

# Submarine Operations in Support of the Gallipoli Campaign

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With the outbreak of WWI hundreds of New Zealanders joined the Royal Navy by transferring from NZ or by direct RN enlistment. The NZ Naval Defence Act 1913 formally established the New Zealand Naval Forces.

In October 1914, the Ottomans closed the Dardanelles to Allied shipping. The actual decision to close the strait seems to have been taken by German military advisors stationed in the Dardanelles without reference to the Ottoman government.

On 2 November 1914 Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire, followed by the British on 6 November. The naval operations in the Dardanelles Campaign were mainly carried out by the Royal Navy with substantial support from the French and minor contributions from Russia and Australia. When the main Dardanelles Allied surface fleet failed to overcome the Ottoman defenses, an invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula was launched in which naval forces (including Australians and New Zealanders) were heavily involved, transporting all the land forces including the ANZACs and keeping them well supplied. Throughout the campaign submarines passed through the Dardanelles to disrupt Ottoman Empire shipping in the Sea of Marmara.



Above the Allies surface fleet in the Dardanelles.

In December 1914, the Royal Navy Submarine HMS B11 was sent to the Dardanelles, commanded by Lt Cdr N Holbrook and sank the Ottoman battleship "Messudieh" in the Straits. The sinking was hailed as a massive victory and a major blow to the Ottoman forces and did a great deal to dampen the morale of the Ottomans. For all B11's success it was too small for the job required. The main task of the submarines in Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara was to create havoc by disrupting the supply lines of the Ottomans in the area. Any supply ship that ventured out into these waters became a target. The submarines were also expected to blockade the German heavy cruisers "Breslau" and "Goeben" that were based in Constantinople. The C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Carden, requested E-class submarines. The E-class had a much more powerful engine capable of generating 1600 hp and it had a submerged weight of 800 tons these gave the E-class a much better chance of getting through the Dardanelles / Straits to the Sea of Marmara. Originally the E-class had no deck gun but from May 1915 some were fitted with Nordenfeldt 6pdr quick-fire guns which were found to be too small so towards the end of the Gallipoli campaign Armstrong 12pdr quick-fire guns were fitted.



On 24 April 1915 the Australian submarine AE-2 (below) commanded by Irish born Lt Cdr Henry Stoker, was first to reach the Sea of Marmara, having found a way through the minefields. The presence of AE-2 in the Sea of Marmara greatly shook the morale of the Ottomans and the Allies had faith in AE-2 to turn the tide against the Ottomans. The ANZAC land forces had taken severe casualties at Gallipoli with their invasion from the 25<sup>th</sup> April and the general staff believed that AE-2 would

torpedo all the Ottoman ships bringing reinforcements, supplies and ammunition to Gallipoli. On 30 April 1915 AE-2 was damaged by shell fire from an Ottoman Torpedo boat (refer map above) and then scuttled by the crew and sank. All of AE-2's crew were saved and taken prisoners



On May 10th 1915, E-14 (commanded by Lt Cdr Boyle) sank the 5000 ton "Gul Djemal" which was carrying 6000 troops and a battery of artillery. In response to this, the Ottomans developed a 416km road/rail route which connected Constantinople to the Gallipoli war front. Thereafter most of the supplies went to Gallipoli by road/rail. For a very short period of time there were only four submarines in the Sea of Marmara, two of these were lost (AE-2 and E-15) but the Ottoman's always believed that eleven submarines were operating in the area.

On May 25th 1915, E-11 (commanded by Lt Cdr Nasmith) after finding a way through the mine fields and across the Sea of Marmara was in Constantinople harbour. This was the first time in 500 years that an enemy warship was in the harbour, the city was thrown into turmoil and disorder quickly broke out. E-11 sank the merchant ship "Stamboul". In itself, this was not very important. But the fact that it had occurred in the city's harbour was of huge importance.

In June 1915, E-7, commanded by Lt Cdr Cochrane, (in the crew was New Zealander born in Oamaru, Stoker Petty Officer John Archibald Wilson) also finding a way through the mine fields and across the Sea of Marmara bombarded the Zeitung Powder Mills in Constantinople. The submarine's small six-pounder gun could do little actual damage, but, once again, the psychological impact of the attack was great. The city was in uproar. The realisation that an enemy submarine had been in the harbour again was too much for the Ottoman authorities. All troops on board the transports were hurriedly disembarked and returned to barracks. All sailings were cancelled, and the shops were ordered to shut. E-7 destroyed two troop trains at Kava Burnu and the Gulf of Ismid. To guard against this, the Ottomans had to place medium artillery along the coastal routes where submarines might surface - these artillery pieces were withdrawn from the Gallipoli battlefields. On the 4 September 1915 E-7 got caught in the Nagara submarine net in the Dardanelles. For 12 hours the crew tried to free the submarine despite mines bursting around them however the submarine was "hopelessly entangled." A depth charge was dropped by the Ottomans and it exploded close to the hull wrecking the electric light fittings and other gear. The commanding officer Lt Cdr Cochrane realised that he had no option but to surrender which he did after he had destroyed the secret documents & codes. The crew was taken as POWs and sent to work in railway tunnels. E-7 was destroyed by an explosive charge from UB-14 the next day.



Interior of an E class submarine.

HMS E-7 before the 6pdr deck gun was fitted

The British submarines in the Dardanelles did not restrict themselves to just the sea. E-11's number 2, Lieutenant D'Orly Hughes with other crew members, went on land and destroyed nearly fifty metres of the Berlin to Baghdad rail line. However, this made the Ottomans even more vigilant and the rail line became even more heavily guarded. Towards the end of the Gallipoli / Dardanelles campaign, the E-class submarines used their Armstrong twelve pounder quick fire guns to attack ships and also land targets. The threat of the Ottomans land based artillery ended the tactics of the British submarines as they could not risk any damage to their fragile hulls. The ultimate impact of British submarines in the Dardanelles was not great in the sense that they did not change the course of the Gallipoli campaign. However, the submarines had proved that they were very valuable when used properly.

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