

"1915"—TOLD BY WINSTON CHURCHILL Kitchener's Mastery of War Council Contributed To Its Weak Indecision Which Ended In Gallipoli Disaster

Day of Resolve Is Followed
by Changes in
Plans.

THE MUDDLE BEGINS

Kitchener Cancels Transport
Order To Send Troops
East.

By RT. HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL
ARTICLE IV.—THE GENESIS OF
THE MILITARY ATTACK.

Up to this point in the story of the Dardanelles the war council and the admiralty had accepted unquestioningly the basis that no troops were available for offensive operations against Turkey. In his first letter to me on Jan. 3, Lord Kitchener had said: "We have no troops to land anywhere. We shall not be sorry for anything big for some months." The first telegram to Admiral Carden of Jan. 3 had asked: "Are you of opinion that it is practicable to force the Dardanelles using ships alone?" At the evening meeting of the war council on Jan. 28 when the final decision was taken, Lord Kitchener repeated: "We have at present no troops to spare." It was on that foundation alone that all our decisions in favor of a purely naval attack had been taken. But henceforward a series of new facts and pressures came into play which gradually but unceasingly changed the character and enormously extended the scale of the enterprise. Under these influences in less than two months the naval attack, with its limited costs and risks, became subsidiary, and in its place there arose a military development of great magnitude. Over this new plan the admiralty had no responsible control. Our advice did not prevail; our criticisms were not welcomed, and even inquiries became a matter of delicacy and tact. Nevertheless, by the results of this military operation we had to stand or fall.

After all there was an army. From the very moment when the purely naval attack had been finally decided troops from many quarters began to come into view. From that moment the pressure to employ troops in one way or another grew steadily in every mind. The decision to abandon or postpone indefinitely the advances along the Belgian coast liberated portions of the reinforcements destined for Sir John French. The feeble character of the Turkish attack on Egypt and its repulse liberated the greater part of the army concentrated there. The continued improvement in the training of the Australian and territorial troops in this army increasingly fitted them for offensive operations. The suppression of the rebellion in South Africa had removed other anxieties. Meanwhile, the first and second of the new armies (in all twelve divisions) were improving in training and progressing in equipment. The large number of armed and organized soldiers in the United Kingdom should have removed all apprehension of overseas invasion.

At least, Ten Divisions Available.
At intervals during the next three months there were actually ordered to the Dardanelles: From England—23rd division; two first-line territorial divisions; Royal Naval Division; Yeomanry mounted division. From Egypt—Two Australian divisions; one extra Australian brigade; Lancashire territorial division; one Indian



HELD SWAY IN DARDANELLES CRISIS.

At the left is shown Lord Kitchener, who was held responsible for the indecision on the part of Britain which led to the Dardanelles disaster. At the right is Earl Grey, who played a prominent part in the campaign when Greece first expressed a desire to aid in the struggle to reach Constantinople.

brigade. From France—Two French divisions.

All these troops were available for moving at this moment. The transport for their conveyance by sea could readily have been procured. All, or their equivalent, and more were subsequently sent. Together they comprised an army of at least 150,000 men. This army could have been concentrated in the eastern Mediterranean in readiness to intervene at any point selected, some time before the end of March. If at any time in January it had been deliberately decided to use such an army, according to some good plan and with a resolute purpose, in a great combined operation to seize the Gallipoli peninsula and thus open the passage for the fleet, few will now doubt that a complete victory would have been gained. On the other hand, apart from the 23rd division, all these troops had been raised or permanently embodied only since the outbreak of the war. To open a new campaign on a large scale was a most serious decision, in view of their partially trained character and of the general shortage of munitions. This was the justification for the naval attack. It also within its limits presented a logical and consistent scheme of war. Either plan was defensible. But for what happened there can be no defence except human infirmity. To drift into a new campaign piecemeal and without any definite decision or careful plan would have been scouted by everyone. Yet so obliquely were these issues presented, so baffling were the personal factors involved,

that the war council were drawn insensibly and irresistibly into the muddle.

