



DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

GALLIPOLI AND THE DARDANELLES 1915-1916



INTRODUCED AND COMPILED BY
JOHN GREHAN & MARTIN MACE

**GALLIPOLI
AND THE
DARDANELLES
1915–1916**

DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

*The Commanding Officers' Reports from
the Field and at Sea*

GALLIPOLI AND THE DARDANELLES 1915–1916

Introduced and compiled by
John Grehan and Martin Mace

with additional research by
Sara Mitchell



Pen & Sword
MILITARY

First published in Great Britain in 2014 by

PEN & SWORD MILITARY

An imprint of

Pen & Sword Books Ltd

47 Church Street

Barnsley

South Yorkshire

S70 2AS

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ISBN 978-1-78159-344-8

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Typeset by Concept, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD4 5JL.

Printed and bound in England by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY.

Pen & Sword Books Ltd incorporates the imprints of Pen & Sword Archaeology, Atlas, Aviation, Battleground, Discovery, Family History, History, Maritime, Military, Naval, Politics, Railways, Select, Social History, Transport, True Crime, and Claymore Press, Frontline Books, Leo Cooper, Praetorian Press, Remember When, Seaforth Publishing and Wharncliffe.

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The original caption to this image, which is almost certainly a staged scene, states: "A scene just before the evacuation at Anzac; Australian troops charging near a Turkish trench."

Part of the Gallipoli battlefields today: A recent view of 'V' Beach, on the other side of Cape Helles from 'W' Beach, taken from the direction of Cape Helles itself.

A reconstruction of the trenches dug by the Turkish troops on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's memorial at Helles, Turkey.

Introduction

The operation against the Turkish Ottoman Empire which began in 1915 was originally intended to be nothing more than a demonstration to help relieve pressure on Britain and France's ally, Russia. Tsar Nicholas II's forces were fighting on two fronts and barely able to hold back the Germans and Austrians, leaving them severely weakened in the Caucasus. Britain's military and political leaders, Churchill, Kitchener, Fisher, Carden and Lloyd George, turned that limited objective into a major offensive which absorbed half-a-million men and vast amounts of military and naval resources. Almost half of those men became casualties.

At first the campaign against Turkey was purely naval. It was led by Vice-Admiral Sir Sackville Hamilton Carden who at the time was in command of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Squadron. As early as November 1914, as soon as hostilities between Russia and Turkey had started, Carden with a combined Anglo-French squadron had tried to force the Dardanelles Strait, a 30-mile long strait in north-western Turkey which, linking the Sea of Marmara to the Aegean, is only between 0.75 to 3.7 miles wide.

In his first despatch, Carden reported back that the Turkish batteries opened fire as soon as the Allied ships made their run. The Allied warships' counter-fire was highly effective and it was believed that some 600 casualties had been inflicted on the Turkish gunners. When, on 19 February 1915, Carden conducted a second run past the Turkish batteries and deliberately bombarded the Turkish positions from the outset, the Turkish gunners remained under cover and did not venture out to man their guns until the afternoon.

Operations continued in February and March in which landing parties captured some of the Turkish forts. Yet it was not the land defences that ultimately proved decisive but the mine fields which had been sown across the Strait.

On 18 March, in another attempt on the Dardanelles, three battleships were sunk by mines and another damaged, and Rear Admiral John de Robeck, who had taken over from Carden just three days before, called off the attack. These were the worst losses suffered by the Royal Navy in battle since Trafalgar.

At this point, Britain and France could have scaled down their operations in this theatre. They had made the demonstration that Russia had pleaded for and if they kept a number of warships in the area, the Turks would have been compelled to maintain substantial forces on the Gallipoli Peninsula to ensure its safety. However, General Sir Ian Hamilton, who had been given command of the Allied Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, was present with the Royal Navy on 18 March and in his first despatch he wrote: 'I witnessed these stupendous events, and thereupon cabled your Lordship my reluctant deduction that the co-operation of the whole of the force under my command would be required to enable the Fleet effectively to force the Dardanelles.'

