

Alemdar Ship's Logs: An Ottoman Ship Hijacked to Trabzon for Service in the Turkish War of Independence

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Abstract: In January 1921, the Ottoman Navy ship 'Alemdar' was hijacked by a pro-Independence crew from Istanbul and taken first to Ereğli on the western Black Sea coast and then, nine months later, to Trabzon where the 'Alemdar' would serve a variety of critical roles in the Turkish War of Independence. Two of the ship's logs (June 1921-May 1922 and January 1923-November 1923), written in Ottoman Turkish, resided for nearly 90 years with the family of an 'Alemdar' captain. The activity recorded in the logs reflects both the daily, routine business of the ship and also the historic events that the ship and its crew participated in. Daily chores included weather readings and sea conditions, ship's maintenance and crew status. Among the various duties taken on by the 'Alemdar' were: transporting weapons and ammunition from Trabzon to Samsun and Amasra for use at the battle front by Mustafa Kemal's army; transporting weapons and ammunition from Bolshevik Russia back to Trabzon for onward delivery; salvaging disabled ships along the Black Sea coast; engaging in two sea battles with Greek Pontus rebels; transporting Moslem refugees from Batumi to Trabzon. The first log reflects the 'Alemdar's' escape from Ereğli to

Trabzon in October 1921, under constant pressure by the French Navy, in particular.

The second log ends in November 1923 with the return of the 'Alemdar' to the shipyard in the Golden Horn, Istanbul, under the control of the new Turkish Republic.

Keywords: Alemdar, Black Sea, Trabzon, Bolshevik

This source consists of two ship's logs, the first of which reflects the daily activities of the Alemdar between June 1921 and May 1922. After having been spirited away from British-occupied Istanbul in January 1921 by a crew loyal to the leader of the Turkish independence movement, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Alemdar remained in Ereğli on the western Black Sea coast for many months, effectively under the watch of the French navy, then in control of the area. When the first ship's log begins in late June 1921, the Alemdar is being readied for a daring escape from Ereğli to take up duties for the independence movement in Trabzon, in the eastern Black Sea region. However, French and Greek naval pressure kept the Alemdar stuck in Ereğli harbor until 24 October, at which time the crew used the cover of a fierce storm to escape to Trabzon.

Once at Trabzon, the Alemdar began ferrying arms and ammunition that had come from Bolshevik Russia to central Black Sea ports like Samsun and Inebolu, from where the material was transported overland to Ankara and onward to the front lines of the ongoing War of Independence, being fought further to the west in Anatolia. Besides this essential duty, though, unexpected missions for the Alemdar were reflected in the ship's log. For example, after delivering weapons and goods at Samsun, on 14 November the Alemdar took on '62 German and Bulgarian prisoners' who were transported to Trabzon and given over to the custody of military officers from the independence movement there.

Subsequent research has revealed that the Samsun office of the Turkish Red Crescent was involved in the repatriation of these World War I POW's, who had been held in French prison camps in north Africa during the war. Given that the war ended in November 1918, it is surprising that these German and Bulgarian prisoners would be still languishing on the north coast of Turkey three years later. Perhaps even more surprising was their transport to Trabzon aboard the *Alemdar*.

The 'Alemdar' was hijacked by Kemalists from Istanbul to Ereğli, near Zonguldak, in January 1921.

By the end of November 1921, the Alemdar was on its way to Russia for the first time. The destination was Novorossisk on the northeastern coast of the Black Sea and the Alemdar towed two motor gunboats behind it all the way there. The gunboats had been given to the Turkish independence movement by the Russian Bolsheviks but, in need of repair, they had to be returned to Novorossisk. Months later, these same two gunboats would capture a Greek vessel near Novorossisk and bring it back to Trabzon, where it was converted for use by the Independence Movement. The Alemdar remained in Novorossisk for four months, waiting to take on guns and ammunition from the Bolsheviks. Finally, in mid February 1922, the Alemdar returned to Trabzon with its precious cargo. Routine duty resumed along the Black Sea coast between Trabzon and Samsun but in April 1922 a new captain took charge of the ship, Mustafa Ercivelek. It was Captain Ercivelek who kept the two ship's logs safe and secure within his family for years. The logs were finally transcribed to modern Turkish from Ottoman in 2013-2014.