Lord Kitchener in the Tolls.

The workings of Lord Kitchener's mind constituted at this period a feature almost as puzzling as the great war itself. His prestige and authority were immense. He was the sole mouthpiece of war office opinion in the war council. Everyone had the greatest admiration for his character, and everyone felt fortified, amid the terrible and incalculable events of the opening months of the war, by his commanding presence. When he gave a decision, it was invariably accepted as final. He was never, to my belief, overruled by the war council or by his cabinet in any military matter, great or small. No single unit was ever sent or withheld contrary to his advice. Scarcely anyone ever ventured to argue with him in council. Respected by the man, sympathetic for his immense labors, confidence in his professional judgment, and the belief that he had plans deeper and wider than any could see, his misgivings and disputes, whether in the council or at the war office, were dominated absolutely by his counsel at this time in all that concerned the organization and employment of the armies.

Yet behind this imposing and splendid front lay many weaknesses, evidences of which became increasingly disquieting. The secretary of state for war had burdens laid upon him which no man, no three men even of his great capacity, could properly discharge. He had absorbed the whole war office into his spacious personality. The general staff was completely in abeyance, save as a machine for supplying him with information. Even as such a machine it was woefully weak. All the ablest officers and leading and strongest minds in the general staff and army council, with the exception of Sir John Cowans, the quartermaster-general, had hurried eagerly out of the country with the expeditionary force, and were now in France, feeling that they ought to control the whole conduct of the war from the highly localized point of view of the British general headquarters at St. Omer.

In their place, filling vitally important situations, were officers on the retired list or men whose opinions had never counted weightily in British military thought. These officers were petrified by Lord Kitchener's personality and position. They none of them showed the natural force and ability to argue questions out with him vigorously as man to man. He towered up in his uniform as a field-marshal, a torrent of rushing, swirling, and irresistible nature. As a result his decisions were sometimes contradictory. He was torn between two perfectly clear-cut views of the war, both urged upon him with force and passion, with wealth of fact and argument. All the leading soldiers in the British army, all the august authority of the French high command asserted that the sole path to victory lay in sending every single man and gun and shell to the French front to "kill Germans" and break their lines in the west. All the opinion of the war council, which certainly contained men who had established themselves as the leading figures of the public life of their generation, was focused upon the southern

and eastern theatre as the scene for the campaign of 1915. Kitchener himself was strongly drawn in this direction by his own eastern interest and knowledge. He saw the full vision of what success in this quarter would mean, but he also felt what we did not feel—the fearful alternative pressure to which he was continually subjected from the French front.

The problem was not insoluble. The task of reconciling these apparently opposed conceptions was not impossible. A well-conceived and elaborated plan and program could have been devised for action in the Near East in March, April, May or even June, and for a subsequent great concentration and operation on the western front in the autumn of 1915, or better still under far more favorable conditions in the spring of 1916. The successive development of both policies in their proper sequence and each in its integrity was perfectly feasible if the great authorities concerned could have been won over. However, in the event Lord Kitchener succumbed to conflicting forces and competing policies.

Beside these trials and burdens, to which he was certainly not able to rise superior, stood the whole vast business of recruiting, organizing and equipping the new armies; and behind this again there now marched steadily into view a series of problems connected with the manufacture and purchase of munitions upon a scale never dreamed of by any human being up till this period. These problems comprised the entire social and industrial life of the country and touched the whole economic and financial system of the world. All this the daily expositions of all military business in cabinet and in council—a process most trying and burdensome to Lord Kitchener, and one in which he felt himself at a disadvantage; add, further, the continuous series of decisions upon executive matters covering the vast field of the war, including important operations and expeditions which were campaigns in themselves, and it will be realized that the strain that descended upon a king's greatest subject was far more than mortal man could bear.

His Courage and Kindness.

