

THE SILENT ANZAC HIS MAJESTY'S AUSTRALIAN SUBMARINE *AE2*

The *AE1* and the *AE2* were the first generation of Australian submarines, and whilst the *AE1* was lost without a trace in September 1914, the *AE2* entered the Dardanelles hitting the surface at 2.30am on the first Anzac Day, 25 April 1915. That day *AE2* accomplished what was considered an impossible feat of arms. This is her story...

When the Commonwealth was proclaimed in 1901, submarines were beginning to appear in the Royal Navy, where their introduction had been opposed for a long time. By late 1910, a contract was signed with a building yard at Barrow-in-Furness, England for the construction of *AE1* and *AE2* (the "A" in their name standing for Australian).

AE1 and *AE2* departed Portsmouth, England on 2 March 1914, sailing via Suez and Singapore. The two submarines arrived in Sydney on 24 May 1914, just three months before the outbreak of World War I. It was a baptism of fire as they were immediately deployed to support the war effort. *AE1* and *AE2* were assigned to operations in New Guinea waters at the outbreak of World War I. One month later, *AE1* was gone.

AE1 was the first submarine in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the RAN's first war loss. She was also the first Allied submarine to be lost in World War 1.

After the loss of *AE1*, *AE2* was offered and accepted for the use by the Admiralty. On arrival in the Mediterranean she joined the British naval squadron engaged in operations off Gallipoli.

During April 1915, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Stoker, *AE2* was ordered to attempt the narrow passage through the Dardanelles for the purpose of disrupting enemy shipping in the Sea of Marmara.

Stoker was keen to have the honour of being the first to force the Dardanelles. The first attempt on April 24 failed due to a broken hydroplane, but on the fateful morning of April 25 Stoker led the *AE2* and her crew into the jagged narrows and minefields of the Dardanelles.

They entered the straits at about 8 knots with Turkish searchlights sweeping the straits. Stoker had been ordered to 'generally run amok' in the Narrows as a diversionary action to cover the landings at what was to become known as Anzac.

He remained surfaced as long as possible to conserve his batteries although this would make the submarine a prime target for the guns of the Turkish forts and warships. Around 4.30am on 25 April 1915 (the first Anzac Day) *AE2* was fired on from a gun battery on the northern shore. She attacked and it is most likely she hit a small Turkish cruiser with her bow torpedo.

Not until 9pm was it safe to surface, recharge the batteries and replenish the fetid air inside the submarine after sixteen nerve-wrenching hours of confinement. Stoker ordered the wireless telegraphist to signal their success that an Australian submarine had penetrated the Dardanelles and torpedoed a Turkish warship.

When the news reached in the grim early morning hours of April 26, it provided a much-needed morale boost to the faltering Gallipoli landings. Instead of agreeing with the shore commanders' recommendation that the landing forces withdraw, Hamilton informed them of *AE2*'s success and urged them 'to dig, yourselves right in and stick it out.'

On the morning of April 26 Stoker finally entered the Sea of Marmara. The next few days were a game of cat and mouse between *AE2* and at least six Turkish boats diverted to hunt down the

submarine. With the *AE2* occupying the enemy's attention, the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the Peninsula were severely disrupted. It can be concluded that many troops lives were spared as the Turkish battleship broke off its bombardment of the landing beaches and shifted to a more secure berth because of the threat posed by the *AE2*.

In the evening of April 29 1915, whilst off Kara Burma Point, the crew of *AE2* were surprised to meet with *E14*. The British submarine had followed Stoker's example of success and also penetrated the Sea of Marmara.

The commanders of the two submarines arranged to rendezvous at 10am the next day. *AE2* spent the night on the bottom once again. The next morning she arrived at the meeting point to find *E14* coming towards them under pursuit from a Turkish torpedo boat, *Sultanhisar*, and two gunships.

E14 dived and continued to draw the enemy on while they manoeuvred for an attack'. But the enemy got too close and *AE2* dived and waited.

Shortly afterwards *AE2* suddenly lost trim, broke surface, exposing her bow and came under fire of the torpedo boat and another enemy vessel. Lieutenant-Commander Stoker flooded the forward tanks and *AE2* dived steeply. Attempts to check the dive, however, caused *AE2* to break surface again, this time exposing her stern.

The Turkish torpedo boat *Sultanhisar* opened fire and *AE2* was holed in the engine room. With his submarine in an incapacitated state and having no other option, Stoker blew main ballast, ordered all hands on deck and proceeded to scuttle the submarine. *AE2* sank in some 72 meters off Kara Burma Point. The wreck was discovered by the Turkish maritime historian and diver, Selcuk Kolay OAM and conclusively identified in October 1998.

All hands were picked up by the torpedo boat and they spent the remainder of the war in Turkish prison camps. Four sailors died whilst Lieutenant Commander Stoker and the remainder were set free after the war.

AE2 was the second submarine in the RAN, and the first Allied submarine to make the passage through the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmara. She was the RAN's first loss by enemy action and the second and final loss of World War 1.

Up to the time of her loss, *AE2* had logged some 35,000 nautical miles, mostly under war conditions. With the loss, the Australian submarine service ceased to exist for the next four years.

For more information, access to images or interviews with *AE2* descendants contact:

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NOTES TO EDITOR

About the Submarine Institute of Australia

Established in 1999, the SIA is a not-for-profit body that has as its objective: 'To promote informed discussion and research in the fields of submarine operations, engineering, history and commercial sub-sea engineering - otherwise known as submarine matters.' With a global membership in military and industry sectors, the Institute has a number of projects that support its objective. It aims to provide an independent input into considerations underpinning Australia's future submarine capability.

AE2: The Silent ANZAC

The objective of Project AE2 is to protect and preserve the AE2 and tell the story of her brave crew. The AE2 Commemorative Foundation (AE2CF) has been established by the SIA to raise funds to achieve this objective.

HMAS AE2 was the first Allied submarine to penetrate the Dardanelles in 1915 as part of the Gallipoli Campaign, on the very morning the ANZAC soldiers landed at Anzac Cove. After five hectic days "running amok", she finally fell to Turkish gunfire and was scuttled. Her crew was captured and spent the rest of the war as Turkish POWs. AE2 lay, unseen, until in 1998 she was discovered, intact, in 73m of water in the Sea of Marmara.

The SIA aims to ensure the protection, preservation and promotion of AE2, to contribute to an informed debate on her future and ensure that AE2's contribution to the Gallipoli campaign is duly recognised by telling the story of her brave crew.