What Hamilton made clear was that 'nothing but a thorough and systematic scheme for flinging the whole of the troops under my command very rapidly ashore could be expected to meet with success; whereas, on the other hand, a tentative or piecemeal programme was bound to lead to disaster.' That, though, is exactly what happened.

The initial Allied landings took place on 25 April 1915, and in the intervening weeks the Turks had worked hard on their defences and reinforced their troops. *Generalleutnant* Otto Liman von Sanders, an adviser and military commander for the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, later noted: 'The British allowed us four good weeks of respite for all this work before their great disembarkation ... This respite just sufficed for the most indispensable measures to be taken.' Roads were constructed, small boats assembled to carry troops and equipment across the narrows, beaches were wired, makeshift mines constructed from torpedo-heads and trenches and gun emplacements were dug along the beaches.

Despite the obvious fact that a very large force indeed would be required to seize Gallipoli and achieve the new final objective of capturing Constantinople, only around 80,000 men were available to Hamilton. A month after the initial landings, little progress had been made by the Allied troops. The expeditionary force was still trapped with its back to the sea, with the Turks holding the high ground that prevented the British and Commonwealth troops from breaking inland.

The difficulties that the operation had encountered were spelt out by Hamilton in his despatch of 20 May 1915: 'The landing of an army upon the theatre of operations I have described – a theatre strongly garrisoned throughout, and prepared for any such attempt – involved difficulties for which no precedent was forthcoming in military history except possibly in the sinister legends of Xerxes. The beaches were either so well defended by works and guns, or else so restricted by nature that it did not seem possible, even by two or three simultaneous landings, to pass the troops ashore quickly enough to enable them to maintain themselves against the rapid concentration and

counter-attack which the enemy was bound in such case to attempt. It became necessary, therefore, not only to land simultaneously at as many points as possible, but to threaten to land at other points as well.'

By this time these factors were only too well known. Whilst Hamilton had managed to land his forces, repeated attempts to break out of the beachheads had failed, as had Turkish counter-attacks aimed at driving the Allies from their slender toe-hold. Casualties on both sides were shocking, and conditions for the troops, continuously exposed in the heat of summer, scarcely bearable.

This is vividly described by Hamilton in his despatch of 26 August: 'The country is broken, mountainous, arid and void of supplies; the water found in the areas occupied by our forces is quite inadequate for their needs; the only practicable beaches are small, cramped breaks in impracticable lines of cliffs; with the wind in certain quarters no sort of landing is possible; the wastage, by bombardment and wreckage, of lighters and small craft has led to crisis after crisis in our carrying capacity, whilst over every single beach plays fitfully throughout each day a devastating shell fire at medium ranges.' Hamilton made 'urgent' calls for reinforcements.

August had seen a major push by Hamilton to capture the Sari Bair heights and when this had failed, further assaults were delivered, following landings at Suvla, against the notorious Hill 60. These also failed.

Whilst the despatches that follow present a clear account of the fighting at Gallipoli, they do not always illustrate the desperate conditions that the soldiers often fought under. The Battle of Hill 60 presents an opportunity to introduce a first-hand account, in this case that of a New Zealander who wrote under the name 'Digger Craven'.

After an initial bombardment, the attack at Hill 60 was delivered in the middle of the afternoon of 21 August 1915 under a blazing sun. Before being able to mount the hill, Craven and his comrades had to cross an open valley. The men ran as fast as they could with their heavy packs on their backs, bent double, dodging the bombs and the shells – and then machine-guns.

'The automatic guns opened on us before we had gone a few yards,' wrote Craven. 'We dropped, fired in a few rounds, then up again, pushing another yard or two. It is damned hard fighting in the open and in broad daylight, especially when your enemy is securely entrenched. They swept our advance line as with the swathe of some gigantic scythe. Clouds of dense smoke hung heavy on the haze of that hot afternoon. In a measure it saved a great number of us. Just the same, men were dropping like rotten sheep all over the place.

