CHAPTER NINETEEN
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HENRY HUGH GORDON DACRE STOKER

19-1 Henry Hugh Gordon Dacre Stoker was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 2 February 1885. Early in his life, Dacre Stoker (as he was called by the family) decided on a naval career and was accepted into the RN in 1900, three weeks before his 15th birthday. In 1906 he accepted an offer to join the submarine service, and in the same year was promoted to lieutenant. In 1908, he was appointed to his first command, the submarine A10, before serving on the next generation submarine B5. He proved himself a capable leader, and next commanded the B8, before being posted to the British submarine station at Gibraltar.\(^1\) With the outbreak of the First World War, Stoker was on loan to the RAN where he commanded the Australian submarine AE2. In 1915, AE2 was the first Allied submarine to breach the Dardanelles. This action is the subject of this inquiry.

19-2 Following the loss of AE2, Stoker and his crew became prisoners of war. After the First World War, Stoker continued to serve in the RN and, in December 1919, was promoted to Commander. However, he chose to retire and went on to become an actor, writer and theatre director. He was recalled into naval service for the Second World War and served as acting Captain until the war’s end.\(^2\) He then returned to his theatrical career and died in February 1966.

Recognition for service

19-3 For his naval service, Lieutenant Commander Stoker was entitled to the following honours and awards:
- Distinguished Service Order (DSO)
- 1914–1915 Star
- British War Medal 1914–1920
- Victory Medal
- Naval General Service Medal 1915–1962
- 1939–1945 Star
- Africa Star
- Italy Star
- France and Germany Star
- Defence Medal

---

\(^1\) Service Records, HHGD Stoker, TNA: ADM 196/127; and TNA: ADM 196/143.
\(^2\) ibid.
• 1939–1945 War Medal
• Mention in Despatches (MID)

What has led to the review?

19-4 For some years, the AE2 Commemorative Foundation, chaired by Rear Admiral Peter Briggs, RAN (Retd), has sought further recognition for Stoker, and in particular, recognition with an Australian honour. In addition, some (but not all) members of the Stoker family have argued that Stoker should have received the Victoria Cross (VC) as four other British submariners did for their exploits during Dardanelles operations in the First World War.

19-5 The inclusion of Stoker formally commenced on 19 October 2010 during an estimates hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. A member of the Committee, Senator Guy Barnett (Liberal, Tasmania), named Stoker among six candidates he put forward for consideration of the award of the VC. Consequently, Stoker’s name was added by the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, to the list directed in the Terms of Reference to this Inquiry.

The submissions

19-6 The Tribunal received 13 written submissions and heard 7 oral submissions regarding Lieutenant Commander Stoker. These are summarised in the following two paragraphs.

Written submissions

a. Submission 21 — Rear Admiral Peter Briggs, RAN (Retd), [on behalf of the AE2 Commemorative Foundation] [for]
b. Submission 21A — Dr Michael White [support for AE2 Commemorative Foundation position]
c. Submission 60 — Mr Alfred Brogan [for]
d. Submission 89 — Nowra-Greenwell Point RSL Sub-Branch [against]
e. Submission 99 — Mr Graham Wilson [against]
f. Submission 123 — Mr Peter Cooke-Russell, National Vice President, The Naval Association of Australia [for]
g. Submission 124 — Mr Richard Pelvin [against]
h. Submission 142 — The Navy League of Australia [against]
i. Submission 171 — Mr Graham Snook [for]
j. Submission 202 — Mr Richard Stoker [relative] [for]
k. Submission 203 — Mr John Stoker [cousin] [for]

3 Oral submission by Rear Admiral Briggs [Retd], Public Hearing Melbourne, 14 December 2011.
l. Submission 204 — Mr Dacre Stoker (godson) (for)
m. Submission 213 — Mr Walter Jenkins (great nephew) (against).

