



united service club

history & heritage notes

The Rendezvous

Sources include notes from Colonel RJ Olive AM RFD, Mr Don Braben FSMA, and various websites esp that of Submariner's Association of Australia Inc. Our thanks go to SAA and to Mr Peter Dornan AM for permission to use their references in this article.



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden awareness and understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

The Rendezvous

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A striking oil painting depicting two submarines meeting at sunset in a calm sea hangs in the Moreton Room. It is titled *The Rendezvous* and is a favourite of many Members. The extraordinary stories behind the painting's donor, its subject, its creation, and the Club, warrant inclusion this series of Notes for the interest of today's Members.



The painting is a perfect 'fit' between the donor, the subject, the artist, and the military history heritage that the United Service Club of Queensland represents and preserves.

This Note outlines the story behind this striking oil painting which was presented to the Club in 2001 by our most highly-decorated member, Captain George Hunt DSO* DSC* RN, who was Britain's most successful submarine commander in the second World War.

Colonel Rick Olive AM RFD was the President at the time that the painting was presented, and summarises the story well:

I think it was during my second year as President [2002] that the Club's most decorated member, Captain George Hunt DSC and Bar, DSO and Bar, RN wrote to me expressing his desire to give something back to the Club. We met in the bar and he told me his story.

He started the war as the XO on a submarine doing patrol work in the Channel. One dark night they were on the surface and collided with a ship in a convoy and sank. As XO he was the second-last man out; dragged by the suction of the sinking boat to a depth of 100 feet, he swam to the surface and was picked up.

He was then posted as the skipper of a sub in the Mediterranean. I asked how he won so many medals and he said he was just lucky, every time he raised his periscope there was one or more ships to sink, so he did. He sank more ships than any other allied submariner. He finished his career as Acting Commodore but relinquished that rank and reverted to Captain on separation from the RN before immigrating to Australia.

As its most decorated member, the Club made Captain Hunt an Honorary Member. He expressed to me some embarrassment in being the recipient of this benefit and asked if there was some gift he could make to the Club.

At that time the Club Committee was conducting its “Artist of the Month” programme. Various emerging and notable Brisbane and Queensland artists displayed some of their paintings in the Club for a month during this programme and one of the conditions was that the Club had first opportunity to purchase any of the works shown. There are many works around the Club purchased during that period. One of the artists was Don Braben, a maritime artist whose work the committee admired but the subjects he had available did not appeal.

It was LTCOL John Langler’s¹ suggestion that we put CAPT Hunt in touch with Don Braben and see if there was a submarine subject that could be generated into a work for the Club. As I recall some 10 sketches were submitted and immediately I selected The Rendezvous as an important ANZAC and Gallipoli event; the title suited the Club, and the colours suited the existing colour scheme in the Moreton Room. As it turned out LTCOL Langler and CAPT Hunt had both already come to the same conclusion.

The painting was presented to the Club at a packed lunch in the Moreton Room. Professor Michael White, Maritime lawyer from UQ, spoke about the history of the AE2 and its rendezvous with the E14 in the Sea of Marmara on the night before the Anzac landings. The two submarines were the first fitted with wires from bow and stern to the mid-section stabilisers to deflect the chains fixing the sea mines to the sea floor and so were the first Allied ships to breach the Turkish defences in the Dardanelles.

Unfortunately the AE2 was disabled and scuttled the next day after this rendezvous. The crew spent the rest of the War in a Turkish POW camp. At the time of this presentation, the AE2 had just been found by divers in the Marmara and interest in it was just restarting.

The Donor: Captain George Edward Hunt DSO*, DSC*, RN (4 Jul 1916 – 16 Aug 2011)

Captain George Hunt was the most highly-decorated member of the United Service Club.

He sank more enemy ships than any other British submariner of the Second World War², commanding patrols that were considered of “unsurpassed daring and brilliance”.

His successes were based on a technical mastery that was allied to steely courage, and for these qualities he was awarded a DSO and Bar, and a DSC and Bar, as well as being twice mentioned in despatches, making him one of Britain’s most highly-decorated naval officers.



¹ Then the Club’s General Manager.

² As distinct from greatest tonnage sunk; David Wanklyn VC achieved sinkings of greater tonnage
File: Artworks. Painting. The Rendezvous. Revised Jan 2016.RM

George left school at 13 to join the Merchant Navy training ship Conway in the Mersey, and at 16 he joined the Glasgow-based Henderson Line which sailed on routes to India and Burma. He also pursued a part-time career in the Royal Naval Reserve; he was commissioned as a Midshipman RNR in 1930.

