

MINESWEEPING OPERATION IN THE DARDANELLES (FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 17, 1915)¹

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The fall of the entrance fortifications on February 25, 1915 only seemingly opened for the Allies the way to the Dardanelles. The entrance concentration, because of the forts' location, range of their guns and tactical guidelines adopted by the Turks and Germans, anyway had been doomed to fall². The success of the ships, enthusiastically assumed in London, was in fact the first, significant step towards an inevitable disaster. To be able to get to Istanbul, first the central forts located in the narrowest part of the straits should have been defeated³. Experience gained during the bombardment of the entrance forts showed that the ships could conduct effective fire on the land targets either from a long distance with the anchors dropped, or from a short distance, but in motion. In the case of the operation inside the Dardanelles, both alternatives were out of the question, of which the allied navy's commander, vice admiral Sackville Hamilton Carden, was probably not quite aware. The first one was impossible because of the restricted size of the reservoir, which implicated that after passing the Kumkale-Seddülbahir line the ships were within firing range of the Turkish artillery. Even if it consisted only of howitzers, this ruled out the bombardment on anchor, while the minefield prevented the navy from application of the second alternative⁴. The ships could not approach the forts to a range which would enable them to eliminate their cannons by conducting the fire in motion⁵.

In this article, by depicting possibly the most detailed chronology of the actions undertaken by allies to sweep the Dardanelles, we shall try to prove that due to the

¹ This text was for the first time published in: "Çanakkale Araştırmaları Türk Yılığ - The Turkish Yearbook of Gallipoli Studies", Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Atatürk ve Çanakkale Savaşları Araştırma Merkezi, Sayı / Issue: 2, Mart / March 2004, p. 81-115 (including summary in Turkish). Then it was published in Polish in: "Okrety Wojenne", nr 71, 3/2005, pp. 20-29. Supplemented with some new information about French minesweeping efforts it became a part of P. Nykiel's latest book – *Wyprawa do Złotego Rogu. Działania wojenne w Dardanelach i na Morzu Egejskim (sierpień 1914 – marzec 1915)* ["Expedition to the Golden Horn. Military Operations in the Dardanelles and on the Aegean Sea (August 1914 - March 1915)"], Wydawnictwo Arkadiusz Wingert, Kraków – Międzyzdroje 2008.

² This issue is discussed more widely by the author in the following papers: *Was it Possible to Renew the Naval Attack on the Dardanelles Successfully the Day After 18th March?* [in:] "The Gallipoli Campaign International Perspectives 85 Years On – Conference Proceedings 24-25 April 2000", Atatürk & Gallipoli Campaign Research Center, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale 2002, p. 110-115 and *The Role of the Turkish Strategists in Shaping the Early Conceptions of Defense of the Dardanelles (September 1914 – March 18, 1915)* [in:] "Beşinci Uluslararası Atatürk Kongresi, 8-12 Aralık 2003, Ankara / The Fifth International Congress on Atatürk, December 8-12, 2003, Ankara", Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2005, Cilt II / Vol. II, pp. 1003-1008.

³ See the map in the "Illustrations" bookmark.

⁴ The first of 11 mine lines was established on August 4, 1914. By March 8, 1915 the total amount of mines laid by the Turks in the Dardanelles has amounted to 403 (see the table in the "Mines" bookmark).

⁵ The events of March 18, 1915 have shown that fire conducted against the forts was really effective only from a distance of approx. 5000 m. (compare with: P. Nykiel, *Was it Possible to Renew the Naval Attack on the Dardanelles Successfully the Day After 18th March?*).

means which the allied navy had, and witty tactics of the defenders, removal of the mines laid in the straits was impossible. In the discussed period, allied battleships and cruisers also conducted wide scale warfare (consisting mainly of shelling the forts and batteries) both inside the straits and at its entrance as well as in the area of Bolayır. Here we shall only mention those directly related to the sweeping of the Dardanelles.

On February 25, after smashing the entrance forts and intensive artillery preparation, at 16.00 hours vice admiral Carden ordered the crews of the fishing boats to start the minesweeping⁶. Cover for those defenseless vessels manned by fishermen from the North Sea was to be provided by the battleships *Albion*, *Triumph* and *Vengeance* and six destroyers⁷. The minesweepers under escort of the latter eventually ventured as far as 4 miles into the straits. Shortly before dawn they returned to base safely without finding any signs of mines in the Dardanelles.