Oral submissions
a. Mr Graham Wilson — Public Hearing Canberra — 1 December 2011 (against)
b. Mr Richard Pelvin — Public Hearing Canberra — 2 December 2011 (against)
c. Mr Peter Cooke-Russell (on behalf of the Naval Association) — Public Hearing Canberra — 2 December 2011 (for)
d. Rear Admiral Peter Briggs, RAN (Retd), (on behalf of the AE2 Commemorative Foundation) — Public Hearing Melbourne — 14 December 2011 (for)
e. Mr Alfred Brogan — Public Hearing Melbourne — 15 December 2011 (for)
f. Mr Richard Stoker — Public Hearing Brisbane — 13 March 2012 (for)
g. Commander Graham Harris, RAN (Retd), (the Navy League) — Public Hearing Canberra — 14 March 2012 (against).

Background

Australian submarine AE2 was the second of a pair of submarines built in the United Kingdom for service with the RAN before the start of the First World War. The submarine was crewed by both RAN and RN officers and sailors, hence the AE designation. AE2 had a complement of 35 and could cruise at 15 knots on the surface and 10 knots under water. AE2 was armed with four 18-inch torpedo tubes (two fore and two aft) and could carry eight torpedoes. Operating endurance was about 16 days.

Note: The Sea of Marmara is also known as the Sea of Marmora.
Source: AW Jose, The Royal Australian Navy, the official history of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, vol. 9, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938, p 240.

Map 6 Movement of the AE2 in the Dardenelles and Sea of Marmara
In 1913, while on a three-year loan to the RAN, Stoker assumed command of the submarine **AE2**. Subsequently, **AE2** joined the second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) convoy, which sailed from Albany, Western Australia, on New Year’s Eve 1914. On arrival in the Mediterranean, she made her way into the Aegean Sea in readiness for the plan to send a naval force through the Dardanelles to threaten Constantinople.

**AE2** was assigned to the Dardanelles patrol, guarding the mouth of the strait (see Map 6) against attacks from the Turkish fleet, which had recently been supplemented by the German battle cruiser **Goeben** and the light cruiser **Breslau**, now stationed in the Sea of Marmara (also known as the Sea of Marmora).

Between February and March 1915, Allied surface units had made a number of unsuccessful attempts to clear the Dardanelles of minefields and to reduce the forts that guarded them, this with a view to moving the fleet into the Sea of Marmara. Stoker documented in his memoir that after a couple of weeks’ study he had formed the opinion that despite the difficulties involved, an attempt to dive a submarine through the Dardanelles and into the Sea of Marmara held sufficient chance of success to justify the attempt being made. While no Allied submarine had yet passed through the Dardanelles and into the Marmara, on 13 December 1914, Lieutenant Norman Holbrook, RN, had taken the older British submarine **B11** as far as Sari Siglar Bay, south of the (Dardanelles) Narrows at Chanak, where he torpedoed and sank the Turkish battleship **Messudieh**. For this action, Holbrook was awarded the VC.

Stoker recalls that on 23 April he was summoned by the Commander Eastern Mediterranean Fleet, Vice Admiral John de Robeck, RN. At this meeting he was ordered to proceed through the Dardanelles. If undiscovered, he was to attack shipping off Gallipoli, watch the approaches and await further orders. If discovered, he was ordered to attack any vessel in the vicinity of Chanak before proceeding to Gallipoli. In his Report of Proceedings submitted in January 1919, Stoker recorded that de Robeck’s Chief of Staff, Commodore Roger Keyes, RN, advised him verbally to endeavour to sink (if possible) any mine-dropping ships found in the Narrows and ‘generally to run amok’.

**Stoker’s action on 25 April 1915**

Stoker reported that in the early hours of 25 April, **AE2** entered the strait on the surface at around 0230. She was sighted and fired upon at around 0430, which forced him to dive and pass through the minefield at a depth of 70 to 80 feet, rising twice to check his position. After rising for the third time at around 0600, he found himself some two miles outside the Narrows, where he chose to remain.

---

5 Record of Service (Officers) Card, NAA: A6769, 2002/05135599.
6 Commander HG Stoker, DSO, **Straws in the wind**, Herbert Jenkins Ltd, London, 1925, p. 89.
7 Stoker, **Straws in the wind**, p. 99.
8 **AE2** Sailing order, 23 April 1915. Provided by Rear Admiral Peter Briggs, RAN (Retd). From: ADM137 HSA319 HS2117.
submerged with his periscope up. He reported that he was again sighted and that AE2 came under heavy fire from both sides of the strait.  