'A score of times we dashed for cover in that monstrous charge, using boulders, clumps of scrub, dead men – anything, anywhere for a breather. For as much as a minute at a time we'd stop, crouching low while officers yelled themselves hoarse.'

Some of the men responded to the futility of the situation by just jumping up and charging into the hail of bullets: ‘When a fellow stood up to his full height and ran into it, we knew he was fed up with it all and wanted to go home. Hundreds did during that sunny afternoon. Hill 60 was [an] anti-climax, and every man knew it was. Of all the death-traps, this was the biggest. Men muttered and cursed in the desolation of this hopelessness.’

‘In half an hour there wasn’t any more left of that first wave of men who had charged Jonny’s trenches. It was as if they’d never been. Every man Jack of ’em was gone from our view – killed or captured or lying wounded in front of those accursed ditches which bristled with rifles and machine-guns. There were only the smashed and the dying.’

The horror of that awful afternoon was just about to become even more terrible. The shells set fire to the low scrub and undergrowth which covered the valley and the hillside. The scorched ground was bone dry and soon the flames, ‘crackling over the earth like a prairie fire’, began to sweep towards where the remnants of the third wave of attackers had been forced to take cover.

‘The fire licked its way over vast areas of the ground. The men in front were caught in the flames. It was spreading fan-wise over the lower slopes of the hill. It crawled over the earth like some evil thing, a holocaust come to convince us – if we needed any convincing – that we might batter ourselves for ever against these fiery mounds of Gallipoli and we should batter in vain.

‘We stared in horror at that expanding carpet of fire. We saw wounded men crawling and scrambling from the flames, and as they got clear of the fire they were shot dead by jeering Turks. Those who were too badly wounded to make the attempt were burned alive. The stench of it all hung on the thick haze.

‘Volumes of smoke rose until it seemed that all the world was afire ... it blazed with intense ferocity, travelling over the ground like liquid fire, so swiftly did it spread, destroying everything in its trail, leaving a vast parched blackness over which could be seen those who had failed to escape, blackened, smouldering heaps of debris, broken rifles with charred butts, tangles of rag ash that had once been uniforms with buttons and insignia of regiment industriously polished. For what? To become these little heaps of black dust.’

As Craven later conceded, coming on top of the other reverses, watching their comrades engulfed in the flames, removed utterly the last remnants of faith and confidence in their leaders, ‘and brought the final touch of despair to war-sickened and weary men ... I had seen many die, but never like that.’

Now, though, Craven and those around him were faced with a terrible dilemma, one that on-one should ever have to face. ‘How could we lie there, a little party adrift under a ridge, and watch those fellows burned alive? To see

them squirming and struggling to get clear of the licking flames, to hear their screams – it was more than we could stand. We took aim ... even as the flames licked about them, setting fire to their clothing.’ ‘God forgive us!’ muttered one New Zealander as they fired their rifles and killed their comrades.

The Battle of Hill 60 was the last major assault of the Gallipoli Campaign. As Craven points out, as the fighting had dragged on the Allied troops became increasingly demoralised. They could see no prospect of ever overcoming the Turkish defences. Indeed, the August offensive had never really offered any prospect of success. Hamilton, though, had to do something. Diseased and demoralised, his troops needed a quick victory. It led to a decisive defeat.

Hamilton’s final despatch was compiled after he had been replaced and sent back to the United Kingdom. It forms a list of additions and corrections to his previous despatch which had been published in *The London Gazette*. His successor, General Charles Munro, took over from Hamilton in October 1915.

Munro had been instructed to report on the military situation on the Gallipoli Peninsula and to give his opinion on whether or not, on purely military grounds, the Expeditionary Force should be evacuated or that if further operations were continued how many troops would be required to take Constantinople.