The following day (February 26), encouraged by the luck of Turkish resistance, Carden decided to move the trawler flotilla, assisted by destroyers⁸ and only two battleships (*Albion* and *Triumph*) into the straits. However vice admiral must have had some doubts, because he finally allocated rather illusory support to those ships in the form of another battleship, which was to be *Majestic*⁹. Yet, the course of activities undertaken that day showed that despite the fact that the flotilla's core was constantly beyond the range of the main forts' guns in the narrows, the execution of the task entrusted to it was extremely difficult. At 09.00 hours the Turkish troops deployed by Kirte (Krithia) had been put in readiness. The reason was not only the renewed bombardment of the entrance forts by three British battleships, but also - more importantly - the appearance of five minesweepers and four destroyers in their vicinity. Half an hour later the destroyers and trawlers proceeded to the entrance of the straits from the direction of Seddülbahir, covered by two battleships which followed them. At 10.00 hours the destroyers sailed to the level of Seddülbahir – Kumkale line. The headquarters of the 9th Division in Sarıcalı was put on alert. An hour later the minesweepers started their run in Karanlık Cove. The three destroyers that followed them had ventured a little farther. When they came within firing range of the battery of cannons with reinforced barrels that were set up in Soğanlı Valley, its artillerymen opened fire. Shocked destroyers replied with several rounds and retreated¹⁰. At approximately 13.00 hours *Albion* fired from a distance of 11.000 m. at the Dardanos

⁶ The British sweeping flotilla consisted of 21 ordinary fishing boats, which – with the preservation of the original engines – have been covered with the armored plates, providing the crews cover from the infantry fire and splinters. However nobody was aware that such a large overload and the necessity of sweeping against the current (sometimes having even the speed of 4 knots) would almost immobilize the vessels. This aspect will be more widely discussed on the following pages.

⁷ N. Steel, P. Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, Macmillan General Books, London 1995, p. 18; R. Keyes (translation: Thies, H.), *Des Bancs de Flandre aux Dardanelles (The Narrow Seas to the Dardanelles) 1910-1915*, Bibliothèque d'Histoire Politique, Militaire et Navale, Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, Paris 1936, p. 130; H. W. Nevinson, *The Dardanelles Campaign*, Nisbet & Co. Ltd., London 1918, p. 53. Unfortunately, sources and books available to the author not always give the names of destroyers taking part in the discussed operations.

⁸ We know only one of them by name. She was *Grasshopper*.

⁹ Interesting fact is that the howitzers had been installed on the top of each *Majestic's* turrets (Usborne, C. V. *Smoke on the Horizon – Mediterranean Fighting 1914-1918*, Hodder and Stoughton Limited, London 1933, p. 84).

¹⁰ Such a rapid withdrawal was most probably a result of damages sustained by *Grasshopper*. According to Turkish sources, she was hit at the radio station and lifeboat (İ. Kayabalı, C. Arslanoğlu, *Çanakkale Zaferi 1915*, Ankara 1975, p. 45).

fortified battery (Fort No. 8). There was no reply from the Turks because – as the battery’s crew wrongly estimated – the ship was out of its cannons’ range¹¹. Two of the above-mentioned destroyers decided to take advantage of this opportunity and once more approached the lighthouse at Cape Kepez. The trawlers’ crews, seeing that the battleship did not stop shelling Dardanos, felt more secure and, not expecting a greater threat, much more boldly continued the fruitless sweeping of Karanlık Cove. At 18.30 hours the flotilla left the Dardanelles leaving only the destroyers remaining on Seddülbahir – Kumkale line. The other vessels sailed away from the entrance to the straits¹².

The facts depicted above, largely based on Turkish sources, shed interesting light on the events of February 26. First of all, they demonstrate a real artistry of warfare conducted by the Turks and Germans¹³. At this point it is worth emphasizing the coastal artillery, which did not fire without a reason. The ammunition was not wasted on – in these circumstances – a harmless destroyer. The only instance was when the vessels dangerously approached to the fourth line of mines¹⁴ on the Soğanlı Valley line and came under fire of the guns with reinforced barrels. Thus, the artillery fire should have forced them to withdraw (since mines were in short supply, there was no reason to waste them on destroyers when they could be saved for more valuable targets such as battleships). One should also note that the destroyers were forced to retreat by an essentially low value battery and not by the cannons of the central forts, of which they were already within range. As the allies were to be convinced in the days that followed, the Turks originally assigned defense of the minefield to the batteries of cannon with small caliber and short firing range, most of which were retrieved from scrap. It is enough to mention that among them were even smooth barreled gunmetal pieces and threaded but short barreled guns, the range of which had been increased by a strengthening coat founded around the barrels (this enabled them to use more powerful throwing charges). Such armament – in other circumstances completely useless – proved to be quite sufficient against the fishing boats which were hurriedly converted into minesweepers. Usage of such archaic armament enabled the defenders to save the ammunition of the fortress’ cannons, which was in short supply. Finally, let us note that on both February 25 and 26 the Turks did not uselessly haunt the trawlers’ crews, because they searched for mines in places where there were none. The allies were surprised that they could not find any mines almost to the line of Cape Kepez. Particularly, this kind of minefield arrangement was not casual and only partially resulted from the fact that the Turks had a restricted quantity of mines. By laying them so close to the narrows, part of the defense burden (especially in daytime) could be shifted onto the howitzer concentration, which had an exceptionally large supply of ammunition¹⁵. In the final analysis, this became much more troublesome for the enemy, as shown by many West European authors. What is, however, more important is that if

¹¹ In fact, the firing range of 150/40 guns, the armament of Dardanos, was 13.300-16.800 m. (depending on the type of ammunition).

¹² Osborne (*op. cit.*, p. 84-85) claims that the trawlers returned to the Dardanelles at night on February 26/27 covered by the destroyers *Colne* and *Jed*, but failed to locate any mines. The Turkish sources do not mention this action.