19-13 Stoker next reported seeing a vessel off Chanak and decided to attack it, believing it might be dropping mines. Before doing so however, he then sighted a small cruiser, 'judged to be of Peike Shetrek type' and considering this might be more likely to carry mines, he decided to attack it instead. Accounts vary as to what exactly took place in this engagement. The vessel is widely documented to have been the torpedo boat Peykisevket or a light cruiser. Stoker launched a torpedo at 300–400 metres, but in order to avoid being rammed by another vessel, he was forced to dive and therefore unable to see what had taken place, but reported hearing the torpedo hit.

19-14 After the engagement, Stoker found himself near the Gallipoli shore and under a fort. He reported being exposed in this position for approximately five minutes, and being under attack from naval units. The diary of crew member Petty Officer Stoker Henry Kinder indicates that at this time the gyro compass temporarily failed, which made navigation under water impossible. AE2 crew member Able Seaman John Wheat also wrote in his diary:

> During all this the Captain remained extremely cool, for all depended on him at this stage. It is due to his coolness that I am now writing this account. Nobody knows what a terrible strain it is on the nerves to undergo anything like this, especially the Captain, as all depends on him.

19-15 Stoker reported that after making some limited progress up the channel while under pursuit from surface vessels, he knew that he did not have the battery power to go very far into the Marmara. At 2100, he was able to surface and recharge his batteries. At this time he signalled his progress, but received no reply or acknowledgement owing to defective wireless equipment. It was only after the war that Stoker would learn that his signal did reach the naval command in theatre that evening. It has been widely regarded by those who have researched the impact of the AE2’s successes on the first Anzac Day that the signal sent by Stoker was a significant factor in the theatre commander deciding against a withdrawal.

19-16 Keyes later wrote that as General Hamilton was penning a note to Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood, Commander of the Anzac Corps, Keyes read aloud the signal received from Stoker and added, ‘Tell them this. It is an omen — an Australian submarine has done the finest feat in Submarine history and is going to torpedo all the ships bringing reinforcements, supplies and ammunition into Gallipoli’. Keyes writes that Hamilton looked up, nodded and went on writing. Hamilton’s reply to Birdwood, which urged him to ‘dig … right in and stick it out’

---

10 Stoker, Straws in the wind, pp. 109–110.
18 Stoker, Straws in the wind, pp. 119–120.
mentioned that ‘the Australian submarine has got up through the Narrows and torpedoed a gunboat at Chanak’.20

While there is no evidence that would now conclusively show that the news of AE2’s success was the determining factor in the continuation of the land campaign, this success must have at least provided a morale boost for those in command at a time of great difficulty. Some proponents believe Hamilton’s comment to be significant to Stoker’s case.

Stoker’s action between 26 and 29 April

Stoker reported that at around 0400 on 26 April, AE2 was able to proceed towards the northern end of the strait where he made an unsuccessful attack on one of two Turkish warships. Stoker put the failure down to the calm state of the sea and his personal error in overdoing an unseen attack.21 Following this, he reported making his way to the Gallipoli anchorage and on finding no suitable targets, continued his passage. At around 0900, AE2 passed into the Sea of Marmara.22

There was only one engagement on 27 April, when AE2 attempted to torpedo a ship escorted by two destroyers. The torpedo failed to start and due to an escort attempting to ram the AE2, Stoker was unable to make another attack. Stoker next reported making two unsuccessful attacks in calm weather on 28 April. Following the second attack, which took place in the evening, AE2 proceeded towards Gallipoli in the hope of having a better chance of making radio contact.23

Stoker’s Action on 30 April

Stoker’s report for 30 April best describes the day’s events that led to the loss of AE2:

Arrived R.V. [rendezvous] at 10 a.m. and sighted T.B. [torpedo boat — The Sultan Hisar] approaching from westward. Dived to avoid T.B. and whilst diving sighted smoke in Artaki Bay, so steered south to investigate. About 10.30 a.m. boat’s nose suddenly rose, and boat broke surface about 1 mile from T.B. Blew water forward but could not get boat to dive. T.B. firing, got very close, and ship from Artaki Bay, a Gunboat, also firing at range of about 3 miles; flooded a forward tank, and boat suddenly took big inclination down by bows, and dived rapidly … Went full speed astern and commenced to blow main ballast. After some interval … boat broke stern first. T.B. was then close to, and fired two torpedoes; gunboat about 2 miles off. Boat … dived very rapidly and passed 100 ft. depth going down fast … After a considerable interval the boat [then] rose rapidly … and broke surface stern first. Within a few seconds the engine room was hit, and holed in three places … I therefore blew main ballast and ordered all hands on deck. Assisted by Lieutenant Haggard, I then opened the tanks to flood and went on deck. The boat sank in a few minutes in about 55 fathoms in approximate position 4°N of Kara Burna Point at about 10.45 a.m.24

