

WINTON SPENCER CHURCHILL

AND

THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN

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By

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1938

Submitted to the Department of History  
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

1941

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## PREFACE

Amid the indecision, confusion, and chaos of the Dardanelles Campaign, Winston Spencer Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, stands out as the one man who consistently appreciated the great strategic advantages of the operation. His eloquence won War Council opinion to the support of the scheme; and his determination and courage might have carried the project through to success, had he not himself fallen victim to the political machinations of his enemies. This study is an account of Mr. Churchill's influence on the Dardanelles Campaign, with particular emphasis upon his activities in the War Council. Naval and military operations are mentioned only in-so-far as they are necessary to explain Mr. Churchill's position and to round out the story.

The writer wishes to acknowledge his thanks to the British Library of Information at New York City for the loan of documents and books.

F.G.H.

# WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL AND THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN

## CHAPTER I.

### Introduction.

#### 1. The Flight of the Goeben and Breslau.

July, 1914, was a month of tension and suspense, a month filled with the fear of war and the hope of peace, but by August the Germans had opened their great offensive through Belgium and brought Europe once more face to face with the grim reality of war. The French armies wheeled into position to meet the attack and all eyes focused upon the plains of northern Europe as the world fearfully watched the first act of the Big Show. As the world had watched the Germans sweep across the plains of Flanders and into France, so had the young politician at the helm of the British Navy. Winston S. Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, had seen the approach of the two armies and he was acutely aware of the fact that much of the success of the Allied cause hinged on the outcome of the initial encounter. Yet even when the German advance reached Cambrai and then rolled on past St. Quentin, Rheims, Laon, and crossed the Somme, the Aisne, the Oise and the Ourcq to threaten even Paris itself, the far-flung battle-lines of the Fleet would not permit the First Lord to be pre-occupied with this particular phase of this gigantic struggle which then, was only beginning. This was a world war and to the Navy, France was but one of the "rings" of the Big Show. To Churchill and the Admiralty there was

also war in the North Sea, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Indian Oceans. The Navy most certainly had to see the Expeditionary Force safely to France, but at the same time, it was also confronted with the problem of making the sea lanes safe for Allied shipping by destroying or driving into port the enemy's organized squadrons and commerce raiders. This task was no less urgent than was the necessity of halting the German drive on Paris.

One phase of this all important struggle for the control of the seas centered in the Mediterranean where the Germans had stationed two of the most modern ships of their navy, the Goeben and the Breslau. These ships, so Churchill believed, had been sent thither to interfere with the transport of the troops from North Africa to France. The French counted upon these troops to bolster their defences and to aid their main armies in turning back the German advance after its momentum had spent itself.<sup>1</sup> As the Goeben and her consort outstripped in speed all but the fastest units of the British Mediterranean Fleet, the First Lord proposed the despatch of an additional battle cruiser to reinforce the ships already operating in these waters.<sup>2</sup> Admiral Sir Berkeley Milne, the commander-in-chief of this Fleet, was instructed not only to cover the French troop ships, but also to bring

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<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), I, 236-37. Hereafter cited as World Crisis.

<sup>2</sup> This proposal was not carried into effect. Minute, Churchill to First Sea Lord, July 28, 1914. Ibid., I, 219.

the Goeben into action as it was feared that she would attempt to attack the transports.<sup>3</sup> In accordance with his instructions of several days previous,<sup>4</sup> the Admiral had located the German ships and he informed the Admiralty on August 2 that the Indomitable and Indefatigable were shadowing these ships.<sup>5</sup> By this time war seemed inevitable and Milne was ordered to hold the Germans and make ready to attack them on the declaration of war. He was later instructed to attack the Goeben immediately if she attempted to interfere with the troops' passage, but this order was revoked on the afternoon of August 4 after the Cabinet had decided that no act of war must be committed prior to the expiration of the British ultimatum.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile events in England and Turkey prepared a haven of refuge for the Goeben and Breslau. In England Churchill, who had distrusted Turkey from the beginning, had come to the conclusion that the Rashadieh and the Sultan Osman, which were being built for the Otterman government in English shipyards, were too "vital" to the Allied cause to allow them to fall into "bad hands and possibly be used against us....." A Turkish crew was even then in England to take over

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<sup>3</sup> Admiralty to Commander-in Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, July 30, 1914, World Crisis, I, 239.

<sup>4</sup> Admiralty to all Commanders-in-Chief, July 27, 1914. Ibid., I, 218.

<sup>5</sup> Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet to Admiralty, August 4, 1914, Ibid., I, 239.

<sup>6</sup> Admiralty to Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, August 4, 1914, Ibid., I, 241.



the Rashadieh, which was ready for delivery, but on July 31 the First Lord requisitioned both ships and threw an armed guard around them with instructions that under no circumstances were the Turks to be allowed to board the vessels. The seizure of these ships did little to improve Anglo-Turkish relations and, though it cannot be attributed solely to the requisitioning of the warships, the Turks on August 2, despite the efforts of Churchill and Admiral Limpus of the British Naval Mission to soothe their "legitimate heart-burnings", signed a secret treaty of alliance with Germany. <sup>7</sup>

Admiral Souchon, the commander of the Goeben, had been informed of this treaty and ordered to proceed to Constantinople on the day that his squadron was located by the Indomitable and the Indefatigable. The Germans were not bound, as the English thought, for the sea lanes between Africa and France but rather for a rendezvous with the German mail steamer, General, at Messina where final preparations were to be made for the flight to Turkey. The British men-of-war stalked their quarry throughout the day but as evening closed in, the Germans increased their speed, <sup>8</sup> shook off their pursuers and escaped in the dark. Souchon put in at Messina the next morning and he immediately started to

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<sup>7</sup>  
Ibid., I, 221-22.

<sup>8</sup>  
 The Goeben and Breslau had a three knot edge over the British warships and under forced draught they could steam at 27 knots. Ibid., I, 241.

coal his vessels for their flight. These operations delayed the Admiral for thirty-six hours and it was not until the evening of the 6th that he headed his ships into the straits, with decks cleared for action, where he fully expected his passage to be disputed by a British squadron. But the British had not yet learned that the French had changed their plans and that Admiral Boue de Lapeyrire had postponed the embarkation of the territorials until an adequate convoy system could be organized. ~~and~~ Then too, the English still thought that the Goeben and Breslau planned to attack the French transport lines and it was this conviction which led Sir Berkely Milne to station his squadron off the coast of Sicily. It was his belief that the Germans were about to attack the troops ships that led the Admiral to remain in these waters throughout the 5th and 6th even though his belief that Souchon had put into Messina had been confirmed by a wireless from the cruiser, Gloucester, and a telegram from the British Minister in Rome.<sup>9</sup>

The northern exit of the Straits of Messina had been blocked by a British squadron under Admiral Troubridge for it was thought that the Germans might make for Pola, a port on the Adriatic. But when Troubridge learned that the Goeben had escaped through the southern exit of the Straits, he immediately ordered his squadron, on his own initiative, to take up the chase. The commander-in-chief was informed of his intentions; thus on the morning of August 7 some

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<sup>9</sup>World Crisis, I, 265-66.

sixteen British ships were converging on Souchon and it appeared that the Germans would be brought into action shortly before dawn. But as the morning wore on it ~~was~~ became evident that the Goeben would not be caught until after daylight so Troubridge, whose action had not yet been approved by Sir Berkely Milne, called off the chase as he feared the superior guns and speed of his opponents would be too much for him in a daylight engagement. For the second time the Goeben and the Breslau had slipped their pursuers.<sup>10</sup>

The chase was resumed early on the morning of August 8 by the commander-in-chief. But fate had decided against pursuit and that afternoon Milne received a telegram, due to an error of an Admiralty clerk, to the effect that war had been declared on Austria. In the case of this eventuality, the Admiral's original instructions had ordered him to concentrate his fleet near Malta, and now that he had been confronted with the event, Milne put about to comply with his orders. By the time the mistake had been set right and pursuit resumed, twenty-four hours had elapsed and Admiral Souchon had made good his flight. He arrived off the Straits of the Dardanelles on August 10 and ~~he~~ immediately applied for admittance to Turkish waters, but it was not without some hesitation that Enver Pasha at last yielded to the Germans and agreed to admit the Goeben and Breslau.<sup>11</sup> Orders were given to the forts to fire on the British warships if they should attempt to follow the

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<sup>10</sup>World Crisis, I, 269-72.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., I, 275.

Germans into the Straits and as General Kannengiesser heard "...the clanking of the portcullis descending before the Dardanelles....",<sup>12</sup> Winston Churchill perceived that a Curse had descended "...irrevocably upon Turkey and the East....", and he later remarked that "In all this story of the escape of the Goeben one seems to see the influence of that sinister fatality which was at a later stage and on a far larger scale to dog the enterprise against the Dardanelles".<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after the arrival of Souchon at Constantinople the sale of the Goeben and the Breslau to Turkey was announced. Churchill, who at this time still sought to placate the Turks for the loss of the Rashadieh and the Sultan Osman, informed Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, that the transfer of these vessels would not be objected to by the Admiralty, provided the sale was a bona fide transaction and that the German crews were immediately repatriated. He also suggested that the Foreign Secretary inform the Turks that England would be quite willing to restore the Turkish warships she had requisitioned after the war and that even then she would be willing to compensate them for their loss.<sup>14</sup> But the Turks were not to comply with the Admiralty conditions for the transfer of the Goeben and Breslau and the First Lord at once became less conciliatory and more belli-

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<sup>12</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, A History of The World War 1914-1918 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, Second Edition, 1934), 213.

<sup>13</sup> World Crisis, I, 274-75.

<sup>14</sup> Churchill to Sir Edward Grey, August 12, 1914, World Crisis, I, 526.

cose. When it became evident that the German crews were not being repatriated, Churchill proposed that a torpedo flotilla be sent to Constantinople "...to threaten and if necessary, sink the Goeben and her consort..." But the other members of the cabinet felt that even if the First Lord was right in his conviction that England had little to hope for and much to apprehend from Turkey, the Turks should be compelled to strike the first blow. A few days later Churchill again called Grey's attention to the "unsatisfactory" Turkish situation and that the presence of the German ships at Constantinople had immobilized two British warships at the Dardanelles and created a condition which could not continue "indefinitely."<sup>15</sup>

It was not to continue "indefinitely" and on September 9,<sup>16</sup> the British recalled Admiral Limpus and the Naval Mission as a result of Turkish defiance and their failure to comply with the English demands for the repatriation of the German crews. Churchill wanted to appoint Limpus to the command of the ships at the Dardanelles but he was overruled by those who then hoped that Turkey might still be kept neutral. They feared that the appointment of an admiral who had so recently returned from Constantinople would be unduly provocative; in his stead Vice-Admiral Carden was given the command with instructions "...to sink the Goeben and Breslau no matter what flag they fly, if they come out of the Dardanelles...". In denying themselves Limpus' experi-

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<sup>15</sup> Churchill to Sir Edward Grey, August 17, 1914. Ibid., I, 526-27.

<sup>16</sup> Admiral Limpus and the other members of the British Naval Mission had been detailed to Constantinople as naval advisers to the Turkish Government.

ience and intimate knowledge of Turkish defences, Churchill felt that the British forged one of the first links in the long chain of events which led to the failure of the Dardanelles campaign.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Turkey and the Near East.

After August, 1914, Churchill lost all hope of settling the Turkish problem by diplomacy and he feared that the Sick Man of Europe was gravitating, perhaps slowly, but always certainly, toward the German magnet. Accordingly he was "greatly attracted" by a proposal which had been put forward by the Greeks shortly after the arrival of the German ships at Constantinople suggesting joint operations against the Turks. The Prime Minister of Greece, the wily Venizelos, had been given permission to place the Greek army and navy at the disposal of the Allies, and the offer had been extended especially to England. The First Lord of the Admiralty at once perceived that a Greek force co-operating with the British Mediterranean Fleet could settle the Turkish problem "....in a most prompt and effective manner". Since Turkey's honest neutrality could no longer be relied upon and since he believed her to be on the verge of casting her lot with the Central Powers, Churchill felt that the Greek offer should be accepted and that England should no longer restrain her freedom of action in the Near East for fear of antagonizing the government at Constantinople. But the Cabinet wanted to keep the East as quiet as

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<sup>17</sup>World Crisis, I, 535-36.

possible for they feared a war with Turkey would be a signal for a Mohammendan revolt in India. == This, together with the fact that the Russians would not look with favour upon the march of Greek armies to the Golden Horn and the uncertain position of Bulgaria, which was regarded as the key to the Balkan political situation, were weighty arguments against the scheme and the Cabinet turned the Greek offer down in August, 1914. Churchill, who had no illusions about Turkish neutrality, had wanted to accept the proposed alliance, but he conformed, though "...with increasing misgivings....", to the government's decision.

There was yet another scheme by which Churchill hoped to cripple Turkish power in the Near East and the First Lord at once recommended that England make a determined effort to win the support of the Christian states of the Near East and promote a Balkan federation, even to the point of war with Turkey. It was with this aim in mind that Churchill wrote to the British propagandist, Noel Suxton--with the approval of the Foreign Secretary--and urged him to impress upon his friends in Greece and Bulgaria that a

"...brilliant but fleeting opportunity...now presents itself, and to assure them that England's might and perseverance will not be withheld from any righteous effort to secure the strength and union of the Balkan peoples."<sup>19</sup>

Churchill was convinced that sooner or later Turkey would make war on the Allies and he began immediately to

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World Crisis, I, 529-30.

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Churchill to Noel Suxton, August 31, 1914. Ibid., 530-31.

prepare for that eventuality. The First Lord believed that in the event of hostilities with this country, the "ideal" operation of war would be an action against the Gallipoli Peninsula, which would be synchronized with a naval thrust through the Dardanelles and into the Sea of Marmora. On September 1, 1914, Churchill had asked General Charles Douglas, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to prepare a scheme.

