CHAPTER XII

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVAL BRIGADE

The foregoing narrative has been almost entirely concerned with the doings of the Commonwealth's sea-going forces. There remains to be considered a great deal of very valuable service, carried out for the most part—but by no means entirely—on shore, which stands to the credit of the Naval Brigade.

In the first years of Federal control over the naval forces there existed a body known as the Royal Australian Naval Reserves, enlisted and maintained on lines as nearly as possible parallel to those laid down for the Imperial Royal Naval Reserve. The introduction of compulsory training completely altered the character of this force, which henceforth included—and eventually became almost entirely composed of—those young Australians who preferred naval to military training. For under the Defence Act the navy has the first pick of each year's trainees. Theoretically, a naval officer, attending at a muster of recruit trainees called for that purpose, selects for the navy as many of them as may be required. In practice such compulsion as is used is of a negative kind; cadets volunteer for the naval side so freely that many have to be rejected, and selection depends mainly on (a) the boy's intended occupation, (b) the distance of his home from the naval drill-room. At the outset of this training scheme the new arrivals were known as "R.A.N.R. (O)," the older members of the force being "R.A.N.R. (M)"; recruiting for the latter section ceased very soon, but its existing personnel provided a sound nucleus for the recruits. As soon as the (M) section had sufficiently diminished, it was absorbed into the (O) section, and the whole force was rechristened "The Royal Australian Naval Brigade."

This brigade at the outbreak of war numbered 1,646 officers and men, besides 3,092 cadets in training. The war-work of the brigade does not, except in a few operations of
an abnormal character, lend itself to continuous narrative. It consisted—as most naval work consisted, but to a much greater extent—in taking precautions against all sorts of unknown but suspected dangers; in maintaining watches and guards and patrols, which were hardly ever challenged and seemed to the layman chiefly a mass of irritating routine, but irrefutably proved their necessity by being so rarely found necessary. The Brigade was the police-force of the Australian coast, just as the destroyers were the police-force of the Malay Archipelago, and the destroyer-crews at least had a change of surroundings. Before considering any of its work in detail, it may be best to set down its various duties in bulk; and it will be well to remember that those who carried out these duties were for the most part boys under age, the first-fruits of compulsory training.

The work of the R.A.N. Brigade, then, comprised—

Examination Services at all defended ports in Australia;

The manning and maintenance of Port War Signal Stations and other War Signal Stations and Look-out Stations;

The manning of auxiliary craft used for Coastal Patrols, and of the motor launches used for Harbour Patrols and Dock Defences;

Detention of enemy vessels;

Providing (towards the end of the war) guards for wireless stations, wharves, and ships in port;

Certain naval intelligence services, including issue of permits to aliens employed on or near the water, investigation of reports concerning enemy activities, and a good deal of local censorship;

Mine-sweeping;

A good deal of naval transport work.

Furthermore, the brigade provided, almost entirely from its own personnel,
A naval contingent for service in German New Guinea;¹

A naval bridging train, intended for service in Flanders, but diverted to Gallipoli and Egypt;

A contingent of 300 men for service with the A.I.F.; and furnished gunlayers and signallers for merchant-vessels, telegraphists for the wireless service, and more than 200 officers and ratings for service in the seagoing navy. And side by side with all this war-work the brigade's ordinary routine of recruiting for the R.A.N. and training the annual contingent of cadets went on uninterruptedly.

II

War precautions ashore, being entirely of a defensive nature, need not await a formal declaration of war. On the 2nd of August, 1914, the Director of Naval Reserves (for the Brigade had not yet been rechristened) was ordered to take immediate steps for putting in force the Examination Service at all "Defended Ports." This meant that at Thursday Island, Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle, and Hobart every vessel entering the port must, unless specially exempted, anchor in an area set apart for the purpose and submit to examination by the naval authorities through an officer of the brigade. For this service the coastal pilots of Australia were, at the outbreak of war, mobilised and given rank as lieutenants in the R.A.N.R. The object of the scrutiny was to prevent the entrance of enemy vessels under any disguise into harbours otherwise defended against enemy attack. Because during war, and especially at its outbreak, every vessel must be suspected until everything is known about her, no exemptions from the actual examination were permitted. Occasionally during the years of war some coastal shipmaster, assuming that his vessel was so well known as to need no examination, would disregard the "stop" signal and attempt to enter unexamined. Such action ignored the possibility that even the best known coaster might, for example, have been seized outside by some German

¹ The special achievements of this contingent are recorded in ch. iii.
raiding captain and sent into the harbour with an enemy crew. The skipper would therefore be brought to by a shot across his bows from the "examination batteries"—the sequel being a reprimand, and a demand to refund to the authorities the cost of the shot necessitated by his defiance of regulations. Well-known vessels, however, whose masters were in peace-time allowed to be their own pilots, retained that privilege when once they had been passed by the examining officer.