22 ibid.
23 ibid.
19-21 Whatever the cause of AE2’s sudden surface breach, Stoker clearly had limited options prior to ordering the crew to abandon ship. He could not dive, and, while AE2 had one torpedo remaining, Stoker’s report shows that he could not take the fight to the Sultan Hisar through any means other than by ramming, which he judged as a useless endeavour.

19-22 There is some suggestion, particularly among Turkish and German sources, that prior to being captured, some of the crew of AE2 surrendered by either waving white sheets or striking a white flag. A crew member, Chief Engineroom Artificer Stephen Bell, wrote in his diary that Stoker told someone to get ready with something white. While the crew did surrender, AE2 was never allowed to fall into Turkish hands. In light of Stoker’s report, this can be put down to the actions of Stoker and his second-in-command, Lieutenant Haggard, in scuttling the vessel.

Prisoners of war
19-23 Though all officers and men survived the action and became prisoners of war, four were to die in captivity, including diary-writer Able Seaman Albert Knaggs. Stoker led two escape attempts, on one occasion escaping with two other officers only to be recaptured and subject to court martial. Following his recapture he was somewhat bizarrely sentenced to 25 days’ imprisonment. Upon his release, the full story of Stoker’s accomplishment was revealed and comes mainly from his first-hand account, set out in his Report of Proceedings. It was after this report had been received by the Admiralty that Stoker was awarded the DSO for his service in AE2 and an MID for services during the war.

Significance of Stoker’s action
19-24 Over time, a number of authors and historians have written about the significance of Stoker’s actions in the Dardanelles campaign. As well as the achievement of passing the Dardanelles into the Marmara against significant navigational hazards, tethered mines and Turkish gunboats, many have put forward their views about the strategic importance of this submarine passage.

19-25 Following the presumed loss of the AE2, the Admiralty sent advice to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB). In doing so, they mentioned:

The Board of the Admiralty desire to record their deep regret at the loss of this vessel with so many of her gallant crew after a memorable feat of arms and congratulates the Commonwealth on the high qualities of their Officers and Seamen.

25 Record, AE2 in the Sea of Marmara, Stiftung Traditionsarchiv Unterseeboote (Foundation of Submarine Archives); RAN Sea Power Centre – Australia AE2 Box File; and C Avci, Thirteen leagues under the Dardanelles, Nart Yayıncılık, Istanbul, 2002, p. 91.
28 Admiralty Telegram of 18 May 1915, AWM 50 18/3.
19-26 In 1916, Vice Admiral de Robeck noted the following on Stoker’s service record:

[Stoker] is a capable and determined submarine captain, his submarine
was in a very efficient condition when she joined the Eastern Mediterranean
Squadron. AE2 was the first submarine to make the passage of the Dardanelles
into the sea of Marmara and her career up to the time of her loss — the
circumstances of which are not known — reflects the greatest credit on
Lieutenant Commander Stoker — his Chief Engineroom Artificer and crew.\textsuperscript{29}

Witnesses to the action

19-27 Stoker’s crew were all general witnesses to the action. The extant diaries of crew
members Kinder, Knaggs and Brown\textsuperscript{30} are usually offered as written evidence
of Stoker’s bravery and leadership. Turkish reports are also used to support the
Stoker claims. It is not known whether the Admiralty called for any statements or
further evidence in their 1919 consideration of Stoker’s DSO.

Chain of command for honours and awards

19-28 While Stoker was in command of an Australian submarine, the chain of command
was through Royal Navy channels. A recommendation for an award, had it been
raised at the time, would have gone through Commodore Keyes, RN, to Vice
Admiral de Robeck, RN, then on to the Admiralty. The Honours Committee at the
Admiralty would then pass it to the Secretary of State for the Navy and on to the
Sovereign for approval. Upon royal approval, the award was listed in the \textit{London
Gazette}, after which it became official.