¹³ We should not forget that the commander of the howitzer concentration was a German colonel Heinrich Wehrle.

¹⁴ See the map in the “Illustrations” bookmark.

¹⁵ Compare with: P. Nykiel, *Was it Possible to Renew the Naval Attack on the Dardanelles Successfully the Day After 18th March?*

the allied navy had wanted to sweep the mines, they would have been forced come within firing range of the central forts.

On March 1, 1915, after the break forced by inconvenient weather conditions, the allies decided to get their ships again on the Dardanelles' waters. Yet, from that day until the end of the Dardanelles operation, minesweeping was only to be carried out at night. About 22.45 hours seven fishing boats, escorted by the light cruiser *Amethyst* and four destroyers (*Basilisk*, *Grasshopper*, *Mosquito* and *Racoon*) approached the minefield. Spotted by the searchlight situated at the entrance to Soğanlı Valley¹⁶ they immediately came under the intense fire of Rumeli Mesudiye¹⁷, Muin-i Zafer and Dardanos batteries, as well as the guns with reinforced barrels and Krupp cannons from Cape Kepez. The allies, without thinking it over, had retreated in such great panic that already at 23.30 hours they turned up at the entrance to the Dardanelles¹⁸. The reports concerning the ammunition consumption by the batteries defending the minefield very meaningfully show how great was the panic of the crews of trawlers and of the vessels covering them, since the Turks only fired 37 rounds that night.

On March 3, with the aim of preventing nighttime minesweeping, two cannons of Uchatius gunmetal and two Chilean mountain guns were deployed at Tenger Valley. This battery, manned by the 2nd Brigade of Heavy Artillery, remained at the mentioned position only at night. At dawn the cannons were pulled back into the valley to prevent their destruction by the allied ships. Having also the minefield's security in mind, the Turks strengthened the Dardanos battery with guns imported from Ulupınar. In the Akyarlar (White Cliff) area, besides the 12th Battery from Anadolu Hamidiye (No. 19) fort, a battery, initially to be used against submarines at Nara (Nagara) fort, was deployed. In the first days of March, the allied navy finished minesweeping in the section from the entrance to the straits to Soğanlı Valley. Thus one would expect that at any moment the trawlers could come up against the fourth line of mines, which was farther to the South of the whole minefield. To decrease the risk of finding it, both the artillery units and infantry were ordered to attack the trawlers immediately after they emerged on the Seddülbahir – Kumkale line.

On the night of March 3/4 the allies made another attempt to sweep the straits. At 21.00 hours seven minesweepers escorted by the destroyers *Wolverine*, *Scorpion*, *Renard* and *Grampus* took course on Soğanlı Valley. Half an hour later personnel of the

¹⁶ We know from the official Turkish historiography that the diameter of the searchlight located at this place was 60 cm. However, G. Yetkin (*Yaratanların Ağzından 18 Mart 1915 Çanakkale Zaferi*, Türkiye Eski Muharipler Cemiyeti Yayınları, Ankara 1965, p. 110) claims that it was a ship searchlight with the diameter of 150 cm., installed on the wheels (rather on a wagon, then on a car) by commodore Ahmet Hidayet. According to that author, on March 2, 1915 it was the only searchlight inside the straits. A few days later another six identical pieces were to be laid out. Regardless of the searchlight's type there is however no doubt that that very day it was the only one piece in the Dardanelles, while Osborne (*op. cit.* p. 87) writes about as many as four.

¹⁷ Although in the discussed period there was only one Mesudiye battery on the Dardanelles' shore (located on the European coast), to avoid the misunderstandings very common in the world's historiography, resulting from the fact that another battery with the same name was erected in the later years of WWI (on the Asiatic coast in Karantina), we will use here the name Rumeli Mesudiye, which means "the European Mesudiye".

¹⁸ Osborne (*op. cit.* p. 87) claims that after the trawlers withdrew, *Amethyst* and all four destroyers remained in the straits to continue the exchange of fire with the Turks for forty minutes and even scored a direct hit at the searchlight. However, no other authors have confirmed this information.

searchlight deployed there once again spotted the flotilla. The cannons with reinforced barrels situated in the above-mentioned valley opened fire. The destroyers endured the cannonade, which at 22.15 hours was joined by the Krupp guns and cannons with reinforced barrels from Cape Kepez. As the allies quickly concentrated their fire on the searchlight, the Turks were forced to switch it off and continue to shoot the enemy “blindfolded” until morning came¹⁹. The minesweepers retreated at daybreak without finding any mines. The artillery defending the minefield fired 68 rounds that night and had neither damages nor casualties.