Before the evening of the 3rd of August all ports except Brisbane had this service in working order, and Brisbane was not long behind. The actual declaration of war touched other springs; just after noon on the 5th enemy ships were being held up all round the coast, measures were taken for the defence of dock-gates (which an enterprising alien resident might try to blow up), and even Australian warships were compelled to follow a prescribed method of approaching and entering Australian ports. In this connection observation-stations (technically known as "Port War Signal Stations") were established at the entrances of the defended ports, and also at Albany; and naval brigade officers in local control were instructed to take on intelligence duty. The details of the work done at these signal stations, like most of the details concerning R.A.N. Brigade work, cannot be published even where they would be of interest, since they conformed to the general practice laid down by the Admiralty in confidential orders for the whole Empire; but the lay reader will not lose much by this reticence, though it prevents justice from being done to the strenuous and consistently laborious work of the brigade.

The Port War Signal Stations were manned and operated almost continuously up to the end of the war, and were, indeed, not closed till the 2nd of December, 1918. They were occasionally supplemented, for periods ranging from three months to two years in different cases, by naval lookout stations more particularly devoted to the acquisition of knowledge as to the movements of shipping along the Australian coast; these were established when necessary near Townsville.

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2 For the capture of the Pfalz, see p. 45 and Appendix No. 11
3 Temporarily, and at a few ports only, these stations were replaced by naval lookout stations.
During part of 1915 and 1916 the precautions were modified. Except at Thursday Island, Sydney, Melbourne, and Fremantle, only naval lookout stations were maintained; in October, 1916, however, fuller services were reimposed.
Brisbane, Hobart, Port Adelaide, and Albany, and on Cape Howe, Wilson's Promontory, King Island, and Cape Otway. The Examination Services, however, were modified, discontinued, or re-established according to the needs of the moment; for at the best they were a hindrance to traffic, and the acceleration of traffic—especially of local traffic—was of such value in war-time that only a real necessity for extreme precaution justified any such hindrance. Port Jackson, therefore, which was the Commonwealth's most vital spot from the maritime point of view, was safeguarded by a service continuously maintained up to the end of the war; but in Port Phillip, which was less tempting and less open to the entry of a disguised enemy raider, the service adapted itself to temporary situations as they arose. When in April, 1915, it seemed unlikely that any German vessel was in a position to approach the Australian coast, the restrictions were considerably relaxed. In July they were abolished. The fear of a raider's proximity in February, 1916, revived the full rigour of the service; but in April of that year it was again modified, and not even the much post-dated news of the Wolf's venture was considered sufficient reason for further stringency. At Brisbane and Newcastle similar (though not identical) alterations occurred, the service being altogether discontinued in April, 1915, re-established in the following February, discontinued again in April, and revived in a modified form towards the end of the year.

To relieve the monotony of bald chronological narrative, it may be interesting to note the process by which one of these alterations—that of April, 1915—was effected. In March of that year the Naval Board, in consequence of the altered conditions prevailing in the Pacific, owing to the destruction of Dresden and the arrival of Prins Eitel Friedrich at Norfolk, Virginia, suggested the discontinuance of the service at all ports except Port Jackson, Port Phillip, and Fremantle, and its modification at the two latter ports. On the 2nd of April, the Defence Department and the Minister having in the meantime con-curred, the Admiralty gave its assent, and during the month
the suggested alterations were effected, arrangements being made in every case to facilitate revival of the full service at twenty-four hours’ notice. As a matter of fact, when in February, 1916, it was decided to revive the service at all ports, Newcastle recorded 5 hours, and Melbourne and Thursday Island 5½ hours for complete restoration. The Admiralty, as a later series of messages showed, considered 6 hours the maximum allowance; but, in a country where neither men nor vessels of the special type required are obtainable in large numbers or at a moment’s notice, few ports were able to reach this standard.

