a certain period in your operations you will have to press hard for a decision'.*[v] **Winston Churchill**

On 13th March Churchill sent another personal and secret signal that reiterated this point.

> *I do not understand why mine-sweeping should be interfered with by firing which causes no casualties. Two or three hundred casualties would be moderate price to pay for sweeping as far as Narrows. I highly approve your proposal to obtain volunteers from the fleet for minesweeping. This work has to be done whatever the loss of life and small craft and the sooner it is done the better'.*[vi] **Winston Churchill**

In addition Churchill told Carden that information had been received in London that morale and stocks of ammunition in the Turkish forts were both low, and that the Central Powers were considering sending either a German or Austrian submarine to the eastern Mediterranean. These details and the tone of Churchill's signals began to increase the pressure on Carden to accelerate his rate of progress.

On 13th March a meeting of the captains of the leading ships of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, together with their gunnery officers, was called by De Robeck to discuss the idea of a rush through the Dardanelles, which Carden had specifically rejected in his first reply to Churchill at the beginning of January.

> *The Rear Admiral De Robeck first stated that mine sweeping was not getting on well, defence of guns & searchlights seemed well organised, & that a heavy concerted bombardment & rush through the Narrows was to be considered. The Gunnery point of view especially, as to distribution of fire among forts & method of attack etc. A certain amount of hot air talked but very little achieved. Everyone, or nearly so I believe, knew really that it would be madness to try & rush them. The Narrows are sure to be mined. It has been proved that bombardment silences forts but does little material damage to guns & only silences because gunners take cover. Personally I feel sure that it is pressure from our cursed politicians on the Vice Admiral which is making him even consider such a thing. A large army 60 or 70 thousand is collecting for [the] purpose of co-operation, the only way to tackle this job, & why not wait for them? Apart from the certain loss of men & ships of a rushing attempt now, the moral effect on navy would not be good if we failed, as I think very likely, & the effect on the enemy would be tremendous. I hope it is not tried & I somehow think it won't.*[vii] **Commander Worsley Gibson RN**

On the afternoon of the following day a second meeting was called on board the *Vengeance*, this time by Carden, to consider a provisional scheme drawn up by Captain Dent and Captain Campbell, respectively captains of the battleships HMS *Irresistible* and HMS *Prince George*. This scheme proposed not a rush through the Narrows but a concentrated attack on the guns and forts which protected the minefield at the head of the Intermediate Defences in order to establish control over them and so allow an effective sweep of the minefield. The scheme also emphasised the desirability of military co-operation in the attack by making landings at Sedd el Bahr and Kum Kale.

> *Captains Dent & Campbell had a fierce scheme for us all attacking Narrows en masse. Most people in their hearts I'm certain think its a huge mistake not to wait for soldiers & that co-operation of military is essential to success. Vice Admiral looked very worried. Somehow he doesn't seem a strong enough man for the job. I wonder if I would be strong enough to resist political pressure. I think I would rather be superseded than have my hand forced against my judgement. The end of the meeting was some such bombardment is apparently to be tried & orders were to be got out at once & distributed tonight for study. Then another council held tomorrow to discuss points & details.* **Commander Worsley Gibson RN**

On the day of the second meeting Carden forwarded an outline of the proposed plan to the Admiralty and they signalled their agreement to it on 15th March. In this signal Churchill toned down his earlier impatience and warned Carden that he should not risk the loss of the successes he had gained by attempting to rush the Narrows too fast. Despite this warning the pressure from Churchill was still intense and Carden informed London that the scheme would be implemented on the next fine day. As agreed the revised plan was also circulated amongst the fleet on 15th March, and following another meeting on 16th March on board the *Queen Elizabeth* it was formally adopted. However, the strain of the past weeks finally

overwhelmed Carden and on that same day he was placed on the sick list and on 17th March De Robeck was confirmed as acting Vice Admiral in command of the EMS.

The day after De Robeck had assumed command, the weather was fine, with a cloudless sky and a warm southerly breeze, and on 18th March the plan was put into practice.[viii] The fleet was divided into three lines of attack, 'A', 'B' and 'C'. Line 'A', made up of the more modern ships consisting of the *Queen Elizabeth*, the *Agamemnon*, the battleship HMS *Lord Nelson* and the battlecruiser HMS *Inflexible*, was to proceed up the Dardanelles first into Erin Keui Bay and open fire in line abreast at a range of 14,000 yards on the forts positioned around Kilid Bahr and Chanak. As soon as the fire of these ships had started to take effect, Line 'B' (the French battleships *Gaulois*, *Charlemagne*, *Bouvet* and *Suffren)* would steam from a position of one mile to the rear and pass through the ships of line 'A' and continue to engage the same targets until they had closed to a range of only 8,000 yards. The *Prince George* and the *Triumph* were to cover the flanks of both of these lines by engaging the forts of the Intermediate Defences, whilst also trying to silence the mobile guns positioned along both shorelines. The remaining ships of Line 'C', the *Vengeance*, the *Irresistible*, the *Albion* and the battleship HMS *Ocean*, were to act as reliefs, forming a new Line 'B' as and when necessary whilst the battleships HMS *Majestic* and HMS *Swiftsure* were available to replace the flank guards.