In 1938 he transferred to the Royal Navy, volunteered for the submarine service and by 1939 he was already serving in submarines. During World War II he was sunk once, rammed twice, and had hundreds of depth charges dropped around him. In one memorable incident he survived an attack of over one hundred depth charges.

His fifteenth mission was described by the Admiralty as *unsurpassed in the Annals of the Mediterranean Submarine Flotilla*. In 1963 he left the Royal Navy, migrated to Australia, and settled in Brisbane where he worked for the British High Commission until 1976.

He co-wrote his autobiography *Diving Stations* with Peter Dorman³.

George Hunt married Phoebe Silson, a fellow Scot, in 1939 when she was serving as in the WRNS. She predeceased him in 2005 and George died on 16 August 2011, survived by their daughter. A separate biographical Note in the *Notable Members* category of this series provides more detail on George's story.

The Artist: Don Braben FSMA

The artist who created the painting is Don Braben FSMA⁴, an internationally-known marine artist based in Brisbane. Don paints many aspects of the sea, ships and docks, both historical and contemporary, using oils, watercolours and acrylics.

His work is in many private and corporate collections worldwide. Inspiration is drawn from contemporary maritime activity and Don has been artist-in-residence on several voyages notably with the Royal Australian Navy, CSIRO and AMSA all of which have resulted in solo exhibitions.

Don was born and educated on Merseyside, England in 1937, growing up when Liverpool was a very busy port which gave him the interest in ships and the sea. Deciding on a career in art instead of the sea, he graduated with NDD and ATD (1960) and later an MA. He taught and lectured in art at schools, colleges and universities in UK, Nigeria, Zambia, Canada and finally Australia where he spent most of his career lecturing in art at Griffith University until 1997.

Don has provided his recollections of preparing this painting:

I recall doing the painting on commission for George Hunt which was to be an oil painting featuring AE2. We discussed various aspects together and with Michael White, whose book 'Australian Submarines' was most informative together with the Brenchley's book 'Stokers Submarine'.

I made several different colour rough sketches including the attack by the Turkish ships and bombardment by shore based guns but the one George liked best of all was 'The Rendezvous'.

So this rough idea was refined with George's knowledge of submarines; at one stage we were sitting on the floor of his lounge room with drawings and diagrams spread about as he described what would be the details of the submarines and the scene, and I could make notes and alterations to the working drawing.

Once the painting was completed George was able to evaluate it and give it his approval, and present it to the USC.

³ Dorman, Peter (2010). *Diving Stations: The story of Captain George Hunt DSO* DSC* RN*. Pen & Sword Books Ltd.

ISBN 9781848843219

⁴ Don is a foundation member, vice-president and Fellow of the Australian Society of Marine Artists. For more information and other works, see: www.donbraben.com

Don continued his interest in marine art with voyages by sea as artist in residence with CSIRO, Australian Maritime Safety Authority and RAN Hydrographic Service. These voyages resulted in exhibitions in Hobart, Brisbane and Wollongong.

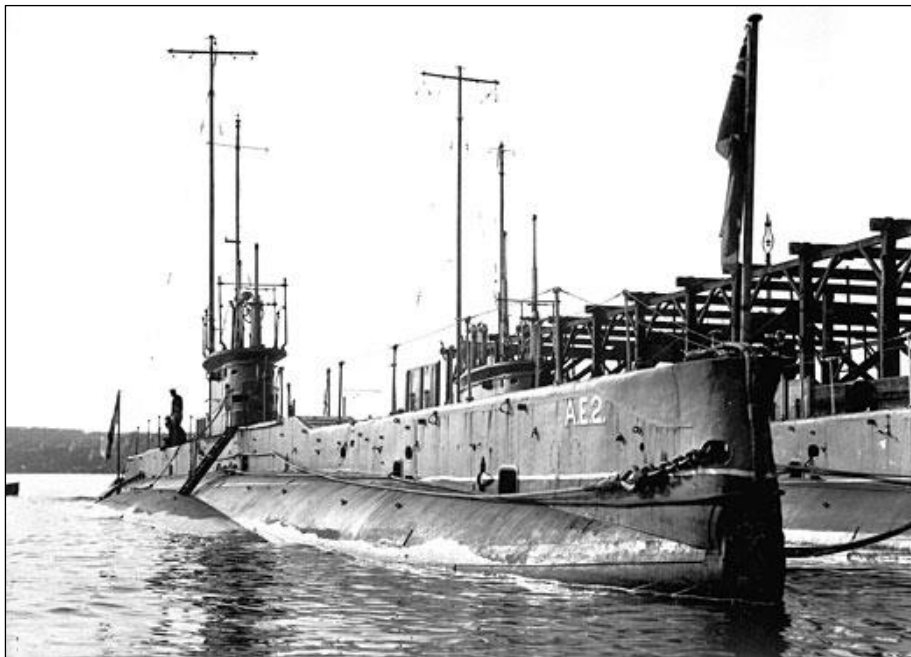
Don's paintings have won many awards and his work is in many public, private and corporate collections worldwide. Solo exhibitions have been held across Australia and internationally and his work has been displayed at prestigious events and Awards overseas and in Australia.