It may be, however, stated that Lord Kitchener in no way sought to lighten these terrific burdens. On the contrary, he resented promptly any attempt to interfere in and even to diminish his responsibilities. He resented the efforts which were made from January onwards to remove the production of munitions and the evacuation of the Turkish peninsula from his control as secretary of state. He devolved on to subordinates as little as he could. He sought to manage the great war by the same sort of personal control that he had used with so much success in the command of the tiny Nile expedition. He kept his cabinet and staff, what was left of it, in a condition of complete subservience and practical abeyance. He even reached out, as his cabinet office justly put it, into political spheres in questions of Ireland, of temperance, and of industrial organization.

It is idle at this date to affect to disregard or conceal these facts. Indeed, the greatness of Lord Kitchener and his lasting claims upon the respect and gratitude of succeeding generations of his fellow-countrymen, for whose cause and safety he fought with single-hearted purpose and a giant's strength, will only be fortified by the fullest comprehension of his character and of his difficulties. If this story and the facts and arguments on which it rests constitute a contribution upon his military policy, I must also testify to the overwhelming weight of the burdens laid upon him, to his extraordinary patience and courage in all the difficulties and perplexities through which we were passing, and to his unvarying kindness and courtesy to me.

Venezelos Declines Proffered Division.
At the war council of February 9 it was decided to offer the 29th division (which was still in England) to Greece, together with a French division, if it would join the allies. I thought that this offer, taken by itself and apart from any effects which might result from the naval attack on the Dardanelles, was wholly inadequate. I did not believe that Greece, and still less Bulgaria, would be influenced by the prospects of such very limited aid. Indeed, the exigencies of the assistance were in themselves a confession of our weakness. This view was justified, and the offer was promptly declined by M. Venezelos.

Meanwhile the preparations for the naval attack had been steadily moving forward. I still adhered to the integrity of the naval plan. Knowing what I did of the military situation and of the state of our armies, I did not undertake the serious nature of a decision to commit British troops to severe and indefinite fighting with the Turks on the Gallipoli peninsula. I had of course thought long and earnestly about what would follow if the naval attack succeeded and a British fleet entered the Marmora. I expected that if and when the Turkish forts began to fall, the Greeks would join us, and that the whole of their armies would be at our disposal thenceforward. I hoped that the apparition of a British fleet off Constantinople and the flight or destruction of the Goeben and the Breslau would be followed by political reactions of a far-reaching character, as the result of which the Turkish government would negotiate or withdraw to Asia. I trusted that good diplomacy, following hot-foot on a great war event, would induce Bulgaria to march on Adrianople. Lastly, I was sure that Russia, who never had need elsewhere, would not re-

main indifferent to the fate of Constantinople, and that further reinforcements would be forthcoming from her. It was on these quasi-political factors that I counted in our own military policy, for the means of exploiting and consolidating any success which might fall to the lot. The reader will see how far these speculations appear to have been well founded.

Needed a Large Army.

But, of course, if after all Lord Kitchener and the war council saw their way to form a substantial British army in the east, the prospects of a great and successful combination were vastly more hopeful. Such an army assembled in Egypt and the Greek islands might well be the motor muscle which would decide and animate all the rest. It could either seize the isthmus of Balafr if the Turks evacuated the peninsula after the fleet had passed the straits; or, if a convention was made with Tur-

key, it could occupy Constantinople promptly. Incidentally, if landing parties on a larger scale were needed during the passage of the fleet, they could be supplied from this source. Thus a considerable unit was established on the immediate step of sending troops to the east between persons who on the further steps held very different views. Amid the conflicting opinions, competing plans and shifting exigencies of the situation, the desirability of concentrating the largest possible army in the eastern Mediterranean with extreme promptitude, and placing at its head a supreme general, seemed to all of us at the admiralty to be obvious. Therefore, we at all times, in all discussions, supported everything that would promote and expedite this concentration.

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