"...for the seizure by means of a Greek Army of adequate strength of the Gallipoli Peninsula, with a view to admitting a British Fleet to the Sea of Marmora."<sup>20</sup>

The staff work for this scheme was done by General Callwell who reported that although it would be a very difficult operation, especially if it were undertaken from the seaward side of Gallipoli, it was a feasible one which he believed an army of 60,000 men could carry the project to success.<sup>21</sup> To follow this scheme up, the First Lord directed Rear-Admiral Mark Kerr of the British Naval Mission to Athens<sup>22</sup> to consult with the General and Naval Staffs of that country as regards what would be the right policy to pursue in the event England and Greece were allied in a war against Turkey. The Admiralty's views, as set out by Churchill, were that Gallipoli should be occupied by a Greek army while an Anglo-Greek fleet, to be reinforced "...by any class of vessel and to any extent", acted in

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<sup>20</sup>

Churchill to General Charles Douglas, September 1, 1914, Ibid., 531-32.

<sup>21</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, Supplement to First Report (London: Harrison and Sons, 1917), par. 45, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>

Rear-Admiral Kerr to Admiralty via Foreign Office, September 9, 1914, World Crisis, I, 533.



conjunction with the troops, forced the Dardanelles and entered the Sea of Marmora. On September 9, Kerr announced that the Greeks were of the opinion that they could take the Peninsula if assured of Bulgaria's neutrality and would have to be guaranteed by more than pledges. "Subject to the above condition, the plan for taking the Dardanelles Straits is ready."<sup>23</sup>

But by ~~the~~ time the Germans had begun their retreat from the Marne, ~~and~~ the Balkan situation relaxed into a state of suspension, and the Greeks became less interested in the scheme for joint operations. Churchill, however, still pushed the scheme vigorously in London and he pointed out to Sir Edward Grey that although the cost of the operation might be heavy, "...there would be no more war for Turkey."<sup>24</sup> But Grey was not interested in the Near East "at all" unless there was some shift in the situation in France. The lagging interest of the Greeks and the unreceptive attitude of the Cabinet together with the fact that Russia was sending all her surplus troops to the Caucasus forced the First Lord to table his Dardanelles project for the time being, but he continued to urge Grey to make his Balkan treaties "...with-<sup>25</sup> out regard for the interests or integrity of Turkey...". Churchill's advice went unheeded and in the end the English

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<sup>23</sup>

Rear-Admiral Kerr to Admiralty via Foreign Office, September 9, 1914, World Crisis, I, 533.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., I, 534.

<sup>25</sup>

Churchill to Sir Edward Grey, September 23, 1914, Ibid., 536-37.

"...had all the evils of both courses and the advantage of no course."<sup>26</sup>

October saw the end of the British Ambassador's "futile and thankless" task at Constantinople. On October 27, the Goeben and Breslau were again in the spotlight as they steamed through the Bosphorus to bring war to the Black Sea and the Near East. In a series of naval sorties on the 29th and 30th the former German vessels, accompanied by the Turkish cruiser, Hamidieh, and a division of destroyers raided Sevastopol, Odessa, and practically destroyed Novorossisk, and to complete the day's work they sunk a Russian transport and torpedoed a Russian gunboat. The Russian minister to Constantinople immediately demanded his passport and at the expiration of a twelve hour ultimatum to the Turks the British Admiralty sent the following order to all ships:<sup>27</sup>

"Commence hostility at once against Turkey...."<sup>28</sup>

### 3. The Deadlock in the West.

After Turkey's entry into the War Near Eastern schemes need no longer be shelved for fear of the reaction at Constantinople. The Foreign Office could work more vigorously for the Balkan federation urged by Churchill and Lloyd George; there was no longer cause for the Admiralty

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<sup>26</sup> World Crisis, I, 539.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., I, 539-40.

<sup>28</sup> Admiralty to all Ships, October 31, 1914, Ibid., I, 540.

to keep its squadron at the Dardanelles outside Turkish territorial waters and on November 3rd, just four days after the Turks had cast their lot with the Central Powers, a bombardment of the outer forts of the Dardanelles defences was ordered by the Admiralty. The purpose of the attack was to ascertain the effective range of the guns defending the entrance to the Straits. The bombarding ships kept out of reach of the forts' guns and for ten minutes they shelled the batteries at Sedd el Bahr, Cape Hellas, Kum Kale, and Orkanie causing "considerable damage" to the defences and inflicting "several hundred casualties on the Turks". Eighty rounds of ammunition were expended during the attack and the extreme range of the forts was found to be about twelve thousand yards. As the War Council had not been consulted as to the advisability of this bombardment Churchill was afterwards severely criticized during the Parliamentary investigation of the Dardanelles failure for ordering this attack. It was charged that this action had put the Turks on the alert against an operation aimed at the Straits, but Churchill has parried

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Dardanelles Commission, First Report (London: Harrison and Sons, 1917), par. 46, p. 14. See also World Crisis, I, 541.

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Lord Fisher's biographer refers to this bombardment as "a foolish proceeding" and charges that it warned the Turks. He attributes the attack to Churchill's "...itch to be always doing something." Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Admiral of the Fleet (Garden City; Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1929), II, 205. Hereafter cited as Bacon. In his testimony before the Dardanelles Commission Sir Henry Jackson expressed the opinion that the bombardment was a "mistake" as it forewarned the Turks. During the same hearing Commodore Bartolome described the demonstration as being "unfortunate." Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 46, p. 14.

this charge by pointing out that even though this attack might have forewarned the Turks, they failed to take the warning, for as late as February 27, 1915, small parties of marines were able to move about on the shores of the Straits unhampered by Turkish troops and guns.<sup>31</sup>

From the bombardment of the 3rd until the beginning of naval operations against the Dardanelles in February, 1915, the Turks were left pretty much to their own resources, with the exception of a few Russian naval sorties on their Black Sea ports,<sup>32</sup> a daring submarine attack on the Turkish cruiser, Messudieh,<sup>33</sup> and the British thrust into Mesopotamia. Under German direction the Turks had organized an expedition against the Suez Canal but aside from stimulating British preparations in Egypt, it accomplished little before it bogged down in front of the Canal's defences. A drive against Russia was opened in the Caucasus and as the Grand Duke could spare no reinforcements

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<sup>31</sup>William Dilsworth Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, A Condensed Study (Annapolis: U. S. Naval Institute, Second Edition, 1927), 37.

<sup>32</sup>On November 6 a Russian Squadron under Admiral Ebergard mined the entrance to the Bosphorus, bombarded Zungaldak, and sunk 4 Turkish transports; on the 17th he bombarded Trebizond; and on the 19th he fought a fifteen minute action with the Goeben and the Breslau. Sir Julian Corbett, "Naval Operations", History of the Great War Based on Official Documents (London: Longmans, Green and Company, Second Edition, 1929), II, 70. Hereafter cited as Corbett.

<sup>33</sup>On December 13, 1914, Lieutenant M. D. Holbrook took the submarine B-11 under five lines of mines to enter Sari Sighlar Bay where he torpedoed and sunk the cruiser Messudieh. Ibid., 140.

for this region, the Turkish offensive here made some headway and caused considerable alarm in Russian circles. Although apparently neglected by her enemies, Turkey was not forgotten, for in the interim between the demonstration of November 3rd and the great naval attack, she was the subject of frequent discussion at their war councils, where strategically-minded statesmen, such as Winston Churchill, had already singled her out as the weakest spot in the armour of the Central Powers.

Churchill had not only picked the weak spot in the enemy's seemingly impregnable lines, but he had also come to the conclusion that the increased fire power of the rifle and the introduction of the machine gun had so enhanced the power of the defence that attempts to penetrate the enemy's lines in France would probably result in failure unless they were carried out in conjunction with flanking movements in other theatres. His conclusion was supported by bloody evidence from the battlefields of France where the Allied generals frequently sacrificed two and even three men to kill one soldier of the enemy and at the same time they grimly calculated "...that in the end the Allies would still have a few million to spare."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this was true, but Churchill began to question the wisdom of that kind of blood traffic with the enemy. The Allies had begun to

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<sup>34</sup>

World Crisis, II, 4.

accumulate vast stores of war materials and their manpower was rapidly being transformed into powerful fighting machines. As the First Lord surveyed the war fronts in November, 1914, he saw and clearly realized that a stalemate had been reached in France and he asked if the new territorial armies, which were nearly ready to be thrown into the conflict, could not do better for the Allied cause than to "chew barbed-wire" in France. At the same time he sought a field where the new naval forces and those released from the German ship-hunts by the victory of the Falklands <sup>35</sup> might not be brought more directly into the war, perhaps by an amphibious flanking operation, where the superior mobility of the British Navy might play a more decisive role than that offered by long range blockade. The problem of how and where to employ the new resources which would soon be at their command was one of the most perplexing questions confronting the Allies as November and December brought them to the close of the first five months of the war.

In past wars decisions were often forced in a stalemated theatre by flanking movements designed to divert the enemy's troops by threatening his communications. But as the Allied generals failed to view all phases of the war as being component parts of one great battle, they could not see beyond the French front, where the enemy had concentrated his main armies; and this lack of perspective stunted their general appreciation of the military situation. As 1915 loomed on

the horizon they apparently ruled flanking movements out of their strategy for it appeared that the right wing of the German lines was protected by the English Channel, while the left was guarded by neutral Switzerland. They would have no other plan of campaign than one which sent the flower of their armies across a fire-swept No-Man's Land to be lost upon the strongly fortified positions of the enemy for a gain of, perhaps, a few hundred yards of shell-pocked trenches or a battle-scarred village or two. In denying to themselves a broader strategy by conforming to the Clausewitzian maxim that the object of absolute war is to crush the enemy's army in the field, the General Staff, probably swayed by the French desire to drive the invaders from their homeland, made the West the "decisive theatre". At times they did admit that a decision was not to be expected in the West, but their actions contradicted their words and as these "Clausewitz-intoxicated generals" applied their knowledge of the science of war, they lost their sense of the art of war and envisioned victory only via of frontal assault and in the destruction of the enemy's army. They accepted, apparently for face value, the words of Colonel de Grandmaison, the foremost French proponent of the Clausewitz theory, that "This result [ the destruction of the enemy's army ] can only be obtained at the price of bloody sacrifice." <sup>36</sup> Winston Churchill was

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<sup>36</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933), 137. They also forgot Napoleon's words from the campaign of 1805 that all his cares would "...be to gain victory with the least possible shedding of blood." Ibid., 137.

of the opinion that while battles may be won by slaughter, they might also be won, and perhaps at less cost, by manoeuvre,<sup>37</sup> and as 1915 dawned, the time was ripe for manoeuvre.

For those who dared to look and for those who possessed the macroscopic eye, there was flanking movements which could have probably been turned to victory had they been tried at the opportune moment, and then pressed whole-heartedly and determinedly. True, the obstacles were great, but so were the rewards and such action could have perhaps brought victory for less than the price paid for decision by frontal assault. There was the Baltic flank and its advantages had been pointed out by Lord Fisher<sup>38</sup> and others; and after October, 1914, there was the vulnerable Turkish flank, on to which the Allies, with the aid of the superbly mobile British Fleet, might have hurled a small, well-trained force and caught the Turks before German efficiency had transformed them into a formidable foe. Yet neither of these promising operations was attempted until every other means had been exhausted to no avail, and then, and then only, long after the opportune moment had passed,<sup>39</sup> were "half-hearted measures" and "grudged resources" assigned to a flanking movement over the protests of the "Moloch of the West."

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<sup>37</sup>

"The greater the general, the more he contributes in manoeuvre, the less he demands in slaughter..." World Crisis, II, 5.

<sup>38</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 67, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup>

Winston S. Churchill, The Aftermath (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 475.



As 1914 drew to a close the Allies were examining both strategic and tactical methods in an effort to find a solution to the deadlock in France. Their generals were confident that they could crush the Germans in the West in spite of the fact that their "...great armies lay glaring at each other at close quarters without any true idea of what to do next...". They had resigned their armies to a war of exhaustion and the Admirals, when it had become apparent that the Germans would not oblige them with the great naval battle of which they dreamed, "...pinned their faith to blockade...".<sup>40</sup> But at the Admiralty, under the patronage of Winston Churchill, experiments were being conducted with tanks as a tactical means of breaking the deadlock and the possibility of amphibious operations on both the northern and southern flanks were under consideration as strategic solutions to the stalemate. As the new year approached, Churchill asked, "Shall we use our reinforced fleets and the great new armies of 1915, either to turn the Teutonic right in the Baltic or their left in the Black Sea and the Balkans? Or shall we hurl our manhood against sandbags, wire and concrete in frontal attack upon the German fortified lines in France."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>World Crisis, II, 3.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., I, 550.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NAVY IS CHARGED WITH THE DARDANELLES ATTACK.

#### 1. The Evolution of the Naval Attack.

As 1915 opened, the quest for alternative theatres was already underway by such men as Winston Churchill, Sir Maurice Hankey, and Lloyd George, who were convinced that the generals could not "kill" enough Germans in France to break the deadlock.<sup>1</sup> As early as the War Council of November 25, 1914, Churchill had proposed a move to counter, and perhaps stave off, the expected invasion of Egypt by military operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula. He believed that a threat to the Dardanelles and Constantinople, the nerve-center of the Ottoman Empire, would not only be the best defence for Egypt but that it also offered a solution to the stalemate in the West. Churchill's scheme was received with favour, but as Lord Kitchener felt that the opportune moment for the expansion of Allied military commitments in the Near East had not yet arrived, the First Lord, after a futile attempt to persuade the War Secretary to sanction the concentration of transports in Egypt in case they were needed for an expedition, "...put the project on one side and thought no more of it for the time...."<sup>2</sup> Churchill was

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<sup>1</sup> When Joffre learned that Churchill and Lloyd George thought that the German lines were impregnable to frontal attack, he at once pronounced them "demented". Basil Henry Liddell Hart, Foch, The Man of Orleans (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1932), 161.

