Gallipoli – AE2

Student activities

Task no. 1

Gallipoli – AE2

John H. Wheat photographs, ca. 1914-1918

The photo of the group of men (see collection items below) was taken a year before the attack on Turkey and does not show the entire crew of the AE2 as it was at that time.

Nearly half the AE2 personnel were Australian but the other half of the crew and the Commander were on loan from the Royal Navy. This was because the AE1 and the AE2 were the first submarines in the Australian Navy and there were almost no Australians with submarine experience.

This picture serves to remind us of the incredible bravery of these submariners. Lieutenant Commander Stoker pushed the Allied command into letting the AE2 attempt the passage through the straits after ships and several submarines had already been lost.

Realistically, they would have known that they would be hunted relentlessly by the Turkish Navy once they were in the confined waterways of the Sea of Marmara. Unless the invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula was successful and quick, the submariners would inevitably be killed or captured. Returning safely through the minefields while being swept along by the currents of the fast flowing straits would be unlikely.

Transcript: Brown war diary, February 10, 1914-November 5, 1918/Herbert A. Brown

What follows is a transcript of the Brown War Diary by Herbert A. Brown (see collection items below).

Arrived off Chanak (1) about 6 a.m made attack on Turkish Fleet Sunk a Minelayer ... with foremost Torpedo, was chased by Motor Boats and Torpedo Boats giving us a lively time, we ran ashore on a bank right under the Forts [and] was fired [on] by Ships and Forts got off and ran strait[straight] on[to] the opposite bank it being so narrow was fired on again but got off and dived again without being hit

... but we managed to get through to Sea of Marmara quite safe, then came to the surface...and continued to patrol and worry all shipping, made Wireless [message] to our Fleet at dusk to let them know we had succeeded to get through safely then dived and lazed on the bottom all night Came to Surface just before daybreak next morning made attacks off Gallipoli [town (2)] but had bad luck with Torpedos...

Came to Surface next morning the 29th run to Gallipoli made attacks on Transports loaded with troops and guarded by Destroyers, sunk one Transport, was worried and chased the Remainder of the forenoon, met with E.14 (3) in the afternoon. she had got through the day before...[we] rested on the bottom all night (4) Came to Surface at daybreak the next morning the 30th set out towards Constantinople to meet E.14, saw her on the horizon steaming towards [us] with Turkish Torpedo Boats in chase saw E.14, dive but continued to draw Enemy on, then [we] dived but we got into difficulties afterwards and kept exposing ourselves to the Enemy which was all round us and firing on us, we had several holes by Gun Shots fire ...which compelled us to surrender, the Boat was in a sinking condition, so the crew got on deck as soon as possible, found a Turkish Gunboat and Destroyer still firing at us but dropping short, the Torpedo Boats Crew lowered Boats to pick us up and we was taken on board, the three Officers being the last to leave the Boat as she sunk in 40 fathoms (5) of Water, after we got on board we found that three Torpedoes had been fired at us, but all missed, we was put down in the forecastle (6) and given blankets to keep us warm while our clothes were getting dry, then we was taken down to Gallipoli where we was...
seen by the German General...

(1) One of a chain of forts that the Turks had built to guard the Dardanelles and the approaches to the Narrows.

(2) Also known as Gelibolu, this is the town that gave the name to the peninsular. It is located on the northern shore of the Dardanelles and above the Narrows.

(3) The British submarine the E14, because of the success of AE2 in getting through the Narrows, was also sent through the Dardanelles shortly afterwards.

(4) When running or resting underwater submarines at this time ran on batteries. However the batteries ran down after a while and the air needed changing so they had to surface regularly and run the diesel engine to clear the air and recharge the batteries.

(5) About 73 metres.

(6) Forward section of a ship, below decks.

Transcript: John H. Wheat narrative, ca. 1914-1918, MLMSS 3054/Item 3

What follows is a transcript of a section from the diaries of John H. Wheat (see collection items below).

We then knew that we were leaving that night at 1.30 a.m. to make a passage through the Dardanelles. An honour for the small young Australian Fleet. We were all greatly excited and I think the majority of us had very little sleep that night: no boat had up till this time been through the Dardanelles and we did not know what dangers awaited us in the way of mines and nets etc.

A French submarine had been sunk in attempting a passage in January 1915 and one of our submarines on April 17th 1915, so we were the third to make an attempt and the first to succeed. ...At 1.30 a.m. 25th April, we got under way to attempt the Dardanelles again.....The searchlights were very active both from the forts of Chanak and Dardanus, so we dived immediately. All went well this time, and nothing was heard till we came to the first mine fields. Here we were alarmed to hear the moorings of the mines scraping along the outside of the boat (1). This was very unpleasant but still we knew we must be quite safe at a depth of 90 feet.

... At this stage Captain Stoker told us to remain cool and all would go well. He then looked through the periscope and saw that we were being fired on from all sides (it was only a miracle that we were not hit). After the Captain had a quick look around, he gave the order to go full speed ahead. We were soon delighted to see by the depth gauge that we were moving off into deep water and we were soon down to 80 feet, as if nothing had happened.