To the Examination Service the brigade allotted 8 officers and 225 men, and in it employed 43 small steamers—mostly the pilot steamers attached to the several ports—and 19 motor-launches. This was the least monotonous branch of the work, especially in the early days of the war, when a number of enemy vessels came into port without being aware that war had been declared. One of them, the s.s. Hobart, arriving off Port Phillip Heads before day-break, and observing the searchlights, hesitated to enter. The armed boarding-party had, however, been disguised as civilians, and the District Naval Officer, Captain Richardson, who with the examining officer and another accompanied them, succeeded in “bluffing” the Germans into the belief that they were quarantine officials. The ship, when safely under the land-batteries, was captured. It was guessed that the German captain, having been thus trapped, had not thrown overboard his secret codes and instructions. Accordingly, Richardson, while placing the rest of the officers and crew under guard, allowed the captain more freedom than usual, in the hope that, thinking himself unwatched, he would attempt to destroy the secret documents and would thus disclose their hiding-place. As had been anticipated, in the early hours of the morning the German captain crept from his bunk, and, entering an inner cabin, slid back a panel behind which lay the papers. Captain Richardson instantly covered him with a revolver and secured them. Amongst them was the code subsequently translated by Dr. Wheatley. Though such incidents did not occur after

Capt. J. T. Richardson; R.A.N. District Naval Officer, Victoria, 1911/19; of Melbourne; b. London, 3 Oct., 1860.
the early days of the struggle, the Examination Service provided other excitement. Although the pilots, who must in all weathers go out and board incoming vessels, were inured to the work, the young trainees of the naval brigade were not. "For those serving aboard the examination steamer" (wrote an officer afterwards) "on a black night, with a howling gale, and with the little vessel rolling gunwales under a vicious cross sea, life was not altogether joyful. . . . . Yet despite discomforts and, at times, the danger incidental to the job, service aboard the steamer was always popular amongst the young signalmen of the R.A.N.R., the majority of whom had never been afloat before."

The other harbour duties—patrols, dock defences, etc.—need not be described in any detail. They were practically continuous throughout the war; in the case of docks, they included the laying and the care of booms and nets as well as the provision of sentries and boat-patrols. But the complexity of these harbour duties may be illustrated by enumerating them as they affected the naval brigade at Sydney; there they included, at one time or another,

Examination Services.

Port War Signal Station.

Guards at Cockatoo Island, Spectacle Island, Garden Island, Gore Bay oil-tanks, Mort's dock, Pennant Hills wireless station, Woolwich dock, Admiralty House, Hawkesbury bridge, and on interned enemy vessels.

Harbour patrols.

About 500 men were mobilised for this work. The total number employed on similar duties throughout the Commonwealth were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Port War Signal Stations</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lookout Stations</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbour patrols</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dock defences</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention of enemy vessels</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarding of wireless stations</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
so that, including the Examination Services, more than 900 officers and men of the naval brigade were occupied with purely local defence—work which at first sight may seem easy and safe, and especially desirable because it did not involve separation from families and home, but which was at the same time incessant, tedious, and almost unrewarded by obvious success or the excitement of combat, and was carried out either by men unfit for active war or trainees too young for oversea service.

### III

The sinking of the *Cumberland* in July, 1917, imposed on the naval brigade two new and extremely important duties. As we have already seen, it was for some time doubtful whether she had been sunk by the explosion of a bomb placed among her cargo or by collision with a mine, and precautions were taken against the recurrence of either danger. As the “internal explosion” theory first held the field, it was against the surreptitious introduction of bombs among cargo that the first precautions were taken.

A Cabinet meeting, intent on providing adequate protection for oversea shipping in Australian ports, decided that the naval authorities should take over the duty of providing guards for all wharves and shipping, especially oversea shipping. The military authorities, who apparently had been attending to this duty to such extent as previously seemed necessary, were asked to supply the bulk of the guards required; but full control was now vested in the navy. Naturally there was at first some confusion. Military aid was essential, since the naval brigade existed only at the chief ports, and at several of these was not in full strength; and it was agreed that enclosed wharves should be guarded by naval detachments, while open wharves and shipping alongside piers were left to military guards under naval orders. But before the end of the year the division of responsibility grew irksome; in December the Commandant
of the 3rd Military District (i.e., the State of Victoria) reported that he had insufficient personnel available to supply the guards required in Melbourne, and in February the Commandant of the 1st Military District (i.e., Queensland), being asked to supply a guard for the port of Bowen, suggested that the navy might enlist some men on its own account.

