

EXPEDITIONARY INTELLIGENCE IN A TIME OF CRISIS: THE USS SCORPION IN
CONSTANTINOPLE, 1914-1918

An Essay

Submitted to

The Faculty of the

United States Naval War College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Graduate Certificate in Maritime History

by
Michael Imbrenda

1 June 2020

EXPEDITIONARY INTELLIGENCE IN A TIME OF CRISIS: THE USS SCORPION IN
CONSTANTINOPLE, 1914-1918

by
Michael Imbrenda

APPROVED:
J. Ross Dancy, DPhil
Committee Director

David Kohnen, PhD
Committee Member

Craig L. Symonds, PhD
Committee Member

Coordinator
Graduate Certificate in Maritime

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 12/06/2020		2. REPORT TYPE Certificate Essay		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) July 2019 - June 2020	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE EXPEDITIONARY INTELLIGENCE IN A TIME OF CRISIS The USS Scorpion in Constantinople, 1914-1918				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Michael Imbrenda				5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
				5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Hattendorf Historical Center US Naval War College 686 Cushing Rd Newport, RI 02841				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Graduate Certificate in Maritime History. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT At a time when Lawrence of Arabia was decimating Ottoman railways in the Hejaz and Gertrude Bell was plotting the political future of Iraq, American sailors were navigating the intrigues of intelligence work in Constantinople. The USS <i>Scorpion</i> served as the American Station Ship at Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Sent with little guidance from Washington, the <i>Scorpion's</i> role evolved into that of a floating embassy, intelligence service, and public diplomacy enterprise. The <i>Scorpion's</i> crew formed deep and enduring relationships with the local population, which facilitated detailed intelligence reports on all facets of the Ottoman war effort. The <i>Scorpion's</i> efforts sowed the seeds of the post-war American effort to stabilize Turkey and the Near East. The experience of the <i>Scorpion</i> can inform future discussions on the question of expeditionary intelligence and defense diplomacy in the modern era.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS (Key words) Turkey, World War I, Intelligence, Diplomacy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT N/A	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 50	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Evan Wilson
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) (401) 841-6552

Abstract

At a time when Lawrence of Arabia was decimating Ottoman railways in the Hejaz and Gertrude Bell was plotting the political future of Iraq, American sailors were navigating the intrigues of intelligence work in Constantinople. The USS *Scorpion* served as the American Station Ship at Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Sent with little guidance from Washington, the *Scorpion*'s role evolved into that of a floating embassy, intelligence service, and public diplomacy enterprise. The *Scorpion*'s crew formed deep and enduring relationships with the local population, which facilitated detailed intelligence reports on all facets of the Ottoman war effort. The *Scorpion*'s efforts sowed the seeds of the post-war American effort to stabilize Turkey and the Near East. The experience of the *Scorpion* can inform future discussions on the question of expeditionary intelligence and defense diplomacy in the modern era.

In April 1917, a lone US Navy ship sat moored in the Bosphorus acting as the symbol of American might in a war weary Ottoman Empire. When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, Germany, the tottering Empire's wartime ally, requested that the vessel, the *USS Scorpion*, be interned. It was an awkward moment. Because the US did not declare war on the Ottoman Empire, U.S.-Turkish relations remained intact even though the United States was now an enemy of Turkey's ally. In early April, Taalat Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior, proceeded to the vessel's mooring in early April to speak with his friend, the de facto commanding officer of the *Scorpion*, Lieutenant Herbert Babbitt with the unhappy orders to take the ship and send the crew into captivity. Babbitt and Talat had developed a rapport over drinks at the Constantinople Club during happier times often playing cards together.¹ Rather than submit to capture, Babbitt had another idea. He challenged Taalat to a friendly game of bridge. If Taalat won, Babbitt would surrender the ship and lead his skeleton crew to a dreary imprisonment at the Ottoman POW facilities inland at Bursa. If Babbitt won, the crew would be allowed to stay on board the ship under a sort of house arrest. Babbitt through some clever card playing and a bit of deception was able to save the ship. What "Four Notrump" Babbitt did not tell Taalat was that he was the Atlantic Fleet bridge champion.²

The crew of the *USS Scorpion* exemplified the dangerous path that the United States walked on the road to its involvement in World War I. The *Scorpion* served a vital intelligence function helping to shape American policy in the post-war series of crisis in the Near East, while ingratiating itself with a city that would come to see the United States as an honest broker and potential protector in the new era to come.

¹ "FG Babbitt letter to All Hands," *All Hands*, Bureau of Naval Personnel, August 1960

² "FG Babbitt letter to All Hands," *All Hands*, Bureau of Naval Personnel, April 1960

To a modern observer, America seems inextricably tied to affairs in the Middle East and it is hard to imagine a world where the U.S. did not have an intimate role in virtually every issue and conflict in the region. The Middle East is critical to the security of the 21st century economy given global reliance on oil as the fuel of industry and transportation. Prior to the 20th century, American interests in the Middle East were largely transient and consisted of short-term engagements to confront threats to commerce, namely North African piracy. Even at the start of the 20th century, U.S. interests in the Middle East were largely parochial: the prosperity of the few American merchants' resident within the Ottoman Empire and the protection of a large network of Christian missionaries and educational institutions across Anatolia and the Levant. The new set of growing national interests focused on the overseas protection of life and property as the American empire expanded. Coupled with a new interest in European affairs, it was only natural that not merely the force of American commerce, diplomacy, and religion should come to the Middle East, but military power should be on hand to allow force to back up increasingly vital interests in the hobbled Ottoman Empire. The USS *Scorpion*, an aging armed steam yacht from the Spanish-American War, along with its crew of around ninety American sailors, was sent as the guarantor of American interests in Constantinople. The First World War stranded the *Scorpion* in Constantinople, where its crew could witness the Ottoman descent into the global conflict first-hand during three years of American neutrality.

This article will examine the role that the crew of the USS *Scorpion* played in promoting U.S. interests in the Middle East, with special attention to the efforts of the crew during and immediately after the First World War. The USS *Scorpion* and the US Naval Detachment in Turkish Waters' post-war exploits are well documented as US Navy officials worked to mitigate the massive humanitarian fallout of the Turkish War of Independence. Much of the current

scholarship views the USS *Scorpion* as merely a chess piece in a broader tale about American disinterest in the plight of the Ottoman Empire's religious minorities.

However, the intelligence and diplomatic role the crew played during the war remains obscure in the existing historiography. This paper focuses on the actions of the crew of the USS *Scorpion* as they embedded themselves within the city of Constantinople. Individuals cultivated close relationships with the authorities of Ottoman Turkey and the other Central Powers and operated as a floating intelligence agency that provided critical understanding to Washington policymakers about the state and trajectory of the Ottoman theater of the conflict. Since World War II, the US Navy has eschewed using its warships as a floating, armed embassy, but is likely to require a naval forces with similar flexibility like the USS *Scorpion* in a new era of great power competition as in-country knowledge and deep regional expertise will become more important to developing new regional security architectures.

In 1914, the USS *Scorpion* deployed to a city on edge. Constantinople had spent most of the early century wracked by states of emergency as the Young Turks consolidated power over the once monarchical and clerical state. Three coups since 1900, coupled with periodic and intense bouts of ethnic and religious unrest targeting the city's Christian minorities and the increasingly common political assassinations became regular facets of living in Constantinople. By 1914, the Ottoman Empire was a decaying and progressively insecure state, "the sick man of Europe," losing its cohesion and descending into strategic irrelevance. Two wars in the Balkans in the previous two years had stripped it of most of its European possessions. The Italian annexation of Libya in 1912 had removed the last Ottoman toehold in North Africa. The Sublime Porte could no longer claim it was an empire on three continents, being effectively contained by

a Slavic-Greek coalition in Europe, British suzerainty in Egypt, restive Arab separatists along the empire's southern reaches, and an ethno-religious powder keg in the Caucasus eyed by Russia.