The first days of a fruitless struggle with the minefield in the Dardanelles allowed us to draw some conclusions. It demonstrated that civilian crews of the trawlers, commanded by an officer who had no previous experience in minesweeping operations, were completely useless. The same sailors who, only a few months ago, coped so bravely with the mines on the North Sea, utterly disappointed in the Dardanelles. It seems the problem was that the circumstances in which they had to work in the straits were drastically different from those to which they were already accustomed. On the North Sea they served on well-known waters and almost unhindered by anybody, while on the Dardanelles they were situated far away from their homes and the attitude of the Turkish artillery was not a friendly one. Although in the first days of the operations not a single minesweeper was sunk, only the awareness that the Turks were shooting was a good enough reason for the fishermen to retreat. Another important factor for their morale was the fact that because of a strong current in the straits and low engine power, the maximum speed of the fishing boats during the minesweeping operations was a mere 2-3 knots. This made them almost motionless targets for the coastal artillery. From a psychological point of view, the most important was the false conviction that the draught of the trawlers was greater than the depth at which the Turkish mines were laid²⁰. Bearing in mind the above, we should not be surprised that the British fishermen used to take all pretexts to escape. As civilians it was their privilege and they could use it with impunity. However, it seems that on that stage not only Carden, but first of all the British Admiralty were not quite aware of the scale of the above-described problem.

On the night of March 6/7 vice admiral Carden ordered several minesweepers escorted by the light cruiser *Amethyst*, the battleships *Ocean* and *Majestic* and a few destroyers to move into the straits. In the face of heavy fire from the batteries defending the minefield, which expended a total of 177 rounds, the flotilla once again achieved nothing²¹.

The following night (March 7/8) the French minesweepers entered the Dardanelles for the first time under the cover of seven British destroyers. It became quickly apparent that those vessels coped with the opposing current even worse than the British ones. Thus the operation ended in utter failure.

¹⁹ Ş. Tuncçapa wrote in his diary (*Çanakkale Harbi Hatıralarım*, “423 Sayılı Donanma Dergisi Eki”, T. C. M. M. V. Deniz Kuvvetleri Kumandanlığı, T. C. Deniz Basımevi, İstanbul 1958, p. 7) that his battery (Muin-i Zafer) fired in the direction from which the sound of the sweeping gear could be heard.

²⁰ Actually, only the mines of the 5th line, situated between Namazgâh (Fort No. 17) and Anadolu Hamidiye (No. 19) forts were laid at a depth of only 2.5 m. The others were 4-4.5 m. beneath the waterline.

²¹ Osborne’s information (*op. cit.*, p. 92), claiming that *Ocean* destroyed a searchlight and a battery in Soğanlı Valley does not have confirmation in any other sources.

On the morning of March 8 (at 07.10 hours), the event occurred which gained a prominent place in Turkish historiography. That very day *Nusret* laid the only offensive line of mines²² along the shore of Erenköy Bay. It consisted of 26 mines placed at a depth of 4.5 m. with irregular 100-150 m. spaces, perpendicular to most of earlier lines. The Turks became convinced of how brilliant an idea this was ten days later when three allied ships fell victim to these mines.

It is noteworthy at this point to quote vice admiral Osborne:

*(...) it was not until the war was over that her little expedition became known to us, yet it is probable that her field of twenty[sic!] mines was the most effective ever laid since the science of mine-laying was added to the other horrors of war (...)*²³

The above-mentioned line, bearing the number 11 in Turkish documents, was laid in a place already swept by the allies. In the last days before the main naval attack on the central forts the navy checked those waters once again. However, coming across seven mines did not arouse the allies' suspicion (this will be discussed more broadly in the following pages). It is also surprising that none of the ships that bombarded the central forts between March 8 and 17 sailed into this line, since all of them used to maneuver in Erenköy Bay.

On the night of March 8/9 at 23.35 hours, a flotilla consisting of the cruiser *Amethyst*, six destroyers and two picket boats dragging explosive sweeps entered the Dardanelles²⁴. There were two principal reasons for such a tactically and technically significant change. Firstly, the picket boats were smaller and most probably faster vessels than the fishing boats used so far, and thus they were much more difficult targets for the coastal artillery defending the minefield. Secondly, the allies – nobody knows why – became convinced that the Turks had observation mines, connected with the shore by cable. The new method was considered to be more effective against this kind of weapon²⁵. However, when the destroyers reached the level of Tenger Valley, the

²² Some Western and Turkish studies give Karanlık Cove as the location of that line, which is more to the South, on the level of the Menderes River delta. The actual place was, of course, Erenköy Bay. The coordinates of the discussed line's North end were: 40° 03' 30'' N; 26° 20' 00'' E, and of the South one: 40° 02' 00'' N; 26° 18' 00'' E (*Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi*, VIII nci Cilt, *Deniz Harekatı*, T. C. Genelkurmay Basım Evi, Ankara, 1976, p. 174). Many authors (including Turkish ones) are not unanimous regarding the date of the discussed event. Some claim that it took place on the morning of March 18, 1915. In "L'Illustration" (samedi 10 avril 1915, 73e Année – No 3762, s. 384) we can read: *On March 18, while entering the straits the allied ships have noticed a small Turkish tug, which has just accomplished her mission and fled. Because of her we have to mourn the loss of three cruisers. All three have stroke the drifting mines laid in a very last moment, against all war rules, which forbid such practices – but we can already hardly count the cases of the Hague Convention's violations.* The diary written by the commander of the mining unit in the Dardanelles, lieutenant commander Nazmi Akpınar, (*Deniz Binbaşı Nazmi Akpınar'ın Savas Günlüğü 1914-1922*) that is in the collection of The Naval Museum in Çanakkale seems to finally dispel all the doubts, saying that the event took place on February 22, 1331, which – according to the Rûmi calendar – is March 8, 1915.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁴ Osborne gives his information, probably as the only one, but in a very detailed and credible way (*op. cit.* p. 95).