To understand what this meant, it may be stated that in Melbourne alone during December the average number of ships under guard each day was twelve. There were never fewer than eight; occasionally twenty-four came under guard at one time. Not all the ships in port were guarded. Coastal colliers and small passenger steamers very rarely obtained protection; large coastal passenger and cargo vessels got it occasionally; for the most part it was reserved for (a) troopships and storeships, (b) oversea merchant vessels. To protect troopships a guard of 24 men was employed; oversea vessels had 20, large coastal vessels 16, and others 9—when they were guarded at all. The usual contingent of guards numbered 110 from the brigade and between 360 and 370 from the military forces. This seems a considerable expenditure of force; but there were no alternatives—patrolling with motor-boats would have used up more men, the enclosure of wharves (except in the case of the New Pier at Port Melbourne) was found impracticable, and the use of guard-parties actually on board the vessels was the only safe method. The brigade, mainly occupied with other duties, could not spare another man. It therefore became necessary to enlist an entirely new body (known as the "R.A.N.B. Naval Guard Section") for the special duty of guarding wharves and shipping. Members of this body must have seen service in some naval or military force within the Empire, and preference was given to returned sailors or soldiers of the

\[\text{Note:} \]

- This term is used in its general sense. In Australia a "coastal" steamer is (generally) one plying along the coast of a single state; those which visit more than one state are called "interstate" vessels.
- Of course the whole 24 were not on duty together. The number allotted provided for three "watches"; that is to say, in a troopship 8 men were on guard at a time, in oversea merchant vessels 6 or 7, and so on.
An officer of the Examination Service on his way to inspect a vessel in the Brisbane River

Lent by Lieut-Commod O H. Collam R 4 NR

The German mine washed up near Falmouth, Tasmania
21 February 1918

Aust War Memorial Collection No 42214

To face p. 384
The Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train at Suvla Bay, 1915

A stone breakwater in course of construction by the Bridging Train at West Beach. (See also Vol. II plate 130-3.)

Lent by Capt. L. S. Brainard, R.A.N.
Aust War Memorial Collection No. A1247

The Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train on the Suez Canal, 1910

Kubri West, showing the filter beds and pumping plant erected by the Train.

Lent by Capt. L. S. Brainard, R.A.N.
Aust War Memorial Collection No. A1272

To face p. 385
Commonwealth. Recruiting began on the 22nd of February, 1918, within the age-limit of 20-50, though chief petty officers of the navy and military officers of corresponding standing were enlisted up to 55. The provisional establishment was laid down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commissioned Officers</th>
<th>Warrant Officers</th>
<th>Petty Officers</th>
<th>Leading Ratings</th>
<th>Able Seamen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queensland</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockhampton District</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New South Wales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Adelaide and Outer Harbour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Pirie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fremantle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasmania</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launceston</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1,356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Tasmania, however, where military guards were plentiful and naval reservists few, the system was left in abeyance; and from this and other minor causes the actual number of naval guards employed was only 26 officers and 1,407 men. The guard was enlisted for the period of the war, its disbandment being fixed to coincide with the rescission of the
proclamation that had called out the Citizen Forces. But when this rescission became imminent in September, 1919, it was decided to extend the guard's term "until all expeditionary forces serving outside Australia have been substantially demobilized," so that it was the last home-service corps to perform war duties.

The second product of the Cumberland disaster—the Mine-Sweeping Section of the Naval Brigade—was established on the 17th of July, 1917, within ten days of the disaster. This was an excellent instance of the foresight with which the Board provided against all possibilities, for at the moment it was thought by everyone that the explosion had been internal. At Sydney five vessels were manned—three trawlers belonging to the Government of New South Wales and two steam-tugs; a third tug was afterwards added. Several of the steamers belonging to the North Coast Steam Navigation Company would have been more suited to the work, but it was decided to avoid any interference with coastal traffic. At Melbourne one seagoing tug and four hopper barges were employed, and at Fremantle four barges and two tugs. The scheme included the use of two sweepers off Brisbane and two off Townsville, but suitable vessels could not be obtained before the war ended. The work done by this section in war-time comprised the sweeping up of the Wolf's Gabo Island mine-field, and the sweeping of a half-mile channel from Port Phillip heads to a position ten miles beyond Wilson's Promontory. At Fremantle also a channel was swept for almost twenty-eight miles from the North Mole—that is, to the edge of the 110-fathom contour—but could not be then buoyed; and from Port Jackson heads a similar channel, to the 110-fathom line, was arranged for but was not swept till the war was over.