The Porte's skepticism towards its large Christian minority proved to be a continual source of violent unrest bordering on genocide. Since the 1860s, a series of coups and counter-coups against the Sultan had plagued the Empire's political scene, culminating with the rise and consolidation of power of the reformist Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), known more colloquially as the Young Turks, whose primary goal was the revitalization of the Ottoman Empire as a great power. The CUP's reformist outlook initially led it to favor a beefed-up US presence in the city when compared with the more religiously oriented counter-coup supporters. Constantinople was the epicenter of these bouts of political unrest and the station ships of the European powers were the primary means through which foreign property and interests were protected. Since the closing of the Civil War, the United States had made several requests to place a permanent vessel in Constantinople, but those requests had been denied since the US was not a member of the Treaty of Paris of 1856, the agreement that ended the Crimean War.³

The initial request for a US naval vessel in Constantinople began with a reason familiar to modern readers, a terrorist attack. In 1906, the United States upgraded its diplomatic representation in Constantinople from ministry to full ambassadorship after a back and forth negotiation with the Porte and a series of vaguely threatening visits by US warships. In 1907, after a bomb exploded in the garden of former minister and now US Ambassador John Leishman's summer home, he sent an urgent request that a U.S. warship be permanently

³ William Still, *American Sea Power and the Old World: The United States Navy in European and Near Eastern Waters*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980) 174

stationed in Constantinople, as was common for European powers at the time.⁴ With the Young Turk's soft coup of 1908, Leishman's second request to Washington for a station ship, which was approved. Leishman recommend the *Gloucester*, a converted steam yacht formerly owned by JP Morgan, though ultimately the *Scorpion* was selected for the role.

The *Scorpion* spent its previous life as a civilian yacht later requisitioned and converted for blockade duty off Cuba during the Spanish-American War. By late 1908, the *Scorpion* arrived in Constantinople, but with no specific instructions. Lt. Commander George Logan, the *Scorpion*'s commanding officer, was simply ordered to figure out what the roles and missions that other station ships from the European powers were given and to emulate them.⁵ The crew had at least some familiarity with the local language. Friction almost immediately developed between Logan and Leishman as the command relationships was totally unclear since a US ship had never before been assigned to station duty there.

In 1909, the *Scorpion* was called away on a humanitarian assistance mission to Sicily after a severe earthquake. The crew therefore missed their first chance to prove the ship's worth, much to Ambassador Leishman's chagrin, as the Turkish Army launched a counter coup against the Young Turks where they occupied much of Constantinople. Mobs calling for sharia law ransacked Christian neighborhoods. By April 1909, the counter coup was defeated. The *Scorpion* returned in July and served primarily as the Ambassador's transportation to various American interests in the transit infrastructure-poor empire and to ferry American investors around the Near East during President Taft's dollar diplomacy plan. Taft's plan was to use American

⁴ "Leishman to Secretary of State, July 19, 1907," *Foreign Relations of the United States 1908*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 738

⁵ Stewart Frederick Bryant, "The Tale of the Scorpion: A Story of the Experiences of the American Sailors on the United States Ship Scorpion at Constantinople," unpublished manuscript, RG 45, National Archives

economic strength as a key foreign policy tool, but to do so would require the use of ships like the *Scorpion* to guarantee the security of such interests.

The *Scorpion*'s first major operation came during with the First Balkan War in 1912 when a coalition of Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria sought to seize the Ottoman Empire's last European territories and Bulgarian troops came within 50 miles of Constantinople.⁶ The *Scorpion* played a relatively minor role in the multinational naval coalition deployed to protect Western interests in the city, sending a complement of twenty sailors to protect Roberts College, which still exists as an elite private high school in Istanbul.⁷ By 1914, with yet another Balkan crisis brewing after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the crew of the *Scorpion* were enmeshing themselves into expatriate society in Constantinople as the sailors reveled in the city's numerous entertainment opportunities and even purchased a building to open the *Scorpion* Club to serve their drinking needs while on liberty.⁸ The crew of the *Scorpion* fraternized with the locals of the city and ingrained itself as an essential part of the expatriate social scene, marrying local women, engaging in drunken brawls, and hosting diplomatic events.

In addition, the *Scorpion* served a crucial diplomatic and intelligence role, maintaining American neutrality while keeping American officials back home informed of the progress of the war in this corner of the world. The *Scorpion* first began reporting on wartime intelligence in September and did so at roughly six week intervals via a convoluted land route through the US naval attaché's office in Berlin.⁹ The *Scorpion*'s intelligence operation leveraged a diverse network of sources that charted the Ottoman Empire's path to war. However, Constantinople was

⁶ ER Hooton, *Prelude to the First World War: The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, (Croydon: Fonthill, 2014), 211

⁷ Still, *Sea Power in the Old World*, 181

⁸ "BTC McQuat to All Hands," *All Hands*, Bureau of Naval Personnel, August 1961

⁹ "Lecture Notes from Babbitt", 1932, US Naval War College Archive

a city of spies, intrigue was everywhere, and the coffee houses where local notables congregated were well known rumor mills where all kinds of yarns mixed with the actual ground truth that the *Scorpion* needed to report to Washington.¹⁰ Almost immediately after the Ottoman government ordered the closure of the straits in September, Lt. Cmdr. McCauley, the *Scorpion*'s commanding officer, reported on the order of battle of the warships and the number of large commercial vessels in the Bosphorus. He also submitted a remarkably detailed map of the Ottoman mine field guarding the straits, which he obtained from clandestine sources.

McCauley sought to report on German activities after the arrival of the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, both by observing the activities of German military officers throughout the city, as well as by forming an informal liaison relationship with senior German officials. Noting the near complete takeover of naval leadership by German officers, McCauley in an October 1914 dispatch pointed out that the, "Germans were doing everything possible to embroil the Turks in the war," and that "the Turks will likely be forced into the war at any time."¹¹

By November, it gradually became clearer to the crew of the USS *Scorpion* that the Porte was going to join the war as Entente diplomatic missions begin to evacuate and Ottoman troops begin deploying heavy equipment throughout the empire. Bucknam Pasha, an American serving as a vice-admiral in the Ottoman Navy in charge of procurement, informed McCauley of their extreme displeasure at the British for their seizure of two dreadnoughts under construction for the Ottoman Navy. Using an informant, McCauley reported back to Washington that he had learned that the movement of Ottoman Navy ships in late October for target practice exercises in the Black Sea was in fact to be a pre-emptive strike against the Russian port of Sevastopol.

¹⁰Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 65

¹¹ USS *Scorpion* to Office of Naval Intelligence, October 9, 1914

Highlighting the limits of the *Scorpion*'s intelligence operation, McCauley informed Washington in December that the only information he could obtain on the Ottoman naval raid came from multiple conflicting newspaper sources from Romania, visual observation of the *Goeben* under repairs and conversations with German sailors about the town. Tracking the ex-*Goeben* and *Breslau* was a top concern for the *Scorpion* for the duration of the war and the crew reported the movements and activities of both ships on an almost monthly basis.