<sup>2</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 47, p. 14. See also World Crisis, II, 33-34.

convinced that neither of the armies in France was powerful enough to break the other's defences and on December 29, 1914, he inquired of the Prime Minister if there were

"...not other alternatives than sending our armies to chew barbed-wire in Flanders? Further, cannot the power of the Navy be brought more directly to bear upon the enemy?"<sup>3</sup>

Two days later, on December 31, after having read advance copies of Sir Maurice Hankey's and Lloyd George's appreciations of the general strategic situation, the First Lord informed Asquith that, as regards the eastern alternatives proposed in these papers, he was in agreement with the reports. Until the question of the alternative theatre was settled, Churchill recommended daily meetings of the War Council.<sup>4</sup>

The Hankey memorandum of December 28, 1914, suggested that the Allies could employ their new armies most effectively by striking, not in France where the enemy was strongest, but rather through his Allies, "particularly Turkey", where he was weakest.<sup>5</sup> Lloyd George was also loathed to see the resources of 1915 sacrificed to the "Moloch of the West" and his memorandum was circulated among the members of the War Council on the first day of the new year. He suggested that the Allies might well take the initiative in the

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<sup>3</sup> Churchill to Asquith, December 29, 1914. World Crisis, II, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill to Asquith, December 31, 1914. Ibid., II, 85.

<sup>5</sup> "Minority Report", Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 7, p. 48. The Hankey plan displayed "...a grasp of grand strategy whereas the horizon of most soldiers, especially the highest, was narrowly bounded by tactics." Hart, A History of The World War, 1914-1918, 216.

Near East where they could strike, either through Serbia at Austria's "most vulnerable frontier", or directly at the weakest of the Central Powers, Turkey.<sup>6</sup> The influence of these "Easterners" became more and more important as the conviction grew that a Balkan victory was essential as a prerequisite to the solution of the western stalemate.<sup>7</sup>

On January 1, 1915, the English received an urgent appeal from the Russian Grand Duke for a demonstration of some kind against the Turks to relieve the Czar's hard-pressed armies in the Caucasus. Lord Kitchener immediately notified the Russian commander, through the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, that the English would come to their assistance<sup>8</sup> and make a demonstration against the Turks. The War Secretary informed Churchill the next day of the plight of the Russians and inquired if he thought that the situation in the Caucasus might not be relieved by a naval demonstration. This question was fully discussed later that day at a conference between the two secretaries. All Turkish alternatives were considered, but both men had their minds on the Gallipoli Peninsula and it was to this objective that the discussion inevitably returned as all other proposals were met by Lord Kitchener's dogmatic "We have no troops to land anywhere." Churchill, however, doubted the wisdom of sacrificing the Straits to a mere demonstration if there would be an opportunity for a major attack at some future date to exploit to the fullest extent the ad-

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<sup>6</sup> David Lloyd George, War Memoirs of David Lloyd George (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), I, 322-30.

<sup>7</sup> Corbett, II, 122.

<sup>8</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 50, p. 14.

vantages to be had from successful operations against the  
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 Dardanelles.

The following morning, January 3, Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, announced to Churchill that he considered that "... THE ATTACK ON TURKEY HOLDS THE FIELD!---but ONLY if it is IMMEDIATE!", then he added, prophetically, "However, it won't be!" An outline of an operation which he called the "Turkey Plan" was incorporated in the First Sea Lord's letter. Part IV of his scheme is significant, and it reads as follows:

"IV. Sturdee forces the Dardanelles at the same time [as feints are made with land forces toward Haifa and Alexandretta] with Majestic and Canopus Class! God bless him!

"But as the great Napoleon said, 'Celerity'--- without it---'Failure'." 10

"Here for the first time", says Churchill, "was the suggest-  
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 ion of forcing the Dardanelles with the old battleships."

The First Lord was no longer to be turned back from Gallipoli by Kitchener's ever ready assertion that there were "no troops to spare"---he would use the old battleships for putting the grand scheme into effect.

Churchill now perceived that there was "...a great convergence of opinion in the direction of that attack upon the Dardanelles which I had always so greatly desired....", and after conferring with Sir Henry Jackson he despatched the following telegram with the active agreement of Lord

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World Crisis, II, 86.

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Fisher to Churchill, January 3, 1915. Ibid., II, 88-9. See also "Minority Report", Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 10, p. 49.

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World Crisis, II, 89.

Fisher to Vice-Admiral Carden<sup>12</sup> at the Dardanelles:

"Do you think that it is a practicable operation to force the Dardanelles by use of ships alone?"

"It is assumed that older battleships would be employed, that they would be furnished with mine-sweepers and that they would be preceded by colliers or other merchant vessels as sweepers and bumpers.

"The importance of the results would justify severe losses. Let me know what your views are."<sup>13</sup>

Carden's reply was received at the Admiralty on January 5 and although the commander did not believe the Straits could be "rushed" Duckworth fashion, he believed they might be "forced" by extended operations with a large number of ships.<sup>14</sup> Churchill passed this information on to the War Council where it was received with "extreme interest" and everyone "seemed alive" to the great strategic possibilities of the scheme, for in addition to fulfilling England's pledge to Russia, the plan also offered the Allies an opportunity of intervening in the Near East without further military commitments. At the Admiralty Churchill learned that Admiral Oliver and Sir Henry Jackson also regarded the Carden plan for methodical reduction of the forts with favour. The following day the

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<sup>12</sup>

Vice-Admiral Carden had been appointed to the command of the Dardanelles September 21, 1914, World Crisis, I, 535.

<sup>13</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 54, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>

During the Parliamentary hearings on the Dardanelles Campaign Admiral Carden qualified his telegram of January 5 with this statement: "I had in mind that it was impossible to form a real opinion...until one had actually destroyed the outer forts..and was able to get inside and actually find out the extent of the gun defences and the minefield and the extent of movable armament on both sides of the Straits." Ibid., par. 55, p. 17. A British Fleet under Ad-Duckworth forced the Straits and entered the Sea of Marmora in 1807. He successfully repassed the Straits on March 1, 1807. On this return passage he lost 150 men. World Crisis, II, f. n. 1, 313.

First Lord carried the Dardanelles Campaign one step nearer to realization with this telegram:

January 6, 1915

"Your view is agreed with by high authorities here. Please telegraph in detail what you think could be done by extended operations, what force would be needed, and how you consider it should be used."<sup>15</sup>

The question of eastern operations was again discussed at the War Council of January 8, at which time Lord Kitchener, whose opinion carried great weight, indicated that he considered the "most suitable military objective" to be the Dardanelles and that the Admiralty plan for forcing the Straits was particularly attractive as it could be called off at any moment without great loss of prestige. He estimated that 150,000 troops would be required for land operations in this theatre but added, that none were available.<sup>16</sup> The Council adjourned without reaching a definite decision on the Dardanelles but the ministers had agreed that there

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It has been charged that this telegram misled Admiral Carden to believe that the "high authorities" were Lord Fisher and the naval advisers. Churchill told the Dardanelles Commissioners that the "high authorities" were himself, Admiral Oliver, and Sir Henry Jackson, the latter having expressed a verbal opinion in favour of the plan. Jackson, however, said he did not remember whether or not he had been consulted before the despatch of the telegram. Lord Fisher testified that he did not see the telegram and added that had he seen it, he would have "objected" and asked that it be worded in some other way. Churchill told the commissioners that Fisher did not express an opinion on the technical question. But "of course he saw the telegram." *Ibid.*, par. 56, p. 17. Fisher's biographer says that the First Sea Lord did not see the telegram and that he did not agree with it. Bacon, II, 207.

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Hart, Foch, The Man of Orleans, 162.

should be no further extension of the Allied lines in France and that for the time, the Mediterranean offered the only field where the Allies might take the initiative with reasonable prospects of success.<sup>17</sup>

Carden's detailed plan for forcing the Straits was received at the Admiralty on January 11. The Admiral proposed a piece-meal reduction of the defences by long-range bombardment and his scheme was in substance as follows:

1. The reduction of the entrance forts.
2. Operations to clear the minefields between the entrance and the Narrows and the destruction of the intermediate defences of the Straits.
3. The destruction of the forts at the Narrows.
4. Sweeping the Kephez minefield.
5. Reduction of the forts above the Narrows.
6. The entry of the fleet into the Sea of Marmora.
7. The maintenance of a patrol of the Straits and begin naval operations in the Sea of Marmora.<sup>18</sup>

Churchill immediately circulated the plan among the members of the War Council where it produced "...a great impression on every one who saw it..." and many thought that it was comparable to the method used by the Germans in the reduction of the great forts at Liege, Namur and Antwerp.<sup>19</sup> In this respect Churchill has often been accused of assuming, with a "...layman's ignorance of artillery...", that the high velocity guns of the fleet would be able to wreak the same havoc with the Dardanelles forts as the German ~~seige~~ <sup>60</sup> howitzers had inflicted upon the Belgian fortresses. At first thought the criticism may appear well-founded, but after consideration of the prospective effectiveness of

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<sup>17</sup>Corbett, II, 65-66.

<sup>18</sup>Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 58, pp. 17-18.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., par. 58, p. 18.



both howitzer and naval gun fire on the targets in the Straits, "...it is certain that...[the] high velocity guns would have the advantages..." over the howitzers against the high and exposed parapets of the ancient forts of the Turkish defences, "...so that the whole argument as to the advantages of high-angle fire [in connection with the Dardanelles forts of 1915] is based on false premises."<sup>20</sup>

## 2. The Preliminary Decision.

As the ministers considered the prospects of successful operations at the Dardanelles in the War Council of January 13, it was apparent that the political and military situation was deadlocked. On the military front the Germans had been stymied by the Allied defences and turned back at Ypres, but the Allies lacked the necessary resources to batter their way through the German trenches; the Russians were hard put-to-it in the East and were faced with a serious ammunition shortage; and the enemy was concentrating his forces in the Balkans for an all-out effort to end the war in Serbia. On the diplomatic front, Italy was still neutral, but Bulgaria was hovering dangerously near to the enemy's camp. This situation caused no little concern to the Allies, who had no desire to add another enemy to an already powerful alliance, but "Diplomacy", as Lord Grey said, "was perfectly useless

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Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson's memorandum of October, 1916, on the superiority of flat trajectory guns in attacks on high and exposed targets. It was presented in his testimony before the Dardanelles Commission and quoted by Churchill. World Crisis, II, 99-100.

without military success." The best and surest way to guarantee Bulgaria's continued neutrality was to present her with a resounding Allied victory over Germany. As the ministers pondered the advantages of the First Lord's proposed naval attack on the Dardanelles, these considerations weighed heavily upon the members of the War Council.<sup>21</sup>

At the war Council of January 13, Churchill explained Carden's view that the straits might be forced if the forts could be destroyed by a series of continued, long-range bombardments. The First Lord pointed out that the operations would be carried out with old ships, although it was possible that the destruction of the more up-to-date forts might require two or three modern ships.<sup>22</sup> The Admiralty, he said, was continuing its study of the plan and Carden believed that his fleet could enter the Sea of Marmora within four weeks after the commencement of operations. The requirements for the undertaking could be met, the First Lord continued, without jeopardizing the strength of the Grand Fleet.<sup>23</sup> Lord Kitchener strongly supported the plan and his belief that the Dardanelles project might be broken off without serious

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<sup>21</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 65, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup>

The Queen Elizabeth, the first of the 15-inch gun battleships then building, was sent out to the Dardanelles for her gunnery trials at the beginning of the operations. World Crisis, II, 95-96.

<sup>23</sup>

H. H. Asquith, "Britain's Unsheathed Sword", New York Times Current History (April, 1915), II, 156-57.

loss of prestige at any time was for many, the clinching argument.<sup>24</sup> Asquith tells us that this point appealed to "everybody".

The opinions of the naval advisers, Lord Fisher and Sir Arthur Wilson, who were present at this meeting, were not solicited and since they made no comments on the views expressed by their chief, the War Council took silence for consent and Churchill "...certainly thought that they agreed."<sup>25</sup>

This misunderstanding of the position of the technical advisers on the Dardanelles project was to lead to serious difficulties and cause Churchill no end of embarrassment, for Fisher was soon to claim that he had always been "dead against" a purely naval attack. Fisher had held his peace at the War Council because he felt that it was not his duty to express his opinions unless he was specifically asked to do so by his chief or some minister.<sup>26</sup>

As he outlined the advantages of the proposal to the War Council, Churchill marshalled all the eloquence at his command to the support of the plan and to emphasize the logic

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Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 86, p.27.

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World Crisis, II, 104.

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The conclusion of the Dardanelles Commissioners as to the position occupied by the experts was that they should have, whether they were specifically asked to do so or not, expressed their considered opinions if they had any doubt as to the technical details involved regardless of the stand taken by the First Lord. Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 91, p. 28.

of his arguments. He described the results which might reasonably be expected from successful operations at the Dardanelles in convincing detail. Some writers have charged that it was "...through...Churchill's excess of imagination.. and the fatal power of a young enthusiasm to convince older and slower brains, [that] the tragedy of Gallipoli was born",<sup>27</sup> but the decision of the War Council cannot be wholly attributed to the eloquence of the certainly imaginative, the most assuredly enthusiastic, and always brilliant Churchill. The difficulties and limitations presented by other theatres had eliminated all other alternatives leaving the Dardanelles as the only practicable operation where the Allies could, at that time, undertake an offensive with considerable hope of securing a first rate victory and at the same time, relieve their hard-pressed compatriots, Russia and Serbia. It was not so much a question of selecting the Dardanelles over another alternative as choosing between initiative and resignation to the stalemate and trench war. The War Council directed that

"The Admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula, with Constantinople as its objective."<sup>28</sup>

Only preparations were authorized by this decision which, although it was not irrevokable, had, according to the

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<sup>27</sup>

World Crisis, II, 117.

<sup>28</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 69, p. 21.

Dardanelles Commissioners, by implication committed the War Council to large scale military operations "...in the event of the attempt to force the Dardanelles by the Fleet alone proving successful."<sup>29</sup> With this decision the Dardanelles enters the second stage of its development, for it was no longer to be a demonstration of secondary import, but had now become a full-fledged, all-out naval attack of major significance.

The War Council also suggested to the Admiralty at the January 13 meeting that a bombardment in the Adriatic, perhaps at Cattaro, ought to be considered as a means of encouraging the Italians to make war on Austria. Churchill was convinced, however, that "...the Dardanelles, not Cattaro, was the key to Italian action."<sup>30</sup> and in a letter to the Prime Minister the following day he depreciated this "sterile" operation of great risk and little promise and commended that their resources had best be concentrated on the Dardanelles, as this undertaking would require the whole of England's available resources. He believed that success in this theatre would have a favourable effect on every Mediterranean power and that the Italians, opportunists that they were, would not long resist a line baited with the spoils of the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>29</sup>

Ibid., par. 72, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup>

Churchill to Asquith, January 14, 1915, World Crisis, II, 105-6; see also Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 68, p. 21.

