Endpiece

Of the fourteen submarines that took part in the Dardanelles campaign (including *B11*), eight were sunk – three British, four French and one Australian (not including *E14* in 1918). Nine submarines undertook fifteen patrols in the Sea of Marmara and, between them, they accounted for the following Turkish losses:

- One battleship – *Barbaros Heyreddin*.
- One coastal defence ship – *Mesûdiye*.
- One destroyer.
- Five Gunboats.
- Eleven transports.
- Forty-four steamers.
- One hundred & forty-eight sailing craft.

In addition to this dramatic disruption to the sea lines of communication and seaborne support, significant damage was also inflicted upon railways and overland reinforcement routes. With some justification, Vice-Admiral de Robeck told Vice-Admiral Limpus in a letter dated 16th May 1915,

"*. . a submarine in the Marmara now is worth an Army Corps.*"

On 3rd June he wrote to him again,

"*Our submarines in the Marmora (sic) are the most valuable weapon that the Navy has at present*."

The Admiralty was also aware. On 9th June, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Jackson, wrote to de Robeck,

"*Your submarines have done wonders . . .*"

As far as my research has revealed, all merchant vessels were stopped, or ordered to heave to, prior to search, with only those found to be carrying war materiel being destroyed. In this case, the crew and passengers were disembarked, either into their own tenders or by taking them aboard the submarines, despite the cramped space available. Such conduct is in marked contrast to the unrestricted submarine warfare sanctioned by the Kaiser, announced by Admiral von Pohl on 4th February 1915. This is intimated by Winston Churchill in the continuation of the quotation on the front cover.

"Their exploits constitute in daring, in skill, in endurance, in risk, the finest examples of submarine action in the whole of the Great War, and were, moreover, marked by a strict observance of the recognised rules of warfare[1]*."*

Four Victoria Crosses were won by submariners in this theatre and it is these and the other COs' names that are remembered – Holbrook (*B11*), Brodie T S (*E15*), Stoker (*AE2*), Boyle (*E14*), Nasmith (*E11*), Cochrane (*E7*), Bruce (*E12*), White (*E14*) amongst others. However, in '*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*', T E Lawrence writes,

"*It is still less fair, of course, like all war-stories, to the un-named rank and file: who miss their share of the credit, as they must do, until they can write the despatches.*"

Glorious stories of derring do are mostly credited to the leaders, whereas anyone with any military nous knows that it is usually only truly cohesive *teams* that earn success. Nowhere is this truer than in submarines where the actions of just one man – officer or rating – could bring glory. But the same individual could equally court disaster. Perhaps it is most appropriate, therefore, that this story *is* told as fiction with an unknown submarine and her crew representing all those courageous men who achieved the most remarkable results. Accordingly, the reader is invited to consider the lowliest crew member. His actions remain unrecorded but were no less vital to his boat's survival and achievements.

Furthermore, in the Dardanelles submarine campaign, it was the entire cadre of boats working as a team that brought eventual success. Individual fortitude was necessary, of course, but together they encouraged one another to overcome the hazards they faced: navigation in poorly-charted waters, with ever-changing salinity, whorls and currents; the incalculable menace of a host of mines (three thousand were swept at

[1] Churchill W S – The World Crisis 1915 p422

the end of the war); the unavoidable, heavy nets strung across their paths; and not forgetting the stout-hearted Turks whose forces always put up a fight when possible.

In his book, "Forlorn Hope 1915: The Submarine Passage of the Dardanelles", C G Brodie – Keyes' staff officer – identifies the team up to the initial defeat of Hellespont.

"*Nasmith, the captain, whose mastery of the game made him, though off the field, an example and a spur to the side. Stoker rather as a brilliant amateur, who stole the show from the professionals, but missed the limelight. Boyle the centre forward who scored the winning goal and got well-earned applause from the public and the team. T.S.* [Brodie, his twin brother killed in *E15*] *I like to think of as "the little cherub, sitting aloft," doing his best to look after the side. I can fancy him gently plucking the sleeve of the helmsman as E14 skirted shoals and mine moorings on her passage, less gently jogging the elbows of the Turkish gunners firing at AE2, aground. Yes, a team, and a good one.*"

Kipling finishes his poem 'The Trade' with this final verse:

Their feats, their fortunes and their fames
Are hidden from their nearest kin;
No eager public backs or blames,
No journal prints the yarn they spin
(The Censor would not let it in!)
When they return from run or raid.
Unheard they work, unseen they win.
That is the custom of "The Trade."