The Subject

The painting depicts an historic rendezvous-at-sea by two submarines in the Sea of Marmara on 29 April 1915.

The boat in the foreground is the Australian submarine AE2, the first Allied warship to make it through the Dardanelles on 25 April 1915, the day of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli. News of this achievement passage was passed to General Hamilton and subsequently boosted the pride and spirit morale of the Australians fighting on the peninsula. AE2 was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Henry Stoker RN with a crew of RAN and RN personnel.

With orders to "run amok" inside Turkish territory, AE2 operated for five days making appearances across the Sea of Marmara to give the impression of multiple boats. Several attacks against Turkish ships were made but all failed because of increasing mechanical problems.



The Royal Australian Navy's submarine AE2 c.1914, probably alongside AE1 in Sydney. [AWM H11559]

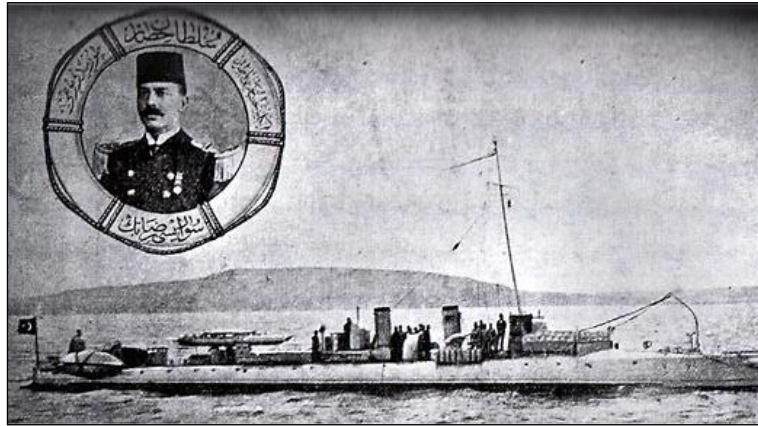
The other boat in our painting is the RN submarine E14, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Edward Boyle⁵ E14 made three voyages through the defences of the Dardanelles during 1915 but perhaps the most famous was the one commenced on 27 April 1915⁶, just two days after the departure of the RAN submarine AE2 on the same mission.

⁵ For his successful patrol of the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara in April-May 1915, Boyle was awarded the Victoria Cross. The second and third officers in the E14 were both awarded the DSC (Distinguished Cross) and each of the crew received the DSM (Distinguished Service Medal). Edward Boyle had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy and died in England in December 1967.

⁶ On 18 May, the twenty-first day of E14's patrol, Boyle brought the submarine back safely through the Dardanelles. E14 was the first British submarine to actually make the double passage of the straits and as they arrived back in harbour one of the ship's company wrote of how 'we had to go round the whole fleet and they certainly gave us a cheer'.

On 29 April 1915 the submarines met in the Sea of Marmara (the subject of our painting) and agreed to rendezvous again the next morning. The AE2, however, was lost on 30 April.

When AE2 reached the rendezvous point on 30 April, smoke from the Turkish torpedo boat *Sultan Hisar* was sighted. AE2 submerged and moved to investigate. At 10:30, about a mile from the torpedo boat, AE2 inexplicably rose and broke the surface.



The Ottoman Torpedo Boat 'Sultan Hisar'

While diving to evade, the boat passed below her safe diving depth. Frantic attempts to correct this caused the submarine's stern to break the surface. *Sultan Hisar* immediately fired on the submarine, puncturing the pressure hull in three places near the engine spaces. Stoker ordered the boat's company to evacuate and scuttled AE2.

All of the crew survived the attack and were captured by *Sultan Hisar* and survived the war except for four who died from illness while in captivity.