In his despatch Munro explained what he found: ‘The positions occupied by our troops presented a military situation unique in history. The mere fringe of the coast line had been secured. The beaches and piers upon which they depended for all requirements in personnel and materiel were exposed to registered and observed Artillery fire. Our entrenchments were dominated almost throughout by the Turks. The possible Artillery positions were insufficient and defective.

‘The Force, in short, held a line possessing every possible military defect. The position was without depth, the communications were insecure and dependent on the weather. No means existed for the concealment and deployment of fresh troops destined for the offensive – whilst the Turks enjoyed full powers of observation, abundant Artillery positions, and they had been given the time to supplement the natural advantages which the position presented by all the devices at the disposal of the Field Engineer.’

Munro then listed all the difficulties experienced by the troops and the impracticality of continuing with the expedition. ‘Since we could not hope to achieve any purpose by remaining on the Peninsula, the appalling cost to the nation involved in consequence of embarking on an Overseas Expedition with no base available for the rapid transit of stores, supplies and personnel, made it urgent that we should divert the troops locked up on the Peninsula to a

more useful theatre . . . in my opinion the evacuation of the Peninsula should be taken in hand.'

The evacuation having been agreed upon, the tricky task of withdrawing the troops became the overriding concern of Munro and Admiral de Robeck. Withdrawing from contact with the enemy is one of the most hazardous operations in warfare and Hamilton had declared that an evacuation under the guns of the Turks would result in 50 per cent casualties. He would be proved wrong, for remarkably it was achieved without the loss of a single man. De Robeck's evacuation despatch is the last of the series from Gallipoli.

Those despatches are reproduced here in the same form as when they were originally published in the UK. They have not been modified or interpreted in any way and are therefore the unedited and unique words of the commanding officers as they saw things at the time when the hopes of many nations, especially those of Australia and New Zealand, were raised only to be dashed in bitter defeat.

Abbreviations

AAD – Advanced Ammunition Depot
ACI – Army Council Instruction
ADC – *Aide-de-Camp*
ADS – Advanced Dressing Station
AF – Army Form
AG – Anti-gas
AO – Army Order
AOC – Army Ordnance Corps
AOD – Army Ordnance Depot
ARP – Ammunition Refilling Point
ARS – Advanced Regulating Station
ASC – Army Service Corps
BA – British Army
BAC – Brigade Ammunition Column
BAD – Base Ammunition Depot
Battn. – Battalion
Bde – Brigade
BGGs – Brigadier-General General Staff
BGRAs – Brigadier-General Royal Artillery
BGS – Brigadier, General Staff
BM – Brigade Major
Brig – Brigade
CB – Companion of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath
CCS – Casualty Clearing Station
CDS – Corps Dressing Station
CHA – Commander Heavy Artillery
CIE – Companion of The Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire
CMG – Companion of The Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and
Saint George
CO – Commanding Officer
Co, Coy – Company
Cpl – Corporal
CQMS – Company Quartermaster Master Sergeant

CRA – Commander Royal Artillery
CPO – Chief Petty Officer
CSM – Company Sergeant Major
CT – Communication Trench
CVO – Commander of the Royal Victorian Order
DA – Divisional Artillery
DAC – Divisional Ammunition Column
DAP – Divisional Ammunition Park
DAQMG – Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General
DCM – Distinguished Conduct Medal
DD – Dishonourable Discharge
DDMS – Deputy Director Medical Services
Div – Division or Divisional
DO – Dug-out
DoW – Died of wounds
DRS – Divisional Rest Station
DSC – Distinguished Service Cross
DSO – Distinguished Service Order
FA – Field Ambulance
FDS – Field Dressing Station
FSPB – Field Service Pocket Book
GCB – Knight Grand Cross of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath
GCIE – Knight Grand Commander of The Most Eminent Order of the Indian
Empire
GCSI – Knight Grand Commander of The Most Exalted Order of the Star of
India
GCVO – Knight Grand Cross of The Royal Victorian Order
GHQ – General Headquarters
GOC – General Officer Commanding
GS – General Service or General Staff
GSO – General Staff Officer
GSW – Gunshot Wound
HA – Heavy Artillery
HE – High Explosive
HIRMS – His Imperial Russian Majesty's Ship
HMS – His Majesty's Ship
HQ, Hqts, HdQrs – Headquarters
Hr – Hour
HT – Horse Transport
Hy – Heavy
IB – Infantry Brigade