Lieutenant Stewart Bryant, one of the officers aboard the *Scorpion* stated that the "relations between the Germans and the Americans were at first pleasant enough."¹² In February 1915, the crew of the *Scorpion* asked the crews of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* to join with them in dressing their ships in celebration of Washington's Birthday. The *Goeben* sent a steamer several miles down the Golden Horn to obtain an American flag to join in the celebrations. The Germans held a reception for the American sailors on board the *Breslau*, toasting "Der Tag," an allusion to the day when the Germans believed the United States and Germany would fight against Japan together. This bit of propaganda was spread widely by German government officials of all sorts in Constantinople.¹³ Any social outing with the Germans would as a matter of rule include copious drinking and Bryant stated of one social call to a German hospital ship that "wine was so plentiful that its amount almost made one suspicious."¹⁴ These peer relationships were rare moments of relaxation for the men in wartime but were also an elicitation tool used to acquire intelligence on the conduct of the war. Nevertheless, Bryant's opinions of the Germans were extremely positive. He had great respect for the captain of the *Breslau*.

¹² Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 6

¹³ *Ibid*, 7

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 73

McCauley reported that Constantinople felt increasingly like a city under siege. Diplomatic representatives were evacuated from the city and in February the crew reported that they could hear the allies bombarding the Dardanelles.¹⁵ Sailors from the *Scorpion* provided security for the evacuating European diplomatic missions and Ambassador Morgenthau even supplied the children from the other missions with liberal supplies of candy.¹⁶ This effort was not without reward as the Americans were allowed to take over the much nicer former British club and make it their new Scorpion Club. The removal of many diplomatic representatives, as well as the apparent unwillingness of US Ambassador Morgenthau to share information gleaned from his activities with the crew of the USS *Scorpion* or the Navy and War Departments made the *Scorpion*'s position more important than ever. Furthermore, the *Scorpion*'s relationships with officials of both the Entente and Central Powers allowed the crew to report a fuller picture of the situation in Constantinople back to Washington.

A new skipper, Lieutenant Commander William Bricker, relieved McCauley on 16 March 1915, only to drown in a dinghy accident a mere four days later.¹⁷ The crew struggled to rescue the men, saving Lieutenant Babbitt and some others, but Bricker never regained consciousness. The sailors were buried at the British Crimean War Cemetery and delegations from the German, Austrian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Greek legations attended. Bryant noted that the largest wreath for the fallen *Scorpion* crewman came from the German embassy.¹⁸

In April, Babbitt reported that massive quantities of troops and materiel were building up in and around Constantinople, ostensibly to throw back the allied invasion of the Dardanelles.

¹⁵ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, February 25, 1915

¹⁶ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 9

¹⁷ New York Times, March 23, 1915

¹⁸ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 15

Babbitt also struggled to find out more about the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the French battleship *Bouvet* and other British warships during the initial naval assault of the straits, reporting that several non-military persons claimed that it was sunk by small caliber Turkish coastal batteries, as opposed the robust minefield the Ottoman Navy deployed since January.¹⁹ Eyewitness reports of operations around the Dardanelles became more scarce as the Ottomans ordered a series of evacuations from the resort towns dotting the straits. Babbitt managed to secure an inspection of one such resort town along with the US Ambassador He reported that the Ottomans were evacuating not because they were building defensive fortifications, as they claimed, but as a result of Turkish paranoia over potential Greek fifth columnists using radio transmissions to report on Turkish movements. Ambassador Morgenthau assumed an even baser motive claiming that local security forces merely wanted an opportunity to loot the property of resident Greeks.²⁰ In another incident reported to Babbitt, Italian sailors who had formerly served on the Italian station ship attempted to return to Italy via Romania, but were held up and able to witness one of the almost fortnightly Russian bombardments of the Bosphorus.

A replacement commanding officer, Lt. Cmdr. James Morton, also arrived in May as the situation heated up. The *Scorpion*'s Turkish contacts were reporting increasing anxiety among Turkish officials, as well as fears among Constantinople's German community that the Ottoman Empire could not survive another year.²¹ Neutrality was also becoming a rarer commodity as allied citizens fell under increasing pressure; it was up to the United States and the *Scorpion* to often act in the role of protecting power. Turkish officials rounded up fifty notable British and French nationals, as well as an official from the US Embassy and two American reporters, to use

¹⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, April 5 1915

²⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, April 12, 1915

²¹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, April 25, 1915

as human shields to protect potential landing sites in the Dardanelles from allied naval bombardment.²² The Gallipoli campaign also made the *Scorpion*'s operations more dangerous. In late May, a British submarine surfaced a mere 300 yards from the *Scorpion* and sunk a Turkish transport. The *Scorpion* achieved a record in getting up its steam during this close call.

Bryant observed Turkish naval officers scouring the waters near the city in small boats armed with rifles in the hope of getting a shot off at the allied submarine's periscope.²³ The *Scorpion* shifted anchorages the following week and a civilian working with allied intelligence informed the *Scorpion*'s paymaster on the street that they were sorry for the close call and that their change in anchorage was noted.²⁴ This did not impede the ability of the *Scorpion*'s source network to report on conditions around the Turkish coastal defenses. In late May, it was already clear to Morton that the allied position on the beaches was hopeless as the Turkish coastal defense artillery remained totally intact and that the wide angle of elevation of Turkish battleships allowed them to even commit naval artillery to fire against allied ships over the peninsula to the battle.²⁵

The *Scorpion* moved from the Golden Horn to a small Greek village of Arnavutkoy between Constantinople proper and Therapia where the Ambassador's summer residence was located. Despite the backwash that "scented the neighboring atmosphere of the ship with the odor of decaying carcasses of every known domestic animal," the crew of the *Scorpion* found their summer there full of both leisure and a new sort of political intrigue. Several of the sailors aboard the ship became smitten with ladies from the village and an "amateur spy" hoped that by

²² USS *Scorpion* to ONI, 10 May 1915

²³ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 25

²⁴ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, May 31, 1915

²⁵ *Ibid.*

following around one of the sailors while on a date he could overhear something of interest to sell the Ottoman police. When discovered, the erstwhile spy lunged at an American sailor with a knife, but was knocked out with “one American punch,” much to the chagrin of Lt. Cmdr. Morton who was presented with multiple bills for medical care the following day. After Morton refused to pay, the village men hereafter kept a “respectable distance” from American sailors and the belligerent sailor was confined to the *Scorpion* for a few weeks.

Ottoman officials peddled in absurd rumors that the *Scorpion* was clandestinely supplying British submarines in the Bosphorus and started implementing mandatory inspections of all visitors to the ship. Despite some of the obvious counterintelligence problems with this scheme, it was more nuisance than anything else as none of the rumors were true. Turkish secret police officers went so far as to deny one of the *Scorpion*’s officers access to his own wife. Eventually a deal was worked out between the US Embassy and the Turkish government that specific passes would be issued to regular visitors to the ship and their movements recorded. The Turkish secret police also set up a nightly boat patrol to circle the *Scorpion* and attempt to eavesdrop near portholes on any expression on the potential future of American foreign policy.²⁶

On one occasion, the crew of the *Scorpion*, the rest of the American colony of the city, and British citizens under American protection gathered for the Fourth of July holiday on board the ship. An Englishman read the Declaration of Independence and Ambassador Morgenthau started a spontaneous swimming race around the ship. By the end of the summer of 1915, the *Scorpion* was called back to a berth on the Golden Horn by the Ottoman government. The days of leisure were over.²⁷

²⁶ Bryant, “Tale of the Scorpion,” 36-43

²⁷ Bryant, “Tale of the Scorpion,” 40

The *Scorpion*'s new berth was next to the drainage pipe of Constantinople's largest slaughterhouse though the locals swam there with alarming regularity. It also placed the *Scorpion* near a critical bridge in the city that afforded the crew many more opportunities to observe much of intelligence.²⁸ With Constantinople's public buildings filling to the brim with wounded from the fighting in Gallipoli, Morton observed the increasingly sorry state of Turkish conscripts being brought into the city from all corners of the empire. Increasing numbers of Germans, too, were moving into Constantinople, assuming more and more authority over the Ottoman war effort.