The crew of the RAN submarine AE2 photographed after being captured by the Turks on 30 April 1915. In the AWM's caption to this image none of the crew members is identified. Given that this appears to be the whole crew, officers and men together, it was most likely taken shortly after their capture, possibly in Istanbul where they had been taken by early May.

[AWM P00371.001]

AE2's achievements showed others that the task was possible and within months Turkish shipping and lines of communication were badly disrupted, with supplies and reinforcements for the Turkish defence of Gallipoli forced to take underdeveloped overland routes.

The AE2 Story

AE2 was the only RAN vessel to be lost as a result of enemy action during World War I. The RAN's total operational losses in the war were AE2 and her sister boat AE1.

HMAS AE2 (originally known as AE2) was an E-class submarine of the Royal Australian Navy, one of two submarines ordered for the fledgling RAN. AE2 was built by Vickers Armstrong in England and was commissioned into the RAN in 1914.

Accompanied by her sister boat AE1, the other of the RAN's first two submarines, AE2 reached Sydney from England on 24 May 1914, manned by Royal Navy officers with a mixed crew of sailors drawn from the RN and RAN. The 13,000-nautical-mile (24,000km) was, at the time, the longest submarine transit in history. 60 of the 83 days of the voyage were spent at sea.

On the outbreak of World War I in September 1914, the two RAN submarines were assigned to the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force as it captured German wireless stations in New Guinea. AE1 disappeared in mysterious circumstances off Rabaul⁷.

As the German threat to Australia had disappeared, on 31 December 1914 AE2 left Albany with AIF Convoy 2 (under the tow of SS *Berrima*)⁸. She arrived in Port Said on 28 January 1915, joined the British 2nd Submarine Flotilla, and proceeded to take part in patrols in support of the Dardanelles Campaign.

Attempts to open the Dardanelles through naval power alone were unsuccessful. Three Allied battleships were sunk and another three crippled during a failed attempt by surface vessels. Two attempts by submarine had also failed, with the loss of the Royal Navy's E15 and the French submarine *Saphir* to mines and strong currents.

Despite the failures of E15 and *Saphir*, Stoker planned his own attempt. After an extraordinary passage, AE2 became the first submarine to successfully penetrate the waterway and enter the Sea of Marmara. AE2's first attempt was made early on 24 April, but the boat only made it six nautical miles into the strait before the forward hydroplane coupling failed, making the submarine impossible to control underwater and forcing Stoker to retreat.

At 02:30 on the following day Stoker made a second attempt. The submarine was spotted by shore artillery and fired on from about 04:30. Stoker ordered the boat to dive to avoid the shells and traversed the first minefield underwater.

AE2 spent the next hour picking her way through the mines' mooring cables. Defensive wires that had been welded to the submarine in Malta prevented the mooring cables from catching.

By 06:00 AE2 reached Chanak and proceeded to torpedo the Ottoman gunboat *Peyk I Sevket* while simultaneously taking evasive actions to avoid an enemy destroyer. The submarine ran aground beneath a Turkish fort but the fort's guns could not be lowered enough to fire and AE2 was able to free herself within minutes. AE2 continued towards the Sea of Marmara and at 08:30 Stoker decided to rest the boat on the bottom and wait until nightfall before continuing.

At around 21:00 AE2 surfaced to recharge her batteries, and Stoker radioed his success back to the fleet. AE2 was the first Allied vessel to transit the Dardanelles.

⁷ At time of writing, the RAN announced that they expected to pinpoint her location in the near future.

⁸ The submarine was the only warship assigned to the sixteen-ship convoy. The Battle of Cocos resulted in the HMAS Sydney's destruction of the last active German ship in the Indian or Pacific Oceans, and the Admiralty felt no need to protect shipping in the Indian Ocean.

The wreck of AE2 has been located. It is not a war grave but moving her would pose high risk to both the submarine and any vessels involved in the relocation as well as potentially damaging the wreck; there is still an unexploded torpedo aboard.

Instead, the submarine is to be preserved through the use of sacrificial anodes to reduce corrosion, and buoys and a surveillance system to mark the wreck and detect unauthorised access and potential damage.

In March 2010, following an overhaul of the RAN Battle Honours system, AE2 was retrospectively awarded 'Rabaul 1914' and 'Dardanelles 1915'.



*Australian and British prisoners of war outside their quarters at Belemelik, Taurus Mountains, Turkey, in 1918. Among them are members of the crew of the Royal Australian Navy's submarine AE2, captured after their boat was scuttled in an action in the Sea of Marmara on 30 April 1915. All but four survived captivity and were repatriated at the end of the war.
[AWM H19414]*