IC – In Charge
2/IC – Second in Charge
Inf, Infy – Infantry
Inf Bde – Infantry Brigade
Infm, Info – Information
Inf Reg, Inf Regt – Infantry Regiment
Int, Intel – Intelligence
IO – Intelligence Officer
KCB – Knight Commander of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath
KCIE – Knight Commander of The Most Eminent Order of the Indian
Empire
KCMG – Knight Commander of The Most Distinguished Order of Saint
Michael and Saint George
KCSI – Knight Commander of The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India
KCVO – Knight Commander of The Royal Victorian Order
KP – Knight of the Order of St Patrick
KT – Knight Companion of The Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the
Thistle
L.Bdr, L/Bdr – Lance Bombardier
L.Cpl, L/Cpl, L/C, Lce Cpl – Lance Corporal
L.G., L. Gun – Lewis Gun
LO – Liaison Officer
L of C, LC – Lines of Communication
L.Sgt, L/Sgt – Lance Sergeant
Lt – Lieutenant
Lt Col – Lieutenant Colonel
MC – Military Cross
MDS – Main Dressing Station
MEF – Mediterranean Expeditionary Force
Mg, MG, M.Gun – Machine-gun
MGS – Machine-Gun Section
MM – Military Medal
MO – Medical Officer
MVO – Member of The Royal Victorian Order
NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer
NTO – Naval Transport Officer
OC – Officer Commanding
OIC – Officer-in-Charge
OP – Observation Post
OR, O. Rank – Other Rank(s)
Pdr – Pounder

Pl, Plt – Platoon
Pnr – Pioneer
Pt, Pte, Prvt – Private
PW, PoW – Prisoner of War
QM, Qr.Mr. – Quarter-Master
QMG – Quartermaster General
QMS – Quarter-Master Sergeant
RA – Royal Artillery
RAMC – Royal Army Medical Corps
RAP – Regimental Aid Post
Rd – Road
RE – Royal Engineers
Rec, Recce – Reconnaissance or Reconnoitre
Recd – Received
Ref – Reference
Reg, Regt – Regimental
Res – Reserve
RFA – Royal Field Artillery
Rfn – Rifleman
Rft – Reinforcement(s)
RGA – Royal Garrison Artillery
RHQ – Regimental Headquarters
RMA – Royal Marine Artillery
RMLI – Royal Marines Light Infantry
RMO – Regimental Medical Officer
RN – Royal Navy
RNR – Royal Naval Reserve
RNVR – Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
RO – Routine Orders
RQMS – Regimental Quarter-Master Sergeant
RSM – Regimental Sergeant-Major
RV – Rendezvous
SAA – Small Arms Ammunition
SC – Staff Captain
Sec Lt, 2/Lt – Second Lieutenant
Sgt, Sjt – Sergeant
Sig – Signal
SL – Start line
SMO – Senior Medical Officer
SO – Staff Officer
SP – Start Point, Strong Point, or support

