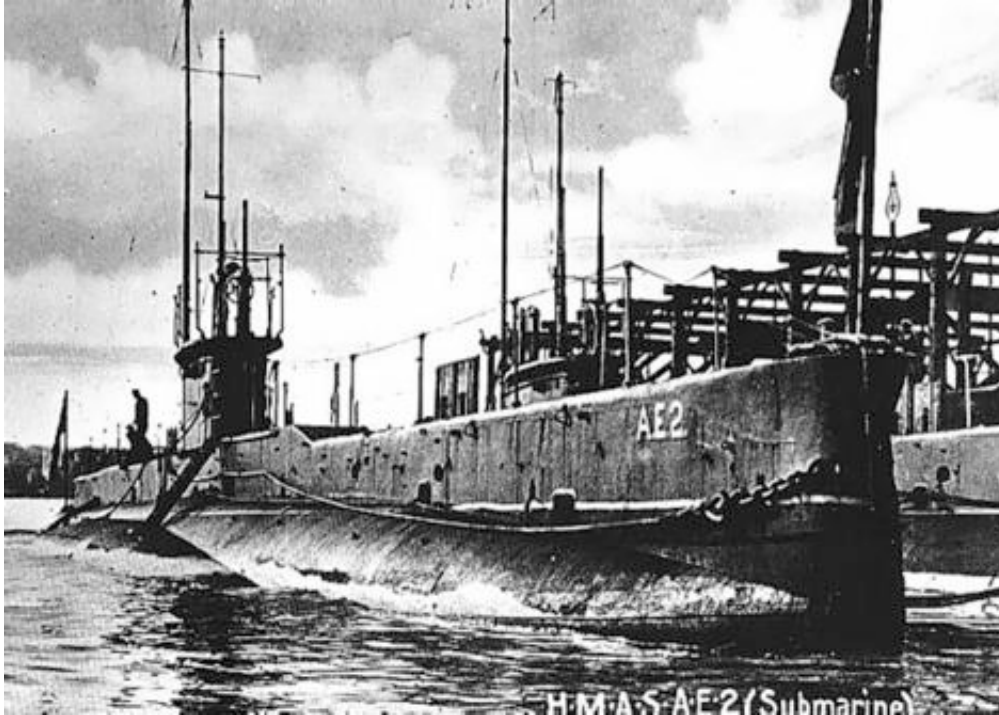


Weight of water and concern over Gallipoli reminder



Probably changed history ... the AE2 at Garden Island in 1914. It now lies on the seabed near Turkey.
Photo: Royal Australian Navy Collection

September 15, 2007

The AE2 submarine played a pivotal role in the campaign, writes Fred Brenchley in Karabiga, Turkey.

THE shores around Turkey - a crossroads of early civilisations - are littered with shipwrecks dating back to 14BC. The Australian submarine AE2, scuttled in 1915, is a relative newcomer.

When a big archaeological survey of AE2 began this week from Karabiga, the launch group in the little Turkish fishing village on the Sea of Marmara included personnel from the Turkish Navy, customs, and the key Turkish Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

CNN Turkey headlined the success of the latest Australian diving survey when three days later it manoeuvred a drop camera through the partially opened hatch, down into the control room so the interior of AE2 could be seen for the first time since Commander Dacre Stoker and his crew scuttled it in 1915, five days after the Gallipoli landing.

The submarine might not have the archaeological status of Greco-Roman finds, but it has become the new touchstone of the modern relationship between Turkey and Australia, which has Gallipoli at the core.

Gallipoli creates sensitivities on both sides, as the furore in Australia about recent road works near Anzac Cove demonstrated. The submarine presents a different problem: should it be left 73 metres down on the floor of the Sea of Marmara as a "living natural museum", or raised, restored and put on display so future generations can appreciate its significance in Gallipoli's shaping of Australia's national identity.

On April 24 - the eve of the landings - Stoker accepted what was virtually a suicide mission to penetrate the heavily mined narrows of the Dardanelles Strait behind Gallipoli and to attack Turkish warships in the strait and create a diversion from the landings.

Stoker and AE2 succeeded in breaching the mined narrows where other Allied subs had failed, hitting a Turkish warship on the way.

Stoker's message back to headquarters that he had succeeded in cracking the narrows into the Marmara arrived on the night of April 25, just as General Sir Ian Hamilton had received an appeal for the Australians, pinned down on the beach, to be evacuated.

After reading the submarine's message, Hamilton ordered the troops to stay. While Hamilton's aides described the message as an "omen", historians still debate the role of the AE2 in keeping the troops on Gallipoli for eight months. Contemporary debate, however, centres on what to do with the slowly crumbling AE2. If left where it is, it will disintegrate, washed away by currents, anchors and fishermen's nets.

The AE2 Commemorative Foundation's drop camera dive has revealed a deterioration in the sub's condition since it was discovered by the Turkish explorer Selcuk Kolay in 1998.

Crucial to the future of the submarine is the state of the hull, and whether it could withstand any attempt to move it, possibly to a public viewing tank at Canakkale, close to Gallipoli.

This would entail a complex exercise to raise it, using a series of slings attached to surface boats. And the cost could be \$10 million to \$20 million. Maybe more. The submarine would need to be kept in a saline bath, possibly for many years. But it would be viewable by the thousands of Australians who visit Gallipoli each year.

The Turks are keen. A memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Australia, signed in 2002, suggests the Turkish Ministry of Culture could provide the viewing pool near Canakkale. Revenue from an admission fee would pay for maintenance. There is no suggestion the submarine be brought back to Australia. Canberra has made it clear that if the submarine is raised, or moved, it has no claim on it.

A conference in Turkey next April by the commemorative foundation and the Turkish Institute of Naval Archaeology will analyse the results of the drop camera work and the data gathered by the team to make recommendations to both governments.

The centenary of Gallipoli is just eight years away. Preservation of the last tangible relic of Australia's Gallipoli presence would be a fitting way to commemorate that.

When news happens: send photos, videos & tip-offs to 0424 SMS SMH (+61 424 767 764), or [email us](#).

[SAVE 31% on home delivery of the Herald - subscribe today](#)

Copyright © 2007. The Sydney Morning Herald.