19-29 In Stoker’s case, the Admiralty apparently took Stoker’s Report of Proceedings
provided in 1919 after his release from Turkish prison as sufficient to process
the award of the DSO. This was no doubt part of the finalisation of First World
War awards when all the facts became known. The Admiralty would have been
cognisant of the four VCs earned in the Dardanelles and no doubt took these
previous awards into consideration. The Honours Committee, however, decided
the DSO was the appropriate honour.

Honours and awards made for the action

19-30 While in captivity in 1915, Stoker wrote a private letter to the Chief of Naval Staff
in Australia, Rear Admiral Sir William Creswell, RAN, where he mentions that
officers and men were proud of the fact that an Australian warship was the first
British vessel to pass through the Dardanelles and he hoped that Australia ‘will
consider it an honour worth winning’. This advice was forwarded by the ACNB
to the Minister for the Navy, with the covering comment that the conduct of the
officers and men would doubtless receive commendation by the court when they
were tried for the loss of their vessel.\textsuperscript{31} No formal recommendation for an honour
was raised at the time.

\textsuperscript{29} Service Records, HHGD Stoker, TNA: ADM 196/127; and ADM 196/143.
\textsuperscript{30} ‘Diary of Engine Room Artificer Herbert Brown.’ RAN Sea Power Centre – Australia AE2 Box File.
\textsuperscript{31} Minute 15/7570’. NAA: MP472/1, 5/19/2520.
In late 1918, Stoker received a handwritten letter from King George V welcoming him home to England on his return from captivity.\(^{32}\)

Stoker submitted his Report of Proceedings in 1919, after which he and members of his crew were awarded a number of honours for this action. Stoker was awarded the DSO in April 1919. His citation reads:

In recognition of his gallantry in making the passage of the Dardanelles in command of H.M. Australian Submarine 'A.E. 2', on the 25th April, 1915.\(^{33}\)

The London Gazette of 14 October 1919 included an Admiralty entry, which, among other things, included Stoker’s MID in the following terms: ‘being brought to the notice of the Admiralty for valuable services in the prosecution of the war’.\(^{34}\) Records in the United Kingdom National Archives confirm that this was for good work during the outbreaks of influenza at Yozgat prison.\(^{35}\)

There were further honours for the crew of AE2 to add to Stoker’s DSO and MID. These included two Distinguished Service Medals and two MIDs for RAN sailors, and a Distinguished Service Cross and two MIDs to RN recipients.\(^{36}\)

Without the knowledge of the Honours Committee recommendation for Stoker, in February 1919, the Commonwealth Naval Representative in London forwarded Stoker’s Report of Proceedings to the ACNB, with a covering letter recommending ‘this officer [Stoker] for promotion, and pressing the claim for special consideration on the British Admiralty’.\(^{37}\) Notes on the report show the Board felt ‘this account appears to establish that AE2 was the first Submarine to achieve the passage of the Dardanelles successfully’, but no specific honour was mentioned.

The ACNB later wrote to Stoker in August 1919, expressing ‘very high appreciation’ for his performance ‘in very exceptional danger’ and explicitly mentioned ‘an Australian submarine being the first to pass the Dardanelles Strait’.\(^{38}\) The letter was written at the direction of Rear Admiral Creswell.\(^{39}\) Creswell had desired in 1916 to express to Stoker and the other members of AE2 the appreciation of the Board, however, a decision was made not to do so while they were in captivity, for fear of Turkish reprisal.\(^{40}\)

Notwithstanding the above recognition, in works published over time and in submissions to the Tribunal, a number of historians, authors and submitters have put forward the view that the VC would have been a more appropriate honour in recognition of Stoker’s actions than the DSO. These arguments are often based on the fact that Stoker was the first Allied submarine commander to pass through the Dardanelles and into the Marmara and that four other submarine commanders who followed Stoker were awarded the VC for similar feats during the Dardanelles.

