

Life's Little Comedies - The Run on the Bank at Birdseye Center



"1915"--TOLD BY WINSTON CHURCHILL

DARDANELLES BURDEN TAKEN OVER BY ARMY

Kitchener Finds His Hands Tied by Earlier Delays and Indecisions—Conference On Board Queen Elizabeth Changes Whole Plan—"No" Is Motto, Months of Inaction Follow.

BRITISH WARSHIPS LEFT STANDING IDLE

By Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, C.H., First Lord of the Admiralty, 1911-1915.

What had happened at the Dardanelles the army had arrived. From the earliest moment permitted to them the admiral had carried all the troops to the point of concentration with punctuality. Sir Ian Hamilton had reached the Dardanelles on the eve of the naval attack on the narrow, and he witnessed from the bridge of the Phœnix its closing scenes. The impression of the sinking of the battleships, the spectacle of the crippled Infedible, listed and slowly steaming out of the straits, the destroyers crowded with rescued crews, was strong in his mind. These appearances aroused in a nature chivalrous to a fault, an intense desire to come to the aid and rescue of the sister service. It was in this mood that he addressed himself to the problem with which he was immediately confronted.

That problem was indeed grave and perplexing in an extreme degree. If the navy asked for help, Sir Ian Hamilton was resolved to give it to the utmost of his power. But obviously there was not a moment to lose. Every day, every hour, the Turkish defences and preparations would improve and their forces accumulate. A fortnight before, the disembarkation of 20,000 men on the peninsula might have been effected without great difficulty. But now sharp fighting must be expected. General Birdwood, who had

most unfavorable conditions to an enterprise of extreme hazard and of first magnitude. It was a decision entirely contrary to the whole spirit, and indeed to the explicit terms, of the latest messages from the admiralty. He had received from the admiralty after the news of the action of March 18. It was outside the scope of the orders with which, on accepting the command, the admiral had stated he was in full agreement. It is true that the admiralty telegram, number 109, of March 15, had said: "You must concert any military operations on a large scale which you consider necessary with General Hamilton when he arrives." But this was not intended to cover, nor did it deliver its own surprise attack, but in plenty of time by its very presence to tempt the navy to desist from theirs.

One must, however, make great allowances for the admiral and for the naval point of view, which he represented. To statesmen or officers, ships in time of war possess no sentimental value. They are engines of war, to be used, risked, and if necessary expended in the common cause and for the general policy of the state. To such minds the preciousness of a sailor, and an old battleship marked for the scrapheap was an instrument of war to be expended in a good cause as readily as artillery ammunition is fired to shell the enemy and support a struggling infantry attack. But to an admiral of this standing and upbringing, these old ships were sacred. They had been the finest ships afloat in the days when he as a young officer had first set foot upon their decks. The discretion and even discretion of a sailor was ingrained deeply by years of mental training and the spectacle of the destruction of noble structures on which so many loyalties centred, which was the floating foothold of daily life, foundering miserably beneath the waves, appeared as an event shocking and unnatural in its character. Whereas a layman or soldier might have rejoiced that so important an action as that of March 18 could have been fought with a loss of only thirty or forty British lives and two or three worthless ships, and that so many valuable conclusions had been attained at such a slender cost, Admiral de Robeck was saddened and consternated by the foundations of his being. These emotions were also present around the admiralty table in Whitehall.

Limans of Sanders in Command. Sir Ian Hamilton and his staff called on March 24 for Alexandria, scheme, I might have had a dart. "I must wait for the 23rd division. By the time they come I can get things straight for a smashing simultaneous blow, and I am resolved that, so far as in me lies, the orders and preparations will then be so thoroughly worked out—as so carefully rehearsed—as to give every chance to my men.

"If the division were here, I had my staff and staff been here, I had then, the moment the fleet cried off, we might have had a dash in right away, with what we have here."

