

**AWM4**

**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,  
1914-18 War**

Engineers

**Item number:** 14/40/1 Part 1

**Title:** D Field Troop and Bridging Train,  
Australian Engineers

September - October 1917



AWM4-14/40/1PART1

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ORIGINAL. ✓  
DUPLICATE.  
TRIPPLICATE.

Australian Imperial Force.

**WAR DIARY**

OF

"D" FIELD TROOP & BRIDGING TRAIN. AUST. ENGINEERS.

FOR

1<sup>ST</sup> PERIOD 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPT. TO 19<sup>TH</sup> OCT. 1917



Signature of Officer compiling

*A. Bowdler Capt.*

Signature of Officer Commanding

*A. Bowdler Capt.*

- OCT 1917

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Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

## WAR DIARY

or

## INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Erase heading not required.)

SHEET NO. 1.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
MOASCAR.	11. 9. 17.		<p><u>First Period from 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1917 to 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1917 both inclusive and covering:-</u>  <u>Formation of Unit &amp; Preparations for Operations during Cavalry Envelopment of Beersheba.</u></p> <p>Upon the formation of Desert Mounted Corps, consisting of three cavalry divisions, it was decided that the provision was necessary of a field troop of engineers additional to the units forming part of the divisions, and working directly under the orders of Corps H.Q. on work which the divisional units had neither the equipment, qualifications in personnel, nor time to perform. Opportunity was offered by the fact that authority still existed for a troop of Australian personnel which had been displaced (and disbanded) in the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron by the provision of the New Zealand Field Troop, and that a draft of 100 all ranks, commanded and carefully selected in Australia by a returned officer and including a good proportion of highly skilled technical men, was then available in Egypt. This officer, Lieut. E. J. Howells, was therefore ordered (11<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1917) to form and command a special field troop, to be for administration part of 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron, and known as 'D' Troop, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron, Australian Engineers.</p>	
MOASCAR.	13. 9. 17.		<p>Details of establishment having arrived, the European personnel in other ranks was selected, with a few exceptions, from the draft above mentioned. Other exceptions were four N.C.O's. who arrived from the field, having been selected by Major Alexander. R.E.; these four proved to be in the main very unsatisfactory and inferior in technical qualifications and soldierly</p>	

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## WAR DIARY

Army Form C. 2118.

or

~~INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY~~

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SHEET NO. 2.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
MOASCAR.	14.9.17		<p>qualities to many of the sappers and were all transferred from the unit at various times later. The European establishment was as follows:-            Officers 2. N.C.O's. 10. Sappers 21. Drivers 4. Batmen 2. = Total 39.            C.R.E. Desert Mounted Corps. (Lt. Col. R.E.M. Russell, D.S.O., R.E.) arrived at Ismailia and communicated to Lieut. E.J. Howells general instructions as to the first work to be undertaken by the troop and with him visited R.E. Machinery Park, Ferry Post and Anzac Training Centre, Moascar, arranging for materiel and personnel respectively to be available, on account of lack of time, in advance of arrangements through the usual channels.</p>	APPENDIX No. 1.
FERRY POST. ISMILIA.	15.9.17		<p>Lieut. E.J. Howells and 17 of the most useful N.C.O's and sappers proceeded from Anzac Training Centre, Moascar to R.E. Machinery Park, Ferry Post and commenced work of selection, collecting, overhaul &amp; testing of engines, pumps, tools, &amp; gear for installation in seven wells demolished by the enemy at <sup>and near</sup> Khalasa and Asluj and then in his possession, information concerning which had been obtained during reconnaissance in force.</p>	
FERRY POST.	16.9.17		<p>General design of the installations was decided on and, together with methods of erection, made the subject of a blackboard lecture and general discussion amongst all ranks.</p>	
FERRY POST.	17.9.17		<p>Remaining personnel, except 1 officer and 1 O/R., joined <sup>and</sup> five detachments, one for each well to be furnished with power installation, were organised as follows:-</p>	