The Alemdar, up to this point a salvage and transport ship, was outfitted with cannons in May 1922 and essentially assumed the additional duties of a warship. Subsequent sea battles in the Black Sea with Greek rebels - in November 1922 with the Pontus Abacı Yanko gang near Samsun and again in May 1923 with the Sarı Yanni gang near

Trabzon-ended successfully for the Alemdar both times. In the first case, the event occurred during a period not covered by the source ship's logs. The second encounter, however, was well-documented in the ship's log, whose entries from the day in question-12 May 1923-reflect the high drama of the confrontation. Nevertheless, the next day, 13 May, the Alemdar was off on a new mission, this time sailing to Batumi to pick up Caucasus refugees for transport to Trabzon and points elsewhere in Turkey. At times, 300 to 400 refugees, their good and even their animals, were loaded onto the 50-meter long Alemdar for the trip to Trabzon.

The remaining months of the ship's log record reflect more trips to Russia to pick up arms and ammunition, continued arms-ferrying duty along the Turkish Black Sea coast, refugee transport missions and salvage operations. In October 1923, the crew of the Alemdar spent an enormous amount of effort to free the Şahin, a large transport ship that had run aground at Amasra. The mission ended unsuccessfully and the Alemdar then headed for Istanbul, by this time under the control of the new Turkish government of Mustafa Kemal. Fittingly, the Alemdar had returned to Istanbul, from where it had escaped nearly three years earlier.

Thanks to the Alemdar's ship's logs, the dramatic events that consumed the ship during the period covered can now be assessed more fully. In addition, the logs provide a rare glimpse into the fine points of Black Sea maritime activity at the time, reflecting day-to-day operations of the ship and the crew.

Herewith selected entries from the Alemdar ship's logs:

First Log (June 1921-May 1922)

29 June 1921: Turkish Naval Chief Şevket Bey arrives in Ereğli (departs 2 July).

25 July: argument between Engineer Osman, who high-jacked the Alemdar from Istanbul, and the newly-appointed naval Captain. Osman declares "Are we the prisoners of you soldiers? You come from outside and have the nerve to order us around!" Ereğli Naval Commander Hulusi Beycomes aboard and has Osman confined to the brig. Two days later Osman is released.

29 July: a French warship arrives in Ereğli to inspect the port.

31 July: reports: an enemy warship sighted 5 miles off shore Amasra, heading west. Two Greek torpedo boats at Zonguldak, heading west.

6 August: an Italian torpedo boat arrives in Ereğli from Zonguldak. Leaves after 5 hours.

17 August: report: the enemy bombarded Rize yesterday.

19 August: a Greek cruiser arrived in Ereğli, inspected and left after 1 hour.

27-30 August: upon a report that an enemy fleet made up of two transports, two torpedo boats and a gunboat were headed toward Ereğli from Kandilli, preparations are made to abandon the Alemdar. The enemy ships are sighted off Bababurnu at about 6 in the evening of 27 August, headed toward Akçaşehir (Akçakoca). The enemy ships returned to Ereğli on 28 August and the Turkish ship Demirtaş fired a shot and took refuge in the interior of the harbor. The Greek ship returned to Alaplı. On 29 August, the enemy ships continued to patrol the waters near Akçakoca, Alaplı and Bababurnu, at the head of Ereğli port. The enemy ships departed for the west on 30 August.

1 September: a French destroyer arrives at Ereğli and a French officer of lieutenant rank is sent to the Alemdar. The lieutenant demands to know why the Alemdar has changed its position in the harbor and whether the engine has been fired up or not. He then departs.