---

\(^{32}\) HRH George V, letter, in possession of the Stoker Family, 1918.
\(^{33}\) London Gazette no. 31303, 18 April 1919, p. 5113.
\(^{34}\) London Gazette no. 31604, 14 October 1919, p. 12779.
\(^{35}\) Register, Officers Mentioned for Service in Post War Papers, TNA: ADM171/88.
\(^{38}\) ‘Letter, Secretary, Australian Naval Board, 15 August 1919’, AWM 36 bundle 49.
\(^{39}\) ‘Minute 19/3460’, AWM 36 bundle 49.
\(^{40}\) Minute, Submarine AE2 Circumstances Attending Loss of, Number 15/0192, Department of the Navy, 15 August 1919, AWM 36 bundle 49.
campaign. These sentiments are also echoed by more recent authors, Tom Frame and Greg Swinden, in their book *First in, last out, the Navy at Gallipoli* as well as members of the AE2 Commemorative Foundation and other submitters.

### A Victoria Cross for Stoker? Comparable actions

19-38 Stoker’s actions have been broadly compared to other First World War submarine captains awarded the VC in the Dardanelles, and it is upon this that claims for a VC for Stoker are generally based. Four other RN submarine commanders, ND Holbrook, EC Boyle, ME Nasmith (sometimes called Dunbar-Nasmith) and GS White, received the VC for comparable efforts in the Dardanelles and in the case of White, after the main campaign had ended in 1918. Although some submissions claimed these four VCs as justification for a similar award for Stoker, no two cases are identical and all cases have to be taken individually and on their merits (see paragraphs 8-21 to 8-25 of this Report).

### Other recognition for Stoker and AE2

19-39 Lieutenant Commander Stoker is remembered with a memorial to him and his crew at Garden Island Naval Dockyard in Sydney, and the Australian War Memorial has a display dedicated to the story of Stoker and the AE2. The Tribunal was advised that a memorial to AE2 and her crew is to be unveiled in Barrow and Gosport, England, in 2013 in commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the launch of AE2. The Tribunal is not aware if the RAN intends to recognise Stoker in any other way.

### Arguments put forward in submissions for and against the award of the Victoria Cross or other recognition for Stoker

#### Arguments put forward in submissions for the award

19-40 The main arguments put forward in support of Stoker’s claim are as follows:

- Stoker was commander of the first submarine to breach the minefield and enter the Sea of Marmara. This was relayed to the Australian troops ashore and was a huge boost to morale. Stoker completed his orders and could have turned for safety, but chose to continue to further disrupt the enemy (Submissions 21, 21A, 60, 171, 203 and 204).

---

41 T Frame & G Swinden, *First in last out, the Navy at Gallipoli*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, NSW, 1990, p. 101; Submissions 21, 21A, 60, 202, 203 and 204.

42 The four ‘Dardanelles’ submarine VC awardees were: Lieutenant ND Holbrook for action on 13 December 1914, *London Gazette* (LG) — 22 December 1914; Lieutenant Commander EC Boyle for action between 27 April and 18 May 1915, LG — 21 May 1915; Lieutenant Commander ME Nasmith (often listed as Dunbar-Nasmith) for action between 20 May and 8 June 1915, LG — 25 June 1915; and Lieutenant Commander GS White for action on 28 January 1918; LG — 26 May 1919; and D Harvey, *Monuments to courage: Victoria Cross headstones and memorials*, The Naval & Military Press, Uckfield, UK, 2008. The seven other naval VCs for action ashore during the Dardanelles campaign include: Lieutenant Commander EG Robinson from HMS Vengeance on 26 February 1915, LG 16 August 1915; and five during the landings on 25 April 1915: Sub-Lieutenant AWS Tisdall (posthumous); Commander E Unwin; Midshipman GL Drewry; Midshipman WS Malleson; Seaman GM Samson; Able Seaman WC Williams. All gazetted on 16 August 1915.
• Stoker did everything and more than the four RN submarine commanders who were awarded the VC. Stoker, therefore, should also have received the VC for this significant and heroic achievement (Submissions 21, 60, 171, 202, 203 and 204).

• Stoker’s action on 25 April was ‘a major contribution to the success of the landings. It was a direct result of Stoker’s determination to press home his attack in the face of strong opposition and despite hazardous navigational circumstances, and should be considered in the assessment of awarding a medal for his bravery in the face of the enemy’ (Submission 21A).