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SHEET No. 3.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
			<p>K.1. 2/CPL. FINCH, F. and five sappers.            K.2. 2/CPL. NICHOLSON, R.C. and five sappers.            A.1. CPL. ROBERTSON, A.C. L/CPL ADAMS, I. and three sappers.            A.2. L/CPL. SCULLY, T.P. and five sappers.            A.3. L/CPL. LESLIE, R. and five sappers.</p>	
FERRY POST.	21.9.17		All plant and gear available at Ferry Post was packed & loaded on to canal barge, all engines and pumps having been tested under load.	
KANTARA.	22.9.17		Whole of material and personnel proceed via SUEZ CANAL by barge in tow from FERRY POST to KANTARA, a distance of approximately 20 miles, leaving at 0700 and arriving at 1400.	
KANTARA.	23.9.17 To 26.9.17		Work of collecting R.E. equipment, mainly special tools and stores for pipe rack and engine and pump erection and running, and of drawing equipment at Ordnance KANTARA proceeded under difficulty due to the fact that Ordnance had not yet been notified of the formation or of approval of mobilization store table of the unit. The work would have been much more difficult however but for the readiness to assist of MAJOR H.F.B.S. MOORE, R.E., I.D.D.W. KANTARA.	
KANTARA.	27.9.17		Material having been loaded on railway trucks with escort of I.N.C.O. and 3 sappers, unit proceeded by railway in open trucks from KANTARA to SHEIKH NURAN the journey occupying about 18 hours.	
SHEIKH NURAN	28.9.17			
SHEIKH NURAN.	29.9.17 To 16.10.17		More approximate dimensions of the wells at KHALASA and ASLUU having been obtained by reconnaissance in force, it was possible to arrange & provide with greater accuracy such details as engine & pump foundations, piping and valve arrangements and belt drives, and the practicability of driving.	

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# WAR DIARY

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SHEET NO. 4.

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
			<p>with a belt in the almost vertical position expected to be necessary in one or two installations was demonstrated. Tests were made to enable quantities of fuel lubricants &amp;c necessary to be determined with some accuracy and collection of them proceeded. The men were more fully instructed in the methods of erection, and practised in the handling of their plants, both in transport, erection, and running. The officers of the other field troops, in whose hands was to be the preliminary work of cleaning out the demolished wells, <sup>and that of provision of water storage,</sup> viewed &amp; discussed the methods and <del>that of provision of water storage and</del> co-ordination between these two branches and our own work of installation and operation of the machinery, <sup>was</sup> thus ensured. The other field troops were also assisted in collecting and preparing their material.</p> <p>The camp was adjacent the railway siding and so convenient for receipt of material, and personnel of the Egyptian Labour Corps was available for assisting in detrucking and handling heavy gear. The site was on the open sandy desert, and conditions of heat &amp; dust were rather trying for the men and difficult for the running of uncovered high-speed machinery. Rations had to be brought by means of camels, drawn from the camel Transport Corps, from SHELLAL, distant about four miles, and water, drawn at an area two miles distant supplied by a branch of the Nile water pipe line, was carried by the same means. The men were quartered under shelters made of woven matting, an article of R.E. stores, erected in a narrow cutting which gave some protection from the dust. The rations consisted mainly of bread (occasionally biscuit), fresh meat (occasionally tinned), milk, jam, tea, sugar.</p>	<p>APPENDIX No 3</p> <p>APPENDIX No 4</p> <p>- OCT 1917</p> <p>181</p>

"D" FIELD TROOP AND

BRIDGING TRAIN. A. E.

No. Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence  
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INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

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SHEET NO. 5.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
SHEIKH NURAN.	16. 10. 17 } To 18. 10 17 }		<p>and small amount of vegetables, of which the dried mixed variety was useful if not palatable. Two men were admitted sick to hospital and one N.C.O. retransferred to another troop of 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron.</p> <p>Animals and transport were taken on strength, these being:- Riding horses. 12. Draught horses. 6. Wagon, limbered. 1.</p> <p>Additional transport, consisting of 12 camels with 4 native drivers, was supplied later, 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1917. at GAMLI.</p>	PHOTO APPENDIX. No. 5.