3 September: a telegraph received from Turkish authorities instructs the Alemdar to delay departure from Ereğli.

13 September: an official report is read to the crew about the enemy's retreat and the victory of the Turkish army (Battle of Sakarya).

19 September: a Greek 'Panter' torpedo boat coming from Akçakoca passes by Bababurnu and is fired upon by Turkish soldiers with rifles. The Greek boat turns around, fires four shots, one of which hits a hospital and another of which lands 40 meters from the Alemdar. No damage.

27 September: the captain of the French-flagged salvage ship 'Lotaz', Avni Efendi, is arrested for deserting the Turkish army. He jumps in the water to escape but is fished out and handed over to the army detachment.

2 October: Şakir of Sinop returns three months late to the Alemdar from leave and is slapped in chains. Şakir is given 50 blows with a rod in front of the officers but then released.

10 October: the Alemdar crew is made aware of regulations about exceeding leave from the 'İstiklalMahkemesi' (Independence Court) and the Naval Command.

Escape from Ereğli

13-22 October: Alemdar officers including ÂdilBey, Osman Efendi and 2nd Captain Ali Riza make repeated trips from the ship to the shore. Guns and ammunition and medicines are loaded onto the Alemdar.

23 October: order to delay departure.

24 October: Alemdar departs Ereğli at 1940 hours.

28 October: Alemdar arrives Trabzon at 1500 hours and remains there until 12 November.

12-13 November: Alemdar transports weapons and ammunition from Trabzon to Samsun.

14 November: 62 German and Bulgarian prisoners are boarded on the Alemdar and handed over to Turkish authorities in Trabzon on 16 November.

23-24 November: another transport mission from Trabzon to Samsun, where an American destroyer is anchored.

28 November: VIP's including Corvette Captain and Ereğli Naval Chief Hulusi, Batumi Representative Rıza, Novorossisk representative Münir and Corvette Captain Şerafeddin are transported from Samsun to Trabzon.

First Trip to Russia

6-7 December: Trabzon-Batumi voyage. The Alemdar is towing Nr. 1 and Nr. 2 motor gunboats to Novorossik for repairs. The captains of the gunboats, Sıdkı and Kenan come aboard the Alemdar drunk, cause trouble and are sent off.

11-17 December: Batumi-Tuapse-Novorossisk voyage.

23 December: at Novorossisk, the Alemdar log's pages are henceforth written to reflect its status as a "TBMM Hükûmeti Sefâini" (ship of the Turkish Grand National Assembly), instead of "Süfün-I Hümâyûn-I Mülûkâne" (the Ottoman Sultan's ship).

18 January 1922: Chief Engineer Âdil Efendi summarily leaves the Alemdar and takes up residence at the home of Novorossisk representative Münir Bey, even taking the ship's dinner plates with him.

23 January: sickness in Novorossisk forces the Alemdar crew to drink only boiled water.

2 February: The Greek ship Petros approaches the Alemdar and watches are increased. Novorossisk representative Münir is informed but does not respond. The Russians instruct the Greek ship to move away. Nevertheless, the Petros remains 5-10 meters from the Alemdar and the crew takes precautions against the possibility of fire or a clash.

3 February: Petros departs Novorossisk for Istanbul.

3 February: four additional train cars of ammunition arrive for loading onto the Alemdar.

11-16 February: Novorossisk-Gelincik-Tuapse-Sochi- Adler-Poti-Trabzon voyage.

Return to Trabzon

22-23 February 1922: Trabzon-Samsun voyage and ammunition transport.

25-26 February: Samsun-Trabzon voyage, immediately followed by Trabzon-Batumi trip (27-28 February).

5 March: ammunition, radios, telegraph equipment, vehicles and horse-riding gear loaded onto the Alemdar. Return to Trabzon (6 March).

28 March: Alemdar ordered to salvage the ship Sinop, which is carrying valuable ammunition, but which is stranded off Vakfikebir.