SS – Steam Ship

ST – Support Trench

TF – Territorial Force

TM – Trench Mortar

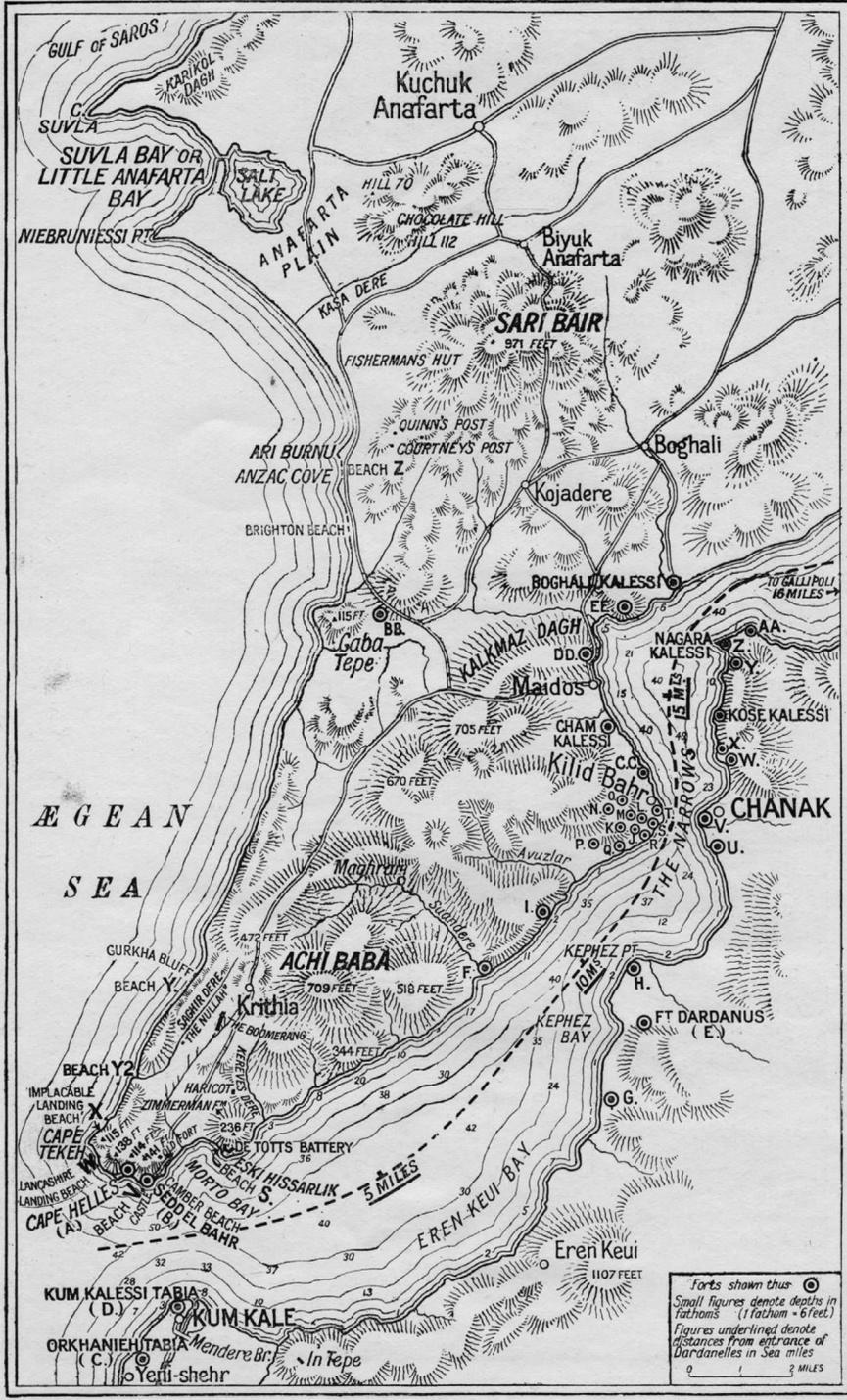
TMB – Trench Mortar Battery

TO – Transport Officer

VC – Victoria Cross

WD – War Diary

WO – Warrant Officer



Forts shown thus: 
 Small figures denote depths in fathoms (1 fathom = 6 feet).
 Figures underlined denote distances from entrance of Dardanelles in sea miles.

1

NAVAL ATTACK ON THE DARDANELLES, 17 MARCH 1915

FRIDAY, 2 MAY, 1919.