²⁵ The explosive sweep, task of which was to break the mooring cable, was in fact the only kind that could be used on the picket boats because of their low engine power.

Chilean mountain guns opened fire on them. The ships responded with several salvos, but – as the British sources say – because of the enemy’s fire superiority had to withdraw achieving nothing. Actually, the artillery defending the minefield that night expended only 42 rounds and the Turks did not have observation mines at all. This, however, the allies learned only after the war.

On the night of March 9/10 at 03.15, two picket boats entered the straits again, passed Cape Kepez without being noticed and, after executing a U turn, began to sweep with the current (it means, from North to South). At the same time, two previously used trawlers started their run using the same method as before. Unluckily, one of the sweeps caught on the mooring cable of a buoy to which an anti-submarine net was attached. The Turks, awakened by this, switched on the searchlights and bombarded the enemy with a hail of shells. The destroyer *Mosquito*, which covered the operation, opened fire on the searchlights deployed on Cape Kepez. However, she herself became a target of Krupp cannons, the Tenger Valley battery, and the guns with reinforced barrels located in the vicinity of Dardanos and Soğanlı Valley. With these combined forces, the Turkish artillery managed to force *Mosquito* to withdraw before she was able to inflict any damage. The same fate awaited two picket boats which ventured to the minefield: shelled by the mountain guns from Tenger Valley as well as the guns with reinforced barrels from Soğanlı Valley and were forced to retreat. Throughout the battles that took place in the daytime on March 9 and during a half an hour of night activities, the Turkish artillery expended only 51 rounds and suffered no casualties.

Discouraged by the fiasco of the two consecutive attempts to sweep the Dardanelles with the use of small picket boats, Carden decided to go back to the old, equally ineffective method. On the night of March 11/12 he sent a flotilla of eight trawlers escorted by the battleships *Grampus* and *Cornwallis*, the light cruiser *Amethyst* and four destroyers, into the Dardanelles. Until that time, several approaches to the minefield by the trawlers were fruitless. However, the above-mentioned night made a breakthrough in the form of sweeping three mines²⁶, yet the allied navy could not avoid losses. The fishing boat No. 339 (*Manx Hero*) sunk at 23.00 hours as a result of a swept mine’s explosion. The blast of two other mines swept a short while earlier by the leading pair of fishing boats alerted the personnel of the searchlights deployed near Dardanos battery and on Cape Kepez. When the searchlights came on, two destroyers on the Akyarlar (White Cliff) – Erenköy line fired on them. The batteries replied. Both vessels, frightened by this cannonade, escaped but returned at 02.15 hours to be once again shelled by the guns with reinforced barrels deployed on the Gallipoli peninsula in the vicinity of Soğanlı and Havuzlar Valleys. At 03.10, the trawlers, under the cover of a battleship, cruiser and a destroyer, approached the minefield once more. The batteries responsible for minefield defense, as well as the cannons of Dardanos and Rumeli Mesudiye, immediately shelled the escort. The ships, of course, returned fire. A few minesweepers, proceeding at the same time towards Baykuş approached considerably close to Havuzlar, which the crews of the central forts noticed immediately. The artillerymen from Çimenlik (Fort No. 20), Yıldız (Fort No. 9) and Namazgâh (Fort No. 17) forts joined the battle. A fierce exchange of fire continued almost until morning. At

²⁶ The Turks claim that there were few of them and the British “a significant amount”. The exact figure give only Akpınar (*op. cit.*), Osborne (*op. cit.*, p. 96) and P. Chack (*Marins a la bataille. Des Dardanelles aux brumes du nord. Les Éditions de France, Paris 1937, p. 24*). From the Frenchmen’s memoirs we can also read a passage, which in a very forcible way sums up the hopelessness of the allies’ efforts: (...) *all [three mines exploded] at the place, which we could not locate on the map...*

about 04.30 hours, the flotilla withdrew from the straits²⁷. The Pyrrhic victory of the allies was the result of a change in the sweeping techniques. Until then the fishing boats made their runs against the current, so when the sweep caught the mooring cable they almost stopped, being unable to overcome the drag. On the night of March 10/11, the allies decided to sail a little bit farther into the minefield and then, after making a U-turn, dropped the sweep and proceeded with the current. However, they did not foresee that the force exerted on the mooring line by the sweep of a vessel going at full speed and with a current of at least 4 knots would be too strong. Most probably a mine picked up too firmly jumped from the water and hit *Manx Hero's* stern. This time the price the Turks paid for the night confrontation with the enemy's ships was slightly higher. Three soldiers were wounded; the forts and batteries fired 843 shells (80 fell on Muin-i Zafer battery). Both searchlights on Cape Kepez were damaged – the electrical cable of one's and the lens of the other's were broken. Yet the damages were repaired the following day.