3-7 April: Trabzon-Samsun-Sinop-Ayancık-İnebolu voyage, ammunition off-loaded at İnebolu.

8 April: İnebolu-Amasra voyage.

9-10 April: Amasra-Sinop voyage. On 11 April Sinop Port Chief Mustafa Nail (Ercivelek) becomes the new captain of the Alemdar, exchanging posts with departing Alemdar Captain Nuri (Pekergin).

12-13 April: return to Trabzon, where the Alemdar is outfitted with cannons.

29 April: the Greek ship Enosis, captured by the Nr. 1 and Nr. 2 gunboats at Novorossisk, arrives at Trabzon.

30 April: two large Greek motor boats, captured at Zonguldak, arrive in Trabzon harbor. Also, the Greek crew of the Enosis are boarded onto the Aydin Reis gunboat, which then leaves Trabzon.

8 May: word received in Trabzon that an enemy ship is in nearby waters. Measures are taken by the Alemdar in case of an attack and, if necessary, to sink the Alemdar.

8 May: Russian gold is obtained from Trabzon authorities for the Alemdar crew's salaries.

18 May: report: an enemy fleet is heading east from Sinop and measures are taken to protect the Alemdar. The following day, the enemy fleet is reportedly active in waters near Trabzon.

22 May: the Naval Commander boards the Alemdar, along with the gun factory inspector regarding the 7.5 Krupp guns mounted on the rear of the Alemdar. The ship then heads for Sürmene for firing practice. //1st log's last entry made on 31 May 1922.//

Second Log (January-November 1923)

1 January 1923: Alemdar in Trabzon. Gaza ship arrives towing another boat from Batumi with ammunition.

26 January: violent storm hits Trabzon harbor, sending ships into one another. Gazal and its tow sink. Alemdar provides assistance to the other ships.

28 January-3 February: Trabzon-Sürmene-Polathane-Hopa-Batumi voyages.

Celebrating Bolshevik Holidays in Batumi

24-25 February: in Batumi, celebrations in connection with the Bolshevik anniversary and the Red Army's occupation of Georgia.

6-11-13 March: the 18th train convoy, made up of twenty train wagons with ammunition, arrives in Batumi. Alemdar takes the ammunition to Trabzon for transfer to the ship Samsun.

14 March: return to Batumi to pick up more ammunition and return to Trabzon (18-19 March).

9-10 April: the body of Trabzon Parliamentarian Ali Şükrü Bey (assassinated by Topal Osman in Ankara) arrives in Trabzon aboard the Reşid Paşa.

15-16 April: Trabzon-Giresun-Trabzon voyage (see 'Conclusion' for additional details).

23 Nisan: 'id-I Milli' holiday celebrated (commemorating the founding of the Turkish Parliament in Ankara in 1920.)

Clash with the Sarı Yani Gang and Refugee Transport from Batumi to Trabzon

8 May: 307 refugees coming from Batumi aboard Alemdar off-loaded in Trabzon.

12 May: while preparing to depart Trabzon for Batumi, Alemdar is ordered to intercept a gang of Pontus bandits-the Sarı Yani gang-6 miles off shore fleeing toward Batumi. In the ensuing clash, 90 of the 130 gang members died but the Alemdar crew is unharmed. The gang's boat is towed to Trabzon and the prisoners delivered to the authorities there (see original log page and transcription below.)

13-16 May: Trabzon-Hopa-Batumi-Trabzon voyage. 201 more refugees taken aboard and transported to Trabzon.

17-20 May: Alemdar rescues the stranded Gülcemal vessel off Giresun and returns to Trabzon.

1 June: three German prisoners (not further identified) taken aboard Alemdar for transport to Batumi.

5-6 June: 378 refugees transported from Batumi to Trabzon.

An American in Hopa

10 June: American mine inspector brought to Hopa from Trabzon aboard Alemdar.

20 June: in accordance with a decree of the Divan-I Harp (Court Martial), the penalties accorded to Hasanoğlu Mustafa of Bartın, Alioğlu Osman and Yakupoğlu Tahirare implemented.