Admiralty, 2nd May, 1919.

LETTER FROM VICE-ADMIRAL S.H. CARDEN,
MARCH 17, 1915.

*H.M.S. "Queen Elizabeth,"
March 17, 1915.*

SIR,-

I have the honour to submit, for the consideration of their Lordships, the narrative of events during the operations of the Allied British and French Squadrons against the defences of the Dardanelles, from the 19th February to 16th March, 1915.

There was a marked difference in the tactics of the enemy manning the forts at the entrance when attacked on this occasion to that which they followed on the 3rd November, 1914; on that day when a short bombardment was carried out by "Indefatigable," "Indomitable," "Suffren," and "Verite," by a run past in close order, range 13,000 yards, they replied to our fire almost at once, and maintained from forts Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 6, till our squadron completed their run. The only projectiles, however, which fell close were those from the 9.4 inch guns in forts Nos. 1 and 4. Good practice was made by the Allied Squadron on forts Nos. 3 and 6, in the former of which there was a large magazine explosion. Information was received later that the casualties to personnel were high amongst the enemy, some accounts putting it at 600.

That it was considerable is, I think, shown by the fact that on the 19th February, when the present operations began, and a deliberate bombardment by our ships took place, no Turkish fort attempted to reply until late in the afternoon, when the old battleships were sent close in. They apparently kept their men in shelters until the desired moment.

Bad weather prevented a renewal until the 26th February, and then there was this difference. Fort No. 1 opened fire on "Agamemnon" at 10,000 yards as soon as that ship was in position, and hit her several times. This fort maintained its fire with great perseverance against "Queen Elizabeth," "Agamemnon," and "Gaulois," until the former ship by hitting with two consecutive

15-inch projectiles dismounted one gun and put the other out of action, and effectually silenced the fort; the surviving personnel quickly made their way down to the neighbouring village.

On the same day the accurate fire of “Irresistible” on fort No. 4 prevented its two 9.4-inch guns taking any part in the proceedings. When the ships closed in forts No. 3 and 6 fired a few ineffective rounds.

Although a heavy and prolonged fire at short range was poured into these forts, 70 per cent. of the heavy guns were found to be in a serviceable condition when the demolition parties landed.

The destruction of the guns in fort No. 3 by “Irresistible,” and in Nos. 4 and 6 by “Vengeance,” was most smartly and effectively carried out on the 26th February and the 1st March by demolition parties from those ships, which were ably supported by their detachments of Royal Marines.

In this service the following officers are specially and strongly recommended:-

Major G.M. Heriot, D.S.O., R.M.L.I., “Vengeance.”

Lieutenant-Commander (T.) E.G. Robinson, “Vengeance.”

Lieutenant (T.) F.H. Sandford, “Irresistible.”

The two latter officers are further very strongly recommended for their conduct in the sweeping operations.

I was present in “Inflexible” close off Kum Kale on the 4th March, and witnessed the landing operations which were under the immediate direction of Rear-Admiral de Robeck and Brigadier-General Trotman, both of whom were on board “Irresistible” in the entrance of the Straits. I consider the operations were correctly conducted, and that everything possible under the circumstances was done.

The skilful manner in which “Wolverine” (Commander O.J. Prentis) and “Scorpion” (Lieutenant-Commander A.B. Cunningham), ran close inshore after dark, and sent whalers ashore to bring off the remaining officers and men is highly commended.

I desire specially to endorse recommendations made by the Rear-Admiral and Brigadier-General on the conduct of Lieutenant-Colonel G.E. Matthews, R.M.L.I., and also of Major A.E. Bewes, R.M.L.I.

Four Maxim guns, which had been left on Kum Kale Pier, were recovered by volunteers from “Agamemnon” – a smart and plucky piece of work.

The sweeping operations by night between the 12th and 15th March were conducted with great gallantry under heavy fire, and though not completely successful I consider the officers and men are deserving of great praise for their efforts.