• Being the first through the straits and into the Sea of Marmara meant subsequent RN submarine commanders knew it could be done. While their efforts were also heroic, Stoker paved the way and took a greater risk (Submissions 21, 21A, 60, 171, 202 and 203).

• Stoker was denied a VC by the Admiralty simply because he was Irish and commanding a ‘colonial’ vessel. He was denied natural justice and this must be rectified (Submission 203).

• The DSO is an award for leadership, not bravery, so it does not replace the VC. Stoker’s bravery also must be considered (Submission 21).

• There was an assertion that: ‘AE2’s efforts avoided the loss of many more Anzac lives’ and ‘was a major contribution to the success of the landings. It was a direct result of Stoker’s determination to press home his attack, in the face of strong opposition … and should be considered in the assessment of awarding a medal for bravery in the face of the enemy’. Stoker, therefore, deserves nothing less than the VC (Submissions 21, 21A and 60).

• Stoker’s subsequent capture and time as a prisoner of war meant a time delay of several years before his story was told. This had a detrimental impact on any claim for a VC as the war was over. This meant his chances of the award were slim (Submission 60).

• AE2 and crew were attacked by shore-based batteries and attempts by enemy vessels to ram them. They persisted in their goal until finally forced to scuttle the submarine. They could have turned and escaped, but chose to fight on against terrible odds (Submissions 21, 60, 171, 203 and 204).

• Stoker’s actions lasted a week, not minutes. Stoker’s action was not spontaneous, ‘it was calculated’ (Submission 202).

• Awarding Stoker a VC would go a long way to healing the rift that seems to linger in Ireland (over the Easter Uprising in 1916 and subsequent unrest) (Submission 204).

• The Australian Navy did not receive a VC during the First World War, and this needs to be rectified. Stoker is the perfect candidate (Submission 123).

• Some of the extended Stoker family support the award of the VC for Stoker (Submissions 202, 202A, 203 and 204).
Arguments put forward in submissions against the award

The main arguments against Stoker’s claim are as follows:

• Stoker was proud of his DSO and never sought further recognition (Submission 213).

• Stoker was not Australian and was an officer in the RN. He was considered as such and was fairly dealt with through the normal British chain of command. The correct process was followed (Submissions 99 and 124).

• Stoker was awarded the DSO for his service and leadership. The DSO is also for gallantry and is not offered lightly so Stoker has already received just recognition and reward (Submissions 89, 124, 142 and 235).

• Stoker did not upset Turkish communications as other submariners in the Dardanelles did, and he lost his boat. No VC has ever been awarded to an officer who surrendered his vessel (Submission 99 and Wilson oral submission).

• Boyle and Nasmith, who were awarded the VC, did not surrender, attacked the enemy and got their submarines safely out of the straits. Their cases were therefore different to that of Stoker (Submission 99).

• Despite assertions to the contrary, the RN did receive its fair share of VCs during the First World War [43], including 11 for actions in the Dardanelles. The RAN was considered a part of the RN during that war (Submission 99).

• Stoker effectively provided the only report of his actions. A recipient cannot nominate themself (Submission 99).

• It is improper for the Australian Government to award a deceased RN member a VC for Australia, and the Imperial VC is no longer available. If Stoker so deserves, then the Royal Navy should raise the issue further with Her Majesty (Submissions 99 and 124).

• Not all the extended Stoker family support the award of the VC for Stoker. Four members are against any further recognition (Submission 213).

Tribunal consideration of the award process

In considering the case for a possible upgrade of the DSO to the VC for Australia or other form of recognition for Lieutenant Commander Stoker, the Tribunal first conducted a process review in accordance with the approach set out in paragraph 8-44 of this Report.

Because of Stoker’s internment in a Turkish prison, recommendations for honours could not be raised until he and his crew had returned to the United Kingdom. Stoker produced his Report of Proceedings early in 1919, having previously received a letter from King George V welcoming him home. After the Admiralty received the report, they recommended a DSO in recognition of Stoker’s efforts. This was published in the London Gazette on 18 April 1919. The Tribunal noted the Admiralty made seven other awards for the crew of AE2.