...On firing this torpedo we had to immediately go down out of sight, as the destroyers were attempting to ram us. We showed our periscope 5 minutes later but there was no transport to be seen only the destroyers. We had to dive a long way on this occasion, as we were followed by destroyers who were trying to locate us. ...We had not been under way 10 minutes before we sighted E 14 (2). She like ourselves had just come to the surface. This was indeed a delightful sight for us as it meant company. We ran up close to her and exchanged greeting. She had come through two days after us, 27th April. It was then getting late so after making a rendezvous for the following day we parted.

...The torpedo boat soon sighted us and came full speed towards us. We immediately dived but it was soon seen that something was wrong with the boat (3). ...In trying to rectify this we broke surface and the torpedo boat (which was up to within a hundred yards of us) immediately fired on us, putting two shots through into the engine room. This made it impossible for us to dive again as the water was pouring in, so we had to surrender. ...The submarine was lying at an angle down by the bows and sinking very slowly. Everybody had plenty of time to get on deck. The torpedo boat ran up close to us and threw out life belts and lowered a small dinghy. ... Just as everybody was clear, submarine AE2 sank beneath the surface at 12.15 p.m. on 30th April, 1915.

(1) The mines floated at the end of cables secured in the seabed so that they would stay in the one place. The submarine has these cables scraping along the sides of their hull.

(2) The British submarine the E14, because of the success of AE2 in getting through the Narrows, was also sent...
through the Dardanelles two days later.

(3) Something was wrong with the AE2.

Questions

1. Use books and the Internet to find out when submarines were invented. What are their advantages and disadvantages as weapons of war?
2. Draw a map showing the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Dardanelles, the Narrows, the Sea of Marmara and Constantinople (Istanbul).
3. Use the transcripts to explain why the AE2 was sunk within such a short time of entering the Sea of Marmara.
4. The AE2 was cutting-edge military technology in its time. How has submarine technology improved? Use the Sources below in your answer as well as your own research.
5. The image of HMAS Sydney (below) shows AE1 and AE2 together. Investigate to find out why they were not together as an Australian force at the Dardanelles.
6. Use the transcripts and your own research to write an account of the exploits and sinking of the AE2.
Item 05: John H. Wheat photographs, ca. 1914-1918, ca. 1914-1918

View collection item detail [2]a5984002
John H. Wheat photographs, ca. 1914-1918

View collection item detail [4]a5984001
Item 05: John H. Wheat photographs, image 3, a5984003


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We arrived Malta 31st March. 23rd March we go into Dock and it was found necessary to put 13 new plates on the bottom. April 9th the submarine depot ship Adamin arrived with submarines K 11, 14 and 15.

The following day they left for the Dardanelles. We came out of Dock April 16th. April 18th we go outside the harbour for a trial run everything is satisfactory. We leave for Lemnos the same evening. After a fairly good trip we arrived Lemnos April 22nd and go alongside the Adamin. The following day we fell in on the upper deck of the Adamin while the Captain of the Adamin read out a recommendation from the Admiralty on AE II's good work, both for record steaming and for escorting the second contingent from Australia, only spending a few days in harbour during the 12 months she had been in commission. In the 12 months we had steamed nearly 40,000 miles. We finished up by saying that we were recommended for 7 days leave at the first opportunity.

After this we were ordered to get in one month's provisions and be ready to proceed by 2 p.m. the same day. By this order we had a good idea where we were going (Dardanelles). After taking in provisions we cast off from the Adamin at 2 p.m., and lay off from the battleship Queen Elizabeth while a wireless officer came off to inspect our wireless to see that it was correct; then we proceeded to Tenedos arriving there 8.30, 23rd April.

After a short trial dive we went alongside the Swiftsure and made fast, we took in some more provisions which we could not get from the Adamin. We then had sufficient food to last us from a month to 6 weeks. We then knew that we were leaving that night at 1.30 a.m. to make passage through the Dardanelles. We were all greatly excited and I think the majority of us had very little sleep that night. No boat had up till this time been through the Dardanelles and we did not know what dangers awaited us in the way of mines and nets etc.

A French submarine had been sunk in attempting a passage in January 1915 and one of our submarines on April 17th 1915, so we were the third to make an attempt to sail off from the Swiftsure at 1.30 and proceed to the entrance of the Dardanelles, it being our object to get as far as we could on the surface, without being seen by the searchlights and before daylight. On entering the Dardanelles between Cape Helles and Asik Kale there was a small gasoline searchlight on our starboard hand. However we got by without being noticed. We got about six miles inside the entrance. The searchlights on the forts of Chanak were very bright, but they seemed to be very careless as if not expecting to see anything. Owing to the searchlights we were forced to dive at 4.15 a.m. At this stage a very unlucky accident happened, our foremost hydroplane coupling broke. This was
HMAS "Sydney" with submarines AE1 and AE2 - Cairns, QLD
