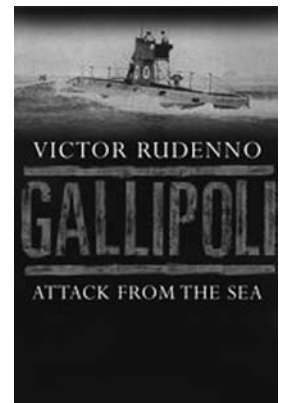


Gallipoli: Attack From the Sea

Victor Rudenno

A review essay by Rob Walls



The title of this book by Dr Victor Rudenno is misleading. It is really about submarines and their exploits – principally submarine war patrols – during the combined British and French campaign to force and control the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora during World War I. Control of this seaway, which links the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, would have enabled much improved Allied support of Russia and her efforts on the Eastern Front. It would also have provided the Allies a much greater capacity to shape events in the Balkans strategically, thus impacting on Turkey, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria (the latter eventually joining the Central Powers in October 1915).

As the book's introduction notes: 'The Gallipoli campaign of 1914-15 is one of the most discussed [campaigns] of the First World War[it] continues to seize the imagination today.' Yet the role of Australians in naval aspects of the Dardanelles campaign had been relatively neglected until the work of Dr Tom Frame and the Brenchleys in the last two decades.

Any addition to what seems to be an ever-broader and perennial series of Gallipoli accounts and interpretations needs to be different if it is to make a successful and lasting contribution to the genre. *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea* is indeed different. It puts aside further discussion of the strategic controversies surrounding the Dardanelles and focuses instead on the submarines involved and how they performed. The narrative addresses submarines from Germany, Austria, and France as well as Britain and Australia. The results of the campaign provided a basis for the influence of submarines on naval warfare, and a benchmark for their performance, ever since.

The phases of the campaign are covered chronologically from each opponent's point of view, rather than discussing the actions of both sides together. This enables detailed coverage of each submarine's activities but demands a continuing contextual reference, using a timeline. The book records the remarkable coincidence, wherein arguably the two best submariners of the Dardanelles campaign were both at sea in the theatre of operations at the end of May 1915.

The German hero was Kapitanleutenant Otto Hersing commanding U-21. On 25 May 1915 he sank the British pre-dreadnought battleship HMS *Triumph* off Anzac Cove, to the chagrin of the ANZACs and the delight of the Turkish soldiers watching from the cliffs above. Two days later, he sank the pre-dreadnought battleship HMS *Majestic* off Cape Helles. As they were throughout most of the campaign, anti-submarine capabilities were ineffective. Battleships were

then withdrawn from the frontline. For the remainder of the campaign, including the Suvla assault in August 1915, naval support for land forces was markedly reduced and destroyers became the workhorses of naval gunfire support for the troops ashore. On his submarine's arrival at Constantinople, Hersing was awarded the order *Pour le Merite* – the highest bravery honour awarded by the Kaiser (and known colloquially as the 'Blue Max'); his crew were each given the Iron Cross.

The Royal Navy's hero was Lieutenant Commander Martin Nasmith (later Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, VC, KBE) commanding HM Submarine E-11. His was not the first submarine through the Narrows to the Sea of Marmora – that achievement was earned by the Australian submarine AE-2, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Dacre Stoker, RN, on 25 April 1915 – but Nasmith was the most successful submarine commander in operations. He literally took the fight to the quays of Constantinople harbour and the Golden Horn in the first of three war patrols in the theatre.

Dr Rudenno provides a well structured context for the excitement of the submarine activities he portrays. His work is not, as his publisher claims, the analysis of the strategies and actions of all land, sea and air forces at the Gallipoli peninsula, but it is 'a gripping narrative' of the conduct and complexities of submarine operations in the Dardanelles campaign. In addition to the insights the book gives into the characteristics and personalities of the submariners (perhaps just as relevant today as in World War I), it provides fascinating details of the impact of technology on submarines, their operation and the development of anti submarine warfare.

One of the remarkable aspects of submarine warfare in World War I was the rate of development of imaginative concepts associated with the application of the new technologies then becoming available. These aspects included the design of submarine hulls, propulsion systems, sensors (including radio and sonics), weapons – such as torpedoes and mines – and gathering and using intelligence. Operational concepts were constantly being assessed and further developed as well; an illustration of this being the development of underwater sound signalling as co-ordinated submarine operations progressed.

In terms of military techniques, the Dardanelles campaign had enormous influence not only on World War I but also World War II. The book's broader context describes the greatest amphibious operation of modern times up to that point. The landings and subsequent evacuations from the

Gallipoli peninsula provide lessons and procedural insights to those who study, plan and conduct amphibious operations even to this day.

The linkage between sea and land operations is well made by the author and he succinctly describes how the failed attempts of the naval offensive to force the Narrows led to the landings of 25 April 1915. There were other matters of significance too as many of the techniques applied in the Gallipoli campaign were new or experimental, notably the use of submarines and aircraft. Thus the Dardanelles campaign was instructive as well as informative in both combined and joint operations, by sea, land and air. The learning process was a costly one in terms of men's lives and resources – eight of the thirteen Allied submarines involved in the campaign were lost.

The book provides broad ranging coverage of matters such as aerial reconnaissance, naval artillery spotting, aerial bombing, and the use of radio. Some of the 'firsts' involved are the world's first successful torpedo attack from an aeroplane, and the first submarine ever to be sunk from the air.

Disconcertingly, the notes to the chapters contain details and discussion which might better have been included in the narrative. The book's appendices suffer perhaps from having too much information and data to select from for inclusion; they are helpful nonetheless. The photos are evocative: the author is fortunate indeed to have such a collection.

In his introduction the author states:

....the impact of the Allied submarine campaign on the Turkish merchant navy in the Sea of Marmara was

significant, although not conclusive. At certain times, particularly during major land engagements, Turkish forces were under considerable pressure, but this did not stop their war machinery or the final despatch of men and materials to the front. By the end of the ten-month Gallipoli campaign, nearly half of the Turkish transports had been sunk, so that a much reduced level of men and materials was transported by sea.....

The narrative supports his judgement.

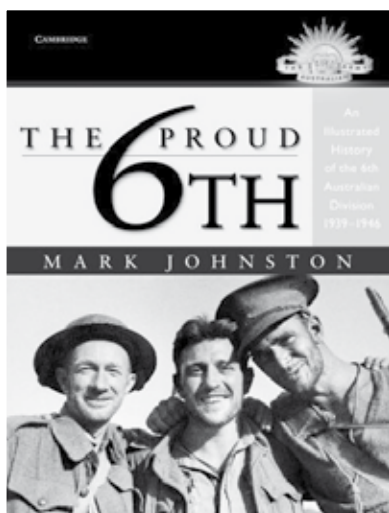
The efforts of the U-Boats were perhaps more conclusive in that their results had a sustained influence on Allied naval operations and plans. This applied even though they were not as frequently active in the theatre as the British submarines in particular were.

Ultimately the Dardanelles campaign was an operational stalemate and a strategic failure for the Allies. The campaign was, however, the first one in the history of naval warfare where submarines of both sides made a significant impact on the outcome.

Dr Rudenno has researched his book thoroughly. It has an extensive and useful bibliography, covering material from amongst the first written to the latest published. *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea* is a fine addition to the history of naval warfare and a most useful contribution to the annals of sub-surface warfighting. ♦

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