At night on March 11/12, the weather worsened. There was light dew over the water and it drizzled. Despite that, at 22.30 hours, two destroyers took their positions in Erenköy Bay near Tenger and opened fire on the searchlights deployed on Cape Kepez and in the vicinity of Dardanos battery. The vessel closer to Tenger Valley quickly fell under the fire of Uchatius' gunmetal cannons. Thus she had to sail away to Erenköy Bay from where she continued to shell the searchlights. Only the salvos of batteries from Cape Kepez as well as of Dardanos and Rumeli Mesudiye forced the ships to withdraw. At about 02.00 hours, the trawlers (this time manned by professional French crews) returned under the cover of *Amethyst* and the destroyers. The flotilla formed an array and began to approach the minefield. When the ships had almost reached the destination, the leading vessel was spotlighted by one of the searchlights. Immediately shelled, the minesweeper turned back. The remaining, reportedly still unnoticed, ships²⁸, also retreated. Thus the night of March 11/12 was a bitter lesson for Carden. Until that time he hoped that civilian crews of British fishing boats, already experienced in minesweeping would do their job with equal sacrifice as they did on the North Sea. For the above-mentioned reasons, it did not happen. To make matters worse, the French crews, which replaced them – and in which maybe the vice admiral placed more trust – disappointed him even more so. So, seeing no other choice, Carden handed over the command of the sweeping flotilla to the chief of his headquarters, commodore Roger Keyes. He then, as a persistence gratitude, presented the fishermen with an appropriate "financial motivation" and strengthened each crew with five volunteers recruited from among the sailors from the allied navy. This step was by all means right but much delayed. The Turkish report shows quite forcibly how exaggerated was the fear of the trawlers' crews. According to it, on the night of March 11/12, the coastal artillery fired only 24 shells²⁹. The propaganda of success unfolded by the official communiqués of the Dardanelles Fortified Zone's Command was equal to the sailor's fear. Namely, the Turkish soldiers learned that four destroyers were sunk. According to the same document, two Turkish torpedo boats left the straits and in the vicinity of the islands

²⁷ As the study titled *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi*, VIII nci Cilt, *Deniz Harekâtı* (p. 170) says, two trawlers were hit (each of them once) by 150 mm. shells.

²⁸ F. Kurtoğlu claims that despite the efforts of *Amethyst* the trawlers did not even manage to approach the minefield (*Çanakkale ve 18 Mart 1915*, "336 sayılı Deniz mecmuasının tarihi ilavesi", Deniz Matbaası, İstanbul 1935, p. 112). Commodore R. Keyes says the same (*op. cit.*, p. 144).

²⁹ We should not forget that this figure also contains shells fired earlier on the destroyers, when they tried to destroy the searchlights.

(we do not know which – possibly Eşek Adaları), sent down an allied merchant vessel and two warships!³⁰

At midnight on March 12/13, the French flotilla, under the command of lieutenant Blanc³¹, once more entered the straits. It consisted of *Pioche* (lieutenant. Blanc), *Râteau* (lieutenant Faurie), *Henriette* (lieutenant Auverny)³², *Jules-Couette* and *Ishkeul*, which were to be covered by the destroyers *Fanfare* and *Sabretache*. The technique used by the French to neutralize the mines was a little bit different than the one implemented by their allies. The British used the “classic” tow sweep, which was a steel cable dragged at a certain depth by a pair of vessels sailing board to board. The French utilized a cutting sweep, which was made of several cables attached to a single vessel. So called “cutters” were attached to those cables in suitable spaces, and when caught on the mooring cable, they cut the mooring lines. Soon after approaching the minefield, the minesweepers were spotted by the searchlights. The French’s job was made much more difficult by the fire of the Turkish guns from Cape Kepez, Soğanlı Valley and Rumeli Mesudiye battery, as well as by a mine drifting between the vessels. Finally, despite the artillerymen defending the minefield firing only 36 rounds without inflicting even slight damage, they withdrew around 04.00 hours after blowing up the mine that drifted between them. The following day the commanders of all individual trawlers compared their maps and again were unable to fix even approximately the zone in which they had operated the previous night.

The lack of progress in sweeping the straits began to irritate the First Lord of Admiralty. On March 13 he sent a confidential letter to vice admiral Carden in which he expressed his impatience. From the content of this document, it follows that – in Winston Churchill’s understanding – the only reason for the lack of progress in minesweeping was the insufficient devotion of the trawlers’ crews. The First Lord completely disregarded the nonsense of entrusting this task to civilians. He also did not know, or rather did not want to know about the technical difficulties, as a result of the trawlers’ overload, weakness of their engines and strong current in the Dardanelles. Those factors in advance sentenced the sweeping operation to failure, even if the crews showed boundless devotion, which Churchill directly expected from them. But the show had to go on, as London wished.