26 June: Trabzon-Of voyage, with a captain, 2 lieutenants and 37 soldiers off-loaded at Of.

30 June: 341 refugees taken aboard Alemdar at Batumi and some additional refugees attack Alemdar, forcing it to pull away from the dock.

5 July: 428 refugees taken aboard Alemdar, with the Mebruke and İkdam boats in tow, all for transfer to Trabzon.

18 July: while in Batumi, Alemdar crew members go to the sinema.

23 July: 'İd-I Milli' holiday celebrations (commemorating the Second Constitutional Period that began in 1909.)

VIP's and More Refugees

5 August: Monsieur Ardisanski, his wife and a number of other VIP's are off-loaded in Batumi and new crew members for Alemdar are taken aboard there, as well.

8-20 August: Batumi-Tuapse (Russia)-Batumi voyage.

28-29 August: 319 refugees and 5 horses taken aboard Alemdar at Batumi, en route to Trabzon.

13-23 September: Trabzon-Samsun-Sinop-Amasra-Zonguldak voyage.

7-27 October: efforts, ultimately unsuccessful, to free the stranded Şahin vessel at Amasra.

Return to Istanbul, From When it Came Three Years Before

3-5 November: Amasra-Istanbul voyage.

5 November: passage into the Golden Horn, Istanbul.

- 2* “üç ağızlı deve boynu
4* yedeklikçiftflanlı tahlisiye valful kebir
1* motor sentrifigel
6* büyük süzgeç
7* deve boynu
1* eski körük
1* çift ağızlı maden boru
2* stim valf
1* lı hortumflancı
1* altı köşeli maden
1* dalgıç iskelesi
1* sagır süzgeç
1* pirinç kılınç gaydlı? hortum flancı
1* halka olmuş demir boru
4* bakır stim borusu
Aded cins
1* demirkılınç
10* helezonlu stim borusu
13* büyükküturdademirboru
5* gayd ?lualıcı hortum
18* gayd?suz “ ”
3* “ “ “ bir ağzının başlığı yok
1* “ “ “ “ iki “ “ “
9* motor senrifigel hortumları
1* “ “ “ başlığı
2* dalgıç makinası
2* “ “ kolu?
(yandakiliste)
Aded cins
2* kebir üç dilli makara
2* “ iki “ “

Sa'ât 7.15'de Batum'a hareket etmek üzere emr alan sefinemiz ; sefere ihzâr edilmekde iken Kumandanlıktan gelen âni bir emirle 3.45'de Jandarma yüzbaşısı Mahmud Efendi kumandasındaki sekiz kişilik jandarma müfrezesini hâmilten Samsun'dan firâr etmiş bulunduğu haber verilen motoru ta'kîb için hareket etmiştir.

Trabzon'un poyraz açıklarına doğru seyr ve tarassud edilmekde iken ufukda görülen bir motor üzerine yol verilmiş ve sadâ menzili dâhiline girilince stim düdüğü ile tevakkuf işâreti verilerek nazar-ı dikkatleri celb edilmiştir. Fakat motor firâra benzeyen şüpheli hareketlere ibtidâr edince yaklaşmak mecbûriyeti hâsıl oldu. Bu sırada motordan mayna edilen bir bot bilâhare motorun tâifesi oldukları anlaşılan üç kişi binüp sefîneye gelmişler ve sebeb-i ta'kîbi sormuşlardır.