The rest of the Royal Navy and families at home were left significantly uninformed of the remarkable achievements of the Submarine Service in the Dardanelles, in the Baltic, in the Heligoland Bight, in the Skaw and elsewhere because, as Kipling implies, their operations were considered too secret. Arthur Balfour who had been Prime Minister (1901-1905) and was First Lord of the Admiralty from May 1915 until November 1916, having read *E11*'s patrol reports, minuted,

"*It is worth considering whether some episodes of this remarkable story might not be published verbatim . . .*"

It never happened. But perhaps the most incredulous example of such unawareness is when Admiral David Beatty, in the command of the Grand Fleet since November 1916, wrote to the Admiralty on 18th January 1917 concerning the disposition of submarines around the coast. He opined,

"*It would appear that nine-tenths of these valuable craft have been used entirely for defensive purposes, and consequently have not been in a position to enable them to do anything during the 2½ years we have been at war.*"

In their response, the Lords of the Admiralty – rather graciously interpreting his comments to refer only to the D- and C-Classes – pointed out that the former were employed in overseas work. In addition and despite the small C-Class boats being unsuitable for off-shore employment, they had nonetheless been so tasked when appropriate. They felt the need to explain to the Commander-in-Chief that units of his own Grand Fleet in Scapa were unable to respond with sufficient rapidity, their response of 30th January stated,

"*. . Submarines constitute our principal defence against raids of all kinds . . ,*"

In August 1916, Commodore (S) had previously reported,

"*The percentage of losses of our overseas submarines has been 33%, probably heavier than in any other of H.M. Forces.*"

Twenty-two boats had already been lost at this early stage in the war – fifteen of these with all hands – and Commodore Hall concludes,

"*These losses . . . bear out my contention that the overseas submarines . . . are always in action when in enemy waters, though actions have not been made the subject of despatches and the losses have not been announced.*"

By November 1918, fifty-eight submarines and 1,174 officers and men had been lost, but with little celebration of their strategic contribution to the winning of the war, which was out of all proportion to the numbers deployed.

HELLESPONT

It is hard for us in the 21st Century ever to conceive what life was like in WW1 submarines: no sonar; no radar; unreliable gyro compasses; inaccurate distance measurement; no echo sounder; poor periscope optics; radio of pathetically short range; no air purification or resupply; and certainly no ability to charge batteries whilst dived. All these elements rendered the fragile craft truly vulnerable both to enemy action and to the exceptionally hostile natural environment. Perhaps the best analogy available today is to consider the astronauts in those space probes bound for the moon in the late 1960s: cramped; trapped within their vehicle in an unforgiving environment; subject to system failures; and with less computing capacity aboard than a modern 'smart' phone. We look back speechless with wonder at, and with huge admiration for, the courage of those pioneers. Now take those thoughts back to the technology of fifty years before that. We should hold early submariners in no less regard, even before pitching them against a determined enemy.

Again, it is Churchill who sums it up best, completing his previous quote:

"When one thinks of these officers and men, penned together amid the intricate machinery which crammed their steel, cigar-shaped vessels; groping, butting, charging far below the surface at unmeasured, unknown obstructions; surrounded by explosive engines [mines]*, any one of which might destroy them at a touch; the target of guns and torpedoes if they rose for an instant to the light of day; harried by depth charges, hunted by gunboats and destroyers, stalked by the German U-boat; expecting every moment to be shattered, stifled, or hopelessly starved at the bottom of the sea; and yet in spite of all, enduring cheerfully such ordeals for weeks at a time; returning unflinchingly again and again through the Jaws of Death"*

HELLESPONT!