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# WAR DIARY

OF

'D' FIELD TROOP & BRIDGING TRAIN. AUST. ENGRS.

FOR

1<sup>ST</sup> PERIOD 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPT TO 19<sup>TH</sup> OCT. 1917.

## LIST OF APPENDICES.

No.	Subject.
1	INSTRUCTIONS RE COLLECTION OF PUMPING PLANTS & PARTICULARS OF WELLS.
2	DURING MOVEMENT BY RAILWAY, KANTARA TO SHEIKH NURAN. 28. 9. 17.
3.	COLLECTING GEAR FOR ERECTION OF PLANT AT KHALASA & ASLUJ. SHEIKH NURAN. 10-10-17.
4.	MACHINERY BEING HANDLED, KHALASA & ASLUJ WELLS. SHEIKH NURAN 9. 10. 17.
5.	HORSE LINES SHEIKH NURAN. 19. 10. 17.



(COPY).

O.C.,  
D Troop



APPENDIX. No. 1.

1. The first duty of your troop will be to undertake the repair of the undermentioned wells destroyed by the Turks and to erect pumping machinery at each.
2. The work will have to be done under war conditions, against time, as an indispensable preliminary to the advance of a considerable force, and it is of vital importance that the minutest detail is foreseen and every possible contingency both mechanical and otherwise provided against ; for this you will be responsible.
3. The plants for wells K1, K2, A1, A2, A3, will be as nearly identical as is possible to provide. They are now in the process of dismantling at various stations on the Canal, and you should at once get into touch with Major Moore R.E., D.A.D.W. Kantara, to arrange for your own men to be present at the dismantling and packing up of each plant. When this is done you will accompany them to Well Sheikh Nuran, where they will be re-erected by you before finally sending out.
4. Major Moore will also provide you with such tools and gear as you require and are available.  
I am providing gear for clearing out the wells, you will have to get the tools for the engine, pipe and pump work.
5. Wells Z and M will probably have deep well type pumps of which I have no details as yet.

6. LIST OF WELLS.

K1 and K2 were masonry lined wells 8' and 12' diameter respectively, 30' deep to water, 33' to bottom of well. Sides blown in about 10' from top and wells completely filled in with debris. The wells are about 500 yards apart.

One Pumping plant ordered for each consisting of a centrifugal pump to deliver 2500 gallons per hour against 30' head driven by a 5 h.p. oil engine, but I understand that the engines sent will be nearer 10 h.p.

A1, A2, A3, are close to one another (within a radius of 200 or 300 yds.). Similar to above but about 10' diameter and 19' to water. Not badly damaged. Two of them are only filled with debris to water level.

Pumping plants similar to K group.

Z is about 60' deep.

M about 20' deep.

A group is 9 miles from K group.  
A and K.

Z and M divide the distance between  
(Sgd.) R.E.M. RUSSELL Lieut. Col. R.E.  
attchd. H.Q. DESERT MOUNTED CORPS.

11th September 1917.

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"D" FIELD TROOP AND  
BRIDGING TRAIN. A. E.  
No. ....  
Date .....

APPENDICES NOS. 2 3 4 & 5.

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APPENDIX No. 2.

DURING MOVEMENT BY RAILWAY,  
KANTARA TO SHEIKH NURAN. 28.9.17.

APPENDIX No. 3.

COLLECTING GEAR FOR ERECTION  
OF PLANT AT KHALASA & ASLUJ.  
SHEIKH NURAN RBT. 10.10.17

APPENDIX No. 4.

MACHINERY BEING HANDLED,  
KHALASA & ASLUJ WELLS.  
SHEIKH NURAN 9-10 17

APPENDIX No. 5.

HORSE LINES. SHEIKH NURAN. 19.10.17.