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# Franco-British Naval Cooperation at the Dardanelles, 1914-1916, new friends, old enemies, eternal rivals?

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper considers the factors needed for a success to have been made of joint Franco-British naval operations during the Dardanelles campaign of 1915 and 1916. It does so by examining the importance of: joint decision making at all levels of the coalition; effective communications within the coalition at both the strategic and operational level; and a mutual respect for the contribution and capability of all members of the coalition.*

Naval coalitions, such as those of NATO, are common today but were much less so in times past. Nevertheless, despite their comparative rarity the First World War was not the first time that France and Britain had worked together in a naval coalition: the Crimean War of 1854-56; the Second Opium War of 1856-60; and the Bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 are all examples of nineteenth century cooperation. However, by 1914 these were long distant in the memory and the fact remained that when Britain and France entered the First World War they did so without recent experience of collaborative naval operations. Outside the main theatre, the Western Front, the Dardanelles campaign was the first major combined naval deployment of the war. Paul Halpern stated that at the Dardanelles, 'relations between the British and French to a large extent depended upon the personalities of the respective admirals'.<sup>327</sup> There is little doubt that this is true.<sup>328</sup> However, many

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other factors came into play that determined relations between the allies in the Dardanelles operation and these factors will be discussed in this article. The rationale for this study rests upon three factors. First, the subject of the Dardanelles naval operation has largely been considered at the grand-strategic level to the neglect of the lower operational level when considering inter-allied relationships. This has resulted in monographs focusing on senior officers to the neglect of their subordinates.<sup>329</sup> Second, recent scholarship into the previously neglected subject of naval coalition warfare makes it possible to ask context-specific questions and discover the factors that resulted in success or failure.<sup>330</sup> Thirdly, within the historiography of the First World War recent scholarship has illustrated and emphasised the critical role of Allied cooperation across all aspects of the war. Elizabeth Greenhalgh argues persuasively that Allied cooperation was the bedrock of victory.<sup>331</sup> She explains:

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<sup>327</sup> Paul Halpern, 'The naval coalition against the Central Powers, 1914-1918, in Bruce E. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, *Naval Coalition Warfare: From the Napoleonic War to Operation Iraqi Freedom*, (Routledge: London, 2008), p. 101.

<sup>328</sup> DRBK4/32, de Robeck Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, (hereinafter CC). Wemyss to de Robeck, 24 February 1916.

<sup>329</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From The Dreadnought To Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era*, vol. 2, (London: OUP, 1961); Alan Moorhead, *Gallipoli*, (New York, Ballantine Books: 1958); Eric W Bush, *Gallipoli*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1975); Tim Travers, *Gallipoli: 1915*, (Stroud: Tempus, 2004); George H.Y. Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles: A Study in the Failure of the Conduct of War*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971). In France, monographs published during the interwar era by the Service Historique de la Marine are too uncritical and lack independent distance from the French naval establishment but remain very useful: Camille Denys de Rivoyre, *L'Expédition des Dardanelles, 1914-1915* (Paris: Travaux du service historique de l'Etat-major général de la Marine, undated, 5 vol.), Adolphe Thomazi, *La Guerre navale aux Dardanelles*, (Paris: Payot, 1926). Recent French historiography tends to neglect the naval aspects of the Dardanelles' campaign. It doesn't use the naval archives and is based on secondary material and sources and updated monographs: Pierre Rigoux, *Les Dardanelles 1915. Une stratégie en échec*, (Paris: Economica, 2013); Max Schiavon, *Le Front d'Orient. Du désastre des Dardanelles à la victoire finale 1915-1918*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2014).

<sup>330</sup> Bruce A. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, *Naval Coalition Warfare: From the Napoleonic War to Operation Iraqi Freedom*, (Routledge: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>331</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005); also see, William Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War*, (Abacus: London, 2014).

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Without a willingness, however forced, to put aside past enmities, work in cooperative ways, submerge differences - to create an efficient machinery of alliance - the powerful threat represented by the Central Powers, and especially Germany, could not be beaten.<sup>332</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear, as Greenhalgh and Philpott demonstrate, that the road to such effective cooperation was littered with painful and costly lessons. In this regard the Dardanelles offers an insight into early war Anglo-French cooperation particularly as it falls outside the detailed scrutiny of the work of Greenhalgh and Philpott. To provide a similarly rigorous analysis this article makes use of both British and French archival material.

There is little doubt that the fundamental causes of the eventual Dardanelles disaster lie at the highest level with a failure among the allies to co-ordinate their military and political aims, many of which were in direct conflict.<sup>333</sup> A particularly important issue to consider is that unlike today when states are willing to accept some surrender of sovereignty this was not the case at the Dardanelles in 1915. The politicians, military and naval officers of 1915 were products of the nineteenth century and to them, national prestige, national interest and personal honour mattered, and mattered a lot. Also, professional pride, now, just as then, was fundamentally crucial. What this paper will demonstrate is that whilst overtly cordial, relations between British and French officers were marked by deep-rooted antipathy and prejudice. This grew out of national prestige and interest and was permeated by concepts of personal honour. Elleman and Paine, in their ground-breaking work on naval coalition warfare identified several factors for success: decision-making; communication; unity of interest; equality of partnership; interoperability and burden sharing.<sup>334</sup> These factors will be examined in this paper within the context of the Dardanelles operation to ascertain to what degree they were relevant to the failure of the operation.

On the eve of the outbreak of war in 1914, the relationship between the *Marine nationale* and the Royal Navy was unequal and unbalanced. The *Marine nationale* believed it enjoyed a special relationship with its Entente partner. French politicians and naval officers were proud of the reforms the *Marine nationale* had undertaken from 1906 that had renewed political and professional confidence. Despite this, officers of the *Marine nationale* recognised their service's inferiority to the fleets of the Triple Alliance and consequently, recognised France's reliance on the Royal Navy.

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<sup>332</sup> Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, p. 281.

<sup>333</sup> Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, pp. 327-249.

<sup>334</sup> Elleman & Paine, *Naval Coalition Warfare*. pp. 219-232.

Except for a few individuals, the *Marine nationale* was an enthusiastic supporter of the Entente and all but a few officers wished to see the Entente become a formal alliance<sup>335</sup>.

The French recognised the global superiority of the Royal Navy and recognised too that the Royal Navy had exceptional technological and operational capability. The Naval Agreement of 1912 relieved the French of the possibility of facing the German fleet alone in northern waters whilst encouraging the view within the ranks of the *Marine nationale* that, by accepting French responsibility for the Mediterranean, the Royal Navy was in need of its support.<sup>336</sup> Far from being an attribution of British confidence in the *Marine nationale* British attitudes to the Mediterranean were complicated. On the one hand former Royal Navy First Sea Lord Admiral Fisher encouraged Churchill to view the Mediterranean as a dangerous submarine infested lake, well left to the French.<sup>337</sup> After all, Fisher argued, 'What is the use of the French Entente if you don't use it?'<sup>338</sup> On the other hand, despite extreme financial and strategic constraints Churchill attempted to maintain a substantial British presence in the Mediterranean in support of British interests.<sup>339</sup> In either case, and contrary to French perceptions, there was no British view that considered the *Marine nationale* either a capable or desirable instrument to defend British Mediterranean interests.

On 22 June 1914, the *Marine nationale* requested that Admiral Henry Jackson, Chief of the Admiralty War Staff, exchange secret codes to enable their respective navies to practice wireless telegraphy (WT) communication in the Mediterranean in advance of any crisis with the Triple Alliance powers. To the French, such an arrangement seemed logical given that such arrangements had been put in place in

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<sup>335</sup> Jean Martinant de Préneuf, 'Entre Londres, Rome et Berlin. Les marins et la figure mouvante de l'ennemi 1871-1914', in Jörg Ulbert ed., *Ennemi juré, ennemi naturel, ennemi héréditaire. La France et ses adversaires (XIVe-XXe siècles)*, (Hamburg: DOBU Verlag, 2011).