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On January 11, Churchill had directed Sir Henry Jackson to go over the Carden plan and prepare a report on the Admiral's proposal. Jackson, having completed his investigation of the scheme, issued a memorandum on January 15 which took up in great detail the armaments of the Turkish forts and the amount of ammunition that he thought would be required for the operation. Although he concurred "generally" in the Carden plan, Jackson did not commit himself one way or another as to the advisability of the naval attack, but he did recommend that the attack on the outer forts should be approved at once "...as the experience gained would be useful."

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Carden was informed, on the same day, that his requirements for the operation would be completed by the end of January, and the concern that some had expressed over these withdrawals for the Dardanelles was partly alleviated by the excellent showing of the Grand Fleet in

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Jackson in his testimony before the Dardanelles Commission said that he did not consider the purely naval attack a "feasible operation", and that he only agreed to the attack on the outer forts. Ibid., para. 59, p. 18. Commodore de Bartolome: "My impression was always that the naval members would much sooner have had a combined operation, and that they only agreed to a purely naval operation on the understanding that we could always draw back---that there should be no question of what is known as forcing the Dardanelles." Ibid., para. 62, p. 18. Sir Henry Oliver: He acquiesced in the naval attack, although he, like Churchill, Fisher and the others, would have preferred a joint operation. Ibid., para. 61, p. 18. Churchill maintains that Jackson agreed to the whole of the Carden plan and that his memorandum of January 15, 1915, was unqualified only in-so-far as he recommended only the immediate sanction of the attack on the outer forts. World Crisis, II, n. 1, 111.

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Corbett, II, 80.

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after consideration of the prospective effectiveness of the Dogger Bank encounter of January 24. At this stage in the campaign, Churchill maintains that the naval advisers "seemed favourable" to the plan and that it had never been criticized on technical grounds. Everyone treated it... as an extremely interesting and hopeful proposal; and there grew up in the secret circles of the Admiralty a perfectly clear opinion favourable to the operation.<sup>33</sup> The French<sup>34</sup> and the Russians were informed of the English plans and Lord Kitchener was asked to time a feint at Alexandretta with the beginning of the naval attack, so that in the event of the failure of this operation, it would appear that the bombardment was merely a demonstration to cover the seizure of Alexandretta.<sup>35</sup> It was expected that the naval attack would commence on February 15, 1915.

### 3. Fisher's Misgivings And The Final Decision.

In the interim between the War Council meeting of the 13th and that of January 23 Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, had developed misgivings about the Dardanelles Campaign,

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World Crisis, II, 95.

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"The Admiralty's plan was submitted on February 2 to our Minister of Marine, M. Augagneur, who approved it on the 9th and promised the assistance of a French squadron commanded by Rear-Admiral Geupratte." Marshall Joffre, Personal Memoirs of Joffre, Field Marshall of the French Army, T. Bentley Mott, translator (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), II, 369. See also Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 74, p. 23.

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World Crisis, II, 112-16.

which was no longer the diversionary operation he had contemplated, but rather a large scale naval attack. He foresaw a drain on the naval resources he had been preparing for his Baltic scheme and in the absence of arguments other than those provided by his experience and his conviction that the northern project was a much sounder undertaking, Fisher now based his objections to the Dardanelles on his belief that these operations would jeopardize the strength of the Grand Fleet.<sup>36</sup>

The Prime Minister learned of Fisher's change of mind on January 20 when the latter expressed his concern about the disposition and future movements of the fleet and complained that he was frequently "outargued" by the First Lord in purely technical naval matters. "Though...the old man is rather difficult", Asquith thought "there is some truth in what he says."<sup>37</sup>

The First Sea Lord's dissatisfaction with the situation was again manifested on the 25th when Fisher requested Churchill to forward a memorandum he had prepared on general naval policy to the Prime Minister and the War Council.<sup>38</sup> In this paper he emphasized the fact that naval tradition had made command of home waters a prerequisite to all overseas operations, but it did not specifically question the soundness of the Dardanelles plan al-

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Fisher "...disliked the whole scheme; he did not think it would be successful; but he had no evidence to bring to the support of his contentions. He had no direct and valid arguments which would prove his assertions." Bacon, II, 215.

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Herbert Henry Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1928), II, 67. Hereafter cited as Asquith.

38

World Crisis, II, 151-54.



though his depreciation of the use of battleships for land bombardments may be taken as an indirect attack upon the scheme. It was not until Churchill had been confronted with this memorandum that he "...perceived...that the First Sea Lord had, since the first meeting of the War Council, developed serious misgivings..."<sup>39</sup> about the Dardanelles. Two days later the First Lord circulated a note to the War Council in which he expressed full agreement with the general naval policy outlined in the Fisher memorandum of January 25, but he differed with the First Sea Lord on the margins available for subsidiary operations. Churchill also pointed out, though Fisher had not directly questioned the attack on the Dardanelles, that this undertaking was in no way in conflict<sup>40</sup> with the principles of the Fisher memorandum.

Asquith was disturbed not a little bit over the Fisher-Churchill differences and he summoned these "two autocrats"<sup>41</sup> to his office for a conference before the War Council of January 28. The First Sea Lord was invited to express his objections but rather than criticizing the technical difficulties of the Dardanelles plan, he devoted his arguments to an advocacy of alternative theatres of operations. As Asquith understood Fisher, the latter's chief objection to the scheme was that he preferred a Baltic operation over

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<sup>39</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 84, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup>Memorandum by First Lord on Naval Policy, January 27, 1915. World Crisis, II, 157-60.

<sup>41</sup>

Bacon, I, xiii.

the attack on the Turkish forts which would interfere with  
the First Sea Lord's own plan. <sup>42</sup> Lord Fisher's biographer

says that "There is no doubt that this was the case..." <sup>43</sup>

and Fisher himself later wrote that the Dardanelles smashed  
this "great plan" and the "great Armada" he had prepared for  
the Baltic was "...diverted and perverted to the damned Dard-  
anelles." Churchill defended the Dardanelles attack to  
the Prime Minister and in the end Asquith agreed with him.

The three men adjourned to the morning War Council, which met  
immediately after this conference. The project "...had moved  
forward to a point where mere vague misgivings could not be  
allowed to paralyze action. Good reasoning or new facts were  
required." <sup>45</sup> In a democracy decisions in such matters of pol-  
icy must ultimately rest with civilian authorities as they are

the ones upon whom the blame for the miscarriages fall. As  
the civilian ministers were "...less absorbed with the exig-  
encies of the actual position in France, ...(and) were able,  
perhaps, to take a wider view and to appreciate more justly  
the political deflections of the broader strategic situation  
..." Sir Julian Corbett, the Official Naval Historian, does

not believe that this situation should necessarily be depre-  
ciated even though technical advice is sometimes, rightly or  
wrongly, disregarded. <sup>46</sup> The choice of the Dardanelles

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<sup>42</sup> Bacon, II, 209.

<sup>45</sup> World Crisis, II, 147-48.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., II, 299.

<sup>46</sup> Corbett, II, 106, 150-51.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., II, 188

over the Baltic was "...preëminently...a matter for Ministers to decide...".

At the War Council of January 28, the First Lord reviewed the preparations that had been made for the Dardanelles attack and acquainted the ministers of his correspondence with the French and Russian governments on the subject. Churchill then asked the War Council if it "...attached importance to this operation, which undoubtedly involved some risks?" At this point he was interrupted by Lord Fisher who said that he had understood that question was not to be raised that day. When the First Sea Lord was informed by the Prime Minister that "...the question could not well be left in abeyance...."<sup>47</sup> Fisher left the council table with the intention of turning in his resignation. Lord Kitchener followed the First Sea Lord and took him to one side and pointed out that "...he was the only dissident..." and urged him not to leave his duty at the Admiralty. Fisher reluctantly gave in to Kitchener and the two returned to the council table.<sup>48</sup> In the discussion that followed Mr. Balfour found it difficult "...to imagine a more helpful operation...", while Sir Edward Grey thought that a

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<sup>47</sup>

World Crisis, II, 161-62.

<sup>48</sup>

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 87, p. 28. According to his biographer, Fisher reconsidered his threatened resignation because of "Lord Kitchener's entreaty" and because he wanted to see the completion of the shipbuilding programmes he had started. Bacon, II, 210-11.

success at the Dardanelles would "...finally settle the attitude of Bulgaria and the whole of the Balkans." Lord Kitchener again strongly endorsed the operations which he described as being "vitally important" to the Allied cause and predicted that a victory at the Straits would be equivalent to a great land success with the new armies.<sup>49</sup>

When the Council had adjourned for the morning, Churchill arranged for a conference with Fisher as he realized he must come to a "clear understanding" with the First Sea Lord. That afternoon he and Fisher had a "long talk" and the First Lord urged his naval adviser "...not to turn back from the Dardanelles operation."<sup>50</sup> In the end Fisher yielded and went in for the scheme "totus porcus."<sup>51</sup> Later, at the evening meeting of the War Council, the First Lord announced,

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World Crisis, II, 161.

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"Mr. Churchill's silver tongue was ever able to persuade Lord Fisher. Appeals to patriotism and good comradeship were always difficult for him to ignore. Without a doubt he agreed to carry out the operations, with which the War Council had charged the Admiralty so urgently, and which he now looked upon as inevitable; but this did not mean that he agreed with them." Bacon, II, 211.

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In the weeks that followed Churchill noted that Lord Fisher was worried about the Dardanelles and that he reproached for having agreed to the operation. "He knew that I wanted the fleet to carry out its plan in its integrity. I knew that he wanted to break off the whole operation and come away. Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 83, p. 26.

in the presence of the First Sea Lord and Admiral Oliver, that the Admiralty had decided "...to undertake the task with which the War Council had charged us so urgently."<sup>52</sup> Thus was the Navy bound, against an old Nelsonic Maxim, to a bombardment of land fortresses, not necessarily because it was the best method of attack, but rather because it was at the time the only operation possible with the limited resources at the command of the Allies. ~~and~~ As Lord Fisher's biographer says, thus did the "political stripling" at the Admiralty override the opinions of naval advisers "...double his age and ten times his experience."<sup>53</sup> Churchill had guided the Carden plan out of "...the region of discussion..." and he was now to press it "...into the domain of action."<sup>54</sup>

What would victory at the Dardanelles mean to the Allies? It would mean: that Russia would be given direct communications with France and England who could furnish her with the arms and munitions she so sorely needed for her armies; that the export of the Russian wheat crops of 1914 to Europe would create the foreign exchange necessary to re-establish Russian finances; that some 350,000 tons of shipping tied up in the Black Sea would be freed for Allied use; that Bulgaria would probably remain a neutral; that Italy, and perhaps Rumania and Greece, might be drawn into the war as allies; that the Danube valley might become a highway to Berlin;

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<sup>52</sup> World Crisis, II, 164.

<sup>53</sup> Bacon, I, ix.

<sup>54</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 39, p. 26.

that the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire would probably rise in revolt; and that the Turkish menace to Egypt and the Canal would be at an end. "The importance of the results was indeed so great that the wonder is, not that the scheme attracted, but that it was not at once adopted with higher conviction and complete singleness of purpose."<sup>55</sup>

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE ARMY UNDERTAKES TO SEE THE NAVY THROUGH THE STRAITS.

##### I. The Inception of the Military Attack.

Churchill had always favoured joint operations at the Dardanelles and the purely naval attack had been decided upon only in the face of Lord Kitchener's repeated assertions that there were "no troops to spare."<sup>1</sup> In accepting, and indeed urging, the naval attack the First Lord had not blinded himself to the fact that a military force would be required to gather in the fruits of a naval victory at the Dardanelles, but he did not rely upon Kitchener to furnish the necessary troops. If there were "prompt and good diplomacy" he felt, quite reasonably, that this force might be drawn from the Balkans. He did not believe these shifty neutrals would long stand idly by as the Turkish Empire tumbled down about them, and he was convinced that the lure of Ottoman territory would send a Greek army to Gallipoli on the double, the Bulgars to Adrianople, and the Russians, regardless of the situation in Poland and Galicia, would scramble for the Bosphorus lest some other power seize

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill informed the War Council of May 14, 1915, that he would not have pressed for the naval attack had he known troops would be available for a joint operation at a later date. Final Report, Dardanelles Commission (London: Harrison and Sons, 1917), par. 7, p. 7.

Constantinople. So it was, not without the knowledge that soldiers would be required, but with the conviction that success would mean new enemies for the Central Powers and armies for the Dardanelles, that Churchill pushed the naval attack with all his energies.<sup>2</sup>

But on January 23th, Lord Kitchener's statement to the contrary, there were troops to spare. At the time Churchill took the War Secretary's words at their face value but from information of a later date, he estimates that there were nearly 150,000 soldiers in England and enough transports to concentrate this force in the eastern Mediterranean by the end of March, 1915. These troops had been freed from other theatres by the abandonment of such schemes as a British offensive along the Belgian coast, the suppression of the revolts in South Africa, and the failure of the Turkish drive on the Suez Canal, and were available, along with the new territorial armies whose training was then nearly complete, for offensive action elsewhere. The First Lord does not believe that Kitchener deliberately misled the War Council, and he attributes the War Secretary's statement to the fact that his decisions were often influenced and colored by day to day occurrences which were often of a "fleeting nature". He stood at the

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<sup>2</sup>World Crisis, II, 179-80.



head of the War Office, the "K. of K's.", unwilling to delegate part of his burdensome task to subordinates, "...with no rock clear, well-thought-out doctrine and calculation at his back..." amid "...the rushing, swirling torrent of events...", Kitchener found himself torn between two schools of strategic thought. He attempted to at once placate the "Westerners", who wanted to "kill" the Germans in France, and sympathize with the "Easterners", who would have preferred to have sent the new armies of 1915 to the Balkans.