In the choice of evils which now alone was open to Sir Ian Hamilton, his staff pronounced that whatever were the risks of delay, they were less than those of a precipitate and unorganized assault. The general therefore determined to transfer his base and his army from Lemnos to Alexandria, leaving only sufficient troops at the Dardanelles for minor enterprises, and to organize from Egypt any large military operation which the navy might require.

Sir Ian Hamilton's intention that a change of base and consequent delay were inevitable did not affect the admiral's intention to renew the naval attack. On the contrary, by revealing how long it would take to intervene before a general military attack, it might well have been expected to strengthen his resolve. His answer to Sir Ian Hamilton on the evening of the 20th shows that this was apparently the case.

Admiral de Robeck to Sir Ian Hamilton.

"As a military measure I concur with your proposal to make Egypt the headquarters, but submit politely that the result of withdrawal of troops from Mudros at the moment requires the gravest consideration. If governments of Balkan states take it to mean failure or abandonment of attack on the Dardanelles, result might be far-reaching. To prevent the wrong interpretation being placed on the movements of the troops, I suggest their departure be delayed until our attack is renewed in a few days. Meantime, faint of landing on a large scale on several points of the all field guns from the general action when they are likely to seriously hamper our sweeping operations."

But now occurred the sudden and extraordinary change, the repercussion of which we have witnessed at the admiralty. On the 22nd of March a conference was held on board the Queen Elizabeth. There were present Admiral de Robeck, Admiral Wemyss, Sir Ian Hamilton, General Birdwood, General Brailmont, and Captain Pollen. Sir Ian Hamilton has recorded this conference:

"Before we went aboard the Queen Elizabeth, I had agreed that, whatever we landsmen might think, we must leave the sea—nothing for or against land operations or amphibious operations until the sailors themselves turned to us from the struggle, and laid the responsibility of the navy upon the operations alone.

"They have done so. . . . At once we turned our faces to the land scheme."

Far-Reached Decisions. It was a far-reaching decision. It put aside altogether the policy of the government and of the admiralty, with which, up to this, the admiral had declared himself in full accord. The plans which had emanated from the feet, on which both admiral and landsmen had been agreed, were cast to the winds. It withdrew the fleet from the struggle, and laid the responsibilities of the navy upon the army. It committed the army in the

whither all the transports carrying troops through the Mediterranean were directed. On the day when the enemy's side an important step was taken. General Liman von Sanders had hitherto been the head of the German military mission in Turkey, but had not exercised any executive command. The distress and the apprehension of the Turkish frontier guards of the good old "No" principle had become established in men's minds, and nothing could ever eradicate it. Never again could I marshal the admiralty war group and the war council in favor could ever eradicate it. Never again could I marshal the admiralty war group and the war council in favor could ever eradicate it. Never again could I marshal the admiralty war group and the war council in favor could ever eradicate it.

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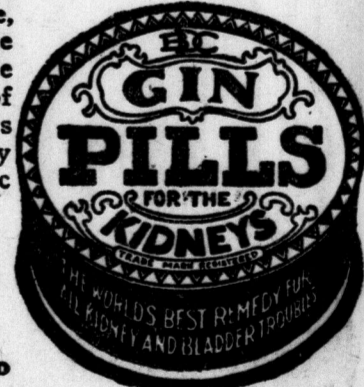
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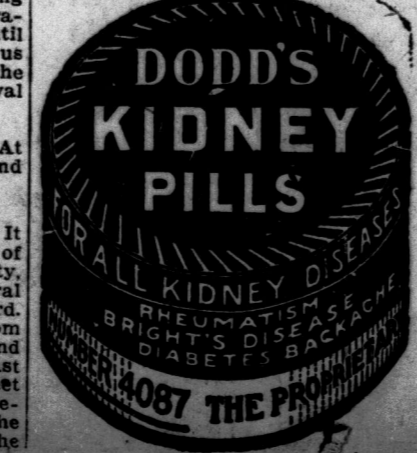
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