<sup>336</sup> Service historique de la Défense – Archives de la Marine curated in Vincennes (hereinafter SHD-MV), SS Es 10, French Naval attaché to Chief of Staff of the French Navy, 18 February 1914.

<sup>337</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 5 March 1912, FGDN, pp. 435-440; also, Cristopher Martin, 'La Marine nationale vue par l'amiral Fisher: entre rival au long cours et allié inutile', *Revue d'histoire maritime*, n°20, 2015, pp. 119-142.

<sup>338</sup> Fisher to Rear Admiral Sir Charles Ottley, 4 November 1911, FGDN, vol. 2, pp. 410-411.

<sup>339</sup> Christopher M. Bell, 'Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution Reconsidered: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911-1914', *War in History*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 333-356.

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the Channel since the agreements of February 1913. Jackson, in a response to the French naval attaché Saint-Seine, refused citing a lack of formal alliance.<sup>340</sup> This reflected Admiralty policy since the inception of the Entente.<sup>341</sup> This lack of cooperation meant that, by the war's outbreak in the Mediterranean theatre, there was a lack of common tactics and signals and the French Mediterranean commander Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère had never met his British counterpart.<sup>342</sup> Nor, indeed, had Boué de Lapeyrère received any instructions from Paris about how to organise collaboration with the British.<sup>343</sup>

To French admirals the arrangements made under the convention of 6 August 1914 were an indication that the British had full confidence in their capability.<sup>344</sup> After all, Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère was designated C-in-C of all Franco-British naval forces Mediterranean, and the French were responsible for the protection of all British trade passing through the Mediterranean.<sup>345</sup> French officers were grateful for the fact that Malta was available as a major logistic base for the French fleet from the first day of the war.<sup>346</sup> All indications were, as far as French officers were concerned, that the Royal Navy regarded the *Marine nationale* as an equal and this was of great importance to the French. It was deemed pivotal to the French that the British stuck to the agreement of 6 August which placed the French in overall command. Indeed, the subordination of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean to French command was

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<sup>340</sup> SHD-MV, SS Xa 1, Secret letter n°12C from the French Naval attaché to the French Embassy in London to French Department of Navy, 22 June 1914.

<sup>341</sup> ESHR10/37, CC, The Papers of Lord Esher, Sir George S Clarke to Lord Esher, 14 December 1905; also ESHR10/38, CC, Clarke to Esher, [n.d.] January 1906, (for general policy): Rudock F. Mackay, Fisher of Kilverstone, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 353 and note 1.

<sup>342</sup> SHD-MV, SS Xa 1, Telegram n°16 from the French Naval attaché to the French Embassy in London to French Department of Navy, 3 August 1914.

<sup>343</sup> Amiral Docteur, Carnets de bord 1914-1919, (Paris: La Nouvelle Société d'Édition, 1932), 3 August 1914, p. 18.

<sup>344</sup> SHD-MV, SS Es 11, Memorandum from Vice Admiral Scherer (deputy of the Chief of Staff of the French Navy), 'Réponse à la lettre de l'amiral de Lapeyrère', undated [August 1914].

<sup>345</sup> SHD-MV, SS Es 10, 'Protocoles des Conventions passées entre l'Amirauté britannique et l'État-major de la Marine', 6 August 1914.

<sup>346</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 78, Letters n°1282 and n°1290, from Vice-Amiral Boué de Lapeyrère to French Department of Navy, 17 and 25 August 1914; Vennin to his wife, 27 September 1914, Louis Vennin, *Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse, 1912-1919*, (Paris: Christian, 2008), p. 87.

emphasised by an Admiralty order of 18 August that placed Admiral Carden as Chief Naval Officer at Malta with Admiral Troubridge as C-in-C at sea and all under the French C-in-C Mediterranean.<sup>347</sup> Whatever the impressions or assumptions of French officers at this time, as to British tactical and technological superiority and their belief in equality, they were to be disabused by the events surrounding the Dardanelles.

As C-in-C Mediterranean, Boué de Lapeyrère adhered strictly to the 6 August agreement although, focussed as he was on operational matters, he failed to take account of the political effect of the balance of forces between the allies as they developed at the Dardanelles and the effect this would have on Franco-British naval relations. The escape of the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* to Turkey significantly changed the balance of naval forces in the Mediterranean so the French were quite happy for a Royal Navy squadron to be located off the Dardanelles to watch for these ships. It made sense when the *Marine nationale* had to concentrate its efforts to cover the Otranto Straits. Furthermore, the *Goeben* alone was more powerful than any French ship. Boué de Lapeyrère regarded Carden's squadron as independent but subordinate to his command.<sup>348</sup> The matter was complicated by the fact that from September there were two French battleships under Rear-Admiral Guépratte<sup>349</sup> operating with Carden's force, and Guépratte, as shall be discussed below, was to prove problematic from the French point of view. Boué de Lapeyrère, who was reluctant to send more French ships to enhance the Dardanelles blockade, continued to give priority to the Otranto Straits. In November, Boué de Lapeyrère, and the Ministry of Marine, declined a British offer — because of the continuing *Goeben* threat — to place the French in command of the blockade, although Boué de Lapeyrère advised his Minister of Marine Victor Augagneur of his willingness to assist his subordinate: 'I will always try to provide any help to Admiral Carden he may ask for when we are able to do [so]'.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Sir Julian S. Corbett, *History of the Great War, Naval Operations*, Vol. 1, (London: London & Battery Press Ltd, Nashville TN, 1997), p. 87, n. 1.

<sup>348</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 106, Telegram n°7659, from French Naval Staff to Admiral Courbet Malta, 28 November 1914; SHD-MV, SS A 78, report n°1357 from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to Augagneur (Minister of Marine), 29 November 1914.

<sup>349</sup> Commander of French squadron at Dardanelles, September 1914-May 1915.

<sup>350</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 78, Letter n°1364 from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to Augagneur, 03 December 1914.

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It was clear that the Royal Navy's officers had little overall confidence in French strategic planning and operations in the Mediterranean.<sup>351</sup> By far the most important factor that generated operational friction from the outset was that as far as the British were concerned the Royal Navy simply did not require the assistance of the *Marine nationale*. At the outset, Churchill had informed Sir Edward Grey that he had invited French involvement only 'out of loyalty and politeness',<sup>352</sup> and the French had only gone along to ensure their regional interests were upheld. Although it is true that French participation was desired in so far as providing what the British initially lacked, small cruisers, destroyers, seaplanes and submarines, it is significant that the French were not included in the original planning and subsequently, when they were, they were detailed off with their own orders.<sup>353</sup> Carden stated to de Robeck, with some resignation and in recognition of the 'political' aspects at the time of initial planning, 'We must let the French take a hand in the opening part'.<sup>354</sup> Keyes noted British 'generosity' in so far as, 'we gave the French Admiral a day with his squadron inside — supporting *Agamemnon* and *Lord Nelson* who bombarded the forts at long range'.<sup>355</sup> But French participation was not received with enthusiasm as Rear Admiral Fremantle, C-in-C 3<sup>rd</sup> Division stated, 'It might, I suppose, be done using French battleships to take a turn [bombarding] but I do not care much for the prospect of having a Frenchman under me in an operation where one might require to give a good many orders by signal'.<sup>356</sup>

Inevitably, grand strategic imperial rivalries re-emerged, especially French sensitivities over Syria, and considerable efforts were made to ensure that a final division of responsibilities was agreed.<sup>357</sup> On 28 December 1914, a memorandum devoted to that issue was sent by the General Staff of the French Navy to the British Admiralty.<sup>358</sup> This interesting document shows that for the first time the *Marine*

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<sup>351</sup> DRBK 4/36, CC, Rear Admiral A. H. Limpus to Vice Admiral S. H. Carden, 14 March 1915, DRBK 4/33, CC, Rear Admiral Sydney R. Fremantle to de Robeck, 1 April 1915.