The War Council of January 28 had decided, in addition to committing itself to the naval attack at the Dardanelles, to make a show of troops in the Balkans for political purposes, in the hope that Greece would be drawn into the conflict and succor the embattled Serbs. It was hoped that the 29th Division and a territorial division might be used for this bribe, but as these troops were promised to Sir John French, his consent would first have to be secured before the scheme could be placed in operation. Upon Kitchener's suggestion, Churchill, who had long been a friend of the British commander-in-chief, was directed to confer with Sir John and endeavor to secure

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<sup>3</sup> Churchill suggests that Kitchener might have devised a plan whereby the new armies could have been employed in the Balkans during the spring and then re-concentrated in the West for the summer campaigns expected in that theatre. World Crisis, II, 169-74.

the release of these troops. The First Lord spent January 29 and 30 in France with the commander-in-chief, and when he returned to London he was able to report that although the general opposed a military occupation of Gallipoli, he would hold two of the new divisions which had been promised him in readiness for political action in the Balkans from the middle of March onward, provided his front was not under a great offensive or defensive emergency. Having secured the troops, the Allies made their two division-bid for Greek support on February 9, only to find that the crafty Venizelos would not sell the support of his people for so small a price, thus confirming Churchill's belief that the offer was "too limited" to be of any value.<sup>4</sup>

As the War Council whiled away valuable time during the critical period between January 28 and March 10, preparations for the great naval experiment were carried forward under the impatient eye of the First Lord and his colleagues at the Admiralty. Kitchener, meanwhile promised the Admiralty military support at the War Council of February 9 if it were needed at some later stage in the operations.<sup>5</sup> Churchill had hoped that the naval operations would be under way by February 15, but he

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<sup>4</sup>Churchill to Kitchener, January 31, 1915, World Crisis, II, 175-77.

<sup>5</sup>Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 95, p. 30.

received word on the 10th that the attack could not be carried out on schedule as it would require several more days to assemble the mine-sweepers.<sup>6</sup> The Admiralty had by this time, through convenient and "informal" intrigue with the Greeks, occupied the island of Lemnos and Admiral Carden was informed on the 16th that the harbor at Mudros on this island might be used by him as a base of operation. As governor of the base, Churchill appointed Rear-Admiral Wester-Wemyss.<sup>7</sup>

On February 15, Admiral Sir Henry Jackson expressed the opinion that the naval attack was not

"...a sound military operation, unless a strong military force is ready to assist in the operation, or, at least, follow it up immediately the forts are silenced."<sup>8</sup>

This, says the official naval historian, may be taken as the final decision of the Admiralty in regard to the problem of military assistance to the Fleet.<sup>9</sup> Jackson's paper, which was forwarded to Carden for his consideration, also recommended the preparation of transports for the expeditionary force which would make fast the successes of the Navy. But

<sup>6</sup> On learning of this delay the Prime Minister expressed his hope that the attack "...won't be delayed any longer." Asquith, II, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 95, p. 30. See also World Crisis, II, 178.

<sup>9</sup> Corbett, II, 124.

Churchill, who was still convinced that success at the Dardanelles would send the Balkan powers into the Allied camp and perhaps precipitate a revolt against "Germanophil Enver Pasha", told Parliament that very day that

"We shall bring...the full force of naval pressure to bear on the enemy. It may be enough without war on land to secure victory over the foe."<sup>10</sup>

Lord Fisher, however, was not so confident that the Fleet, by itself, could secure the victory that Churchill thought possible, and he urged the First Lord on the 16th to press for the immediate despatch of troops---which was, in view of the opposition that would have been aroused by such a proposal, of course, impossible---to the Mediterranean for the purpose of storming the Gallipoli Peninsula. Unless there was a military occupation, he warned, "Not a grain of wheat will come from the Black Sea...", and predicted that

"...it will be the wonder of the ages that no troops were sent to cooperate with the Fleet with half a million soldiers in England."<sup>11</sup>

By the middle of February it was generally recognized that diplomatic efforts initiated at the of January to bring the Greeks into the war had failed and the War Council

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<sup>10</sup>

Irene Cooper Willis, England's Holy War, A Study of English Liberal Idealism During the Great War (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1928), 202-3.

<sup>11</sup>

World Crisis, II, 179.

of February 16 was confronted with the knotty problem of what to do about troops for the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup> In the face of this problem, Kitchener consented to the despatch of the 29th Division, which was to have been given to the Greeks, to Lemnos where it would be available, if required, for co-operation with the Fleet. The War Secretary also authorized an order for the withdrawal of troops from Egypt for reinforcements. The Council then directed the Admiralty to make ready transports for 50,000 men, and to begin collecting horse-boats, tugs, lighters, and other types of small craft in the Levant. There was no definite decision to employ troops, but these preparations formed the foundation of the military attack, and troops were in the Near East so that they would be ready if their support was needed by the Navy.<sup>13</sup> Upon Churchill's return to the Admiralty following this meeting, he immediately notified Admiral Oliver of the decision, and this officer issued orders that evening for the concentration of transports near the Dardanelles.<sup>14</sup> The Serbian and Baltic expeditions were out, and British diplomacy had failed in its efforts to bring

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<sup>12</sup>

Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 8, p. 7.

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Sir Maurice Hankey informed the Commissioners that the War Council action of February 15 was "...the all important decision from which sprang the joint naval and military enterprise against the Dardanelles. Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 96, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup>

World Crisis, II, 181.

Greece into the war so the English now fixed their eyes on the Dardanelles.

The naval operations at the Dardanelles opened on February 19 and the hope evoked by the results of this attack had done much to consolidate opinion behind the undertaking, but even at this stage the "negative forces" which were to delay and so often hinder the campaign were already at work. No sooner had it become known that Kitchener had consented to the despatch of the 29th Division, the War Secretary was put under great pressure by the "Westerners" to rescind his order. According to the official naval historian, the 29th had become the symbol of the struggle between the eastern and western schools of strategy. Circumstances played into the hands of the "Westerners" and the ne Russian reverses, which had been climaxed by the fall of Czernowitz, clinched their arguments. 15 Kitchener believed that these successes in the East would enable the enemy to withdraw large numbers of his men from that theatre and throw them into a great offensive in the West. The War Council was then informed that the 29th could not be

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Corbett, II, 150-54. "Sir William Robertson tells us that all the leading French Generals with which he was brought into contact, including Joffre, Foch, and Petain showed in manner if not in actual words, that they intensely disliked the project and that was also the attitude of our own general staff." Asquith, II, 182-83. Joffre saw in the despatch of the 29th East "a disquieting omen of the destination of the new army divisions. Hart, A History of the World War, 1914-1918, 223.

spared for the Dardanelles,<sup>16</sup> and though their views remained unaltered, "...the Council bowed to Lord Kitchener's will...". Although accepting the War Secretary's decision, Churchill informed the Director of Transports on February 20 to make every effort to complete the preparations for the embarkation of these troops "...with the least possible delay."

Kitchener, in a letter of the same day, wrote to the First Lord strongly depreciating the assembly of the transports and his personal military secretary, Colonel Fitzgerald was sent to the Admiralty to inform the Director of Transports that the 29th was to stay in England. The First Sea Lord and the Director of Transports assumed that Fitzgerald's visit was the result of some agreement reached by Kitchener and Churchill and the orders for the transports were forthwith cancelled. The First Lord was not consulted and nearly a week passed before he learned that the order had been recalled.<sup>17</sup> As will be seen, this unfortunate event was to delay the transport of the 29th for nearly fifteen days.

By the February 24 meeting of the War Council, there had

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<sup>16</sup> Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par4, 9, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Two of the Australian Divisions then at Egypt were placed under orders for the Dardanelles this same day. Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par4, 101, pp. 32-33; see also Corbett, II, 151-52; and World Crisis, II, 183

been an important change of opinion in respect to breaking off the operations at the Dardanelles in the event that the difficulties were too great. Lord Kitchener now reached the conclusion that a defeat in the Orient would be "very serious" and if the navy could not force the passage unaided, the army would have to see the Fleet through to Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> Kitchener questioned Churchill as to whether or not the latter thought troops would be required. The First Lord replied, that though a land attack was not contemplated, "...it was quite conceivable that the naval attack might be temporarily held up by mines, and some local military operations required."<sup>19</sup> Even though a land attack was not contemplated, the First Lord continued to press for the immediate despatch of the 29th Division but at Kitchener's insistence, it was decided, "...to Winston's unconcealed dudgeon," to hold this division in reserve and to later send it where it was most needed.<sup>20</sup> This indecision led Churchill to disclaim formally, at this meeting, all responsibility for any military consequences which resulted from the delays attending the despatch of the 29th Division and induced him to seek out Asquith after the meeting and endeavor to persuade him to use his authority as Prime Minister to override

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<sup>18</sup>

Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 9, p. 7.

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Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 100, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>

Asquith, II, 76.



Kitchener's decision. Asquith thought that the position taken by his War Secretary was "on the whole" right and he refused to intervene in the matter. Churchill had appealed to Asquith because

"I felt at that moment in an intense way a foreboding of disaster. I knew it was a turning point in the struggle, as surely as I know now that the consequences are graven on the monuments of history...".

In a note written on February 27, 1915, the First Lord predicted that even if the Navy should accomplish its objective, "...the weakness of the military force may compel us to forego a large part of the advantage which would otherwise follow."<sup>21</sup>

Following this meeting of the War Council Churchill, in accordance with the decision to keep the ships for the 29th available, inquired of the Director of Transports as to the state of the preparations he had ordered on the 16th. He learned then, for the first time, that his order had been countermanded six days before as a result of Fitzgerald's visit and that the transports had been dispersed. He immediately issued a new order for the re-concentration of the ships and informed Kitchener that this singular act might have resulted in "grave consequences". It was nearly fifteen days be-

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<sup>21</sup>

World Crisis, II, 185-87.

fore the transports could be re-assembled.<sup>22</sup> At the meetings of the War Council, Churchill continued to press for the despatch of the 29th. As a reward for his persistence, Kitchener promised the War Council at the first meeting of March 3, to have a definite decision concerning the destination of the division by March 10, at which time he hoped to have a report from General Birdwood, whom he had sent to confer with Carden.<sup>23</sup>

Kitchener received reports from Birdwood on March 5 and 6, and the doubt which this officer expressed as to the ability of the Admiral to force the Straits unaided,<sup>24</sup> together with the failure of the campaigns in the Neuve Chapelle and Champagne sectors of the Western Front, led the War Secretary to announce to the Council on March 10, "...the situation was now sufficiently secure to justify the despatch of the 29th Division..." to Lemnos.<sup>25</sup> It had taken Lord Kitchener nearly four weeks to make up his mind and although he cannot be blamed for hesitating to take on further military commitments, his fears were "groundless" and on the basis of

"...the evidence that was available at the time, it certainly seems strange that the actualities of

<sup>22</sup>Dardanelles Commission, First Report, II, 187-88.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., para. 100, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, para. 12, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 103, p. 33.

the situation should not have been more fully realized both by Lord Kitchener and his colleagues."<sup>26</sup>

During this critical period, few members of the War Council, save Churchill, recognized that the turning point was at hand, and their vacillatory policy allowed the opportune moment to slip through their fingers and gave the Turks the precious time they needed to strengthen their defences on Gallipoli. The Dardanelles Commissioners' conclusion as to the importance the First Lord attached to this period of February 16 to March 10 is that

"...Mr. Churchill was quite justified in attaching utmost importance to the delays which occurred in despatching the 29th Division from this country."<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Naval Operations to March 18.

The naval attack on the outer defences of the Dardanelles opened on February 19, 1915. The results of the first day's operations were promising but in his report to the Admiralty, Carden admitted that "...the effect of long-range bombardment by direct fire on modern earth-work forts is slight."<sup>28</sup> Rains and heavy seas delayed the renewal of the attack until

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<sup>26</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 106, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., para. 106, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., para. 27, p. 31.

the 25th, but on that day the forts at the entrance to the Straits were again brought under the heavy fire of the Fleet, causing considerable damage to the outer forts.<sup>29</sup> This bombardment was followed up by demolition parties, which were landed on both shores of the Straits on February 26 and 27. Unhindered by either the guns or the troops of the enemy, these parties succeeded in destroying or putting out of commission most of the guns in the entrance forts.<sup>30</sup> The First Lord was well satisfied with the results of these early operations and recollects that in these days he was surrounded by "smiling faces" and supported by "robust" naval opinion. Churchill, however, was under no illusions of victory and he warned his colleagues the real difficulty would come at the Narrows.<sup>31</sup>

The defences at the jaws of the Dardanelles were sufficiently dominated by March 2 to allow the fleet to enter the Straits and begin operations against the intermediate batteries. This action was opened by direct bombardment of the

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<sup>29</sup> According to Turkish information obtained after the Armistice, all the guns in Sedd el Bahr and Kum Kale were put out of action in this engagement. Corbett, II, f.n.l., 149.

<sup>30</sup> Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 37.

<sup>31</sup> World Crisis, II, 194.

defences and on the 4th, the Susan Elizabeth, with her powerful 15-inch guns, was thrown into the attack and ordered to carry out an indirect bombardment of the forts across Gallipoli from the seaward side of the peninsula. Ineffective spotting, however, prevented her from developing a telling fire.<sup>32</sup> With good weather Carden had estimated on March 2, that it would take him about fourteen days to battle his way through the defences to the Sea of Marmora.<sup>33</sup> General Birdwood, however, thought that the Admiral's forecast was too "sanguine" and he expressed the opinion that the Navy could not force the passage without the aid of the Army.

During the first week of March, the great political advantages that Churchill had expected to accrue from the Dardanelles had already begun to present themselves. The Greeks had, on the first day of March, offered to send three divisions to Gallipoli to assist the Fleet, but in spite of Churchill's urgings, the War Council gave in to the Russians and rejected the Greek proposal.<sup>34</sup> Italy made her first approaches to the Allies on the fourth and the Bulgarians had already hauled

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<sup>32</sup> Puleston, op. cit., 39-42.

<sup>33</sup> World Crisis, II, 194.