Correspondence dated 15 August 1919 indicates that after receiving Stoker’s Report of Proceedings, the ACNB offered Stoker an expression of: ‘their high appreciation of the services you [Stoker] carried out under conditions of very
exceptional danger’ and thanked him for ‘having achieved for the Australian Service the honour of an Australian Submarine being the first to pass the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmora [sic’].

The Board was well aware of Stoker’s accomplishments, but did not approach the Admiralty to alter his DSO award.

The Tribunal concluded that Stoker’s case was properly considered at the time, it followed due process and Lieutenant Commander Stoker was honoured with a DSO, which was what the Admiralty intended.

Tribunal review of the merits of the case

The Tribunal also considered, from all the material available to it, the merits of the case for elevating the recognition of Stoker for his actions in the Dardanelles. This merits review was carried out in accordance with the Tribunal’s approach as set out in paragraph 8-46 of this Report.

The submitters did not provide any new or further evidence in favour of the VC award that in the Tribunal’s view would call into question the judgement made by the Admiralty in 1919 that the appropriate recognition of Stoker’s achievements was the DSO.

Some submitters offered the diaries of three shipmates as evidence. These diaries do not contain enough in substance or wording to describe an outstanding ‘signal act of valour’ necessary to allow the Admiralty to consider Stoker for the VC.

Numerous submissions (21, 60, 171 and 203) claimed that Stoker did more than the four RN officers who received the VC, and that this was justification enough. But each case is considered on its merits and no two cases are the same. Stoker’s case only came to the Admiralty after the end of the war, and with the full knowledge of those who went before still fresh. The Admiralty made their decision based on the information available and chose not to seek additional supporting evidence at the time. The Tribunal placed no weight on the use of comparisons to reassess the merits of a case to support varying the extant recognition. As discussed at paragraph 8-48 of the Report, the Tribunal’s Guidelines for Conducting the Review reiterates that similar cases should not be used as a precedent or for comparison; while two cases might appear to be alike, no two cases are exactly the same.

Submission 203 suggested that because Stoker was Irish there was some Admiralty bias against the award of the VC. The Tribunal could find no evidence of this alleged bias. In fact, throughout its history, the VC has been awarded 188 times to men born in Ireland and of Irish parentage. Specifically, the Tribunal noted the case of Commander Edward Bingham, VC, RN, of County Down, Ireland, who was awarded the VC for his action in the Battle of Jutland. Bingham was one of only 23 VCs awarded to Navy personnel for actions at sea in the First World War.

---

43 Stoker family records. Submission 204.
44 Harvey, Monuments to courage: Victoria Cross headstones and memorials.
45 Members of the Royal Navy were awarded 43 VCs for the First World War. These were 23 for action at sea, 18 for action on land and 2 for action in the air. See Report Part 1, Table 8-1.
Submission 203 also claimed that as Stoker was in command of a ‘colonial’ vessel that this somehow prevented Stoker and his crew receiving their just reward. On the contrary, the Tribunal found that AE2’s RN and RAN crew were equally rewarded, and that captains and crews of other RN submarines (e.g. E20, lost in November 1915) who were unsuccessful, received no honours.

The Stoker family submitted a hand-written letter sent to Stoker by His Majesty King George V in December 1918 that welcomed Stoker home after his internment by the Turkish. The letter indicates that Stoker was known personally to the King and he was held in high regard by the Royal Family. The Tribunal noted that this correspondence pre-dated the Admiralty’s consideration of Stoker’s report and was unable to see how it could be concluded that the letter now provides any basis for calling into question the Admiralty’s recommendation that the appropriate level of recognition was the DSO.

No previously missing, new or compelling evidence was produced by submitters. The Tribunal therefore concluded that there was no basis to question the judgement of the Admiralty in 1919 and now recommend that Stoker be awarded the VC for Australia.

Tribunal conclusion

The Tribunal therefore concluded that on both process and merits, the case was properly considered at the time, followed due process correctly and that Lieutenant Commander Stoker was appropriately honoured with a DSO.

Tribunal recommendation

The Tribunal recommends no action be taken to award Lieutenant Commander Henry Hugh Gordon Dacre Stoker a VC for Australia or other further form of recognition for his gallantry or valour.