<sup>352</sup> Quoted in Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, p. 56, and note 39.

<sup>353</sup> Keyes Papers, British Library, Add Mss 82469, vol. xcii, Naval Operations and Memoranda, 'Orders for Attack on Dardanelles', 9 February 1915.

<sup>354</sup> DRBK 4/37, CC, Carden to de Robeck, 14 February 1915.

<sup>355</sup> Keyes to his wife, 8 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 102.

<sup>356</sup> DRBK 4/33, CC, Fremantle to de Robeck 7 February 1915.

<sup>357</sup> Vincent Cloarec, *La France et la question de Syrie 1914-1918*, (Paris: CNRS, 2002), chapter 1: also Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>358</sup> SHD-MV, SS Es 11, Memorandum from the French Naval Staff to British Admiralty, 28 December 1914.



*nationale* agreed to make an exception to French command of the entire Mediterranean as had been established in August 1914. This memorandum proposed to give independence to the British in Egypt and Red Sea, in exchange of the recognition of France's pre-eminent role in the Dardanelles and, more important, in front of the Syrian coast, which was considered the core of French interests in the area. But the *Marine nationale's* unrealistic position was quickly pointed out by the British — a want of resources — and finally a compromise was found by which the French government had to accept the British claims: the attack on the Dardanelles was recognised as being 'distinct' with a French squadron under Carden's command independent of Boué de Lapeyrière.<sup>359</sup>

While the 'geopolitical' issues had been resolved, at least officially, there were several issues that undermined cooperation in theatre. The first problem on the British side was their failure to keep French officers informed at all levels; second was the general attitude of British officers to the French that resulted in the latter being relegated to subsidiary duties; the third was the failure of the attack of 18 March 1915. On the other side, the French were insistent on making grand strategic claims in the Levant that their naval capability and contribution did not match and they repeated claims for operational responsibilities that the *Marine nationale* was unable to undertake. There is no doubt that these issues affected the conduct of Dardanelles campaign with the relative imbalance of overall naval power affecting the mind-set and approach of both the British and French personnel involved.

Interpersonal relations and subjective assessments between French and British officers reflected the unequal share of burdens negotiated in the Eastern Mediterranean. At first sight, cordiality appeared to be the order of the day, especially when matters were unofficial; from British sailors from HMS *Cornwallis* chatting with and giving sugar to French troops,<sup>360</sup> and French troops helping Midshipman Forbes recover 'his' trophy (part of a Turkish fort),<sup>361</sup> on a *prima facie* basis relationships appear to have been convivial between the allies. At senior levels within theatre matters were more complex. Keyes recorded how en route to the Dardanelles he played cards with several 'nice' French naval officers.<sup>362</sup> Keyes also recorded exchanges for dinner, as did other British officers.<sup>363</sup> Vice Admiral

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<sup>359</sup> SHD-MV, SS Es 11, Augagneur to Churchill, 31 January 1915.

<sup>360</sup> A. T. Stewart & The Rev. C. J. E. Penshall, *The Immortal Gamble and the part played in it by HMS Cornwallis*, (London: A. & C. Black Ltd, 1917), p. 124.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 190-191.

<sup>362</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 11 February 1915, Paul G. Halpern, *The Keyes Papers*, vol. 1, 1914-1918, (London: Navy Records Society, 1972), pp. 86-87.

<sup>363</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 5 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 101.

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McClintock of HMS *Lord Nelson* recorded a very happy dinner at which they entertained Boué de Lapeyrère, the retired Vice Admiral Fournier and Captain de la Roche-Kérandraon commander of the battleship *République*. He recorded that all went splendidly, although he makes humorous notes about four other French officers who did not speak, were 'fat and of a certain age' and 'lunch for them was no laughing matter. They tucked their napkins under their chins, squared their elbows and cleared for action'.<sup>364</sup> Keyes, after one dinner on board *Gaulois* on 9 September 1915 recorded: 'This visit has been a great success. The French C-in-C [Boué de Lapeyrère] never liked us before, always rather resented our independence, etc. But now he is our friend forever! He and my admiral [de Robeck] got on splendidly'.<sup>365</sup> Admiral Wemyss, commander at Mudros harbour wrote to de Robeck, 'The French C-in-C left here this evening amidst an interchange of cordial signals which I think truly reflected the feelings on both sides...he spoke of you in most warm and cordial terms and begged me to send you back his very best wishes'.<sup>366</sup> Such recollections are not untypical but some reflection is required. As will be shown subsequently, Wemyss comments are indicative of his known tact, for he disliked the French intensely. As for Keyes, he is either very naïve in believing in such a Damascene conversion on Boué de Lapeyrère's part or was very ignorant of the protocol of the French naval officer corps that permits no discordant discussion at dinner. By this point in the operation French honour had been damaged too much to accept that matters were so cordial behind the scenes. Indeed, exchanges were not always so cordial. Admiral Fremantle, for example, informed de Robeck of his irritation of Rear-Admiral Jaurès who on visiting HMS *Hibernia* demanded, 'la salade et les oeufs pour la table des officiers'.<sup>367</sup>

On the part of the French, records indicate a less cordial scene. British officers, although considered loyal, professional and individually gallant, were also considered distant and chauvinistic.<sup>368</sup> By May 1915 on board *Gaulois*, medical officer Moreau and the commander of the ship, Captain Morache recorded that although outwardly matters appeared cordial there was little professional or personal contact between

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<sup>364</sup> Imperial War Museum, IWM Doc Ref, 12295, Vice Admiral J. W. L. McClintock to Major R. S. MacClintock, 13 September 1915, Papers of Vice Admiral J W L McClintock.

<sup>365</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 9 September 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, pp. 192-193.

<sup>366</sup> DRBK4/22, CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, 11 September 1915.

<sup>367</sup> DRBK4/33, CC, Rear Admiral Sydney R. Fremantle to de Robeck, 30 December 1915.

<sup>368</sup> Vennin to his wife, 27 August 1914, Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse, pp. 73-74.

French and British officers with each remaining within their own community doing little to develop professional or personal contacts.<sup>369</sup> Later at Mudros a decision was made by French officers to discontinue the normal official exchanges.<sup>370</sup> By October 1915, Dartige du Fournet was reporting that British officers were adopting a superficially 'cordial' attitude to French officers.<sup>371</sup> Cordiality, superficial or otherwise, was certainly not evident in private communications between officers of the same 'side'. The view held by British officers was not one driven *wholly* by xenophobic national views. Their view of the French *Poilu* was one of admiration<sup>372</sup> although this admiration was not extended to French black colonial troops.<sup>373</sup> In reciprocation, French naval officers had a dim view of British troops who they regarded as unprofessional, and of the British conduct of the land campaign.<sup>374</sup>

The general problem was Royal Navy officers holding a view of the *Marine nationale* that was predicated upon their sense of superiority, which fed through to operational problems. It was an attitude that permeated from the top down to junior officer ranks. At the senior level, Admiral Limpus made the following comment: 'gallant, spirited and charming as our French allies are, they are 25 years behind us in hard, practical, dogged sea patrol work. They will never learn in a year how to do it'.<sup>375</sup> Lt Thomas Haldane, serving on board HMS *Doris* en route to the Dardanelles,

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<sup>369</sup> Laurent Moreau, *À bord du cuirassé 'Gaulois', Dardanelles, Salonique*, (Paris: Perrin, 1930), p. 95; Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois. Journal du commandant (1915-1916). De Moudros à Salonique', in *Revue des Deux mondes*, 1ère quinzaine de Janvier 1925, pp. 115-146.

<sup>370</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', 17 June 1915, p. 122.

<sup>371</sup> SHD-MV, SS Oc 3, Report n°34, from Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet to French Department of Navy, 2 October 1915.

<sup>372</sup> GDFY 1/2, CC, Naval Memoirs of Admiral J H Godfrey, *Dardanelles Commentary and Aegean Diary, Egypt and East Indies, Mediterranean and Black Sea*, vol. 2, 1915-1919, p. 18, 'Battle of 6-8th May 1915'; Stewart & Pershall, *The Immortal Gamble*, p. 151.