There were no illusions about the power of the Turkish defences, with the six main forts at the Narrows acknowledged to contain forty-two guns of at least 8" calibre, including six of 14", and since the start of the naval bombardments the number of mobile guns had steadily increased despite all the effort of the British to destroy them. Under the cover of the ships' bombardment, it was intended that the mine sweeping would begin two hours after the start, to clear a passage around 900 yards wide which would enable would the fleet to advance into Sari Siglar Bay (a small inlet on the Asiatic shore beyond Kephez Point) and from there further reduce the forts of the Narrows. Pressure was to be maintained on the forts during the night, although the majority of the fleet was to withdraw temporarily, and on the following day the forts were to be finally smashed at close range. The ships would then begin their preparations for an entry into the Sea of Marmora.

By the morning of 18th March the mine-sweepers had reported that the Dardanelles were clear of mines to within 8,000 yards of the Narrows forts, which meant that the area in which the fleet would have to manoeuvre was presumed safe. Unfortunately this was not the case. Ten days earlier, on March 8th, the Turkish minelayer *Nousret* had successfully laid a line of twenty moored mines parallel to the shore of Eren Keui Bay after observing that the British battleships had manoeuvred there on the previous day. This single line of mines was to prove fatal to the Allied plan.

At 10.30, Line 'A' entered the Dardanelles preceded by their picket boats and the *Chelmer* and a second destroyer HMS *Colne,* fitted with light mine sweeping gear who made a final check of the area. The battleships then advanced to their firing positions, coming under

irritating but relatively ineffectual howitzer and light artillery fire, and at about 11.30 they opened fire on their target forts; with the *Queen Elizabeth* firing at the Asiatic forts and the *Agamemnon*, *Lord Nelson* and *Inflexible* taking on those on the European shore. The ships fired well but the forts for the most part held their fire. Signs could be seen that the bombardment was having a material effect including a heavy explosion inside the main Chanak fort.

In view of this apparent success, at 12.06, De Robeck ordered Line 'B' to pass through Line 'A' and commence the close bombardment. However, as the French ships began to move forward, more and more of the concealed Turkish batteries and intermediate forts started to find the range of the British ships, particularly those closer to the Asiatic shore. Over the next hour the *Agamemnon* and HMS *Inflexible* suffered hits, causing the *Inflexible* to temporarily fall out of the line. In the face of the increasingly heavy fire from all sides as the apparently undamaged guns of the Narrows' forts joined in the fray, the French ships of Line 'B' pressed on bravely. They closed to 10,000 yards and appeared to be hitting their targets and a tremendous duel ensued as the two lines of battleships shot it out with the forts. At 13.45, De Robeck judged that the Turks' fire was slackening and so ordered the mine-sweepers to begin moving up to clear the channel through which the fleet were to approach to decisive range. The reserve British division was also ordered up to relieve the French in Line 'B' who were inevitably beginning to suffer severe damage. But as the British ships began to move forward the first real disaster occurred. From the *Queen Elizabeth*, Lieutenant Douglas Claris noted that 'the French ships, still firing, started retiring. At 2pm a small cloud of yellowish smoke, which turned black afterwards, came out of the starboard quarter of the *Bouvet*'.[ix] This moment could be seen as the beginning of the end for the Allied attack…

> *I noticed the Bouvet was heeling to starboard & said so to McB. & even as I spoke she was listing more & more & it was evident she was badly wounded. She was steaming quite fast & went over & over until she was on her beam ends & her masts went into the water, a lot of smoke & steam rolled out but no explosions took place & she turned bottom up for a few seconds. I saw a few figures on her bottom and then she disappeared. The whole thing didn't take two or three minutes at the most. I had no idea a ship could disappear so quick.... This rather shook us all for a moment I know I felt a bit staggered but tried to keep the fore top party from thinking about it. I told the faithful Popperwell to hand me my swimming collar - which made them all laugh.*[x]
> **Commander Worsley Gibson RN**

Despite this shattering sight the British relief ships continued their advance. After the British ships had replaced the wounded French line and the original two British flank guards at the head of the attack, they closed to the same range. But it was extremely difficult to determine the exact effect of their fire as the forts began to stop and then recommence firing at intermittent intervals. Both sides were now hitting hard and even the pride of the Royal Navy, the precious *Queen Elizabeth*, was taking punishment. The fleet returned this fire vigorously and the gunners worked steadily to maintain the bombardment. The firing of the guns was a

noisy and complicated business, as encapsulated by Midshipman Leslie Berridge in a description of the firing of the *Albion*'s primary armament.

> *From the Fore turret come hissings & rumblings as the cages are brought up. Then a metallic ringing as the proj. goes home, after that more clanking & in go the charges, finally a rumbling & the cage goes down. Then a clank & more hissing as the breach of the gun is closed & it is brought up to the horizontal. The hissing continues & the gun goes up & down, keeping it on the target. Ting, Ting, Ting, 3 times the fire gong rings, & suddenly the whole ship seems to lift and wobble, the wires of the shelterdeck screens tauten out & then go slack again & a brown cloud obscures every thing. The tremendous roar dies away & a rumbling, more punctuated with hissings, as the shell wobbled a little in its flight. After a few seconds the brown smoke clears, & you see a huge fountain of earth & stones go up close to the fort.*[xi] **Midshipman Leslie Berridge RN**

During a naval gun battle, as Private William Jones of the *Prince George* recalled, the inside of any gun turret was not a pleasant place to be.