So, at midnight on March 13/14 *Cornwallis* shelled the searchlights (presumably in vicinity of Kepez) and withdrew. At 00.30 hours (according to some sources only at 02.00) after provoking the searchlights and cannons from Cape Kepez and Dardanos battery, the flotilla of trawlers³³, escorted by the light cruiser *Amethyst*, again turned back, trying to convince the Turks that the sweeping operation was over for this night. Counting on the element of surprise, at 03.20 hours, seven trawlers (one leading and three pairs) returned, accompanied not only by the above-mentioned light cruiser, but also by destroyers and an undefined number of picket boats manned by volunteers and

³⁰ *Musaoğlu Hafız Mehmet’in 1914-1915 Çanakkale Muharebelerinde yazmış olduğu gerçek savaş günlüğü not defteri* [Notebook with the real war diary written by Musaoğlu Hafız Mehmet during the Dardanelles battle 1914-1915], p. 2 (transcript in the author’s possession); Ş. Tunççapa, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³¹ As we can conclude from commodore Keyes’ memoirs, eventually the British gave up the idea of strengthening the trawlers’ crews with navy sailors and on March 12/13 decided to completely replace the civilians with navy crews.

³² Sources do not give even the first letters of names of the above-mentioned French commanders.

³³ The vessels were already manned by sailors from British warships.

fitted with explosive sweeps. Having past Cape Kepez the trawlers turned towards the Northwest and divided into three groups, which were to sail with the current along the European shore, keeping the spaces of about 800 m. between each other. The mines, once picked up, were to be dragged to the shallow waters of the Menderes estuary. Finally, one pair of trawlers stayed on the level of Tenger while the other sailed towards Baykuş and the third one towards Cape Kepez. The vessels sailing to Baykuş even managed to reach Havuzlar, but were forced to withdraw by the siege cannons eventually. The trawlers that tried to achieve some measure of success in the vicinity of Cape Kepez and Soğanlı Valley also got into trouble, not only because of the minefield protection, but also as a result of fire conducted by Dardanos and Rumeli Mesudiye. For the minesweepers, the night of March 13/14 turned out to be the most tragic of all. Nearly the full crew complements of two vessels were killed³⁴. Four trawlers and two picket boats were so damaged that, although they did not sink, they were eliminated from further operation³⁵. The cruiser *Amethyst*, which tried to cover the defenseless trawlers with her hull, also suffered a great deal of damage. One shell damaged her steering gear and she drifted for about twenty minutes taking subsequent hits. An officer of that vessel recalled a shell that exploded between a group of sailors and splashed the walls and ceiling of the cabin with their blood and remains. Everything was collected into sacks, but the day after, during the assembly, it became known that there were not twelve in the cabin, as was originally thought, but nineteen people³⁶. The hero of the first landing at Kumkale, lieutenant commander Eric Gascoigne Robinson, was personally convinced of the accuracy of the Turkish fire³⁷. That disastrous night he commanded a trawler which was hit by the coastal batteries 84 (!) times³⁸. In face of such great enemy counteraction, the allied flotilla left the Dardanelles at 04.20 hours³⁹. As for this kind of operation, the casualties were significant: 27 sailors killed and 43 wounded (39). The Turks fired 974 rounds. Carriages of two non-fortress guns were damaged⁴⁰.

Carden finally realized that the attempts so far to sweep the Dardanelles had achieved poor results. To make matters worse, half of the trawlers were already out of service because of damage. In the face of such severe casualties, it was impossible to count on the further cooperation of the civilian crews. Under these circumstances, the

³⁴ The trawlers accidentally rammed each other. For some time they remained locked together with the engines stopped and drifted down over the minefield under heavy fire. When they finally staggered apart, it became obvious that there was no way to renew the sweeping. On board one trawler only the man at the wheel was not hit. The other sailors were killed or severely wounded. Under these circumstances both vessels had to withdraw (Usborne, *op. cit.*, p. 101).

³⁵ The Turks shot off the sweeping gear of the third pair of trawlers, before they managed to take operational position. The minesweeper No. 49 was hit at the mess-deck. A large shell entered her side and passed through near the after galleys. The other hit under the waterline resulted in the flooding of her bunker. The mast rigging and lifeboats were riddled (*Ibid.*, p. 102).

³⁶ James, R. R. *Grand Strategy. Gallipoli*, Pan Books London and Sydney 1965, p. 50.

³⁷ On February 26, 1915, while commanding a demolition party that landed at Kumkale, he showed great bravery, destroying an anti-aircraft battery and damaging one of the 240/35 cannons of Orhaniye fort under heavy enemy fire (Fort No. 4). For that achievement he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

³⁸ Snelling, S. *VCs of the First World War, Gallipoli*, Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud 1995, p. 5.

³⁹ Before that, the commanding trawler No. 705, in cooperation with the destroyer *Mosquito*, tried to drag the antisubmarine net (stretched on the level of Soğanlı Valley) down the straits. The attempt was not successful because the sweeping gear broke (Usborne, *op. cit.*, p. 102).