Increasingly, the *Scorpion*'s crew found its activities curtailed as any man not wearing the fez, the traditional Ottoman headgear, were prevented from accessing seaside areas where ship observation was easily done, interrupting regular updates on the Turkish naval order of battle. On multiple occasions, allied submarines breached the ever increasing mine and net barriers to sink merchant shipping within the city's waters. Ottoman countermeasures once inside the maritime fortress were more laughable with the *Scorpion*'s crew reporting that Turkish police officers would regularly fire their service revolvers at moving objects in the water, often porpoises or random pieces of detritus, and that the most sophisticated antisubmarine activity were unarmed conscripts standing ready to drop canvas bags full of hand grenades into the water.²⁹

²⁸ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 43

²⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 31, 1915

Morton himself witnessed the horror of an allied submarine attack when a lighter carrying ammunition detonated spectacularly after being hit by a torpedo one July afternoon.³⁰ The crew had acquired a number of binoculars and looking glasses to join in the periscope hunting that seemed to become a popular paranoia in Constantinople. One morning the entire crew rushed to the forecastle to spot an allied submarine, and Ottoman newspapers subsequently published a general order forbidding the ownership of all binoculars by any persons in the city or ships docked in the city. Morton ordered the binoculars locked up until the Ottoman paranoia subsided.³¹ To further discourage Ottoman suspicion and preserve American neutrality, Morton ordered the radio outfit aboard the ship closed, as Ottoman sweeps had allegedly found a cell of Armenians communicating via radio with allied submarines.³² The crew could regularly observe the passage of city notables, new recruits, POWs, and hunger-driven suicides across the nearby bridge. Also in sight was the drydock of the *Breslau*, which made it much easier to report on its operations.³³

Another preoccupation for the *Scorpion*'s intelligence effort was seeking information on Russian operations along the Turkish coast in the Black Sea. Besides the obvious military intelligence value, one of the primary consequences of ongoing tit for tat raiding between Russian and Ottoman forces in the Black Sea was the persistent insecurity of coal shipments bound for the capital. By mid-1915, coal was an increasingly rare commodity, especially high-quality Welsh coal. The *Scorpion* could store about 180 tons of coal and had an operational reserve of Welsh coal of about 120 tons in the event the ship might have to escape on a long

³⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 26, 1915

³¹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 31, 1915

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 50

distance cruise; the other sixty tons or so consisted of incredibly unreliable Turkish coal, normally in dust form.³⁴

The crew reported on the increasingly severe restrictions on large private stocks of coal and the ship's own struggle to obtain a reliable fuel source to conduct even the most basic naval movements from anchorage to anchorage. Russian naval units patrolling along the Northern Anatolian coast were a persistent scourge of Ottoman efforts to ensure coal supply lines. Intermittent shortages were a perennial problem. The *Scorpion* often contracted with local middlemen in Constantinople at outrageous prices just to keep the ship's power plant working. Small artisanal mines sprouted up within the vicinity of the city to take advantage of the high prices. Morton, during his trip to the Dardanelles, was able to tour one such handicraft coal mine and was unimpressed by its efficiency.³⁵

German naval contacts of the *Scorpion* thought the inability of Russia to stop the transit of coal along the coast was indicative of the deep incompetence of the Russian Navy.³⁶ The coal market was also rife with theft and corruption. Coal barges were often bribed into delivering their shipments to private customers rather than mandated government customers.³⁷ The crew of the *Scorpion* had to weigh every basket of coal brought on to the ship from private merchants as they would often water down the coal if the crew did not keep an attentive watch during the coaling process. The *Scorpion*'s crew had also discovered several coal lighters with secondary pockets on the side where coal would be hidden during the coaling process. The crew would

³⁴ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 36

³⁵ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 1, 1915

³⁶ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 25, 1915

³⁷ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 37

often wait until the lighters pulled away and began emptying the pockets before a few of the larger sailors were sent out to relieve the thieves of their haul.³⁸

By late 1915, the imminent defeat of the allied invasion at Gallipoli, coupled with German and Austrian successes in Serbia allowing an uninterrupted rail connection throughout the Central Power, buoyed the mood of Turkish population. In October, Morton was finally able to secure a tour of the Ottoman lines in the Dardanelles, accompanied by a senior officer from the *Breslau*. During the journey down the peninsula on an Ottoman torpedo boat, Morton observed the hulks of several merchant ships and a British submarine, *E-15*, that was unfortunate enough to find itself caught in the net defenses, peeking from the shallows of the strait. Earlier in 1915, Morton had received specific technical details of the submarine net from a reliable source, and now having passed through several of the locations detailed in that report, he was certain of its accuracy.³⁹

The formidable net defenses allowed the Ottomans to effectively secure the Sea of Marmara from the submarine threat by late November. The net forced a French submarine, the *Turquoise*, aground where it was captured by a detachment of Ottoman troops. Morton learned from another German officer that documents found aboard her allowed the Turks to locate a British submarine, the *E-20*, during a scheduled rendezvous, which they torpedoed while some of the men were on deck swimming. The crew of the *Scorpion* observed Turkish steamers laying new submarine nets on a near daily basis, hoping to capture what the Ottomans believed was the last known submarine in the Sea of Marmara.⁴⁰ By January 1916, one of Morton's contacts at the German embassy who had previously served on the German station ship prior to the war

³⁸ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 38

³⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 1, 1915

⁴⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, December 6, 1915

intimated that the Marmara was probably free of submarines given the withdrawal of allied force at Gallipoli.⁴¹

The peculiar quirks of the new command arrangements were evident to Morton when traveling on a torpedo boat en route to the Dardanelles. The boat had both a German and an Ottoman captain, with the Ottoman captain operating as the equivalent of an executive officer. Enver Pasha ordered that German naval officers take official precedence over Turkish ones, irrespective of rank, much to the annoyance of often far more senior Ottoman naval officers who by seniority should have been in command. This was probably for the best as Morton described the average Turkish officer as “not smart” with “lamentable” seamanship in addition to being “too old” and lacking zeal.⁴² He also pointed out that peculiarly all official communication on Ottoman Navy ships happen in English, as most Ottoman Navy officers understood English from the Porte’s previous training relationship with the United Kingdom. It appeared to Morton that the Turks were all too ready to allow the Germans to do the hard thinking and that the same was true for Turkish army officers. During his time with the German officers, Morton was impressed by the nightly Socratic seminars on topics of military interest that developed in the mess, seemingly organically, and hoped that a similar environment of open dialogue would be adopted by the US Navy. Morton’s travel mate from the *Breslau* was also a ready source of war stories on Ottoman operations in the Black Sea.