> *I was a member of one of the six inch guns on the lower deck. There were eight of the crew and two by the ammunition hoist. We were in that casemate eleven hours. It was about fourteen feet wide and twelve feet deep. Inside it was very hot. Some of us were very scantily dressed. I was wearing a bathing costume and a pair of heavy boots in case a projectile dropped on your toe. Well, you can just imagine being in a very hot atmosphere like that. The old fellow, a corporal in the marines with a very heavy moustache, poor old chap! We gave him the lightest job that was there, but out he went - he was right out. We went round to see him and the gunlayer sergeant said: "Leave the old 'B' alone", and we carried on. Then the old fellow came a kind of around. It was no good trying to get him outside - we were forbidden to open the casemate door. There was cocoa, it was cold, and there was biscuits. No bread. Biscuits and some corned dog, otherwise known as corned beef! We were all packed in there in the morning and we were not allowed outside. There was an officer outside with a revolver, walking up and down. We were forbidden to go outside whatever. What we wanted to do we had to do in the casement, whatever it might be. When we loaded the gun it was quite a big job because the shell was about 112 pounds. You open up the breech of the gun, pulling the breech back. Up comes a No.4. He gets a shell on top of the shell guide, gets a rammer and rams home. A No.6 comes along with a cylinder and enters the tube, pushes it right home. A No.2 closes the breech. "READY". Immediately you stand clear from the gun and its fired by the No.1, the gunlayer. Then open the breech again. Get the extractor on your arm, that fits around the back of the cartridge, and you fling it aside, and I can assure you its red hot. Then the whole procedure is gone through again.*[xii] **Private William Jones**

Deep inside the bowels of the *Ocean* in the 12" magazine was Petty Officer George Morgan.

We soon began to pay our respects to the forts ashore as fast as we could send up ammunition. No thoughts of anything but charges and shells. "What the Dickens was that?" said one to me as a monster shell must have struck the armoured plating. "Oh! Someone's false teeth have fallen in the shell room", said another. Working in the magazine was like being in a tank with a party outside with different size hammers belting away. Now and then the ship would heel over, trembling, the thump of the propellers going now hard, now soft. The news came down that we were doing good work.[xiii] **Petty Officer George Morgan**

In front of Line 'A' the minesweeping trawlers had moved up and begun to sweep for mines. Ominously three were exploded in an area thought to have been cleared; these were probably from the line of twenty laid on 8th March. But no report of this was forwarded to De Robeck until the following day. Had he been informed on 18th March of the possible presence of mines in the area where his fleet was manoeuvring, many lives might have been saved. However, the crews of the trawlers were unable to carry out their duties in the face of Turkish fire and retreated with their task uncompleted. De Robeck's Chief of Staff, Commodore Roger Keyes, was critical of their performance attributing the retreat to their fear of the concealed howitzer and field batteries.

The fear of their fire was actually the deciding factor of the fortunes of the day. For five hours the Wear and picket boats had experienced, quite unperturbed and without any loss, a far more intense fire from them than the sweepers encountered.... the latter could not be induced to face it, and sweep ahead of the ships in 'B' line.[xiv]
Commodore Roger Keyes

With Erin Keui remaining unswept, at 16.11, the *Inflexible*, after bringing a fire on board under control, had returned to her station on the right of Line 'A'. She ran into a mine causing severe damage to her starboard bow.

We felt a frightful shock and the whole ship shook and rocked. I thought it was a mine and went up to the next deck to see what was up. Shortly, there sounded the 'clear lower deck' bugle and then one came running 'everyone on deck'... Of course the poor wounded had to be man-handled in no very gentle fashion to get them up on deck quickly.[xv] **Fleet Paymaster Henry Horniman RN**

Just three minutes later, at 16.14, the *Irresistible* also struck a mine.

About 4 PM a great shock was felt which lifted the whole ship up. She at once listed to starboard, having been struck in the starboard engine room, which filled up very quickly & a Warrant Officer & three men being drowned. The bulkhead between the two ERs gave way & she righted a bit. The order was given for everyone to come on deck. Everybody came up from below & started throwing everything that would float overboard, as we thought that we should have to swim as there were not any destroyers or anything near. We were subjected to heavy fire from the forts.... We

> *were hit twice by shells, one lydite on the after conning tower & another which entered the Commander's upper deck cabin after passing through the officers' WCs.*[xvi]
> **Midshipman Owen Ommaney RN**

From the *Albion* the plight of the *Irresistible* was painfully obvious.