⁴⁰ The most casualties were among the crew of cruiser *Amethyst* (22 killed and 28 wounded). The official Turkish report said that one "battleship" was damaged and one destroyer sunk (diary of Musaoğlu Hafiz Mehmet, p. 2).

vice admiral came to the conclusion that first he had to deal with the artillery, and then return to minesweeping. Beginning from that moment, the conception of the decisive attack on the central forts, which finally occurred on March 18, 1915, started to take its final shape. Despite the above-mentioned decision, the sweeping of the Dardanelles was still continued on a limited scale.

On the night of March 14/15, a flotilla, most probably consisting of two destroyers and three larger vessels covering the minesweepers, tried to move along the straits from the vicinity of Domuz Valley. We do not know much about the course and results of this venture. The Turkish sources say that the Dardanos battery shelled those vessels for ten minutes. At 04.30 hours, two destroyers took position at the level of Tenger Valley, from which once again they tried to destroy the searchlights deployed at Cape Kepez. This action again brought no results, because Rumeli Mesudiye battery, howitzers and Uchatius gunmetal cannons showed substantial activity⁴¹.

The following night (March 15/16) at 23.30 hours, four trawlers and three destroyers entered the Dardanelles' waters. Two hours later they made an attempt to reach Erenköy Bay, but were quickly forced to retreat by the coastal artillery defending the mines laid by *Nusret*. At 04.30, two destroyers appeared near the European shore, between Kereviz and Domuz Valleys. At the same time three trawlers were reported in Erenköy Bay. As most sources claim, the extreme vigilance of the artillery once again prevented the allies from any kind of activity. Akpınar mentions in his diary that the only success the allies achieved was in vicinity of Erenköy where they blew up seven mines. It is hard to suspect this author of confusing the dates because in the record from the same day he wrote that "on the grounds of Merten and another Pashas" decision he was awarded with the silver medal for loyalty and heroism (Gümüş Liyakat Madalyası). It seems that the above information has partial confirmation in Osborne's study⁴². Osborne wrote that between March 14 and night of March 17/18, the allies managed to blow up four mines laid along the Asiatic coast. No matter the number, the destruction of those mines had enormous importance, but even Osborne, while writing his book, was unaware of that fact. All participants of the events in the Dardanelles, as well as historians, unanimously claim that line No. 11, laid by *Nusret* on March 8, 1915, was not discovered and the allies learned of its existence only after the end of WWI. Yet from the aforementioned Akpınar's record (partially confirmed by Osborne), there is no doubt that on the night of March 15/16 in Erenköy Bay the allies swept seven mines belonging exactly to the line laid by *Nusret*, since there were no other mines located there. The odds are that – as had occurred before – the crews of the aforementioned three trawlers were also unable to precisely fix the location in which they found the mines. This light-heartedness enormously influenced the fate of the allies' main confrontation with the central forts on March 18, 1915, when they lost two ships because of *Nusret's* mines.

The two sweeping attempts made (at 01.00 and 04.00 hours) on March 16/17 ended in failure. The flotilla had to retreat under the fire of the 8th Heavy Artillery Regiment, a group of Uchatius gunmetal cannons, Rumeli Mesudiye battery and a few anti-aircraft

⁴¹ We can read from Osborne's study, beginning from March 14, Carden started preparations for the final naval strike on the central forts and all the minesweeping activities undertaken since that day were aimed at again making a reconnaissance of the already swept waters, on which the ships were to maneuver (*op. cit.*, p. 103).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

guns. Akpınar, was the only one that mentioned in his diary that the allies blew up a single mine in the vicinity of Baykuş.

The night preceding the main naval assault, the Turks again made the trawlers' job difficult. Seven vessels of that type, covered only by three destroyers, reached the waters between Akyarlar (White Cliff) and Cape Karanfil. The artillery once more easily repulsed the intruders. And so, in this unspectacular way, the attempts made by the allies to sweep the Dardanelles in the discussed period came to an end.

As we can see, the allies' defeat at this stage of the Dardanelles operation was the result of several factors.

The allies clearly disregarded the enemy, thinking that during the minesweeping of the straits they would encounter little or no resistance (hence the idea of using the fishing boats with civilian crews). Undoubtedly, they also did not possess even basic information on the reservoir on which they were going to operate, as they were surprised by strong and opposite surface current. It seems hardly probable that the trawlers' crews had no idea about navigation. Thus we can presume that the problems with fixing the locations of previous sweeping were the result of very inaccurate or even false maps that the sailors possessed.

On the other hand, the Turkish defenders deserve great admiration. In times of enormous technical progress brought on by WWI, they proved that the key to an effective defense was not power and technological superiority, but intelligent tactics. The Turks defended the minefield using minimal, and to a large extent, very archaic means and in so doing saved the ammunition of the forts and stronger batteries for the main confrontation with the allied navy. They also showed the enemy that outdated gunmetal cannons and small field artillery were effective enough weapons against the trawlers. If the Turks were not forced by the circumstances to use such means, we could say that on the allies' disrespect they replied accordingly.

Three weeks of war operations ended with the destruction of only 12 mines. The allies also did not manage to permanently eliminate any cannon or searchlight. The Turkish casualties were limited to three wounded. Because of gaps in the data, it is hard to determine precisely the quantity and kind of the artillery ammunition they used. However, we can assume that it was approximately 2.500 rounds.