<sup>373</sup> SMVLI/6, CC, Papers of Lt Commander James F. Somerville, *Diary 1915*, Sunday 2 May 1915.

<sup>374</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', 15 August 1915, p. 125; Papers of commodore Amédée Van Gaver, *Diary written aboard battleship Charlemagne*, 28 June 1915, Chomel de Jarnieu Family Archives (the author express their gratitude to Admiral Chomel de Jarnieu for having allowed them to work on to these new documents).

<sup>375</sup> Vice Admiral Arthur H Limpus to Jackson, 2 February 1916, in Paul G Halpern (ed), *The Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, 1915-1918*, (Aldershot: Temple Smith for Navy Records Society, 1987), p. 91.

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recorded with a sense of casual superiority, 'we met the French battleship *St. Louis*. She was trying to destroy a pier by gunfire but could not hit it and so we opened fire and pretty well destroyed it with about 10 rounds'.<sup>376</sup>

Rear Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss was, according to Julian Corbett in his official history, the ideal choice for command at Mudros given his, 'exceptional experience and success in working with the French'.<sup>377</sup> In reality, Wemyss's view was almost wholly negative. To his wife, he wrote on 3 March on assuming command: 'The French, with whom I am again Alas! connected are hopeless and awful and of course full of promises which are never performed'.<sup>378</sup> On another occasion he noted: 'Alas! From seeing the French working side by side with our sailors one's impressions formed previously from naval experience are only confirmed. They appear to be quite without method or organisation, and are dreadfully subject to nerves, though individually brave and dashing'.<sup>379</sup> In truth, there is no shortage of evidence praising the officers and men of the *Marine nationale* for examples of individual gallantry or seamanship.<sup>380</sup> Wemyss's attitude to officers of the *Marine nationale* as an organisation in general, in contrast to the high esteem he held the French army, was typical among British naval officers. 'Talking of General d'Amade...he is the only Frenchman that I have come across in the last 8 months who seems capable of coming to a decision of or on an initiative. If he is the type of the French soldier, certainly they surpass their naval comrades'.<sup>381</sup> He got away with his views because as Keyes recorded, 'No one could possibly be better — so tactful with our soldiers and the French...'.<sup>382</sup> Indeed he was tactful enough to avoid the displeasure French officers would later heap criticism on their British allies. Private papers show that, although French officers recognised Wemyss's skills, they complained that although

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<sup>376</sup> TGNH 8/2, CC, Papers of T. G. N. Haldane, Diary kept aboard HMS Doris, Monday 24 May 1915.

<sup>377</sup> Julian S Corbett, *Naval Operations*, vol. 2, (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1921), p. 140.

<sup>378</sup> WYMS 7/11/2, CC, Wemyss to his wife, 3 March 1915, (Underlined in original).

<sup>379</sup> WYMS 7/11/2, CC, Wemyss to his wife, 6 May 1915.

<sup>380</sup> DRBK 4/37, CC, Carden to de Robeck, 30 March 1915; SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville Papers, Diary, 18 September 1915; IWM12295, Vice Admiral J. W. L. McClintock to Major R. S. McClintock, 10 March 1915 & 29 March 1915; IWM6973, Papers of Captain H. R. Errington, Diary 31 July 1915,; Keyes to his wife, 21 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 112; Diary of Midshipman Drage, 26 July 1915, Halpern (ed), *Royal Navy in the Mediterranean*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>381</sup> WYMS 7/11/2, CC, Wemyss to his Wife, 25 March 1815.

<sup>382</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 27 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 121.

he could speak French, he deliberately conversed with them in English which they took as a deliberate slight on his part.<sup>383</sup>

To some degree British perceptions were mirrored by the French themselves. French officers knew that the force they sent to the Dardanelles comprised old battleships. They were worried about the technical limits of the *Marine nationale* in general compared to the Royal Navy and they were aware that British crews were more disciplined than their French counterparts. They were particularly concerned that no incident should occur that would tarnish the image of the *Marine nationale* before their British ally.<sup>384</sup> Nevertheless, French disillusionment set in early with the arrival at the Dardanelles in November of additional French warships increasing the French force under Guépratte to battleships *Gaulois*, *Suffren*, *St. Louis* and *Verité*, six destroyers and three submarines. Accordingly, more French officers began to get first-hand experience of the Royal Navy at work, and its limitations. Lieutenant Vennin explained to his wife that:

And, well, you see, there's nothing like to be next to the others to compare and judge by yourself. By seeing closely the British Navy, many of my illusions are dispelling [...]. Well, we don't have at all to suffer from comparison with it. I don't want to say more by letter, but I shall not to hide you that I'm glad to have a closer look on these self-imagined demi-gods.<sup>385</sup>

The British superiority complex mixed with certitude that they did not need major operational help from a less effective French fleet paved the way to exclude the French from intelligence and operational planning. Very early indications were that the British were acting autonomously and did not keep Boué de Lapeyrère informed.<sup>386</sup> What he regarded initially as a lack of professional courtesy was the germ of what became an increasingly fractious dispute as events developed. A situation which the French regarded as one of initial mutual confidence and respect led ultimately to disappointment, disillusionment and bitterness. Failure to keep French command informed of decisions made by Royal Navy officers undermined gallic notion that officers of the Royal Navy regarded officers of the *Marine nationale*

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<sup>383</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', 29 June 1915, pp. 126-127.

<sup>384</sup> Docteur, Carnets de Bord, 12 August 1914, p. 23.

<sup>385</sup> Vennin to his wife, 20 November 1914, Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse, p. 101.

<sup>386</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 106, Telegram n°7659, from French Naval Staff to Admiral Courbet Malta, 28 November 1914; SHD-MV, SS A 78, report n°1357 from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to Augagneur (Minister of Marine), 29 November 1914.

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as equals. It was clear that the British planned and undertook operations without reference to the French at all levels. Boué de Lapeyrère only discovered the preparations undertaken from January 1915 because Guépratte, his man on the spot, had requested logistic supplies from Bizerta.<sup>387</sup> That Carden was planning an operation without referring to Boué de Lapeyrère was bad enough; that Guépratte should later disclose to Boué de Lapeyrère he had been told by Carden not to inform Boué de Lapeyrère was even worse.<sup>388</sup> This British indifference to French sensitivities continued into the campaign. On 25 May 1915 following a visit to Malta, Rear Admiral Cecil Thursby, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron at the Dardanelles, informed de Robeck, now C-in-C Dardanelles that: 'I called on the French C-in-C. He is a decent old chap but I think feels he is rather left out in the cold as operations presently take place in his command without his knowledge vide the bombardment of Smyrna'.<sup>389</sup> As for the Smyrna bombardment itself, Boué de Lapeyrère was left to discover events through Reuters though, when he asked for information from de Robeck, he admitted the latter disclosed the information, 'very gallantly'.<sup>390</sup>

British officers for their part only confirmed the opinion of French officers by maintaining their sense of superiority and for persisting, in the view of the French, in making poor tactical and strategic decisions. These perceptions were derived from experience. It is perhaps Dartige du Fournet who best illustrates this experience of French officers when working with the British. Dartige du Fournet, successor to Boué de Lapeyrère as C-in-C Mediterranean from October 1915, was a firm supporter of the Entente and of an alliance; he also sincerely admired the Royal Navy. After his first meeting with de Robeck and other senior British officers, he reported to his minister, Victor Augagneur, that he was certain that the British sincerely desired to develop operational cooperation and integration and include French naval forces far more in their pursuit of the campaign. He concluded definitively: 'History is full of disagreements which paralysed so many coalitions, and so often created opposition between generals and admirals. I am convinced there will be nothing like that in the Dardanelles'.<sup>391</sup> One month later, his state of mind was now dominated

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<sup>387</sup> Docteur, Carnets de Bord, 25 January 1915, p. 60.