> *The batteries got the range of her & began to drop shell all around her & occasionally hit her. It was simply damnable to see her drifting helplessly along there with her crew quietly standing about or throwing planks & anything that would float overboard'*.[xvii]
> **Commander Worsley Gibson**

Captain Arthur Hayes-Sadler, of the *Ocean* was ordered to take the *Irresistible* in tow if necessary whilst the *Albion* did everything she could to provide covering fire. The destroyer HMS *Wear* played a vital role in bringing assistance and managed to take off 28 officers and 582 crew whilst the captain and a few selected volunteers remained aboard to prepare the ship for towing. The *Wear* unloaded the rescued crew aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* and reported to De Robeck that the damage had been done by a mine. Still trusting the earlier reports that the whole area had been cleared of moored mines, he not unnaturally considered that this was probably a floating mine such as had been reported by some of the picket boats and that nothing further could be achieved until some effective defence against this new threat had been devised. He therefore ordered the advanced Line 'B' to fall back and withdraw from the Dardanelles. Keyes was given permission to accompany the *Wear* back to the *Irresistible* and De Robeck authorised him to direct the captain of *Ocean* to take *Irresistible* in tow without further delay.

By the time the *Wear* returned, the *Irresistible* was under heavy fire from the forts of the Intermediate Defences, as well as various mobile batteries, and the remaining ships of Line 'B' were also now withdrawing.

> *I could see no sign of life on board the Irresistible when the Wear ran alongside her at 5.20pm. and concluded that the captain had decided to abandon her and go aboard the Ocean, as an hour had passed since she was disabled, and the Ocean seemed to have no intention of taking her in tow. This was shortly afterwards confirmed. Under the circumstances, I think the captain of the Irresistible was justified.*[xviii] **Commodore Roger Keyes**

The *Irresistible* was still drifting towards the Asiatic shore and if there was to be any chance at all of saving her she would have to be pulled into the current moving down the Dardanelles. As time was pressing Keyes attempted to force the issue and signalled to the *Ocean*: to take *Irresistible* in tow, to which the *Ocean* replied that there was insufficient water to do so. Keyes was not happy but Hayes-Sadler was his senior and he could not issue an order in his own name.

> *As it was evident that the captain of the Ocean still did not think it possible to take the Irresistible in tow, and she was steaming about firing rapidly to no purpose, since there was nothing to be gained by expending ammunition except for a definite object, I signalled: "If you do not propose to take Irresistible in tow, the Admiral wishes you to withdraw".*[xix] **Commodore Roger Keyes**

At this stage Keyes turned his attention back to the damaged *Irresistible*.,

> *She had lost her list, was practically on an even keel, and though down by the stern, she seemed still to have plenty of buoyancy and was apparently no lower in the water than when I had arrived nearly an hour previously. So I decided to leave her and go full speed to the Admiral to suggest that trawlers might try and tow her into the current after dark. The Ocean was still steaming about blazing away at the forts much to my anxiety, as it was obvious that the enemy had some unpleasant form of mine about, and it seemed only a question of time before she hit one.*[xx] **Commodore Roger Keyes**

Almost inevitably as soon as the *Ocean* finally began to withdraw at 18.05 she also struck a mine, followed a moment later by a heavy shell, and the shock penetrated to the 12" magazine below the water line.

> *I was about to hand out a charge for the loading tray, when bang!! The force of the blow lifted me off the floor with the charge in my arms. We didn't need ask what it was. The order came, "Close magazines and shell rooms". The men all went up the trunk from my magazine, but it was my duty to see all the ventilators fastened and water tight in case they wanted to flood the magazine to avoid an explosion. It only took a few minutes but it seemed such a time to me, but at last it was finished. There was only one way to get out and that was through the shell-room escape hatch. To my joy it was open. I was soon through and closed it behind me. But my troubles were not over. Supposing the other hatch above me was closed? Anyone seeing it open in passing would close it. I lost no time. Just as I reached the ladder I heard someone raising the catch to let it down. I yelled, and whoever it was didn't stop to argue. I was soon through.*[xxi] **Petty Officer George Morgan**

It was obvious there was no hope; at least so it appeared to Captain Hayes-Sadler who was not, it seems, an optimistic man concerning the possibilities of salvaging crippled pre-dreadnoughts. The nearby destroyers were immediately ordered to close to rescue survivors and their promptness meant that the crew were safely taken of and she was finally abandoned at 19.30.

By this time the fleet had withdrawn but Keyes was still confident that both the *Irresistible* and *Ocean* could be saved and returned to report this view to De Robeck. Having done this, and obtained De Robeck's permission to torpedo them if his attempt failed, he then boarded the destroyer HMS *Jed* and re-entered the Dardanelles. However, by the time he arrived in Erin Keui Bay both ships had disappeared, having sunk during the night. His experiences during

the search convinced him that, despite all the losses and difficulties which had characterised the day, it had been a success.

> *Except for the searchlights there seemed to be no sign of life and I had a most indelible impression that we were in the presence of a beaten foe. I thought he was beaten a 2pm I knew he was beaten at 4pm - and at midnight I knew with still greater certainty that he was absolutely beaten; and it only remained for us to organise a proper sweeping force and devise some means of dealing with drifting mines to reap the fruits of our efforts. I felt that the guns of the forts and batteries and the concealed howitzers and mobile field guns were no longer a menace. Mines moored and drifting must, and could, be overcome.*[xxii] **Commodore Roger Keyes**

This was not the impression gained by other experienced naval commanders in the area, but Keyes firmly believed it, agitating for a resumption of the naval offensive for the rest of the campaign, and he continued to believe it for the rest of his life.