<sup>34</sup> World Crisis, II, 203; Churchill wrote a letter, which he never sent, on March 6, 1915 to Sir Edward Grey threatening to do his "utmost" to prevent Russia from getting the Straits if she denied the English Creek participation in the Gallipoli campaign. Ibid., II, 204.

down their sails and anchored their ship of state to see what direction the wind from the Dardanelles would take. Although bad weather was slowing down the operations themselves, confidence in the attack continued to grow. The campaign, said the London Daily News on March 5, 1915, offered the flighty neutrals of the Balkans "a concrete argument" which might move them from "hesitation to decision"; on the 8th, the same paper predicted, rightly, that the operation would be "a trumpet call to the Greeks."<sup>35</sup>

The weather at the Dardanelles might hamper the movements of the Fleet, but it could not slow down the First Lord. On March 11, Churchill telegraphed Carden to ask if he did not believe that the time had come when it was necessary, at the risk of "regrettable losses", "to press hard for a decision." He re-assured the Admiral that every "well-conceived" plan to hurry up the operation would meet with his approval and support.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile Carden was finding the Turkish defences much more of a problem than he had anticipated and the activity of the concealed shore guns was causing considerable annoyance, though not much damage, during the attacks on the

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<sup>35</sup>

Willis, England's Holy War, A Study of English Liberal Idealism During the Great War, f. n. 3, 213.

<sup>36</sup>

Churchill to Carden, March 11, 1915. Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 109, p. 35.

forts.<sup>37</sup> On the 14th, Carden replied to the First Lord's message of three days previous to the effect that he also considered that the time had arrived when the operations must be "pressed hard."<sup>38</sup> At this time Fisher was also urging the renewal of the attack and agitating for Kitchener to send troops out to protect the advance of the fleet. The Admiral on the spot could be ordered on, but it was not so easy to tell the "K. of K.'s" what to with his troops as has been noted in the preceding section of this paper. Lord Kitchener said there would be no military action until the 29th arrived at the Dardanelles and <sup>then only when it</sup> was ready to go into action along with the troops which had already been sent out to Lemnos from Egypt.

According to Admiralty Intelligence Reports, the forts at the Dardanelles were running short of ammunition and this made Churchill all the more anxious that the attack be pressed with the least possible delay for the strength of the Turkish defences increased with the passing of each day along with the submarine threat.<sup>39</sup> The hour had arrived to deliver "...the stolen bride of the Western World and Christendom...", but the

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<sup>37</sup>Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 94, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup>Carden to Admiralty, Ibid., par. 109, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup>Corbett, II, 207-08.

First Lord, "...anxious not to allow his impatience to drive him to rashness...", sent Admiral Carden another wire elaborating on his previous inquiry of the 11th and at once qualifying it.<sup>40</sup> The Admiral replied that he intended to clear the minefields under the cover of a vigorous attack on the defences at the Narrows at the first favourable moment. By this time the great significance of the Dardanelles and Constantinople "possessed all minds" and as Churchill says:

"Every one's blood was up. There was a virile readiness to do and dare. All the will-power and cohesion necessary to mount and launch a great operation by land and sea were now forthcoming. But, alas, a month too late!"<sup>41</sup>

At this time naval opinion was also unanimously behind the project---Wilson, Jackson, Oliver, and Bartolome---were all "...united and agreed to press on and to press hard." Even Fisher concurred in the plans and, with all his seventy-four years, he offered to go out to the Dardanelles and take personal command of the attack. On the eve of the great assault on the Narrows, fate intervened to rob the Fleet of its commander-in-chief, Admiral Carden. Rear-Admiral de Robeck, who had been in charge of the arrangements for the attack and who had directed the preliminary bombardments, was appointed to

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<sup>40</sup>

Henry Woodd Nevinson, "The Naval Disaster of the Dardanelles", Source Records of the Great War (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1930), III, 88.

<sup>41</sup>

World Crisis, II, 219.



succeed Carden with the rank of Vice-Admiral.<sup>42</sup> On the 17th the new commander-in-chief expressed his satisfaction with the plan which had been worked out for the operation against the Narrows and announced to the Admiralty that, weather permitting, he expected to begin the attack the next day.<sup>43</sup>

The 18th promised to be a perfect day and the attack was opened as scheduled. The bombardment was to be directed against the forts at the Narrows and the undertaking promised from the beginning to be much more difficult than the assault on the outer defences had been because the Fleet here had not only to be concerned with the batteries in the forts, but also the concealed howitzers on the shores. These guns so harassed the fleet that the attackers were compelled to keep moving in spite of the protection offered by the ships supporting the right and left wings of attacking and demolition squadrons.

During the engagement, the ships inflicted considerable damage on the forts, but when the "General Recall" was ordered, most of the forts were still firing. The English themselves had been roughly handled in the encounter,<sup>44</sup> not so much by the guns of either the forts or the shore batteries, but rather to a newly planted minefield off Erenkeui. This field

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<sup>42</sup>Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 47.

<sup>43</sup>De Robeck to Admiralty, Dardanelles Commission, First Report, para. 110, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup>Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 48-56.

was sown parallel to the shore and contained about twenty mines, three of which had been picked up by the English mine-sweeps. Three others accounted for all the English losses---sinking the Bouvet, the Ocean, and the Irresistable to the bottom of the Straits. In addition, three other vessels were damaged so badly as to be out of action "indefinitely".<sup>45</sup>

In England Churchill complacently regarded the report of the losses in the attack only as the result of "...the first of several days of fighting...It never occurred to me for a moment that we should not go on, within the limits we had decided to risk." Fisher and Wilson were in the "same mood" and the London and the Prince of Wales were immediately put under orders for the Dardanelles to replace de Robeck's losses.<sup>46</sup> The War Council directed the Admiralty on the 19th to inform de Robeck that he could, if he thought fit, continue the attack and orders to that effect were sent out to the commander. On the 20th, Carden was advised that it appeared "...important not to let the forts be repaired, or to encourage the enemy by an apparent suspension of the operations."<sup>47</sup> De Robeck telegraphed the Admiralty that the

"Squadron is ready for immediate action except

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<sup>45</sup> Corbett, II, f. n. 1, 225.

<sup>46</sup> World Crisis, II, 234.

<sup>47</sup> Admiralty to de Robeck, March 20, 1915. Ibid., II, 234-35.

as regards ships lost and damaged, but it is necessary to re-consider the plan of attack. A method of dealing with the floating mines must be found."<sup>48</sup>

Churchill was to stand alone in his determination to renew the naval attack for Fisher, Wilson, Jackson, and de Robeck were soon to change their minds.

### III. The Abandonment of the Naval Attack.

After seeing the naval attack of March 18, Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the military forces of the Dardanelles Expeditionary Force, wired Lord Kitchener that from what he had seen of the attack it was certain that the Navy could not force the passage up the Straits unaided and the Army would not be relegated to a secondary position but would rather have to undertake full scale operations.<sup>49</sup> Hamilton met de Robeck on March 22 aboard the Queen Elizabeth, and de Robeck confirmed the General's conclusion when he announced that it had become "quite clear" that he could not force the Straits unaided.<sup>50</sup> This was a momentous decision for the abandonment of the naval attack in favour of joint operations meant a delay of nearly six weeks, as the transports would have to be re-stowed at

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<sup>48</sup>De Robeck to Admiralty, (not dated). Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 113, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup>Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 22, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup>Sir Ian Hamilton, Gallipoli Diary, 1915. (Shortened Edition), (London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1930), 24.

Alexandria and the troops prepared for disembarkation under fire. Meanwhile the Turks would transform the once weakly occupied Gallipoli into a great fortress. De Robeck advised the Admiralty of his decision to abandon the naval operations on March 23, and he informed them that he felt it was better to prepare for a decisive operation about the middle of April rather than "...to take great risks for what may well be only half-way measures."<sup>51</sup>

Churchill read this telegram with great "consternation". He "...feared the perils of the long delay..." and he immediately convened the Admiralty War Group. He proposed to despatch a wire to de Robeck pointing out the dangers of the delays entailed by the new plan and recommending that the naval attack be resumed at the first opportunity for

"...The entry into the Marmora of a fleet strong enough to beat the Turkish Fleet would produce decisive results on the whole situation. We know that the forts are short of ammunition and supply of mines is limited. We do not think that the time has yet come to give up the plan of forcing the Dardanelles by purely naval operations."<sup>52</sup>

But now that the Admiral on the spot no longer recommended the attack the First Lord found that the Sea Lords would not agree to a continuation of the operations and that the resistance of

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<sup>51</sup> Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 23, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Admiralty to de Robeck, (not sent), World Crisis, II, 238.

Fisher, Wilson, and Jackson was "insuperable." The youngest of the naval advisers, Commodore de Bartolome, "stoutly" supported Churchill's views, but Fisher, who had never been more than lukewarm toward the scheme, and the rest prevailed in their opinion. Asquith and Balfour were in complete accord with Churchill but the latter was forced to admit that he could do nothing to

"...overcome the Admirals now they had definitely stuck their toes in. They had only to point to the losses of ships which had been incurred, and every one would have sided with them. I was therefore compelled under extreme duress to abandon the intention of sending direct orders to Admiral de Robeck to renew the attack." <sup>53</sup>

But it was not without regret and no little anxiety that the First Lord gave way before his technical advisers to announce to the War Council on March 23, 1915, that the naval attack had to be discontinued in the face of the opposition of the Board of Admiralty and the commander on the spot. <sup>54</sup> There was no discussion, the professionals "...carried all before them and the "stolen bride of the Western World" was to remain the hostage of the Infidel.

On the 24th Churchill obtained Fisher's reluctant consent to a telegram asking de Robeck for a statement of the develop-

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<sup>53</sup>

Ibid., II, 239.

<sup>54</sup>

Ibid., II, 253-54.

ments which had rendered the naval attack impracticable. The Admiral's reply was received three days later and it was learned that although he did not consider the check of the 18th as decisive, he felt

"...that decisive result would be best obtained by a combined operation rather than by either a military or a naval force acting alone.....the result of naval action alone might, in my opinion be a brilliant success or quite indecisive....a Fleet intact outside the Dardanelles can do this [force the Turks to abandon the Gallipoli Peninsula] better than the remains of a Fleet inside with little ammunition..."<sup>55</sup>

The Admiral went on to point out that with the expeditionary force in possession of the Peninsula, the communication lines of the Fleet operating in the Sea of Marmora would be insured and that "...our success would be assured."

Churchill, however, continued to urge on de Robeck a resumption of the naval attack and March 27 he approved a plan submitted by the Admiral for the sweeping of the Kephez minefield under the cover of a bombardment of the forts at the Narrows. But the Admiral and his staff became so involved with the preparations for the landing of the troops that this operation, or any other large scale naval action was never attempted again. "From this slough", says Churchill, "I was not able to lift the operations..." and "The negative forces began to band themselves together." At the Admiralty all

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<sup>55</sup> De Robeck to Admiralty, March 27, 1915, World Crisis, II, 249-52.

counsel pertaining to the Dardanelles was to conform henceforth to the "No" principle and Churchill's "hope of the world" was crushed under the deadening weight of professionalism. Never again was the energetic First Lord able to mobilize Admiralty and War Council opinion to the support of his brilliant scheme.<sup>56</sup> After an expenditure of only 7500 rounds of ammunition<sup>57</sup> and the loss of three obsolete battleships, Churchill was forced aside as the Navy was withdrawn from an operation which promised not success, but "...the shortest path to a triumphant peace."

The Navy had become a passive spectator to the bloody "tragedy of Gallipoli."

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<sup>56</sup>

World Crisis, II, 258.

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Ammunition expenditures at the Dardanelles during the naval attack from February 19 to March 18 was as follows: 5,345 six-inch shells; 749 nine-two/teenths shells; 1,101 twelve inch shells; and 252 fifteen-inch shells. Ibid., II, 264, 269.

## CHAPTER IV.

### POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN.

#### 1. Lord Fisher's Resignation and the Coalition.

In the interim between the abandonment of the naval attack on March 22 and the landings of April 25, the Fleet at the Dardanelles, to Churchill's regret, descended into a state of tranquil inertia. Meantime, at Alexandria, General Hamilton made ready his troops and re-stowed their transports for the landings, while General von Sanders, who had been appointed on March 25 to the command of the Turkish troops at the Dardanelles, completed his preparations for the expected assault on Gallipoli. In England, Churchill, with no authority over military operations, now occupied a role less suited to his restless nature for he too had become more or less a spectator to the "tragedy". The soldiers had his moral support and their appeals for reinforcements were constantly and eloquently championed by the First Lord, but the War Secretary was not one to welcome either advice or criticism for he was, as Hamilton aptly calls him, the "K. of K.'s". Although Churchill was given no voice in military matters, he continued to seize upon every opportunity which might open the way for the renewal of the naval attack, but unfortunately, the Fleet never resumed the offensive. Lord Fisher continued to be the main stay of Admiralty opposition to the naval attack, and he continually sought to draw the First Lord's attention from the Dardanelles



to "his theatre", the North Sea. Fisher candidly declared to Churchill on April 5 that the First Lord was

"...just simply eaten up with the Dardanelles and cannot think of anything else! Damn the Dardanelles! They will be our grave!"<sup>1</sup>

The First Sea Lord placed himself on record against the Dardanelles again on April 7 when he informed the Admiralty War Staff that he considered the "absolute limit" of reinforcements for the Dardanelles Fleet had been reached. He was satisfied with the present situation, he told his colleagues, but he would of course, be better satisfied "...when we get the battleships back from the Dardanelles."<sup>2</sup>

The military forces were all ready for action by April 20 and on the 25th, "Sired by strategic confusion and damned by naval negation, the landing on Gallipoli was born---and marred in delivery by muddled military midwifery."<sup>3</sup> That the Turks had made good use of the time after the naval attack of March 13 now became evident---new roads had given their forces mobility and the disadvantages of the unfavourable terrain of Gallipoli were magnified by strong entrenchments and barbed-wire entanglements, which greatly increased the difficulties of the English.<sup>4</sup> Troops were put ashore on five selected

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<sup>1</sup>Fisher to Churchill, August 5, 1915, World Crisis, II, 313.

<sup>2</sup>Fisher to Sea Lords, April 7, 1915, Ibid., II, 315.

<sup>3</sup>Hart, A History of the World War, 1914-1918, 235.