One more of the naval brigade's many sections deserves special notice. The wireless stations of the Commonwealth were at the beginning of the war put in charge of the military for protection (as will be seen later, their operation became
a purely naval affair). But towards the end of 1916 the Board decided to take over full control of the principal stations—those at Townsville, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Sydney, and Adelaide. This step was a natural one, inasmuch as the necessity for a regular system of precautions was likely to be less obvious to the military than to the naval authorities. In South Australia, indeed, the military commandant—to whom the responsibility had been left—had abolished guards altogether after the first few months of the war, employing only a night watchman between midnight and 6 a.m. In February, 1917, the new régime was adopted at the stations just mentioned—a petty officer and four men being on duty night and day, with provision to increase this number in time of danger to 1 petty officer, 1 leading seaman, and 12 men. The arrangement worked so well that in April it was decided to bring the guarding of the stations at Thursday Island, Cooktown, Melbourne, Hobart, and Perth under similar control, leaving a few distant stations in statu quo; thus Darwin was to be left to the military, Port Moresby to the care of the local European constabulary, and the out-stations of Western Australia—Esperance on the Bight, Geraldton, Roebourne, Broome, and Wyndham—to night watchmen only. Even this decision was afterwards altered, so that in the end only the Melbourne and Hobart stations were taken over, Melbourne on the 18th of May and Hobart (where the lack of R.A.N. Brigade ratings necessitated the employment of returned discharged sailors and soldiers attached temporarily to the brigade) on the 7th of June. Of the work done by this branch of the brigade there is no more to say than that, like the rest of the navy’s police-work, it was efficiently and undisturbedly performed.

The brigade at its moment of greatest expansion numbered 2,817 adults (besides 3,834 cadets); in all 90 officers and 2,909 men passed through its ranks during the war. As many of these were at different times used for different services (a man being engaged, say, for six
months in mine-sweeping, and three years in examination services), the enrolment by services shows a larger muster still:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examination services (exclusive of the coastal pilots)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port war signal stations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval lookout stations</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine-sweeping</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbour patrols</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dock defences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wharf and ship guards</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>1,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention of enemy vessels</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guards at wireless stations</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total on home service</strong></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2,380</td>
<td>2,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Guinea Expeditionary Force</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Bridging Train</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Reinforcements battalion, A.I.F.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport duties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lent to R.A.N.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraphist ratings lent to R.A.N. radio service</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns' crews for merchant vessels</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signalmen for merchant vessels</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total on oversea services</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>1,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total</strong></td>
<td>127</td>
<td>4,155</td>
<td>4,282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For their work the various sections of the Brigade used at Thursday Island 8 motor-boats (including the harbour master's launch and the quarantine launch); at Brisbane the Gayundah, 3 auxiliaries, and 1 motor-boat; at Newcastle the steam-tug Ajax; at Sydney 10 auxiliaries (including the pilot-yacht Captain Cook) and 5 motor-boats; at Melbourne 12 auxiliaries and 5 motor-boats; at Fremantle 9 (including the Gannet, which was originally the Penguin), and at Hobart 3.1

1 About 80 pilots were also employed as examining officers.
On the 8th of November, 1918, peace seemed so near that the Board made preparations to terminate the Brigade's war services. On the 12th the Examination Service was modified by ceasing to board incoming merchant vessels unless there was definite reason for suspicion; on the 21st the service was totally discontinued, the lookout stations were paid off (except that on King Island), and the mine-sweeping section was put on a peace footing. With the gradual disbandment of the naval guards, the Brigade's war work came to an end.

IV

The account of the war services of the Naval Brigade would be incomplete without reference to a little-known and unique series of operations carried out oversea by the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train, a body mainly composed of Australian Naval Reserve officers and men.

By the beginning of 1915 it was clear that, apart from the shore services already described, there would for some time be little employment for the Australian Naval Reserves. At the same time information received from England disclosed the great need of engineer units on the Western Front, where the "trench war" had begun to take shape; and hints had been given that a naval unit would be acceptable, since it would work in connection with the Royal Naval Division in Flanders and should be qualified for technical operations of the kind contemplated. Consequently on the 8th of February, 1915, the Naval Board forwarded to the Minister for Defence, who then controlled naval affairs also, the following minute:

The Naval Board, having consulted the Chief of the General Staff as to most suitable method by which services of R.A.N.R. officers and men can be made use of in the present war, propose that an offer be made to the Home Government to supply two Bridging Trains, completed to war establishment, the same to be manned by naval ratings drawn mainly from ranks of R.A.N.R. . . . It is proposed that, while retaining naval ranks and ratings in all other respects, the men comprising these trains should be paid, organised, equipped, and trained under military supervision.