Of the other damaged ships, almost miraculously, the *Inflexible* was saved and eventually run aground at Tenedos. The badly hit *Gaulois*, which had been taking in water, was beached on one of the smaller islands nearby. Whatever belief Keyes might have held, the reality of 18th March was that it had been a severe defeat for the Allied fleet. Of the sixteen capital ships engaged, three had been sunk and three more put out of action for a prolonged period. Yet almost nothing had really been achieved. Although the forts had been heavily damaged they had the great advantage of not having to stay afloat. Repairs could, and would, be made. The *Bouvet*, *Irresistible* and *Ocean* were irrecoverable at the bottom of the sea. The sinking of the *Bouvet* in particular had highlighted the speed with which these 'expendable' old pre-dreadnoughts could sink, leaving no opportunity to rescue their invaluable crews. The attempt to speed up the rate of progress through the Dardanelles had been counter-productive and the fleet had in practice been set back. The minefields - the true defenders of the Straits - remained intact. In what was to prove one of the most concentrated naval actions of the war, the Royal Navy had failed.

> *This is just what one might expect, & what we really did more or less. Every book on war ever written always states the fact that politicians interfering with Commanders in the field always lead to disaster but still they think they are born strategists & know alls & do it again & again.*[xxiii] **Commander Worsley Gibson RN**

PART II

Failure on March 18th lead to a complete reversion of roles. Initially de Robeck was intent on resuming the onslaught on the Straits as soon as possible and the Admiralty promised a further four Pre-dreadnoughts to replace casualties. However given time to reflect on the losses de Robeck lost his nerve in the face of the continuing uncertainty as to the exact cause, and a fear that without the Army securing the control of the Peninsula his lines of communication would be cut. At a conference aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* with Hamilton it was decided that the Navy was to wait until the Army had captured Achi Baba, the low but dominant heights above the Helles Plain. They would then launch attacks on the minefield defences in tandem with the advance of the Army along the Peninsula until the Kilid Bahr Plateau and forts were taken. The Army was expected to take Achi Baba on the first day but in fact in nine months of tortuous fighting never succeeded in this aim. As such the naval attack remained stalled.

From this point the Army was to be responsible for taking control of the Gallipoli Peninsula whilst the Navy provided any support required. Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that it was only the naval supremacy wielded by the Royal Navy over the entire Mediterranean and Aegean area which allowed the army to exist there at all. The navy allowed the troop transports to travel from Europe, Australasia and North Africa; the navy established the forward bases on the offshore islands of Lemnos amd Imbros without which no serious campaign could be launched and maintained; the navy provided the small boats, the expert helmsmen and the covering fire during the landing on April 25th; once ashore the navy facilitated the passage of reinforcements, munitions and supplies, as even water supplies had to be brought right across the Mediterranean from Egypt; the navy provided the submarines which heroically penetrated the Narrows underwater nets and defences to reach the Sea of Marmora where they caused real inconvenience to the Turks own supply operations; and finally the Royal Naval Air Service maintained a steady improvement in reconnaissance, bombing and artillery observation.

The security of all the hard won but small bridgeheads at Helles, Anzac Cove and Suvla Bay was underpinned by the British naval supremacy. The presence of the fleet and its potential fire power, however unpredictable the level of accuracy, still gave the allied troops a welcome degree of moral and material support. But this position was soon dramatically altered by a series of disasters. The first occurred when the Turks launched a daring torpedo-boat raid on the two battleships and five destroyers posted each night to guard the army's flank in the Dardanelles. At 01.17 on 13th May the *Goliath* was on station in Morto Bay when it was struck by 3 torpedoes fired from the Turkish *Muavenet-i Millet*.

> *I was woken up by the explosions. The ship listed at once to an angle of 5 degrees to starboard. There was no panic as it was all too sudden for anyone to realise what had happened. I went up to the quarterdeck in my pyjamas. The ship was then heeling over fast. When the starboard side of the deck was level with the sea she stopped for*

about 60 seconds. Then she heeled rapidly again. Then I dived over the port side. I struck the side of the ship with my face. It was a horrid feeling as I felt my nose slithering over the wet side. I suppose I dived about 30 feet as I saw a good many constellations when I struck the water. I swam about 200 yards away & then turned round to see her sink. She had heeled back to almost an even keel & was going down bows first with her stern about 40 feet up in the air. You could plainly hear all the crockery and furniture tumbling about & breaking up inside her. She then heeled completely over until her bottom was uppermost & she slid right under. You could hear the cries of drowning men all round. I swam down with the current to the Cornwallis which I could dimly see in the dark about 2 miles away. There was a five knot tide helping me on. When I was about a mile from the scene of the disaster I came across a big spar about 30ft long. I hung onto it for a few minutes to get my breath & then abandoned it as I could get on quicker without. I was eventually picked up by the Lord Nelson's cutter & taken to a trawler.[xxiv] **Midshipman Wolstan Forester RN**

Forester had been fortunate as only 183 of the ship's complement of 750 survived. Although this attack was a serious set-back, tightened precautions greatly reduced the chance of a repeat performance.