<sup>4</sup>Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 60.

beaches, and though the enemy disputed their landings, footholds were secured and stoutly held against fierce Turkish counter-attacks. The heavy fighting continued for days after the landings and the English losses were so severe that Churchill and Fisher made a joint appeal to Kitchener on the 28th for the immediate despatch of reinforcements to Hamilton. That evening the War Secretary assigned the 42nd Division and an Indian brigade to the Dardanelles.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile the prospect of a serious ammunition shortage threatened the operations at the Dardanelles. In response to Hamilton's request for shells, Kitchener informed him that the supplies for the campaign had not been calculated on the basis of a prolonged occupation of Gallipoli, and that it was important that it was important that he push on.<sup>6</sup> The cry for more munitions was raised by Hamilton again on May 9, and in his diary the general bewails the fact that he cannot appeal to "Winston" for aid for fear of antagonizing Kitchener.<sup>7</sup> Due to their flat trajectory, the naval guns were not of much use to the army in reducing the barbed-wire entanglements and trenches of the enemy.<sup>8</sup> On the next day, Hamilton informed his

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<sup>5</sup> World Crisis, II, 339.

<sup>6</sup> Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 44, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, Gallipoli Diary, 98.

<sup>8</sup> Final Report, Dardanelles Commission, par. 48, p. 23.

chief that unless reinforcements were forthcoming, he feared that the operations would degenerate into trench warfare. On May 11, Kitchener assigned the Lowland Division to the Dardanelles only to be met two days later by a request for more replacements, this time for the 29th Division, which had suffered heavy casualties in the landings.

On May 10, de Robeck proposed a renewal of the naval attack against the Straits as the bloody battles of May 6, 7, and 8 had convinced the Admiral and his Chief of Staff, Roger Keyes, that the Navy could force the Dardanelles with smaller and less costly losses than those which would be sustained by the Army in its push to the Kilid Bahr plateau. Hamilton approved of the scheme and was sure that it would not jeopardize his position and that his defences at Anzac and Helles were strong enough to hold off "all the Turks in the empire". When the Fleet reached the Sea of Marmora it was expected that the naval guns would be able to dominate the Bulair Isthmus and cut Turkish communication and supply lines thus enabling Hamilton to invest completely the peninsula within two weeks. At the Admiralty, Churchill viewed this prospective operation with enthusiasm, but Fisher, the "Angel of Darkness", refused to be taken in by this scheme, nor would he consent to a more limited operation suggested by the First Lord.<sup>9</sup> Conditions

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<sup>9</sup> Paleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 193-04.

had changed since March 18, and as Admiral Oliver, the Chief of Staff said, at that time "...the Fleet was single, now it had a wife on shore."<sup>10</sup> Then too the German submarines had already made their appearance in the Mediterranean, thus increasing the dangers of the Dardanelles Fleet, which was soon to be weakened by the withdrawal of eight battleships and light cruisers for service in the Adriatic with the Italian Navy.

On May 11, Churchill attempted to persuade Lord Fisher to agree to Admiral de Robeck's proposal, but the First Sea Lord remained fixed in his determination and he did not succumb to the First Lord's "seductive" entreaties. The old sea dog had again put the brakes on the "Damned Dardanelles" and when Churchill pressed an alternative scheme for the sweeping of the Kephez minefield under the cover of an attack on the Narrows the First Sea Lord again refused to concur in the operation. To make his position in regards to the Dardanelles clear, Fisher sent a memorandum to the First Lord on May 11, from which the following extracts are quoted:

"...I have clearly expressed my opinion that I did not consider the original attempt to force the Dardanelles with the fleet alone a practical operation.

"I have always insisted that the North Sea is the proper theatre of operations....For this reason I have

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<sup>10</sup> World Crisis, II, 353.

looked with misgivings on the steady drain of our naval force to the Dardanelles during the last four months....

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"...Any attempt by the fleet to rush by the Narrows is doomed to failure, and, moreover, is fraught with possibilities of disaster utterly incommensurate to any advantage that could be obtained therefrom.

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"For the above reasons I cannot, under any circumstances, be a party to any order to Admiral de Robeck to make an attempt to pass the Dardanelles until the shores have been effectively occupied. I consider that purely naval action, unsupported by the Army, would merely lead to heavy loss of ships and invaluable men, without any reasonable prospect of a success in any way proportionate to the losses or to the possible further consequences of those losses. I therefore wish it to be clearly understood that I dissociate myself from any such project."<sup>11</sup>

Churchill countered this memorandum with a letter to Fisher pointing out that the proposed operation might be necessary to aid the army and reminded the First Sea Lord that he was absolutely committed to the naval attack. He closed his letter with an appeal for Fisher "...to lend...whole aid and good will; and ultimately then success is certain."<sup>12</sup>

Fisher, however, denied that he was "absolutely committed" and pointed out to the First Lord "...that you must know that my unwilling acquiescence did not extend to such a further gamble as any repetition of March 18 until the Army had

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<sup>11</sup>

World Crisis, II, 355-57.

<sup>12</sup>

Churchill to Fisher, May 11, 1915. Ibid., II, 357-58.

done their part."<sup>13</sup>

The next day, May 12, a Turkish destroyer slipped past the British patrol at the Dardanelles and torpedoed one of the English battleships, the Goliath.<sup>14</sup> This event immediately determined Lord Fisher to recall the Queen Elizabeth to safer waters. Churchill concurred in his decision and the War Secretary was notified on the 13th that his vessel was to be withdrawn from the Dardanelles. Kitchener protested vigorously against the recall of this ship and accused the Navy of deserting the land forces. Fisher flew into a fury and declared that "The Queen Elizabeth would come home; she would come at once; she would come home that night, or he would walk out of the Admiralty then and there." Churchill endeavored to explain to the War Secretary that the naval operations at the Dardanelles had never depended on the presence of the Queen Elizabeth and that her gun power would be amply replaced by the despatch of other vessels.<sup>15</sup> Lest the Admiral on the spot be disheartened by the recall of his flag ship, Churchill telegraphed de Robeck that

"I am determined to support you and the Army in every way to the end of your task and I am quite sure

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<sup>13</sup>Fisher to Churchill, May 12, 1915, World Crisis, II, 358-59.

<sup>14</sup>Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 104.

<sup>15</sup>World Crisis, II, 365-66.

that the result will amply repay the sacrifice and anxieties of the struggle."<sup>16</sup>

On May 14, 1915, Churchill reluctantly notified the Commander that the time for independent operations at the Dardanelles had passed and that he should at present cooperate with the Army and conserve his strength until the Army had won the Sillid Bahr plateau.<sup>17</sup>

On this day, May 14, the War Council held its first session since March 19. Kitchener opened the discussion with his complaint about the withdrawal of the Queen Elizabeth, but Fisher broke in to say that both the War Secretary and the Prime Minister had known that he had been "...against the Dardanelles from the beginning." Kitchener having registered his protest, then proceeded to review, pessimistically, the whole war situation and when he had finished his survey Churchill tells us that "...the Council turned to me---almost on me." The First Lord defended the Admiralty decision to withdraw the Queen Elizabeth and informed the Council that had he known in February that an adequate military force would have been available for operations at the Dardanelles, the purely naval attack would not have met with his support. An early

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<sup>16</sup>Admiralty to Vice-Admiral de Robeck, May 12, 1915. World Crisis, II, 363.

<sup>17</sup>Admiralty to Vice-Admiral de Robeck, May 13, 1915. Ibid., II, 365.

decision in this theatre was highly desirable and Churchill now recommended the concentration of all available forces, with the necessary supplies, to achieve this end. The seriousness of the shell shortage, which the First Lord thought could be solved by the abandonment of the "vain offensives" in France was also brought up for discussion at this meeting, but no definite decision was reached before the Council adjourned.<sup>18</sup>

Churchill, however, began immediately to prepare reinforcements for the fleet at the Dardanelles. In a minute to the Admiralty War Staff he recommended the installation of shore batteries and the establishment of semi-permanent landing stages for, in his opinion, the operations were developing into a siege similar to that of Port Arthur. He also suggested that the battleships of the Dardanelles Fleet be sent in turns to the Malta dockyards to be fitted with mine-bumpers.<sup>19</sup> In another note of the same day he directed that a 15-inch howitzer, complete with ammunition, and two 9.2-inch guns for shore mounting be sent out immediately; that the new monitors be despatched as soon as they were delivered to the Admiralty, and that four ships of the Edgar Class be sent to

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<sup>18</sup>

Ibid., 366-67.

<sup>19</sup>

First Lord to Admiralty war staff, May 14, 1915. Ibid., II, 369.



the Dardanelles.<sup>20</sup>

Churchill "...did not want these demands to fall upon Lord Fisher with a shock..." and that evening the First Lord called on his naval adviser "...to talk over the whole position with him...". The visit and conversation, according to Churchill, was friendly enough, but the First Sea Lord was uneasy about the steady flow of the naval resources to the Dardanelles. Churchill frankly told the "old boy" that he thought it was unfair for him to obstruct the necessary steps for carrying the attack through to success, and then turn around to say "'I told you so, I was always against it.'" The First Lord remembers that Fisher looked at him in an odd way and said, "'I think you are right---it isn't fair'". The first Sea Lord accepted the minutes and Churchill remarks that "...we parted amicably."<sup>21</sup>

The First Lord, who was a late worker, returned to the Admiralty about ten o'clock that evening. He was interrupted about midnight by the Italian Naval Attaché, who brought word that the Italian Cabinet had resigned and that opposition to Italy's participation in the war might create a disastrous political crisis. The Naval Attaché believed that if the oppo-

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<sup>20</sup>First Lord to Admiralty War Staff, May 14, 1915. World Crisis, II, 370.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., II, 371.

sition were confronted with actual naval cooperation the situation might be saved, and he asked Churchill immediately to fulfill England's obligations as set forth in the naval pact of May 5, 1915.<sup>22</sup> But according to Admiralty practise, no ships could be moved without the First Sea Lord's concurrence; also Fisher and Churchill had worked out an agreement whereby neither of the two was to make decisions regarding matters of policy, except in consultation with each other.<sup>23</sup> Churchill at once sensed the gravity of the situation and since the terms of the naval pact had already been agreed to by Fisher, the First Lord felt that there was no matter of principle involved; since the issuance of immediate orders would facilitate the despatch of the ships to the Adriatic by forty-eight hours. He also thought he would be justified in writing the order at once, which he did with the notation "First Sea Lord to see after action."

The next morning Churchill was informed by Fisher's Secretary, Masterton-Smith, that the First Sea Lord had resigned and he "...means it this time!" After reading Fisher's letter of resignation, the First Lord "...was pretty sure that a good friendly talk would put matters right..."<sup>24</sup> and bring the

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<sup>22</sup>

World Crisis, II, 372.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., II, 374.

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., I, 256-59

First Sea Lord back to the Admiralty. But in this, as he was to learn, he had reckoned without the determination of Lord Fisher, who had already informed the Prime Minister that it had become so

"...increasingly difficult to adjust myself to the increasing policy of the First Lord in regard to the Dardanelles I have been reluctantly compelled to inform him this day that I am unable to remain as his colleague....."<sup>25</sup>

Asquith immediately sent Masterton-Smith in search of Lord Fisher with orders for him to return to his post.

The Prime Minister also advised Churchill to write to the First Sea Lord and warned him that if Fisher carried out his intention, the situation would be difficult. The First Lord pointed out in his letter to his naval adviser that "...our rupture will be profoundly injurious to every public interest..." and ~~that~~ he would not want it said that he had thrown the First Lord over just "...because things were for the time going badly at the Dardanelles."<sup>26</sup> He added, that he did not understand the "specific cause" of the trouble.<sup>27</sup> Fisher informed Chur-

<sup>25</sup>Asquith, II, 108-09.

<sup>26</sup>Churchill to Fisher, May 15, 1915, World Crisis, II, 375; see also Bacon, II, 256-57.

<sup>27</sup>Churchill feels that it was the telegram ordering the movement of ships to the Adriatic that "...was the spark that fired the train." Ibid., II, 373. Lord Fisher's biographer says that Mr. Churchill had added strain after strain to the chain that bound Lord Fisher to until, at last, it snapped. A chain broken by stress is not easy to mend, for all the links have been stretched and are weakened; and, at the best, a sound repair is doubtful, and such a chain is liable to break again at any moment under even a feeble load." Bacon, II, 257.

chill by letter that it had been his proposals of May 14th for the reinforcement of the Dardanelles Fleet that had convinced him that "...the time had arrived for me to take a final decision, there being much more in those proposals than had occurred to me the previous evening when you suggested some of them."

Fisher went on:

"YOU ARE BENT ON FORCING THE DARDANELLES AND NOTHING WILL TURN YOU FROM IT---NOTHING. I know you so well. I could give you no better proof of my desire to stand by you than my having remained by you in this Dardanelles business up to the last moment against the strongest conviction of my life...." <sup>28</sup>

"YOU WILL REMAIN AND I SHALL GO---it is better so."

This letter apparently convinced Churchill that the First Sea Lord would press his decision to resign. He then appealed to Fisher not to make his withdrawal from the Admiralty effective until the Italian situation had cleared and that in the meantime, Sir Arthur Wilson, the Second Sea Lord, could do his work. <sup>29</sup> The First Lord requested an interview, but Fisher refused to see Churchill. <sup>30</sup>

Churchill had feared that Fisher's action might also be followed by the resignation of the other Sea Lords but he

<sup>28</sup>

Bacon, II, 257-58.

<sup>29</sup>

Churchill to Fisher, May 16, 1915. World Crisis, II, 277-79.

<sup>30</sup>

Lord Fisher was convinced that his position was "right" and he would not see the First Lord for there was "nothing" to say "...as I am determined not to...." discuss the matter. Fisher to Churchill, May 16, 1915. Ibid., II, 379.

learned, to his great relief, that Sir Arthur Wilson had informed his colleagues on May 15 that it was their duty to remain in office. The First Lord offered Admiral Wilson the post left vacant by Fisher's resignation and he accepted the offer. That afternoon at a conference with Asquith, Churchill offered to place his office at the Prime Minister's disposal, but at that time the latter did not think that such action would be necessary. The Prime Minister was then informed that Sir Arthur Wilson had agreed to succeed Fisher and that a new Board of Admiralty was being formed. The First Lord understood Asquith to assent to this arrangement, but later in the day he learned from Asquith's private secretary that the Prime Minister feared that Fisher's resignation, coming in the face of the shell shortage exposures, would necessitate consultation with the Unionists on the realignment of the Board of Admiralty.<sup>31</sup>

Two days later, on May 17, Bonar Law threatened a Parliamentary discussion on Lord Fisher's resignation---which would have led to a general debate on government policy---unless the Prime Minister was ready to reorganize the Cabinet and remove Churchill from the Admiralty.<sup>32</sup> Unaware of the impending

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<sup>31</sup>World Crisis, II, 389.