The peninsula was very much an active warzone during Morton’s trip, and he was able to send back to Washington a sketch of allied and Ottoman lines along the peninsula. He personally observed the effectiveness of a French air attack as well as persistent high angle fire from British

⁴¹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 19, 1916

⁴² USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 1, 1915

monitors. The ineffectiveness of low angle fire from battleship guns was on full display as Morton counted something like eighty holes in an embankment in front of an Ottoman battery, none of which were able to neutralize the gun. In a discussion with naval gunnery officers on board the two Ottoman battleships providing fire support, Morton was impressed by the Ottoman fire control system, which used on shore telegraph communications and heliostats to coordinate fire on the other side of the peninsula.⁴³ Excited by the seeming effectiveness of the Ottoman and German navy's control of coastal defense in the Dardanelles rather than the army, Morton argued in his dispatches that the "advantages appear to be overwhelming" of Navy control of coastal defense and that "further study of its merits have been justified by the events of the past year."⁴⁴

By the end of 1915, the Ottomans had defeated the ill-fated allied effort at Gallipoli. In late December, Lieutenant Babbitt, the executive officer of the *Scorpion*, secured his own trip to the waning Gallipoli front along with Ambassador Morgenthau's son using his network of Turkish contacts. The Germans did not receive him with the niceties given to Morton probably because Babbitt's Turkish language skills allowed him to glean additional information and develop a rapport with his Ottoman contacts, upsetting the carefully curated image that the Germans probably showed to Morton.⁴⁵

Despite the cold reception received from Field Marshall Liman von Sanders' staff at Turkish headquarters, Babbitt made careful notes on several operational maps displayed at the HQ and asked the Turkish officers joining him on the trip about the most recent developments on the front. Field Marshall Sanders did provide a briefing about the allied withdrawal to Babbitt and Morgenthau, crediting a recent fog for helping the allies to withdraw around seven divisions

⁴³USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 1, 1915

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 4, 1916

in two days essentially undetected. Sanders also remarked that dysentery likely killed more British than battle wounds. Babbitt noted the great quantities of wine and beer consumed in the mess at Sanders' headquarters and was surprised that there seemed to be no drunkenness despite the enormous amounts consumed.⁴⁶ From there, Babbitt toured about four kilometers of abandoned British positions, taking detailed notes of the detritus of military value left by allied force, drawing diagrams of numerous allied grenade designs and the layout of the Australian trenches. Babbitt finished the trip with a walk around ANZAC cove, where the precarious position of the landing forces was noted. During a visit of several officers from the *Scorpion* to a German hospital ship, there was some mild consternation from injured German soldiers over American steel being used for British munitions. On a visit to Gallipoli, the American military attaché was caught in a shell blast and afterwards picked up a fragment of the munitions stamped "Bethlehem Steel." He tossed it abruptly to the side before his Ottoman minders could notice.⁴⁷

Ottoman confidence at the start of the new year allowed the lighthouses around the Sea of Marmara to reopen and the relief of the immediate threats to Constantinople allowed the crew of the *Scorpion* to collect intelligence more freely than the previous year. However, the Ottoman war effort was going anything but smoothly. In late January, Morton secured his own interview with Field Marshall von Sanders who spoke highly of the Australian fighting spirit and detailed the conditions that Turkish and German forces observed on the now empty evacuation beach at Seddul Bahr. Sanders intimated that the amount of booty seized had been immense, including over seventy ships and a fine yacht. Furthermore, the Germans were withdrawing forces from the Peninsula and moving their headquarters closer to the Greek frontier.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in February a

⁴⁶USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 11, 1916

⁴⁷ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 72

⁴⁸ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 25, 1916

Turkish officer informed Morton of the incredibly poor conditions for Ottoman soldiers on the Caucasus front, such as the complete lack of cold weather clothing and mortality rates due to typhus at above ninety percent.⁴⁹ Also noted by the crew were the empire's manpower problems, as increasing numbers of Arabs were brought from the interior and numerous contacts of the ship were called up for service as the conscription exemption fee of about 40 Turkish pounds was retroactively limited to only 18 months.⁵⁰

The crew of the *Scorpion* also took great interest in the plans and intentions of the Bulgarian and Romanian governments, acquiring newspapers from both countries and receiving rumors from the commercial ship traffic in the region. The two previous Balkan Wars before World War I left great enmity over the territorial arrangement between the newly independent Balkan states, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire. In early 1916, Morton travelled to Sofia and Bucharest, where the US military had no permanent representation, to gather information on the likely trajectory of Bulgarian and Romanian involvement.

First, Morton went to the Bulgarian capital. It was readily apparent that Germans civilians and soldiers were everywhere, and that Berlin had begun to fully enmesh itself within the Bulgarian government. He was denied a room at the largest hotel in Sofia because he was not German or Austrian. Morton noted that the U.S. charge had essentially become persona non gratia and that the Bulgarians viewed himself with deep suspicion. Bulgarian military orders included qualifiers signaling that orders were valid only if German headquarters assented and the German General Staff occupied the largest office building in town. In response to a request to visit the front with the Bulgarian Army. Morton was quickly rebuffed by German influence.

⁴⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, February 7, 1916

⁵⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, March 20, 1916

Morton slowly came to the realization that the Germans believed war with America was likely inevitable, citing it as the sole topic of conversation in most of his interactions and the downright cold attitude in which he was received by German officers he did not know previously in Constantinople. The militarization of Bulgarian society seemed total as virtually all military aged males were in uniform and all places of amusement closed promptly at 8 PM. Morton was also able to speak with a few British and French POWs captured during Bulgaria's operations on the Salonica front.

Romania was a different story and his reception there was much more cordial. Morton had a lengthy discussion with a pro-Entente Romanian politician who laid out the argument in detail for why Romania was likely to join the Entente. The Romanian Army brought Morton to a few field exercises and he learned a great deal about the deplorable supply situation that a likely besieged Romania would suffer when it entered the war. On a tour of the port of Constanta, it was evident that Romania's oil wealth would be a critical factor for the alliance that controlled it. Trade was still open between Romania and Constantinople and a standard operating procedure developed to evade periodic Russian sweeps for Constantinopolitan-bound traffic along the coast. The Central Powers even laid a screen of mines protecting the coastal route from Russian naval interference.⁵¹ On his return train ride home, Morton observed a formidable trench network being developed along Romania's southern border, suggesting which way Bucharest would go.⁵²

The Turkish paranoia over its Christian subject peoples was also evident to the crew of the *Scorpion*. Constantinople was the most cosmopolitan city in the empire with about half of the population from the empire's Armenian and Greek communities. Ottoman officials ascribed

⁵¹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, May 25, 1916

⁵² USS *Scorpion* to ONI, February 23, 1916

various acts of sabotage to both communities and there were persistent fears that they belonged to an intelligence network that was aiding allied naval efforts in the Sea of Marmara. The crew of the *Scorpion* witnessed several public executions for such acts of sabotage and espionage. One such procession of twenty three condemned Armenians and Greeks passed by the *Scorpion*'s berth en route to three separate execution areas so that more of the city could witness the slayings.⁵³ The condemned were hanged and left to "sway in the breeze from dawn till noon."⁵⁴

The Ottoman government made periodic sweeps of Greek and Armenian neighborhoods to seize civilian-owned firearms, and dozens of Greeks and Armenians would be charged with treason in the wake of these sweeps.⁵⁵ It was unclear to officers of the ship just how valid these concerns were or whether they were merely pretext to seize personal property and real estate for personal and public purposes. German and Austrian officers and technicians were housed in former Greek and Armenian properties that were seized because of ostensible illegal acts against the Ottoman state.⁵⁶ Morton noted that his Greek and Armenian contacts were becoming increasingly reticent to talk about any topic related to the war or the government by 1916. Even Christians from third countries were under threat. On one occasion, the *Scorpion* assisted in the transport and evacuation of an entire convent whose facilities were seized by the Turkish authorities for military purposes.⁵⁷

By late 1915, the trickle of allied POWs into Constantinople became a deluge and the crew of the *Scorpion* sought to use its role as a de facto protecting power to investigate their treatment and glean what intelligence information they could. Entente POWs were a crucial

⁵³ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 3, 1916

⁵⁴ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 64

⁵⁵ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, March 20, 1916

⁵⁶ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, March 20, 1916

⁵⁷ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 12

information source and the *Scorpion* used its role as a neutral party to corroborate POW conditions. While most British POWs were held in the interior of Asia Minor, they were occasionally given liberty in Constantinople. British officers often lived in leisure while in captivity with postal access back home that afforded cricket uniforms and tennis equipment.⁵⁸ In November, the crew of the British submarine sunk in the Dardanelles, *E-15*, was brought to the city for a week with an English-speaking Turkish officer and officers with the *Scorpion* were able to secure an interview.⁵⁹ In January 1916, Morton observed Muslim prisoners from the Russian Army captured on the Galacian front at Yildiz Mosque, finely clothed, and a German officer contact told Morton that the prisoners had been given an audience with the Ottoman Sultan. The Sultan also held the title of Caliph, professed leader of all Muslims, and the Ottomans probably hoped to build goodwill among Muslim subject populations within the Entente powers.⁶⁰

Bryant recalled a separate strange incident where a captured Cossack POW was in fact a woman and the ladies of the US Embassy were called upon to help clothe the female soldier.⁶¹ General Charles Townsend, who commanded British forces during his capture at the ill-fated Siege of Kut in late April, was housed on one of the Prince's Islands in the Sea of Marmara, but given free reign of the city.⁶² He became a close contact of the crew of the *Scorpion* and the darling of the Turkish press. He passed a lengthy denunciation of the British High Command to Morton and Babbitt, finding them entirely to blame for his capture at Kut. One of the *Scorpion's* oilers who had command of several Balkan languages escorted, in addition to his wife and

⁵⁸ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 45

⁵⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 9, 1915

⁶⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, January 25, 1916

⁶¹ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 64

⁶² USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 3, 1916

children, a blinded British POW through Bulgarian lines to Salonika after receiving special approval from the Ottoman War Ministry.⁶³

The *Scorpion* used its robust foreign language capability aboard the ship to forward all manner of open source information of interest back to Washington. Translations of Ottoman newspaper articles were a regular staple of the monthly package of dispatches. Morton secured additional funding from Washington to hire a full-time translator for this purpose.⁶⁴ Often these would be impossible to access for an interested American policy audience through any other means. The *Scorpion* provided summaries of the Turkish Naval Annual and the vessel sent back newspaper snippets on all manner of political and military topics. By 1916, Morton assessed that the Turkish newspapers were so firmly censored that they were carefully curated to extol only the virtues of the Central Powers. The powers that be in Constantinople wanted to prepare a view of America that was “divided in its policies, incapable, and generally negligible in its strength.”⁶⁵ Morton feared that this would be a major hurdle to the ship’s ongoing public diplomacy and intelligence effort. Of particular interest to Ottoman newspapers were updates on the deteriorating relations between the US and Mexico and President Wilson was openly derided as a friend of the Entente.⁶⁶ The strict control over the press also made the city’s coffee houses a lively center for all kinds of unofficial news, some true, some bombastic.

As the social order in the Ottoman Empire frayed under the pressures of the war, increasing numbers of American missionaries and physicians came into the capital from the hinterlands along with throngs of refugees. By 1916, the Sublime Porte began requisitioning

⁶³ Bryant, “Tale of the Scorpion,” 94

⁶⁴ Bureau of Operations to USS *Scorpion*, February 9, 1916

⁶⁵ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, May 11, 1916

⁶⁶ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 2, 1916

American-owned property for use as field hospitals and barracks.⁶⁷ Private American citizens were invited to dine with the crew of the ship and share their observations on the conduct of the war outside of the city. Even in Constantinople, the poor still suffered. Near the *Scorpion's* Golden Horn berth was a bread distribution point and Bryant shared an incident where a Turkish guard began beating an old woman who had become mad with hunger. The guard's German overseer arrived and beat the man so seriously for his infraction that he had to be hospitalized.⁶⁸ While food remained plentiful albeit expensive in Constantinople during the war, the fleeing Americans painted a much more dire picture in the hinterlands. In 1916, one American agricultural expert coming from Syria who dined with the *Scorpion's* crew estimated that over 50,000 Ottoman subjects had already starved in Syria and that the centralized food distribution system managed by the government was systematically malnourishing the countryside.⁶⁹ An American fleeing Smyrna reported to the *Scorpion's* crew a daring nighttime transfer of large artillery guns by the Ottoman and German armies in order to bombard the British garrison on an island off the coast.⁷⁰

By the summer of 1916, it was evident that a sense of pessimism was falling over the Ottoman war effort. Morton had received numerous reports of Turkish officers being imprisoned in Constantinople for open insubordination of German officers and that German and Turkish officers no longer saluted each other in public.⁷¹ Tensions flared between Germany and Austria too. A neutral military attaché told Morton of another incident where a German officer came into a small café in the city and began taunting an Austrian officer for his country's poor performance

⁶⁷ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, May 11, 1916

⁶⁸ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 44

⁶⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 22, 1916

⁷⁰ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, September 16, 1916

⁷¹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 22, 1916

during the Brusilov Offensive. The Austrian officer then drew his pistol and killed the German officer.⁷² The crew of the *Scorpion* reported greatly reduced numbers of Austrian and German soldiers in Constantinople as manpower needs grew more acute elsewhere for the Central Powers.⁷³ Ottoman naval officers successfully resisted an attempt by the German Navy to appoint all of the key admiralty positions to German officers.⁷⁴ Ottoman authorities rounded up all of the prostitutes who were nationals of the Entente powers in Constantinople much to the chagrin of the sailors of the *Scorpion*, as well as emptied the jails of various undesirables from combatant nations, and sent them to Bulgaria on a steamer that ran aground en route.⁷⁵ One of Morton's sources told him that he believed Romania would soon enter the war on the Entente side with frenetic activity on Romania's southern border and intimated that the Bulgarian government requested Turkish troops to bolster their own defenses.⁷⁶ By early August, the Ottoman government ordered an end to trade between Constantinople and Constanta.

On a tour of the Ottoman positions on the European side of the empire, Morton reported greatly reduced troop levels and he believed many of the troops defending the capital from this side were moved to fight in the Caucasus and in Palestine. Furthermore, the Turkish War Ministry began transferring the first batch of 1500 officers from the Ottoman Navy to the Army to boost its crumbling officer corps.⁷⁷ The Ottomans finally suspended the law that allowed citizens to pay a fee to defer military service, calling up an additional 150,000 troops, highlighting the increasingly dire manpower situation.⁷⁸ By October, the Ottomans resorted to

⁷² USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 7, 1916

⁷³ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 7, 1916

⁷⁴ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, October 14, 1916

⁷⁵ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, July 22, 1916

⁷⁶ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 7, 1916

⁷⁷ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, August 22, 1916

⁷⁸ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, September 16, 1916

calling up 16 year olds and men over 50. Morton reported that some men were so weak and sick to even require assistance marching.⁷⁹ Even women were now being pressed into service with mandatory agricultural work.

The deteriorating situation in the city, especially with the spread of typhus and cholera, necessitated the transfer of half of the crew of the *Scorpion* to the dormitories at Roberts College for the summer of 1916, which was near where the *Scorpion* berthed the previous summer. A skeleton crew was kept on the ship down on the Golden Horn and another detachment was sent to live at and guard the U.S. Embassy grounds. The sailors were sent in small groups over the course of three days and arranged to have their supplies clandestinely moved given the level of tension in the city. Since many of the students, who hailed from states all over the Balkans, had gone home as the war got into full swing, the condition of the dormitory was deplorable.

The sailors organized a massive effort to rid the entire building of parasites, as well as scrub the living areas to naval standards. To keep the men occupied, the petty officers aboard the *Scorpion* also developed a curriculum of seventeen different courses informally dubbed “Scorpion University.” Even so, bar fights between American and German enlisted sailors became more than a regular occurrence and the need for distraction was paramount. The sailors used their daily athletic regimen, including hikes of the hills behind the college, to record the movements of Ottoman troops and material around the region as well as the activities of the *Goeben* and *Breslau* which were moved to a cove about a mile upstream from the college.⁸⁰

By the end of 1916, the *Scorpion*’s intelligence work in Constantinople became even more dangerous. Morton reported that any discussion of military matters, even in diplomatic

⁷⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, October 3, 1916

⁸⁰ Bryant, “Tale of the Scorpion,” 77-86

circles, was more difficult. Reports of secret arrests, executions, and home searches in the middle of the night were prevalent and greatly curtailed the *Scorpion's* ability to collect intelligence. In September, while attempting to get back the United States, Bryant was stopped at the Bulgarian frontier, his documents seized, including a confidential copy of US naval gunnery instructions.⁸¹ Only after a strongly worded diplomatic demarche from the Secretary of State was the Embassy able to get his personal affects back, which included confidential government papers. For his carelessness, Bryant was demoted.⁸² To further add to the stress level of the crew, an ammunition mishandling accident resulted in an explosion that injured four sailors, two seriously, in August.⁸³ The *Scorpion* managed to get out of port for a forty-three-mile cruise to another port on the Sea of Marmara.

Almost immediately afterwards, the ship spent most of November in dry-dock where Morton noted the antiquated methods of the yard.⁸⁴ Around four tons of sea life was scraped from the bottom of the ship, much to the happiness of local Turkish fisherman.⁸⁵ The crew of the ship filled their times with ad hoc educational activities, such as historic walking tours with the ship's surgeon.⁸⁶ The increasing cost of most basic foodstuffs necessitated the purchase of a six month emergency food supply in case the crisis worsened. The sailors in this trying time also took it upon themselves to marry the local Greek women, a fact borne out in the next of kin registration list for the ship that shows marriages to women on multiple Greek islands and addresses within Constantinople.

⁸¹ CNO Benson to SecNav Daniels, September 6, 1916

⁸² Bryant's manuscript of the ship's activities, which was present in the *Scorpion's* file because he submitted it to the Department of the Navy for official review, in Constantinople forms an important part of the sourcing for this paper.

⁸³ Babbitt to Bureau of Navigation, September 29, 1916

⁸⁴ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, November 2, 1916

⁸⁵ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 96

⁸⁶ Bryant, "Tale of the Scorpion," 61

In March, Morton expressed his concern about preparing for America's potential entrance into the war. He pressed Ambassador Elkus, who took his post in February 1916, to work with the *Scorpion* on developing a plan for the eventual US entry into the war. At the very least, Morton wanted to disable the *Scorpion*, if not outright scuttle her to prevent her use by the enemy.⁸⁷ His primary concern was to establish a plan to evacuate most of the sailors so that they could be of use elsewhere when the war came. Elkus feared that any attempt to scuttle the ship would endanger the good relationship that the *Scorpion* had built thus far with Turkey, as well as potentially open other American interests, such as missionaries and schools, to reprisal. While the Turks had little interest in war with the United States, neither Morton nor Elkus thought Constantinople could withstand sustained pressure from Germany to declare war on the U.S. Given the heavy surveillance the ship was under, any out of the ordinary activity would almost certainly be identified by Turkish authorities.⁸⁸

The crew was operating somewhat in the dark. No mail had arrived to the *Scorpion* from the United States since February and Morton requested orders from Washington as to what actions to take in the event that hostilities commenced. Discussions with nationals from the belligerent countries in Constantinople correctly believed that the United States was about a week away from declaring war on Germany.⁸⁹ Instead, the only order to come from Washington instructed Morton to "use his discretion."⁹⁰ By mid-March, Morton led some of the crew to Switzerland, with plans to send out the rest in small detachments over time. The crew also hid the two suitcases containing several thousand pounds of gold previously used to buy supplies on

⁸⁷ Morton to US Ambassador, Constantinople, February 9, 1917

⁸⁸ Morton to Secretary of the Navy, March 2, 1917

⁸⁹ USS *Scorpion* to ONI, March 30, 1917

⁹⁰ Secretary of the Navy to Secretary of State, February 23, 1917

the local market with some friendly assets within the city.⁹¹ With American entry into the war against Germany on April 4, the *Scorpion*'s role changed from active observer to one of ensuring its own survival. Thanks to Lieutenant Babbitt's victory in the bridge game, the *Scorpion*'s crew was interned, but not taken as POWs on April 11, 1917. Ultimately, fifty-six men along with Babbitt, the ship's surgeon, and the paymaster were restricted from leaving and all were interned. Babbitt's close relationships with Turkish and some German officials would prove critical in ensuring the safety of the *Scorpion* and her crew in the coming year.

The crew was given a fair degree of liberty and could go on shore for short periods for exercise and visiting local family. In May, Babbitt sent a letter to Washington with for a plan to send all but twenty men home as part of the Embassy staff, but when the issue was broached by the Swedish legation to the Ottoman government the request was denied.⁹² With the explosion of the Haidar Pasha train station in November 1917, likely via sabotage, the crew's movements were severely restricted and their communications with the outside world were significantly constrained by Ottoman authorities.⁹³ To entertain the crew during the lengthy confinement, the officers developed a study program using the ship's set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* and taught translation skills in French, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, and German.⁹⁴ In early December, orders came that the crew would be shipped to Bursa, in direct violation of the deal between Taalat and Babbitt. After a strongly worded diplomatic protest to the Swedish legation, who was operating as protecting power for American interests, the order to move to the POW camp never came and the ship was moved to a berth near the Turkish admiralty for the duration of the war.

⁹¹ Babbitt to *All Hands*, January 1960

⁹² Secretary of State to Secretary of Navy, June 21, 1917

⁹³ Official Ship History, April 24, 1927

⁹⁴ Babbitt to *All Hands*, January 1960

On October 22, 1918, with the war winding down, the ship's request to resume normal operations was granted. The *Scorpion* quickly became a haven for British POWs released to fend for themselves in postwar Turkey. Within a few days of the Armistice, the *Scorpion* housed about fifty POWs and Babbitt worked with some of the other Americans still in Constantinople to secure the YMCA building for the hundreds more without housing.⁹⁵ With the arrival of armistice commissioners in November, the *Scorpion* provided allied officials with information on the positions of German ships, as well what was known about the resident German spy network, which included several pro-German Americans and Brits. The crew was finally relieved on December 16, 1918 with a new crew from the USS *Nahma*. Some Americans who had married locals stayed in Turkey remained there, but others took the quickest route home possible.⁹⁶ The ship was dry docked and this time twenty-eight tons of shrimp and mussels were scraped off her bottom.

It took Babbitt six months to make it home via a circuitous route through the Balkans. The Navy assumed he was dead and struck him from the Navy list. After returning home to Navy headquarters and proving he was very much still alive, he requested leave, which was denied. His detailer thought the six-month journey home was enough. Babbitt became one of Secretary of the Navy's Near East advisers and prepared a report on Turkey for President Wilson.⁹⁷ Babbitt lectured on Turkey at the Naval War College and retired a captain.

In the post-war period, citizens of Constantinople would ask "where are the American sailors?" as the crew of the *Scorpion* had become such a fixture of the life of the city.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁵ *Scorpion* to Secretary of the Navy, December 18, 1918

⁹⁶ Babbitt Letter to Time Magazine, November 9, 1936
Letter to *Our Navy*, April 1919

⁹⁷ FG Babbitt to *All Hands*, April 1960

⁹⁸ Draft Official Ship History from Babbitt

impact of the ship extended far beyond the walls of Constantinople to the new nations formed out of the husk of the Ottoman Empire. One of the warrant officers on the *Scorpion* went to a talk in Boston given by a man who hoped to represent Armenia at the Versailles Conference. The crew once sheltered the man at the Scorpion Club. In the middle of his speech, he stopped, singled out the warrant officer, and told the audience he saved his life.⁹⁹

An obsolete pleasure yacht turned warship, living on the local economy, in a den of spies like Constantinople was able to have an outsized impact. Intelligence provided by the *Scorpion* informed a nation that knew next to nothing about the region they were about to enmesh themselves. While the *Scorpion* became the flagship of the US Naval Detachment in Turkish Waters led by Admiral Mark Bristol in late January 1919, it was more for show than anything else. America's modern navy, built during the war, soon took up patrols in Turkish waters for the chaotic time to come. The *Scorpion* by then became merely a pleasure yacht for Admiral Bristol and his wife to support their diplomatic effort.¹⁰⁰ The *Scorpion* made it home to Philadelphia in 1927 as America increasingly withdrew from abroad. The ship was finally scrapped in 1929.

While the *Scorpion*'s deployment to Constantinople contained many firsts, lessons learned from the *Scorpion* extend to today. The ship's mission was truly expeditionary, embedding itself within the local culture, operating off the local economy with limited instructions from back home. Few efforts by the United States government in the modern day operate with a logistics tail as small as the *Scorpion*'s. Partly this is because very few places in the world are beyond the reach of the United States, but also because fears of clientitis and bad morale prompt decisionmakers to assign a strict rotational schedule to foreign deployed forces.

⁹⁹ Sherry to *All Hands*, January 1961

¹⁰⁰ Robert Shenk, *America's Black Sea Fleet: The US Navy Amidst War and Revolution 1919-1923*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017) Chapter 9

Only in the direst circumstances has the United States deployed forces with so little support, namely the initial insertions of CIA and military forces into Afghanistan in the days following the terrorist attacks of 11 September. Self-sustaining forces in large part vanished with the industrial demands of World War I, but as the *Scorpion* demonstrates, small units could provision themselves on the local economy, at a lower cost and with lower risk than a traditional logistics train. Furthermore, in keeping with the US Navy's long history of mission command, the *Scorpion* built these connections and gathered this intelligence with incredibly little guidance from Washington or even the Ambassador, challenging the current model of commander-driven intelligence requirements. The broad purview afforded to the crew of the *Scorpion* allowed them to gather critical intelligence that otherwise likely would not have been collected. Our current environment of near ubiquitous communications technologies and just-in-time global delivery stifles some of the benefits of expeditionary operations, which need to rely on creativity and economy of force for success.

Not since the strategic hamlet program of the Vietnam War have American military personnel embedded themselves so deeply in a local culture to build trusting, long-term relationships with the population. However, the *Scorpion* presents an alternate model of deeply embedded forces, especially for peace time. Often military and intelligence resources are surged to emergent crisis zones, outside of the CIA and the diplomatic community, extraordinarily little care is taken to a global coverage security mission. As great power competition is likely to grow more intense, the importance of deeply rooted security relationships will be critical to the long-term success of the United States, especially when conducted outside of the current US alliance framework. The *Scorpion* was not merely a traveler to Constantinople but rooted itself within the fabric of the city. The officers built up a contact network that reached into virtually every corner

of the diplomatic, military, and commercial communities. They spoke some of the local languages. Even the enlisted sailors were enmeshed in the culture enough to marry local women. These deep relationships build a trust that cannot be fully built by the current rotational tour system. Agencies such as USAID have even transitioned to make some of their tours as long as five years to build those deep local ties. Success in great power competition will hinge on who can demonstrate the greatest long-term commitment and this can only be achieved through deep, long-term ties.

Since great power competition is likely to be won by diplomacy and not force, the US Navy should revisit the station ship concept. In many ways, the evolution of the modern interagency has spread the *Scorpion*'s role over multiple offices now resident in an embassy. Attachés and rotational deployments are not enough to build close local relationships that could be key enablers in a future regional crisis. An attaché's contact pool is inherently narrowed through competition with the State Department, limiting the reach of the Department of Defense's relationships.

The captains of the *Scorpion*, while not the senior US military attaché, were able to have a much wider and more productive relationship with the Ottomans and other third countries by having more personnel with the requisite language skills and because the ship's ceremonial role allowed it more extensive contacts in the city. The mobility of the ship and size of the crew, in addition to its nightlife holdings like the Scorpion Club, also enhanced its ability to operate as a human intelligence platform. While short deployments may be better for morale, they fail to cultivate a sense of partnership with local contacts.

For the sailors of the *Scorpion*, Constantinople became home which allowed the sailors to forge bonds in a country of a vastly different cultural and religion scope. Yet the alien-ness of the

city also brought the crew of the *Scorpion* and other expatriate communities together, including with countries the US would eventually go to war against, giving the *Scorpion* rare direct access to intelligence on Germany. Long-term home porting of navy ships in areas emerging in importance to the global security architecture will likely derive many of the benefits for the current United States as it did in 1916.

Archival Resources

US National Archives, Old Navy, Record Group 45, Subject File 1900-1924, USS *Scorpion* File

US Naval War College Archives, Office of Naval Intelligence reports 1914-1918

Bureau of Naval Personnel, *All Hands* Magazine archives

Foreign Relations of the United States 1908, Published in 2012

Bibliography

Hooton, ER, *Prelude to the First World War: The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*. Croydon: Fonthill, 2014.

Horton, George, *The Blight of Asia: On the Systematic Extermination of Christian Populations in Asia*. 1924.

McMeekin, Sean, *The Ottoman Endgame: War Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015.

Morgenthau, Henry, *A Personal Account of the Armenian Genocide*, San Bernadino: Pantianos, 1918

Morris, Benny and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of its Christian Minorities 1894-1924*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019

Ozbek, Nadir "Defining the public sphere during the late Ottoman Empire: War, mass mobilization and the young Turk regime (1908–18)," *Middle Eastern Studies*. (2007): 795-809.

Rogan, Eugene, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.

Seligmann, Matthew "Keeping the Germans Out of the Straits: The Five Ottoman Dreadnought Thesis Reconsidered," *War in History*. 23, no. 1 (January 2016): 20–35.

Shenk, Robert and Sam Koktzoglou eds, *The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries: Naval Commanders Report and Protest Death Marches and Massacres in Turkey's Pontus Region, 1921-1922*. New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2019.

Shenk, Robert, *America's Black Sea Fleet: The US Navy Amidst War and Revolution 1919-1923*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017.

Sondhaus, Lawrence, *The Great War at Sea: A Naval History of the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Still, William, *American Sea Power and the Old World: The United States Navy in European and Near Eastern Waters, 1865-1917*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980.

Still, William, *Victory Without Peace: The United States Navy in European Waters 1919-1924*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018.

Ureneck, Lou, *The Great Fire: One American's Mission to Rescue the Victims of the 20th Century's First Genocide*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015.

Walther, Karine, "For God and Country: James Barton, the Ottoman Empire and Missionary Diplomacy during World War I." *First World War Studies*. 7 (1): 63–79.

Zürcher, Erik Jan, "Young Turk Governance in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War," *Middle Eastern Studies*. 55:6 (2019): 897-913.