A far more serious threat lay in the German submarines that had been despatched to the eastern Mediterranean. Of these the most effective was the *U21*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Otto Hershing, which had set off from the German naval port of Wilhelmshaven on 25th April. *En route* she was spotted many times and in anticipation of her arrival off the Gallipoli beaches anti-submarine precautions were adopted. On 17th May the number of battleships lying off Helles was reduced from seven to four and at Anzac the number was halved to only two. In the remaining ships a diligent anti-submarine watch was kept, anti torpedo nets were hung out and escorting destroyers tried to keep the U Boats away from their prey.

The *U21* reached Gallipoli on 25th May and went straight into action. At first the anti-submarine defences seemed to work. Destroyers spotted her periscope and prevented an attack on the *Swiftsure* off Helles, while a torpedo fired at the *Vengeance* was spotted and successful avoiding action taken. Moving north a new target in the form of the *Triumph* was stalked off Anzac. At 12.25 *U21* struck and although the torpedo was spotted it was too late.

I was range finder up in the aloft position. One day midday I came down to get my ration of rum. I'd just drunk it when I heard a lot of commotion, guns firing, so I immediately returned to my position. On my way up a torpedo struck us. Then when I did get up I saw one of our boys aiming his rifle at a torpedo coming through the water. Unfortunately he missed but he stuck to his post firing at this torpedo trying to divert it. No luck so it came through and hit us. We didn't know that the Germans had invented a net cutter on the front of the torpedo. We were protected by huge steel nets pushed out on booms to try and stop the torpedoes. But they just passed straight through and

> *hit us. I could feel the ship listing over. Remembering I had a brand new pair of boots on which I'd bought the previous day I took them off and hung them on the rigging thinking to myself that if nothing happened they'd still be there and I came down the rigging. By this time the ship was heeled pretty bad and the majority of the ratings were catching hold of the nets, the leeside, the side in the water. I didn't like the idea, I don't know why, and I jumped off and got in the water, Shortly after the destroyer Chelmer came up and started picking us out. Then she put her bows on the stern of the ship which by now had heeled almost on one side. A lot of the men got on board of her that way.* [xxv] **Ordinary Seaman W G Northcott**

As a result of England's skilful handling of the *Chelmer* only 75 men from the *Triumph* were lost.

The arrival of the German submarines changed the whole situation for the British supporting fleet. The loss of the *Triumph* caused the emergency withdrawal of all the remaining battleships to the protected anchorage of Imbros. The next day De Robeck decided that despite the risk two were always to remain available for supporting bombardments at Helles, one off Y Beach and one in the Dardanelles facing the Asiatic batteries. In accordance with this arrangement the *Majestic* was stationed off W Beach. Her presence was meant to improve morale ashore and reassure the infantry that the Royal Navy had not deserted them. But many saw her as a tethered goat and the end proved swift. Rowatt was sea bathing off W Beach when she was hit.

> *Suddenly her siren began to blast and to our amazement she began to roll over, with men jumping into the water. We grasped that she had been torpedoed and was sinking so we hurriedly pushed off one of these [derelict] boats wading out as far as we could, pushed her off and jumped in to discover that we had no oars, so we had to meekly swim ashore again whilst the battleship turned completely bottom up.*[xxvi] **Sapper Thomas Rowatt**

Once again casualties were mercifully slight and only 43 were killed.

It was to prove the high water mark of the German submarine campaign against the British capital ships. Although more and more U-boats arrived, they never again equalled these early triumphs. The navy ceased to expose battleships and cruisers off the Peninsula, keeping them instead at Imbros in Kephalo Bay unless the army specifically requested their heavy guns in support. Day to day support was provided by destroyers and later on by shallow draught monitors or ships filled with anti torpedo bulges around the water line. But the U-boats were successful in posing a perpetual threat to the British lines of communication which stretched back across the Mediterranean. Transports and shipping were sunk and administrative arrangements were rendered even more complicated. The disappearance of the larger ships also had a distinct effect on the morale of the British troops. Their presence had been deeply reassuring and indicative of a joint effort being made by the two services. To the soldiers as they faced the renewal of an offensive that had only been undertaken

because the navy had failed to pull off the campaign on its own, the withdrawal of the ships was seen as a desertion.

The land campaign at Gallipoli was perhaps always doomed to be a failure. This traditional exposition of British naval policy was fatally undermined by the perceived necessity of feeding the guns on the Western Front. A brilliant amateur strategic concept based on time honoured British naval and military policies but it could not succeed in 1915. The confused ad hoc nature of the planning was fatally coupled with a refusal to give up the kind of military resources that were really required to give a chance of success. As the summer months wore on at Gallipoli each under nourished effort to break the deadlock broke against unwavering Turkish opposition until finally evacuation became the only real question of the day. It was at this point Keyes that launched a full bodied attempt to have another naval attempt on rushing the Straits.

Commodore Roger Keyes had never accepted the failure to force the Narrows and he had been marshalling his arguments for another attempt.