<sup>388</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ob 2, Letter n°13, from Rear Admiral Guépratte to Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère, 25 January 1915.

<sup>389</sup> DRBK4/35, CC, Rear Admiral Cecil Thursby to Vice Admiral John de Robeck, 25 May 1915.

<sup>390</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 78, Letter n°1457, from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to French Minister of Marine, 18 March 1915.

<sup>391</sup> SHD-MV, SS Oc 3, Report n°34, from Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet to French Minister of Marine, 2 October 1915.

by bitterness after being excluded from operational planning by the British. He denounced the British as an unfair, incompetent ally:

Unfortunately, it is obvious that the *Marine nationale* is considered here as a kind of reserve force, only dedicated to support foreign operations. We're going to be excluded from their genesis and their direction till the day when the *Marine nationale* will have to compensate for [British] mistakes ... she won't be responsible for these errors but she will have to support their consequences. I don't talk about success because there are tiny opportunities for us to be put in position to get it and, in general, to honour his ally for a success is unusual, even if you owe it to him.<sup>392</sup>

The British trend to provide little operational and tactical information to the French and to appoint them only for secondary tasks was enhanced by the predominance of British telegraphic communications which always remained a major problem for the *Marine nationale*. The French were wholly dependent on the British for communications and intelligence such that when in February 1915 Boué de Lapeyrère needed to communicate with French naval forces in the Aegean he had to use British systems and codes, which only the British officers possessed. This meant his communications to his subordinates were known first and in full to the British.<sup>393</sup> Within theatre too, the British were determined to control communications, especially wireless telegraphy (WT). The operational orders, which were written by the British, contained detailed arrangements for signals by WT, flag and searchlight, especially for spotting and directing fire. For the initial bombardments, Guépratte's ship, *Suffren*, had four Royal Navy signals ratings seconded to ensure the efficient interpretation of signals.<sup>394</sup> Staff officers too were exchanged to facilitate effective communication.<sup>395</sup> Nevertheless, despite these sensible arrangements, Vice Admiral Nicol<sup>396</sup> recorded that de Robeck, although consistently courteous, refused to share information with him or integrate French forces within Royal Navy operations

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<sup>392</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 79, Letter n°27 M from Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet to French Minister of Marine, 2 November 1915.

<sup>393</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 78, Letter n°1453, from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to French Minister of Marine, 11 March 1915.

<sup>394</sup> British Library Add Mss 82469, Keyes Papers, 'Orders for forcing Dardanelles by Allied Squadron', 14 February 1915.

<sup>395</sup> Keyes to his wife, 18 February 1915, and 20 February 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 89 & p. 91.

<sup>396</sup> Commander of French Dardanelles Squadron, April-September 1915.

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preferring instead to delegate the *Marine nationale* to secondary tasks.<sup>397</sup> Captain van Gaver, in command of *Charlemagne*, recorded that, although relations with Royal Navy officers were not bad, communication was very limited and he complained that he was not properly informed by his British counterparts regarding forthcoming operations. He noted that, even as late as May 1915, there were no French officers detached to work with British army batteries and that French ships were not provided the codes for British army batteries which meant that he had to ask HMS *Agamemnon* to decode messages.<sup>398</sup>

Even in theatre, a fundamental problem for the French was that the British were determined to control communications, despite the codes having been distributed in orders, and personnel being exchanged, communications remained problematic. Lt Cdr Somerville, the officer responsible for WT at the Dardanelles, had constant problems controlling its use by airmen, soldiers and especially the French.<sup>399</sup> It was a persistent problem that was referred to the highest levels.<sup>400</sup> WT had two distinct problems. The first was that too much traffic caused confusion; the second was the lack of security. For Somerville, the French WT sets were seen as 'AI' but at crucial times they failed causing him great stress.<sup>401</sup> However, he was constantly having to intervene to curtail WT use. On one occasion, the French proposed using WT ashore to improve communications but the British response was that it: 'would really hash up everything ... line is must be stopped at all costs'.<sup>402</sup> On another occasion, when the need was to maintain security as the land forces were mobilising for the 25 April landings, he recorded with some irritation and humour: 'Operations ordered to commence and transports started to pour out of the harbour for their rendezvous. I had to go ashore and seal up the French WT station. Its naval commandant was furious but the operators didn't seem to mind much'.<sup>403</sup> For the French, this was all a

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<sup>397</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 109, Letter n°85, from Vice Admiral Nicol to French Minister of Marine, 23 June 1915.

<sup>398</sup> SHD-MV, SS Oc 1, Report n°7, from the Captain Van Gaver to Rear Admiral Guépratte, 27 May 1915.

<sup>399</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Lt Cdr Somerville, Diary 1915, 18 April 1915 & 30 April 1915.

<sup>400</sup> De Robeck to Jackson, 11 February 1916, Halpern (ed) Royal Navy and the Mediterranean, pp. 100-101.

<sup>401</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville, Diary 1915, 16 May 1915, 5 October 1915 & 8 October 1915.

<sup>402</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville, Diary 1915, 19 April 1915.

<sup>403</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville, Diary 1915, 23 April 1915.



source of considerable frustration and a problem never really solved for all the measures put into effect.<sup>404</sup>

The failure of the 18 March bombardment did much to undermine the image of the Royal Navy in the opinion of French officers and it was a major turning point from which the reputation of the Royal Navy and its senior officers never recovered in French eyes. The attack was not supported at the most senior levels of French command in any event.<sup>405</sup> This loss of professional respect by French naval officers of their Royal Navy counterparts, especially when seen in conjunction with the failure to communicate openly, meant increasingly that French officers, with the exception of Guépratte, regarded the Royal Navy with growing contempt for what they regarded as its arrogance and incompetence. According to Lieutenant Vennin:

The British had made an unforgivable mistake not to act in August [1914], by not following the *Goeben* when it entered in the Dardanelles. In October, in November, in December, in January, it was still easy to enter in the Strait because the Turkish were not on their guard and they didn't believe it was possible. In February, it was still possible forcing through. But in March, it was too late, especially after the attack of March 18<sup>th</sup> so badly led which warned the Turkish.<sup>406</sup>

The commander of *Gaulois* was harsher, probably because his ship was severely damaged during the attack: 'From the naval point of view especially, the heaviest faults have been done'.<sup>407</sup> This state of mind was very common among French naval officers serving in the Dardanelles and it was shared in Paris. In private, members of the French Council of Ministers were similarly severely critical of the Royal Navy's inability to manage the operation.<sup>408</sup>

Indeed, operational cooperation was fraught with difficulty. The reality was that the allies did not have what today would be regarded as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and this meant they went about operations in their own way often to the

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<sup>404</sup> Papers of Commodore Amédée Van Gaver, Diary written aboard battleship *Charlemagne*, 25-27 May 1915, Chomel de Jarnieu Family Archives.

<sup>405</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 109, 'Memorandum sur l'action aux Dardanelles', from the Vice Admiral Aubert to Augagneur (Minister of Marine), 07 February 1915.

<sup>406</sup> Vennin to his wife, 21 May 1915, *Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse*, p. 162.

<sup>407</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du *Gaulois*', 17 June 1915, p. 125.

<sup>408</sup> Abel Ferry, *Carnets secrets, suivis de Lettres et notes de guerre*, André Loez ed. (Paris: Grasset, 2005), 22 July 1915, p. 141.