On the 12th the Commonwealth Government offered by cable one Bridging Train in accordance with Imperial War Establishments, including personnel and their equipment, vehicles, and horses. Personnel will be Royal Australian Naval Reserve and trained in bridging.

On the 18th the Imperial War Council accepted this offer.
Looking about for suitable officers, the Board decided to appoint two who had done good service already with the New Guinea expedition—Lieutenant Bracegirdle, and Lieutenant Bond whose daring at the taking of the wireless station has been already noted. These officers, Bracegirdle being in command, took up their appointments on the 24th, and the work of enlisting and training the new force began forthwith. By the 12th of March 115 men were encamped in the Domain at Melbourne, and the difficulties showed themselves. No one, either in the naval or in the military service, knew anything practical about bridging trains; the pontoons and vehicles to be used had first to be built, and none were available for training until the middle of May; and practically the whole personnel had to be taught from the beginning how to ride and how to handle horses, with a very few rough remounts to practise on.

On the 3rd of June, however, the unit embarked in the transport *Port Macquarie*. It consisted of 7 officers, 278 petty officers and men, 26 "first reinforcements," and 412 horses, with fifty 6-horse pontoon and trestle waggons and eight other vehicles. The training in pontoon construction, which had been impossible hitherto, was to be given at Chatham on arrival in England. The voyage was not fortunate, as the ship ran into tropical conditions too soon for horses closely stalled and newly come from a Melbourne winter; by the end of June, when they were landed at Bombay, 79 had died, mostly of pneumonia or exhaustion through over-heating. It had been intended to proceed direct from Australia to Aden, but near Socotra orders were received to return to Colombo, and from thence the ship was sent to Bombay to discharge all horses. It was just as well; the mortality among horses in the Red Sea ("temperature 93°, water 90°," says the log on the 13th of July) would have been very heavy.

At Port Said the Train was suddenly diverted from its original purpose. On the 17th of July—the day of arrival
orders were issued that obviously contemplated a voyage to England; on the 18th new orders sent the Train to the Dardanelles; at Imbros on the 25th it was announced that the unit had been handed over by the Admiralty (which until then had controlled it) for service with the British Army and had been attached to the IX Army Corps, which was at the moment busily preparing under General Stopford for the landing at Suvla Bay on the 7th of August. Thus a body of men whose previous training had been either purely naval or specially concerned with horse management were suddenly flung into work mainly concerned with the one service—pontoon construction and management—in which they had received no training at all. Probably nothing but what the officer commanding described as "a general feeling of refusal to be associated with failure," so characteristic of the real Australian, enabled the Train to carry on without serious mistakes or obvious inefficiency.

On the 27th began the process of discharging equipment on shore. The Port Macquarie was anchored far out from land, and neither tugs nor lighters were available; consequently all stores, baggage, and superstructure had to be embodied in rafts on deck, slung over the side, and towed ashore with pontoons manned by members of the Train. Luckily it was decided not to land the waggons. The original intention of the British authorities was to have the pontoons, etc., made up into raft formation and towed across to Suvla Bay at the proper time by picket-boats; in a choppy sea, such as is occasionally met with in the northern Aegean, this would have meant their immediate destruction, and the Train was in the end allowed to use a small transport, the Itria, into which everything must be reloaded.
The Train's log about this time is worth quoting from:

27th July . . . Started discharging. . . .
28th July . . . Continued discharging. . . .
30th July . . Instruction in building pontoon rafts. . . .
31st July . . Instruction in pontoon piers and rafts. . . .
1st August . . Instruction, and building rafts in darkness for night attack.
2nd August . . Instruction in building pontoon piers, &c. Instruction carried on during night. . . .
3rd August . . Instruction in pontoon pier building. . . .
4th August . . Started loading pontoons and superstructure in s.s. Itria. . . .
5th August . . Loading pontoons and bridging material all day. . . . All pontoons had to be pulled off by our own men.
6th August . . Loading remainder of pontoons and gear. . . .
All hands aboard by 8 p.m. Men working until midnight stowing gear. Destroyers and lighters filled with troops leave harbour at dusk.