> *The problem of forcing the Straits is not now so difficult as it was on the 18th March. An attack would probably surprise the enemy. It is possible that he has moved many of the small guns that make minesweeping so difficult. The presence of the long range monitors makes the attack on the Chanak Forts, Suan Dere Batteries and the Torpedo Tubes (if they can be located) much more deadly, as they can be shelled from the west side of the Peninsula. The Navy now possesses an efficient air service -balloon and aeroplane - so that difficulties of spotting are much less than when the Queen Elizabeth used indirect fire from Gaba Tepe. Above all there is now an efficient sweeping flotilla ... If the attack fails the Navy will be still easily capable of carrying on its present duties - the ships that will be risked are those at present in Mudros. If three or four ships succeed in entering the Marmora with say six to eight destroyers, the Squadron will, in combination with the submarines, be sufficient to complete the domination of that sea.*[xxvii] **Commodore Roger Keyes**

The improvement to the minesweepers held the key to any possible success. In March they had been unsuitable trawlers with a top speed of 5 knots working against the Straits 2 - 4 knot current and they were largely manned by partially trained civilians. Since then a number destroyers had been fitted up and trained as minesweepers. Trials were to show that they could sweep effectively at a speed of 14 knots which was felt would make them a difficult target for the shore batteries. In addition eight of the Grand Fleet minesweepers had arrived. Like Hamilton, Keyes was a man with a vision and he could be very persuasive indeed and Rear Admiral Wemyss, for one, was convinced.

> *I should find it very difficult not to agree with your memo of 17th. Whilst there was any chance of the Army winning through, the argument was different, but late events have quite altered the balance of the scales. A naval attack on our objective is the only way*

> *now to avert a winter campaign, whose greatest achievement can only be stalemate at the cost of much wastage.*[xxviii] **Rear Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss**

Vice Admiral de Robeck, the man who had to bear any responsibility for failure, was not so sanguine.

To attack the Narrows now with battleships would be a grave error, as chance of getting even a small efficient squadron past Chanak was very remote'.[xxix] Nevertheless he allowed Keyes to continue his planning and he was truly tireless: *'I never lost an opportunity of talking to the Admiral on the subject, and urging my view, but it was quite evident that he would have nothing to do with it*.'[xxx] In view of these tactics perhaps it was partially self interest and a desire for a quiet life which led de Robeck to allow Keyes to put his ideas forward in London. but after considerable discussion the First Sea Lord, Sir Henry Jackson, refused to countenance it on the grounds that without a joint military assault the ships would just get cut off even if they did reach the Sea of Marmora.

This question of whether the fleet would have made it through the Straits with a renewed assault is of perennial interest. In particular some have drawn attention to the fact that three pre-dreadnoughts were lost off Gallipoli which, they argue, would have been the likely losses in the event of a further effort in the Straits. In my view schemes such as the one proffered by Keyes which rely in essence on everything going right are not favoured by professional staff officers used to weighing the odds, or the admirals who have to carry the can in the event of failure. Hence it is no surprise that Keyes arguments for a renewed assault were rejected and indeed it is more of a surprise that the initial assault on March 18th was permitted.

But the future was beckoning and the Royal Navy did have a kind of revenge on the *Goeben* and *Breslau* when they emerged from the Straits on a raid in 1918. At the start Captain Donald Graham of the RNAS was lucky not to have a hangover!

We had a very successful party which lasted until one or two am. To everybody's horror we were wakened up in the very early hours if the morning by the shouts of, "The Goeben's out! The Goeben's out!" They had slipped out well before dawn slipping through our minefields quite successfully. The dawn patrol reported the Straits clear not knowing that the Goeben and Breslau were actually behind them and were out in the Aegean. Why they didn't attack Mudros and Lemnos and blow the Headquarters to pieces, I don't know. They may have thought the Lord Nelson was there but she was in dock in Malta. So there weren't any heavy ships to stop them. But they didn't - they turned back and that was where we came into the picture. I got a Camel, got the tank filled up and got going mainly to escort the bombers against attack from any German fighters from the mainland. We were hitting both ships with quite small bombs from a low height. In truth the bombs were not very heavy and they couldn't have done armoured ships much harm but the crews definitely lost their nerve and instead of proceeding in a straight line for the mouth of the Dardanelles they started to zigzag - and in a minefield that is fatal. [xxxi] **Captain Graham Donald, RNAS**

The *Goeben* and *Breslau* were armoured and the bombs, even when dropped accurately, did little damage. But there was a certain atavistic joy in shooting at these symbols of German naval might under their Turkish flags. They were also a potent distraction from the task in hand which was to navigate through the minefields.

When there were no German fighters appearing then just for the hell of it we attacked with machine guns pelting everything we could at them. Merely as gesture but it was quite funny to see machine gun bullets bouncing off conning towers. It couldn't do much harm unless you could shoot somebody through a slit. Anything you could do to rattle them - raking the decks with tracer. The Breslau hit several mines and began to sink most convincingly. So we concentrated on the Goeben and she hit at least two. Being a heavier armoured ship she didn't show such signs of distress but she slowed down and began to settle a bit lower in the water. By the time they reached the mouth of the Dardanelles the Goeben was going slowly and the Breslau had sunk. It wasn't our bombs that had sunk her but we'd bombed her on to the minefield so we claimed it as a RNAS victory. [xxxii] **Captain Graham Donald, RNAS**

The Straits and there minefields held no terrors for the British pilots who could follow where the fleet could not..