Müsellâh eşkiyâyı hâmil motorun teslimi dermeyân edilerek hareket etdirilen bot, bordayı terk eder etmez motordan şedîd bir yaylım ateşle zelîl Rum canavarlarının gaddârlığı başladı. Bi't-tabi' buna teslim edilen sefine efrâdıyla birlikde jandarma efrâdı, alabandayı siper ve küpeşteyi mesnet ittihâz ederek mukabil ateşde bulunmuşlardı. Müsâdeme şedîd bir sûretde devam etmeğe başladı ve iki sa'ât devam etdi. Bu müddet zarfında dümen palanka ile idâre edilmekde ve herkes küpeşte hizâsında aşağı eğilmiş bir hâlde vazîfesini îfâ etmekde idi. Müsâdeme uzadı. Motordan yaralananların, ölenlerin, kendini denize atanların manzarası efrâda bir vesîle-i teşvîk olmakda idi. Fakat sefinede mevcûd cephâne tükenmeğe başladı. Motorda teslim için hiçbir hareket yokdu. Bu sırada motor provaya alınarak tam yolla mehmûzlanmak için üzerine gidilmiş fakat eşkiyâ teknenin küçüklüğü hasebiyle sür'at devrinden istifâde ederek bu müsâdemeyi bir sıyırtma şekline ifrâğ etmişlerdir. Bunu müte'âkîb motordan teslim işaretleri çekilmiş ve motordan silâhlar, fişengler denize atılmışdı. Motorun kıcındaki râhip de ölmüş ve denize düşmüştü. Motor çağırılmış ve sefîneye yaklaşarak erkekler anbara alınmış, kadınlar motorda nöbetçiler ve mühendis Nuri Arif Efendi nezâretinde îbkâ edilmişlerdir. Mühendis Sürûrî Efendi

yarahlara mu'âlece-i lâzıme-yi îfâ ediyor, askerler denizdekileri tahlise çalışıyorlardı. Gemi motoru yedeğine alarak limana hareket etdi. V e limanda bilâhare sefinedeki efrâd tahliye edildiği zaman bunların biri yaralı olmak üzere otuz beş kişiden ibâret oldukları tahakkuk etdi saat 11.20. Motordakilerin adedi henüz tahkîk edilmemiştir. İskarça olduğundan efrâdı mahkeme olunan bekâya-yısaat 12.00 eşkiyâ ve kadınları hamil motor bir filika yedeğinde iskeleye çekilmiştir.

Conclusion

The entries in the Alemdar logs are generally brief and do not provide many details of related activities going on around the ship. Fortunately, in some cases alternative sources have helped to flesh out events involving Alemdar. One such incident occurred during Alemdar's voyage from Trabzon to Giresun in April 1923, registered blandly in the log without amplification.

In fact, based on a book subsequently written by Alemdar crewmember M. Celaleddin Orhan, we learn that the Alemdar had received an order from Ankara to sieze the Fulya motorboat, which had been stolen from the Greeks and was in the possession of Topal Osman, the assassin of Trabzon Parliamentarian Ali Şükrü Bey, now in Giresun with his men. Alemdar's captain, Mustafa Nail Ercivelek, ordered Orhan to go to shore with a few soldiers and seize the Fulya in the dark of night.

Orhan and his men went to the local village and had the locals take them up to a ridge from where they could survey the location of the Fulya. Later that night, Orhan and his crew secretly and silently boarded the Fulya, all the time expecting shots to be fired from Topal Osman's men high on the ridge above. Within two hours Orhan and his men had freed the Fulya from its chains and the motorboat was tied to Alemdar

for towing to Trabzon. But not a word about this derring-do is reflected in the ship's log.

No doubt there are many other fascinating stories that may yet emerge from the Alemdar ship logs. For example, the full stories behind the "62 German and Bulgarian prisoners" boarded on the Alemdar and handed over to Turkish authorities in Trabzon on 16 November 1921, along with the transfer of "3 German prisoners" from Trabzon to Batumi aboard the Alemdar in June of 1923, would certainly provide fascinating angles. Similarly, the background and subsequent events related to the transport of hundreds of refugees from Batumi to Trabzon in 1923 bear closer examination. In any event, the unique information included in the logs provides a rare glimpse into the Black Sea environment during the Turkish War of Independence and the mechanics of the transfer of vital arms and ammunition from Bolshevik Russia to the Turkish nationalist forces.

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