And so, after five days' and nights' instruction in the use of pontoons—which was henceforth to be their principal work—and six other days' hard work unloading and loading up again, the Train was flung into the muddle of the Suvla Bay attack.

The orders received by the O.C. were to land as early as possible, reconnoitre the beach, and select suitable spots for immediate landing and for permanent piers to be erected later. The Itria reached its anchorage at 5 a.m. At 11.30, his reconnaissance complete, Bracegirdle in pursuance of orders tried to confer with the Chief Engineer of the IX Corps. Repeated wireless messages failed to ascertain his whereabouts; but just after 5 p.m. written orders came from the A.Q.M.G. to send ashore a party to erect a barrel pier at "A" landing, the barrels having been landed from some other vessel, but no working party with them. This was the only work done by the Train on that day, simply because no other orders could be obtained; but the rest was welcome to men

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10 Of course this was not the only or the first reconnaissance for that purpose. Landing was actually in progress when the Itria reached Suvla.
who had been at work for forty-eight hours. Nor was it a very tranquil rest, since enemy shrapnel was continually reaching the upper decks of the Itria, and a Taube did its best to land bombs there also, so that in the evening anchorage had to be shifted.

Next day at noon disembarkation really began. The pontoons were brought ashore, and a landing-pier was constructed at top speed, in spite of the possible presence of enemy land-mines. Work went on all night, and disembarkation was complete by 2 p.m. on the 9th. During that day news came from "Old A" beach that the lifeboats engaged in taking off the wounded there could not get within 100 yards of the shore; could the Australians put up as soon as possible a pier from which embarkation could proceed? At once the necessary pontoons and superstructure were prepared and rowed two miles to "A" beach under continual shrapnel fire; a pier 120 yards long was constructed in twenty minutes from the time of arrival, and was in full use five minutes later.
From that time the Train had its hands full. Two days of further pier-construction, landing troops, landing artillery stores, and shifting camp to "Kangaroo" beach were followed by an altogether new task—the supplying of water to the army ashore. It is notorious that at and after the landing the water-supply was chaotically managed. Every drop of water had to be brought ashore from lighters, a good deal in small petrol-tins. "It was a common sight," wrote the O.C., to see thousands of thirsty troops congregated on the beach with the thermometer well up in the nineties, waiting to pounce on any available water-supply. This naturally gave the enemy guns the targets they desired, and it was heart-rending to see the unnecessary number of casualties incurred thereby.

On the 12th, however, it was decided that the R.A.N.B.T. should become responsible for the whole supply from ship's side to shore, and thence to storage tanks and distributing centres. This work was in addition to, not in lieu of, the Train's regular occupations of pier-building and stores-landing. No proper material was to hand, but three fire-engines and some canvas fire-hose were obtained from warships. Then a trestle was run out into nine feet of water, with a pontoon at the end of it carrying two fire-engines; the fire-hose was laid along the trestles to shore, where it communicated with a line of canvas water-troughs laid in shallow trenches. Surplus pontoons were dug into the ground, to be used as temporary storage tanks. Lighters brought alongside the moored pontoon were thus able to discharge directly into the tanks. This system remained in use for many months. Oil engines were tried for pumping, instead of the usual manhandled ship's fire-engines, but they broke down repeatedly. The canvas hose—which soldiers were continually puncturing to get a squirt of water to fill their bottles—were at first guarded by sentries; afterwards a line of 3-inch iron pipe was substituted, and regular iron tanks replaced the pontoons, being perched high enough to distribute water along the beach camps by gravitation.11

On the 20th of August it was explained confidentially to the O.C. that next day certain enemy positions would be heavily attacked, and that engineers were badly needed to help in

11 An enemy high-velocity gun made a direct hit on this pipe-line. The tanks were frequently damaged by shell-fire.
entrenching on the ground expected to be won; would the Train lend the army, say, 34 men for this business? The Train did so, with Lieutenant Bond in charge; but the attack (that of the 21st) was unfortunately a total failure, and the engineers were not called in.