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irritation of each other. The Royal Navy traditionally operated with maximum sea-time and one of the most common complaints from Royal Navy officers was that the French were always in port.<sup>409</sup> As Wemyss complained:

As regards berthing of ships, [at Mudros] double berthing doesn't help me a bit as far as men of war are concerned. It is a case of depth of water, and the Frenchmen take up all the billets. They really are the limit. It makes me mad...and our ships out for such long periods, and then no room for them when they want to come in...<sup>410</sup>

Later he recorded with even greater frustration: 'they do little or no work and only take up valuable space and time. They are tiresome and I am beginning to look upon them with feelings far from amicable'.<sup>411</sup>

French naval forces were to a large extent reliant upon the British for logistics support in theatre. Lieutenant Vennin, in command of the destroyer *Sape*, was particularly impressed by the efficiency of the administration at Malta and the ability of British logistics operations to bring in personnel, ships and supplies to the theatre.<sup>412</sup> Nevertheless, for the British this French dependency was a source of irritation.<sup>413</sup> Wemyss, C-in-C Mudros and hence responsible for logistics in theatre, recorded: 'they not only do nothing but they actually want everything.'<sup>414</sup> On another occasion he railed to his wife:

Imagine my feelings this morning there appears on the scene a French General who informs me he is the precursor of French Army who has apparently been told that I will supply them with all they need. Truly the ways of those in authority is beyond thought...the French are quite enough.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> DRBK 4/35, CC, Thursby to de Robeck, 22 July 1915; DRBK 4/39, CC, Captain Rudolf M Burmester to de Robeck, 5 November 1915.

<sup>410</sup> DRBK 4/33, CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, 23 May 1915.

<sup>411</sup> WMYS 7/11/2, CC, Wemyss to his wife, 22 May 1915.

<sup>412</sup> Vennin to his wife, 27 September 1914 & 20 November 1914, *Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse*, p. 87; p.101.

<sup>413</sup> DRBK 4/32, CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, n.d. April 1915.

<sup>414</sup> DRBK 4/32, CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, n.d. 'Friday'.

<sup>415</sup> WYMS 7/11/2, CC, Wemyss to his wife, 9 March 1915, (Underlined in original).

At times these small issues resulted in petty breakdowns of cooperation. Captain Edward Unwin VC, when securing the use of the *River Clyde*, discovered she had aboard 100 tons of French supplies. Despite having the approval of the French admiral, the local French officer so disapproved of Unwin's requisition that he refused to allow his men help the unloading which Unwin and his men had to do overnight.<sup>416</sup> It was also clear that the French had to rely on British support when ships required repair, especially in emergency. When *Gaulois* was torpedoed and beached it was carpenters and divers from HMS *Cornwallis* who repaired the damage.<sup>417</sup> Similarly when *Suffren* was torpedoed British divers also repaired her, with Keyes recording, apparently with some satisfaction: 'The French Admiral made most gallant signals, but they are very helpless and looked on with folded hands doing nothing, full of gratitude and admiration for the energy of their dear allies'.<sup>418</sup>

Among British officers there was a general attitude that the French, for all their individual gallantry were not up to the job and neither was their technology.<sup>419</sup> These factors fed through to operational problems with submarines the most exasperating problem. In the minds of British officers the presence of German submarines in the Mediterranean was primarily the fault of the French, after all they were in command.<sup>420</sup> As for submarines operating at the Dardanelles, the French were again blamed for ineffective patrols.<sup>421</sup> British officers were also incredulous at the way the French operated despite the submarine menace. Somerville recorded two incidents that annoyed him in particular: 'Great excitement in the forenoon when French reported a German submarine in difficulties off Kereves Dere. All destroyers rushed to attack but submarine got away. It was there an hour and the blasted Frenchman thought it was ours. They are the limit!'<sup>422</sup> He later recorded that, despite the great submarine menace: 'Left Mudros at 4pm. Fine hot day. Passed *Henry IV* gaily steaming

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<sup>416</sup> IWM1343, Papers of Captain Edward Unwin VC, p. 1 & p. 8.

<sup>417</sup> Stewart & Pershall, *The Immortal Gamble*, p. 53; Keyes to his wife, 27 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>418</sup> Keyes to his wife, 27 March 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>419</sup> DRBK 4/31 CC, Jackson to de Robeck, 7 November 1915; DRBK 4/32 CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, 14 July 1915; DRBK 4/39 CC, Burmester to de Robeck, 25 November 1915; SMVL 1/6, CC, 'Somerville Diary', 9 November 1915.

<sup>420</sup> DRBK 4/36, CC, Limpus to Carden 14 March 1915; DRBK 4/36, CC, Limpus to de Robeck 12 November 1915.

<sup>421</sup> DRBK 4/31, CC, Jackson to de Robeck, 29 January 1916; DRBK 4/35, CC, Thursby to de Robeck 25 May 1915; DRBK 4/38, CC, Captain Rudolf Burmester to de Robeck, 5 November 1915.

<sup>422</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville Diary, Thursday 17 June 1915.

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towards Helles at 9 knots, no escort or anything. The French are the limit!<sup>423</sup> However, French officers were similarly astonished at British attitudes to the submarine problem. French officers record the same general and persisting lack of caution on the part of Royal Navy's major surface units against mines and submarines compared to French attitudes. French officers regarded British modes of operation as most unprofessional and irresponsible;<sup>424</sup> Admiral Nicholson in particular was singled out as responsible for the loss of HMS *Majestic*, in exactly the same circumstances as had occurred a few days before, of HMS *Triumph* and for failing to take account of the submarine threat.<sup>425</sup> Somerville recorded that the French were similarly at fault: 'French transport *Carthage* sunk by submarine off Helles, not surprised as she had been there three days'.<sup>426</sup> In reality these examples are more probably expressions of the fact that there was no solution to the submarine threat but they also indicate considerable discordancy among allies.

Two further issues that irritated the British were interrelated. Firstly, a French determination to undertake as much work as possible. Secondly, the fact that they had insufficient resources to do so. This was particularly the case with patrols against submarines. Wemyss complained to de Robeck in September: 'I have asked the French if they could assist me by taking their share of the island patrol, which is at present entirely run by English [sic] boats, but they say they are unable to do it.'<sup>427</sup> Similarly, Captain Rudolf Burmester of HMS *Euryalus*, recorded that in pursuit of submarines near Budrum and Mandilyeh Gulf he was:

to cooperate with French patrol vessels in search of the latter area in two days' time. I have not been able to persuade the Captain of *Henry IV* to move earlier...*Henry IV* is keen on doing what he can, but he is greatly handicapped having lost all his destroyers and several trawlers, taken to escort troopers. The result is that their coastline which wants a large number of craft

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<sup>423</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville Diary, Sunday 7 July 1915.

<sup>424</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 109, Report n°7, from Vice Admiral Nicol to French Minister of Marine, 23 June 1915.

<sup>425</sup> Papers of commodore Amédée Van Gaver, Diary written aboard battleship *Charlemagne*, 27 & 30 May 1915, Chomel de Jarnieu Family Archives; Vennin to his wife, 29 May 1915, *Lettres d'un officier de marine à son épouse*, p. 166.

<sup>426</sup> SMVL 1/6, CC, Somerville Diary, Monday 5 July 1915.