<sup>32</sup>Bonar Law to Prime Minister, May 17, 1915, Asquith, II, 115-16.

crisis, that afternoon the First Lord went to Asquith's office to obtain his formal approval of the revised Board of Admirals. He met Lloyd George in one of the outer offices, and it was from him that he learned that a coalition was in the offing. When Churchill submitted his new Board for Asquith's approval, the latter told him that it would not do, that it was not "broad" enough, that he was forming a coalition with the Unionists,<sup>33</sup> and that he and Kitchener<sup>34</sup> were to go on the block for the sins of the old government. Churchill immediately recommended that he be succeeded by Balfour, who "...could succeed me there with the least break in continuity." Asquith then asked Churchill if he would accept a cabinet post in the new government, or if he would prefer a command.

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<sup>33</sup> Churchill was opposed to the formation of a coalition government without first convening Parliament in a secret session to discuss the situation. He believed that the government's policy could have been successfully defended and then after a vote of confidence, the Prime Minister could have asked for a coalition. Asquith disagreed with the First Lord claiming that it was impossible for a secret session of so large a body to be really secret and that it was doubtful whether or not such a session would have attained the "temper and atmosphere" necessary for the formation of a coalition. Ibid., II, 125-26.

<sup>34</sup> It was later decided that Kitchener should stay because of his popularity and Churchill "...alone was held to blame for all the upheaval and its discontent." World Crisis, II, 387.

in France? Later that day, the First Lord signified by letter that he would accept an appointment in the new government only if he were offered a military post.<sup>35</sup>

When Lord Fisher, whose resignation had not yet been accepted, learned that Balfour was to succeed Churchill, he wrote a note to the Prime Minister on May 19, which has since become known as "Fisher's Ultimatum",<sup>36</sup> in which he indicated his willingness to return to his post provided that Asquith complied with his six conditions, the first being that he would serve under neither Churchill nor Balfour. This note determined Asquith to accept Lord Fisher's resignation, and he

<sup>35</sup> Churchill to Asquith, May 17, 1915, World Crisis, II, 535.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix A for text of this document. Churchill did not know of this document prior to September, 1927, at which time Asquith sent him a copy of the original. Churchill's comment is as follows: "The document is new to me, and certainly has never been made public. I knew of course that Fisher had demanded powers similar to Kitchener's, but am surprised--- and now I think I may say amused---at the categorical manner in which his requirements were explained.....The document seems to show that Fisher used the uncertain course of events at the Dardanelles as a means of making a bid for the supreme naval power. Asquith, II, 111. According to Fisher's biographer, the First Sea Lord wrote this document against the advice of his friends when he heard that Balfour...was to be given the post of First Lord. "Desirous as he was of staying at the Admiralty and completing the work he had started, he determined not to do so with the Dardanelles millstone hung round his neck. Bacon, II, 268. "Lord Fisher was undoubtedly a man with streaks of genius, but he was afflicted with fits of megalomania, in one of which this extraordinary ultimatum must have been composed. I always remained on the best of personal terms with him, but the whole of his conduct at this critical time convinced me that it had become impossible that he should remain responsible for the Admiralty. Asquith, II, 115.

formally did so on May 22, 1915.

## 2. The Anti-Climax: The Sinecure and Resignation.

The new government offered Churchill the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancashire, and a seat on the newly created Dardanelles Committee. This "magnificent sinecure" was accepted by Churchill even though it carried with it no executive authority because it would enable him "...to watch over the Dardanelles."<sup>37</sup> He felt that it was most urgent to attempt to force a decision in this theatre for he realized that the situation at the Dardanelles "was at once hopeful and dangerous" and that "...the longer it lasts, the more dangerous it will become."<sup>38</sup> Nowhere, he said, could a gain of three or four miles produce strategic results of so great importance as on the Gallipoli Peninsula. In a speech at Dundee on June 7, 1915, he told his audience that "Through the Narrows of the Dardanelles and across the ridges of the Gallipoli Peninsula lie some of the shortest paths to a triumphant peace..." and that even then, the army was but a few miles from victory.<sup>39</sup>

The question of reinforcements was the ever present problem of the Dardanelles Expedition and Churchill, in his new

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<sup>37</sup> Churchill to Major John Churchill, May 25, 1915, World Crisis, II, 395.

<sup>38</sup> Churchill to Cabinet, Note on the General Situation, June 1, 1915, Ibid., II, 403-10.

<sup>39</sup> "But these few miles! !". Willis, England's Holy War, A Study of English Idealism During the Great War, 218.



position, never despairing of the ultimate success of the campaign, continued to plea for adequate reinforcements and to urge Lord Kitchener to keep in Egypt reserves which might be drawn upon at short notice if needed. He criticized the government for its vacillatory policy and condemned it for its indecision, charging, with no little truth, that "We have always sent two-<sup>40</sup> thirds of what was necessary a month too late."

On November 2, 1915, the Dardanelles Committee was re-constituted and organized under the name of the War Committee and Churchill was excluded from its membership. His exclusion from this committee was probably due to his outspoken criticism of the government's "half-hearted" Dardanelles policy and his own unqualified support of the Dardanelles operations. The loss of this seat on the War Committee removed the only condition that tempered his distaste for a "sinecure" office and he accordingly resigned from the government on November 15, 1915, as he could no longer "...accept Cabinet responsibility for what I believe<sup>41</sup> to be a wholly erroneous conception of war."

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<sup>40</sup> Churchill, Memorandum to Dardanelles Committee, July 15, 1915. World Crisis, II, 445.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., II, 522-24.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

In 1914 an old Europe which had become hardened to the clash of armies and the carnage of battle through centuries of conflict was engulfed by another war. Armageddon was no stranger to Europe, but this time it appeared under the guise of world conflict and those who were charged with the conception and execution of the war lacked, with few exceptions, the strategic insight necessary to see behind the masquerade. Winston S. Churchill, however, was one of the first of the Allied statesmen to penetrate the disguise and grasp the full significance of the new war. Sack of the camouflage of world conflict he recognized an old war and ~~he~~ clearly realized that the lessons of military history could be modified and effectively applied to the struggle of 1914. Fundamentally that is what the Dardanelles Campaign was—the application to large scale warfare of one of the oldest manoeuvres of military science, the flank attack, conceived on such a grand scale as to make it a whole war in itself. Unfortunately this view was not held by the generals, who were, in the main, convinced that they were confronted with a new quantity and their tactical-bound minds could envision no other theatre of war than the one in which the enemy had concentrated his main armies. The generals had not the clairvoyant eye of Churchill and the great strategic possibilities so clearly manifest in the First Lord's macroscopic survey were lost in the minuteness of their microscopic perspective.

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The professionals, probably because of this failure to see the war as a whole and the resulting differences in strategic thought, constantly obstructed the operations at the Dardanelles. As soon as it became apparent that the attack was to be, not the demonstration Lord Fisher had wanted, but rather a full-fledged naval assault to admit a Fleet to the Sea of Marmora, he immediately began to curb the operations at every opportunity. After the naval check of March 18, 1915, had won the other Sea Lords and Admiral de Robeck to Fisher's view, the latter at once became more outspoken in his opposition. With the support of this group he prevented Churchill from renewing the naval attack at a time when Intelligence Reports indicated that the Turks were running low on ammunition.

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Admiralty Intelligence Reports at this time were to the effect that the ammunition in the Turkish forts was nearly exhausted. This report has since been confirmed by George A. Schreiner, an American correspondent of the Associated Press, who discussed this situation with the chief technical officer at the Straits, General Mertens, on the evening of the repulse of the first attack (March 18). The general, according to the newspaper reporter, did not say that the ammunition was exhausted, but the correspondent discovered this to be the case. Although there was a goodly supply of black powder available, Fort Hamidieh I, one of the key positions in the Asiatic defenses, had only seventeen armor-piercing shells left on the evening of the 18th, while Kilit-ul-Bahar on the European side had only ten of these shells in its magazines. The general expected the British to return the next day and he advised the American to do as he and his men, "get up early" and "take to the Anatolian hills...." Henry Morgenthau, "The Naval Disaster of The Dardanelles", Source Records of the Great War, III, 81-82. Enver Pasha is reported to have said: "If the English had only had the courage to rush more ships through the Dardanelles they could have got to Constantinople, but their delay enabled us thoroughly to fortify the Peninsula, and in six week's time we had taken down there over 200 Austrian Skoda guns." Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 119, p. 40.

After the army was committed to the Dardanelles, professionalism became once more the "ball and chain" of the campaign. Nowhere was this more evident than in the divided counsels and delays of the February 16 to March 10 interim, especially in respect to the despatch of the 29th Division.<sup>2</sup> Churchill attached great importance to the delays attending the assignment of this force and the Dardanelles Commissioners thought his concern was "justified." They further stated that

"...This delay gravely compromised the probability of success of the original attack made by the land forces, and materially increased the difficulties encountered in the final attack some months later."<sup>3</sup>

The "Westerners" grudged every replacement that was sent to the Dardanelles and the fact that reinforcements were sent at all is a tribute to the eloquence and perseverance of Churchill, who constantly urged the War Council to send adequate reinforcements to the Dardanelles. In May, 1915, the First Lord's insistent plea for more ships for the Fleet at the Straits led to the resignation of Lord Fisher; and in November of that year Churchill was excluded from the new War Committee because of his steadfast demands for added forces for the Dardanelles and his well-known opposition to all proposals for the evacuation of Gallipoli.

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2

In his diary General Henry Wilson says that when Sir John French learned that Kitchener had promised the 29th Division for the Balkans, "Sir John told me to get the French to combat the idea for all they were worth." A few days later during a chat with Bonar Law, the leader of the opposition, at St. Omer, Wilson depreciated the idea of sending troops to the Balkans and intimated that Joffre and Foch were both opposed to such plans. Hart, Foch, The Man of Orleans, 164.

3

Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 121, p. 43.

4

Reinforcements were always sent but only "...two-thirds of what were necessary a month too late." World Crisis, II, 445.

In spite of the "half-hearted" support of Downing Street, the constant opposition of the Westerners, and the miscarriages at Gallipoli, the attack need not be written off as a complete failure. It did not achieve the objective, which was the fall of Constantinople, but it postponed Bulgaria's alliance with the Central powers and immobilized a large Turkish force which might otherwise have been available for use in some other theatre. According to Sir Edward Grey the Dardanelles Campaign

"...did gain valuable time....I can only state that there were certain consequences which would have happened sooner if the Dardanelles Expedition had not been going on."<sup>5</sup>

But when these results are compared with what might have been won by a determined effort, they appear niggardly, and it is extremely doubtful, in the light of the irresolute temper of the War Council during the critical stage of the campaign, whether the operation would have netted even these miserable advantages had it not been for the perseverance of Winston S. Churchill. The writer cannot agree with the concluding sentence of Captain Puleston's excellent study of the naval operations to the effect that

"It is doubtful if even Great Britain could survive another World War and another Churchill."<sup>6</sup>

and he believes it to be counter to the facts of the case as well as contrary to the march of time.

It is the writer's conclusion that, though Winston Churchill may have been led astray by his enthusiasm on minor points of de-

<sup>5</sup> Dardanelles Commission, First Report, par. 118, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Puleston, The Dardanelles Expedition, 168.

tail and little consequence, he cannot be held solely responsible for the failure of the Dardanelles Expedition; that he probably ought to be held the least accountable member of the War Council for that failure; that the burden of the defeat should probably rest heaviest on Lord Kitchener; and that the gains won, meager though they were, were due largely to the unrelenting efforts of Winston Churchill. It was indecision and lack of determination on the part of the War Council, not Churchill, that transformed the Dardanelles Campaign into the tragedy of Gallipoli. Churchill's Dardanelles Campaign did not contain the rows and rows of crosses that line the hills of Gallipoli, they are the gifts of the hand-maids of defeat: indecision and lack of determination.

## APPENDIX A

## Lord Fisher's Ultimatum

May 19, 1915.

## Preamble

If the following six conditions are agreed to I can guarantee the successful termination of the War and the total abolition of the submarine menace. I also desire to add that since Lord Ripon wished in 1885 to make me a Lord of the Admiralty, but at my request made me Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes instead, I have served under nine First Lords and seventeen years at the Admiralty, so I ought to know something about it:

1. That Mr. Winston Churchill is not in the Cabinet to be always circumventing me, nor will I serve under Mr. Balfour.
2. That Sir A. K. Wilson leaves the Admiralty and the Committee of Imperial Defence and the War Council, as my time otherwise will be occupied in resisting the bombardment of Heligoland and other such wild projects, also his policy is totally opposed to mine and he has accepted position of First Sea Lord in succession to me, and thereby adopting a policy diametrically opposed to my views.
3. That there shall be an entire new Board of Admiralty, as regards the Sea Lords and the Financial Secretary (who is utterly useless). New measures demand New Men!
4. That I shall have complete professional charge of the War at sea, together with the absolute sole disposal of the Fleet, and the appointments of all officers of all rank whatsoever, and absolutely untrammelled sole command of all the sea forces whatsoever.
5. That the First Lord of the Admiralty should be absolutely restricted to policy and parliamentary procedure and should occupy the same position toward me as Mr. Mennant, M. P., does to Lord Kitchener (and very well he does it).
6. That I should have the sole absolute authority for all new construction and all dockyard work of whatever sort whatsoever, and complete control of the whole of the Civil establishments of the Navy.

## APPENDIX A

The 60 per cent of my time and energy which I have exhausted on nine First Lords in the past I wish in the future to devote to the successful prosecution of the War. That is my sole reason for the six conditions. These six conditions must be published verbatim so that the Fleet may know my position.

Cited by Henry Herbert Asquith,  
Memories and Reflections, 1852-  
1927 . pp. 112-13.



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