We followed the Goeben up the Straits. Machines were going back and forwards from Mudros and Lemnos, loading up with every bomb they could get, coming back over and pelting away. The Goeben was going slower and slower and by the time she was half way up from Cape Helles to Chanak we though she was just on the verge of sinking. The only thing they could do, and they did it brilliantly was beach her as fast as they could at Nagara Point which is just at the Hellespont on a very suitable sloping beach which allowed her to sit there without sinking, absolutely stuck solid. They had picked

> *a very good place to beach her at Nagara Point - it was the German Seaplane Station and had the finest battery of anti-aircraft guns in the Middle East. It was just the most gosh-awful place to fly at normal times let alone with the Goeben there. Believe me the sky was full of the stuff. They brought up their fighter squadrons and the air was stiff with German fighters. They were attacking our bombers - we got several shot down. The Camels job was to hang around the bombers and keep the fighters off and I think we got quite a few of them down.. A small Halberstadt Fighter climbed up to attack Rafe Sorley and Smithy in their DH4 at an unbelievably steep angle. He was right below me so I put my old Camel into a vertical pilot and practically fell on top of him with both Vickers going. He went down in a queer sort of tumbling spin - but nobody saw him crash. It was one long, confused melee of a dogfight above the Dardanelles - just one hell of a crowd of aircraft and anti-aircraft shells.* [xxxiii] **Captain Graham Donald, RNAS**

The problem was that the aerial bombs available although full of potential had relatively little high explosive!

> *We were bombing her from all heights and getting quite a lot of hits. We had every available thing we could get hold of to keep bombing her. The bombs weren't terrifically heavy - actual physical serious damage was just not on, the bombs were not powerful enough, they weren't armour piercing - but we weren't doing her any good. We were hoping to delay the repair long enough till she got stuck in the mud and she couldn't get off. But it just so happened they did - by going full speed astern when they'd got her patched, their luck was in, they slid off and she got away in the night.* [xxxiv] **Graham Donald**

The aircraft had failed on that occasion but the writing was on the wall for the battleship as the primary unit of naval warfare. Without protection from the air and under the sea they were little more than death traps by the time the Second World War started.

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[i]. *No.49 Memorandum: Orders for the forcing of the Dardanelles by the Allied Squadron*. Copy used in IWM DOCS, Captain H S Bowlby, RN, papers relating to his service as Flag Lieutenant to Rear Admiral and later Vice Admiral John de Robeck.

[ii]. IMW DOCS, Commander H F Minchin, RN, ms letters, letter dated 28th February 1915.

[iii]. Gibson, 1st March 1915.

[iv]. Quoted in Captain Eric Wheler Bush DSO DSC RN, *Gallipoli*,(London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975), pp45-6.

[v]. ? Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1915*, (London: Butterworth Ltd, 1923), pp217-8.

[vi]. Ms signal from First Lord of the Admiralty to Admiral Carden, 13th March 1915, in IWM DOCS, Rear Admiral H Miller, papers relating to his service as Naval Secretary to Rear Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss, Box 73/11/2.

[vii]. Gibson, 13th March.

[viii]. Operation Order No 4, Attack on Minefield at Kephez Point, 17th March 1915.

[ix]. IWM DOCS, Captain D J Claris RN, ms diary, entry dated 18th March 1915.

[x]. Gibson, 18th March 1915.

[xi]. Berridge, ms notebook, 'A Dardanelles Day'.

[xii]. IWM SR 4141, William Jones.

[xiii]. IWM DOCS, G Morgan, microfilm memoir, p?, also quoted in Bush, *Gallipoli*, p59.

[xiv]. Keyes, ???

[xv]. Horniman, diary, 18th March 1915 ?

[xvi]. Ommaney, account in Journal.

[xvii]. Gibson, 18th March 1915.

[xviii]. Keyes, *The Fight for Gallipoli*, p63-64.

[xix]. *Ibid*., p65.

[xx]. Keyes ???

[xxi]. Morgan, memoir, p?, also quoted in Bush, *Gallipoli*, p59-60.

[xxii]. Keyes, *The Fight for Gallipoli*, p69.

[xxiii]. Gibson, 18th March 1915.

xxiv. IWM DOCS, Lieutenant Commander W B C Weld-Forester RN, papers, ms letter dated 15th May 1915.

xxv. IWM SR 4187, W G Northcott.

xxvi. Rowatt, Vol.I.

xxvii. Keyes, *The Fight For Gallipoli*, p239-240.

xxviii. Keyes, *The Fight for Gallipoli*, p241.

xxix. Aspinall-Oglander, *Military Operations: Gallipoli*, II, p366.

xxx. Keyes, *The Fight for Gallipoli*, p255.

[xxxi]. Graham Donald, SR 18, Reel 10 & Additional Notes in Transcript:

[xxxii]. Graham Donald, SR 18, Reel 10 & Additional Notes in Transcript:

[xxxiii]. Graham Donald, SR 18, Reel 10 & Additional Notes in Transcript:

[xxxiv]. Graham Donald, SR 18, Reel 10 & Additional Notes in Transcript: