

Robert Shenk 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: The University of New Orleans Press, 2020), 404pp,\$24.95

A lot has been written about the genocide of Greeks, Armenians and Christians in general both in the Ottoman Empire and its successor, the Republic of Turkey. Some of the most moving, independent and detailed accounts have come from American missionaries, journalists, and members of relief organizations (particularly the Near East Relief) operating in Asia Minor in the first quarter of the 20th century. Important is also the account of former US ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau. The editors of this volume present for the first time the war diaries of US naval commanders whose ships operated in the Black Sea until mid-1923. These records had been kept in the National Archives of the US. The foreword has been written by Admiral James Stavridis (USN, Ret.)

These records provide new accounts of the death marches of Greek women, children and men organized and carried out by Turkish forces and their agents. During these government organized death marches deportees were deprived of food and water, were robbed, killed and raped, while young women were taken as concubines and slaves. Men who survived the death marches ended in the so-called “labor battalions” only to die in the harsh conditions of the labor camps. Other men were rounded up and publicly hung after sham trials. The official war diaries of American naval commanders who served in the Black Sea, primarily out of the port of Samsun starting in 1921, supplement earlier accounts of journalists, missionaries and relief workers. The reports contain somber observations on the conditions in the Pontus region derived from their own observations and conversations these officers had with Turkish civilian and military leaders, American relief workers and American businessmen working in their area of operations.

US Admiral Mark Bristol was in charge of the American naval forces in the region and served as US “high commissioner” in Constantinople starting in 1919. His primary mission was the promotion and protection of American commercial interests throughout the Near East. He soon came to believe that the new Turkish nationalist authorities (Kemal Ataturk’s government) would provide the best support for American business interests. Concerned with the protection of American business interests and the fate of American relief and missionary personnel, he stayed in close contact with Ataturk’s government in Ankara. This was one of the reasons for stationing US warships in Samsun, Turkey’s largest port in the Black Sea. American officials in Constantinople regularly received and discussed reports of atrocities against Greeks and Armenians and made occasional protests to Turkish authorities. Unfortunately, Admiral Bristol’s instructions to his naval staff were to “remain neutral”. Bristol almost

became Ataturk's spokesman. Despite risks to their careers, many officers expressed their concern about the atrocities in their direct communications with Turkish officials. US naval officers were rarely allowed to venture out of Samsun. However they were able to observe the fires that destroyed near by Greek villages, observed minority round ups, and heard accounts from American relief workers and American tobacco company managers. Captain Leahy of the cruiser St. Louis even contemplated the use of force to protect minorities in Turkey. Under pressure, only once did Admiral Bristol sent a message to Ataturk on August 3, 1921 protesting the expulsion of women and children and the killing of innocent civilians while in military custody. Bristol expressed his concern about the "unfortunate impression" such actions created for the new Turkish government. In his response, the Turkish Foreign Minister dismissed these claims...

This latest volume is another valuable addition to the literature on Turkey and the treatment of its minorities. The forcible Greco-Turkish population exchange ended thousands of years of the Greek presence in Asia Minor. However, the mistreatment of the Christian minorities allowed to remain in Turkey after the population exchange continued as shown by the imposition of the "varlik"(the capital tax) on Greeks, Jews and Armenians at the height of WWII; by the government organized Istanbul pogrom of 1955, and the expulsion of Greeks from Istanbul in 1964. Turkey also systematically carried out the ethnic cleansing of occupied Cyprus following the 1974 invasion. Unfortunately, Admiral Bristol's legacy continues to define our response to Turkey's actions. John Foster Dulles attempted to attribute to 1955 pogrom to "Communists", while Cold War considerations were used to limit responses to the 1955 pogrom, the 1964 expulsions and the 1974 invasion of Cyprus. To this very day we are witnessing Washington's failure to respond to the on going violations of the sovereignty of Greece and Cyprus and to the well documented gross violations of human rights in occupied Cyprus.

Human rights and the rule of law continue to be subordinated to business and strategic interests much as Admiral Bristol ordered his naval commanders to do a century ago. The editors of this volume ought to be congratulated for bringing us these reports from the US National Archives.

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