<sup>427</sup> DRBK 4/32, CC, Wemyss to de Robeck, 11 September 1915.

to look after it is not visited, and I have no doubt that even the [French] vessels on patrol spend most of their time in harbour.<sup>428</sup>

French concerns at the opening of the campaign that their ships were technologically inferior were borne out in the views held by British officers, notwithstanding the fact that except for *Queen Elizabeth* and *Inflexible*, the British contribution in naval vessels was also decidedly second-rate. Admiral Limpus recorded: 'The French have no fast cruisers...and their destroyers can't stand the work that ours can.'<sup>429</sup> Keyes recorded on 15 March 1915 that: 'the French Squadron consisted of *Suffren*, *Gaulois*, *Charlemagne* and *Bouvet*. They had done very well, but they, I mean the ships, not the personnel, can't stand much knocking about and they are rather a cause of anxiety'.<sup>430</sup> Carden, when handing over to de Robeck noted: 'The old type French battleships in the squadron are unable to make good the loss of fresh water...their coaling is very slow, and their machinery is apparently not in good condition...'<sup>431</sup> Conversely, after 18 March, a more critical French eye noted that in reality, the French warships at the Dardanelles were proving to be more resilient to damage than the British warships. Captain Morache of *Gaulois* proudly noted that the British themselves acknowledged this fact when working on the torpedo damaged *Jean Bart*.<sup>432</sup>

For operational tasks, French mines and minesweeping were also a concern for the British; Lt Commander John Godfrey, then on board HMS *Euryalus*, was tasked with laying French mines. He recorded the following over several days: 'The mines are French...and are supposed to be unsafe to handle.' He noted that French sal-amoniac plugs were 'unsatisfactory' [i.e. they detonated prematurely]. Next, 'The *Casabianca* has sunk, blown up by the first mine she laid last night. These French mines seem to be a great danger to any ship that lays them'. Finally, 'I cannot say I look forward with any pleasure to laying anymore of these French mines'.<sup>433</sup> The mine issue and the loss of *Casabianca* was noteworthy enough for Keyes to record the event.<sup>434</sup> Minesweeping was a problem for both parties but the French system added problems as far as the execution of sweeping in the Straits. Keyes recorded that the British system differed and the most noteworthy difference was that it took

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<sup>428</sup> DRBK 4/39, CC, Burmester to de Robeck, 5 November 1915.

<sup>429</sup> DRBK 4/36, CC, Limpus to de Robeck, 7 May 1915.

<sup>430</sup> Keyes to de Robeck, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>431</sup> DRBK 4/1, CC, Carden to De Robeck, 15 March 1915.

<sup>432</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', p. 119.

<sup>433</sup> GDFY1/2, CC, Naval Memoirs, entries for 2nd to 4th June 1915.

<sup>434</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 4 June 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 148.

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5 minutes for a British minesweeper to deploy but a French one took 30 minutes. This had consequences and so the following deserves detailed consideration.

The C. O. of the French [minesweepers], who were given a free hand on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> [March], meant to try to get above the mine field, but he decided they couldn't risk half an hour [to deploy] under a heavy fire stopped, so he tried to sweep against the current. After a bit, as he was making no headway, they withdrew. So once again, we had to say that we had no headway owing to a heavy fire — which caused no casualties!<sup>435</sup>

This is as close to an accusation of cowardice as one can get! Reciprocally, British mine warfare was severely criticised by the French. Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère complained about the Royal Navy's material deficiencies. He reported that the British systems were less efficient than the French.<sup>436</sup> The commander of the French minesweeping flotilla underlined the persistent inefficiency of the British operations: 'It seems to me, there is no direction for minesweeping: everybody operates haphazardly'. In his view, cooperation was very limited because of the British: 'I feel we're just borne by the British and that we're considered first of all as spectators'.<sup>437</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the French experience of working with a far from perfect Royal Navy, and the many negative impressions formed as a consequence, it remained the case that the *Marine nationale* retained a complex mix of feelings of inferiority, disappointment and rivalry. Throughout the Dardanelles operations, French personnel remained very sensitive to the British opinion of them and welcomed with pride British expressions of favour.<sup>438</sup> Nevertheless, at the French equivalent of the Dardanelles Commission, Victor Augagneur, the French Minister of Marine at the time of the operation, spread the blame widely and of the Royal Navy he stated: 'the British have the idea that they have the world's first navy, true

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<sup>435</sup> Keyes to his Wife, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>436</sup> SHD-MV, SS A 78, Letter 1457, from Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère to French Department of Navy, 18 March 1915.

<sup>437</sup> SHD-MV, SS Oc 14, Commander de Courtois, Diary written aboard minesweeper Poupée, 26 February 1915 & 10 March 1915.

<sup>438</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ob 3, Report n°87, from de Robeck to Guépratte, 6 April 1915; Moreau, À bord du cuirassé 'Gaulois', p. 35.

perhaps, at least formerly. [But] They can't accept the smallest of their ships under command of a man who is not British'.<sup>439</sup>

On both sides, as Thomazi and Halpern have noted, individual characters and skills played a key role. De Robeck and Guépratte embody and are the focus of British and French critics alike who emphasise their personal responsibility for the Dardanelles failure. There is something of a parallel between these two national scapegoats but criticism is not skewed by nationality, criticism came equally from both British and French officers. As noted before, following the 18 March failure French officers revised their presuppositions regarding, amongst other issues, British technical, tactical and general superiority. Admiral de Robeck attracted most of the ire of French officers. With the exception of Guépratte, who regarded the real culprit as Churchill.<sup>440</sup> French officers focused their attacks on de Robeck's military skill, character and his utter hostility to French interests. Following his own experience, Dartige du Fournet completely reconsidered his opinion of the possibility of effective cooperation and writing just four months after his favourable comments to Augagneur of 2 October 1915 he informed his chief: 'Even though cooperation is strong between Admiral de Robeck and me, the differences of national character and state of mind are too great between officers and men of both nations to facilitate parallel cooperation in any area with success'.<sup>441</sup> Although Keyes's papers suggest that de Robeck was disinclined to pursue a further naval only attack, Dartige du Fournet took the view that de Robeck was driven by nothing but revenge following the 18 March failure.<sup>442</sup> De Robeck was, in the opinion of Captain van Gaver, captain of *Charlemagne*, foolhardy, arrogant, a braggart and incompetent.<sup>443</sup> Ultimately, from the French perspective it was the refusal of Royal Navy officers, de Robeck in particular, to receive French advice on the conduct of the campaign that resulted in

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<sup>439</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ca 9, 'Audition de Victor Augagneur par la Commission de la Marine de Guerre de la Chambre', 18 July 1917.

<sup>440</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ob 2, Report n°102, from Rear Admiral Guépratte to Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrière, 21 May 1915.

<sup>441</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ed 84, Report n°25 M-S, from Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet to French Minister of Marine, 8 February 1916.

<sup>442</sup> Proposal by Keyes for a Renewal of the Naval Attack on the Dardanelles and de Robeck's Comments', Keyes Papers, vol. 1, pp. 188-192; SHD-MV, SS Ed 84, Report n°4S, from Vice Admiral Dartige du Fournet to French Minister of Marine, 5 January 1916.

<sup>443</sup> Papers of Commodore Amédée Van Gaver, Diary kept aboard battleship *Charlemagne*, 20-25 May 1915 & 07 June 1915, Chomel de Jarnieu Family Archives.

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its eventual failure, and in particular a British refusal to land on the Asiatic side of the Straits.<sup>444</sup>

Guépratte is a complex figure in an assessment of relationships at the Dardanelles. As commander of French forces, he was subordinate to Carden and then de Robeck, and like de Robeck, his position carried with it both military and political burdens. Militarily, his job, after supporting the British, was to ensure that he protected his ships and men from unreasonable risk. Politically, he should have ensured that French interests were represented and upheld. After several months on station the authorities in France had concluded he had done neither. Dubbed the 'fire eater', Guépratte was loved by the British:<sup>445</sup> 'a gallant old fellow spoiling to fight', recorded Keyes. <sup>446</sup> When advised that Guépratte was to be replaced, British officers recorded their views with various degrees of irritation and regret. De Robeck informed Limpus: 'Private. Have they told you about the future and the new formation of the squadron out here? Don't like it at all! They are sending a French V. A. up here senior to Guépratte, which is a great mistake; dear old soul he is the most loyal friend one could have and hate anybody coming between us!'<sup>447</sup> It is certainly noteworthy that as a rule Rear Admiral Guépratte is usually celebrated within the Royal Navy and Vice Admiral Nicol within the *Marine nationale*.

The decision on Augagneur's part to replace Guépratte had two aims; the first was to get a French admiral on the spot, equal in rank to de Robeck, and thereby neutralise his influence; the second was to ensure French interests were represented effectively. Vice Admiral Nicol was known to be loyal to Boué de Lapeyrère and to be an excellent commander.<sup>448</sup> French officers quickly appreciated the change in tone and appreciated too his less accommodating and passive attitude to de Robeck, in full contrast to that of Guépratte.<sup>449</sup> Morache noted that: 'although he was subordinate

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<sup>444</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', 17 June 1915, p. 125.

<sup>445</sup> Stewart & Pershall, *The Immortal Gamble*, pp.53-54; Keyes to his Wife, 2 July 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, pp.155-156; DRBK, 4/37, CC, Carden to de Robeck, 30 March 1915.

<sup>446</sup> Keyes to his Wife, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>447</sup> De Robeck to Limpus, 16 May 1915, in N. A. M. Roger (ed.), *The Naval Miscellany*, vol. 5, (George Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, 1984), p. 450.

<sup>448</sup> Papers of Commodore Amédée Van Gaver, Diary kept aboard battleship Charlemagne, 20-25 May 1915, Chomel de Jarnieu Family Archives.

<sup>449</sup> Docteur, Carnets de bord, 28 May 1915, p. 78.



to de Robeck, he knew how to keep his independence'.<sup>450</sup> Nicol's impact was noted by de Robeck somewhat spitefully:

[I]t is very hard to get this new French V. A. to do anything, he will do nothing as well as anyone...Nicol is a very different man from dear old Guépratte who is a gallant fellow and the most loyal friend! Nicol is a little man of the most unprepossessing appearance; does not look a gentleman and don't think his name would be in the 'Stud Book'! We get on very well with the French, but they want everything and do as little as possible (most of them). It was a great pity the French Admiralty did not leave Guépratte here in command.<sup>451</sup>

No doubt de Robeck missed Guépratte's compliant character. The question remains, to what degree was Guépratte 'compromised'? There is little doubt that among French officers he was bitterly criticised for his overfamiliarity with the British and his failure to represent French interests resulted in a sense of a loss of French independence. Commodore Edmond Delage, a teacher at the French Naval Academy, recorded that he was: 'the most obliging collaborator'.<sup>452</sup> Indeed in January 1915 Guépratte was confronted by Admiral Docteur who, recognising Guépratte's collusion with the British in keeping information from Lapeyrère, stated: 'I am wondering if you have not become a British admiral'.<sup>453</sup> Guépratte was alone among the French in his view that at the Dardanelles all was well between the allies: 'for the first time in history, two naval squadrons are totally integrated' in what he called 'allied forces'.<sup>454</sup> Furthermore, he never expressed any reservations about the planned attack.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Commandant Morache, 'La dernière campagne du Gaulois', 17 June 1915, p. 122.

<sup>451</sup> De Robeck to Jackson, 15 June 1915, in Rodger, *Naval Miscellany*, vol. 5, p. 456.

<sup>452</sup> Edmond Delage, *La tragédie des Dardanelles*, (Paris: Gasset, 1931), p. 45.

<sup>453</sup> Docteur, *Carnets de bord*, 25 January 1915, pp. 60-61.

<sup>454</sup> Rapport de Guépratte (October 1914?) quoted in Adolphe Laurens, (Commodore), *Travaux du service historique de l'état-major générale de la Marine, Le commandement naval pendant la Grande Guerre*, tome I, s.d. p.392; VA Paul Émile Guépratte, *L'expédition des Dardanelles*, (Paris : Payot, 1935), pp. 12 & 17.

<sup>455</sup> SHD-MV, SS Ob 2, Telegram n°323 Rear Admiral Guépratte to Vice Admiral Boué de Lapeyrère, 17 March 1918.

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French officers regarded Guépratte, as they did de Robeck, as incompetent and careless with the lives of his men. Glory and honour appear to have been high on his personal agenda. His message of 21 March to de Robeck following the 18 March failure confirms this view. 'My division has been placed at a splendid school of valour and devotion; under such conditions, we had an easy role, ruling our conduct on your splendid example and that on our noble brothers in arms of the British Fleet. It was enough to remain faithful to the honour and to the religion of sacrifice'.<sup>456</sup> Guépratte's words indicate a strong degree of subservience and deprecation of the role of the French, especially when one considers the loss of *Gaulois* and six hundred men. Additionally, he committed the cardinal sin of criticising his own men to his allies. Keyes recorded:

The French are miserable. They sent in the *Mariotte* (submarine) a few days ago...she has been sunk and the crew captured. Poor Millot is very unhappy—and Admiral Guépratte said today that they had taken such pride in their submarines service before the war and thought they were the best, [but] we [the British] went everywhere as we liked, our crews were splendid—they [the French] with the best intentions were always failing.<sup>457</sup>

Although Guépratte was not the only French officer to make disparaging remarks about his own men, Boué de Lapeyrère too, according to Thursby, blamed French destroyer Captains for their 'stupidity' in allowing German submarines to escape.<sup>458</sup> Nevertheless, Guépratte appears to have 'gone native'. Perhaps the degree to which Guépratte had indeed 'become a British Admiral' is indicted by Keyes in a letter to his wife bemoaning that: 'They would not leave *our* dear Guépratte in command!'<sup>459</sup> The opening section of this paper noted that several factors required consideration: unity of intent; interoperability; burden sharing; decision-making; communication and equality of partnership. It has been shown that for every factor there was a fundamental or partial failure at the Dardanelles. There was no unity of intent between the allies with both pursuing diverse and antagonistic grand strategies but there were major issues at the operational level as well. In 1915, it would be unreasonable to expect the allies to achieve a full level of interoperability; indeed, as

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<sup>456</sup> DRBK 4/22, CC, Le Contre-Amiral Guépratte la Division de Complement da l'Armée Navale, a Monsieur le Vice-Amiral Commandant en Chef d'Escadre de la Méditerranéan Orientale, HMBS 'Queen Elizabeth', 21 March 1915.

<sup>457</sup> Keyes to his Wife, 30 July 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 172.

<sup>458</sup> , DRBK 4/35, CC, Thursby to de Robeck, 25 May 1915.

<sup>459</sup> Keyes to his wife, 27 September 1915, Keyes Papers, vol. 1, p. 207, (italics added).

NATO has shown, it takes decades of work to arrive at such a capability. Despite evidence that exchanges were made at staff level, many French officers took the view that the British had no interest in interoperability at all. In the matter of burden sharing it is also clear that there was considerable friction. The British strongly held the view that the French were not operationally up to the job and to make matters worse they attempted to take on as many jobs as possible despite their lack of means. However, it was undoubtedly the issue of command and control that caused the greatest friction. The British believed they simply did not need the French. That, and their sense of superiority, meant that the British took decisions without first consulting or including their ally and to compound matters then failed to communicate operational decisions effectively, if at all. There was absolutely no equality of partnership; a breach that the French felt very deeply. However, these failures of command and control could have been mitigated or eliminated altogether had a different French admiral been in post from the start. Guépratte, as a French admiral first and foremost, failed. He failed his own squadron and he failed France. A stronger French personality like Nicol might have provided a challenge to the dominance of the Royal Navy but instead Guépratte 'went native' obligingly following whatever the British did regardless of the damage to French interests, ships and men. Elizabeth Greenhalgh has made the point that through 1915: 'British and French groped towards effective military cooperation [on the western front] during the opening months of the war, hindered by the many differences that divided them and by the prewar failure to establish the command relationship'.<sup>460</sup> This paper has demonstrated the extent to which this was also true at the Dardanelles.

The most important lesson from the Dardanelles operation for contemporary naval coalition operations is that where any one partner is in a position of dominance it is vital that it recognise the interests of its junior partners and then ensures officers are educated in the avoidance of crude stereotypes and inherited misperceptions about allies which may become a decisive obstacle to efficient cooperation. Unified decision-making and above all effective communication with junior members is vital for success, especially political. It may often be the case that with modern naval coalitions, junior partners, even those offering niche capabilities, might not be regarded by the dominant partner as militarily important in overall terms to the conduct of the operation. However, politically, it is crucially important to recognise, not just the interests of the junior partners in the operational outcome, but that involving them fully within the command and control mechanism is vital to the success of the coalition overall.

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<sup>460</sup> Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, p. 40.