About this time the Train found itself in a very amphibious position, so to speak. Previously attached to the 11th Division of the IX Army Corps, it was now made part of the Corps Troops; but in addition it was ordered for the future “to carry out any work afloat, or on the beach up to high-water mark, that the Navy might require.” In consequence, to quote the O.C. again:

The principal duties allotted to the unit by the Royal Navy were as follows:—Water supply, care of landing-piers, discharging of stores from store-ships and transports, lighterage of same to the shore, salving of lighters and steamboats wrecked during gales, assisting in salving of T.B.D. Louis, disembarking of troops with their baggage on all beaches, and of munitions and stores. . . .

The duties allotted to the unit by the G.O.C. the IX Army Corps were briefly as follows:—Control and issue of all engineer and trench stores and materials, care and issue of trench bombs and demolition stores (for some weeks after landing, and until proper ordnance dumps were established), erection of high-explosive magazines, dug-outs, cookhouses, and galleys, assembly of hospital huttings, construction of iron frames for front-line wire entanglements; and the manning and control of the steam-tug Daphne. 12

Besides all this, the unit supplied many wireless operators for the advanced field wireless stations, and several draughtsmen for the Army Corps work; the O.C. also acted as beach-master at Kangaroo Beach until the Evacuation in December.

Quite early in the Suvla days danger became monotonous. The log for many days alternates between “Enemy aircraft dropped bombs” and “Base heavily shelled with high explosives” or “Base shelled as usual.” On the 30th of September “Enemy have not bombarded base for two days,” but they made up for it on the 1st of October. The mortality, it is true, was low, casualties being a little over 10 per cent., but the unit was powerless to retaliate; its duties did not involve any form of active fighting, and it had merely to carry on and be shot at or bombed—no easy method of living. During the rough weather, which prevailed from the beginning

12 Photographs of several works carried out by the Train are given in Vol. XII—plates 130-3 and 150.
of October onwards, it was often necessary to requisition from the British troops fatigue parties of two or three hundred men to assist in landing troops or stores, and the requisitioned men openly looked forward to trench-life and its comparative shelter again as a rest from the heavy work under shell-fire on the beach.

The weather was probably even more exhausting than the Turkish fire. In October "Southerly gale—two horse-boats piled on rocks" and "Heavy swell running. Water services interfered with" are typical log entries. The details of some of the Train’s work in these conditions—notably the construction of crib piers without proper material, and the salving of a large iron motor-lighter—are given in an appendix. From the 28th of September, too, the "Sick Report" becomes a daily item of the log. At that time the average sick-list numbered 35; a month later it rose to 45, but then slowly decreased to the twenties. Apart from wounds, the chief ailments were jaundice, paratyphoid, pneumonia, and blood-poisoning (since flies quickly infected every slight scratch or abrasion). But the Train came well through it all. And, simply because the quality of its work is so little known, and so emphatically deserves knowing, three descriptions of it are here quoted from authorities who carry weight:

There they are to-day, in charge of the landing of a great part of the stores of a British army. They are quite cut off from their own force; they scarcely come into the category of the Australian Force, and scarcely into that of the British; they are scarcely army and scarcely navy. Who it is that looks after their special interests, and which is the authority that has the power of recognising any good work that they have done, I do not know. If you want to see the work, you have only to go to Kangaroo Beach, Suvla Bay, and look about you. They have made a harbour.

(C. E. W. BEAN, Official War Correspondent, A.I.F.; 11/10/15.)

The ability of the unit to overcome the difficulties of the lack of adequate material which necessitated improvising to a large extent, was due to the fact that the majority of the personnel were adult naval trainees. These men in most instances had excellent training as apprentices to various trades in civil life; and, by reason of their years of training, both as senior naval cadets and as adult naval trainees, took pride in the fact that they were the only Australian naval unit serving in a European theatre of war. They were there-
fore bent on proving, both to the Royal Navy and to the British Army, that they could overcome any difficulties. . . . The workmanship of the skilled tradesmen in the unit was of the highest quality; this fact has been admitted by senior officers of the technical branches in both arms of the service, who were in every way competent to judge.

(Commander Bracegirdle, O.C. the Train.)

From the time the 1st R.A.N.B.T. joined the IX Corps all ranks have worked hard, cheerfully, and well. They have rendered most valuable services in connection with the construction and maintenance of landing-piers, beach water-supply, and the landing, charge of, and distribution of engineer material at Suvla, and have most willingly given their help in many other directions. Their work has been continuously heavy, and they have done it well.

(General Bland, R.E., Chief Engineer, IX Army Corps.)

The Australian Navy, it would seem, had its share of Gallipoli honour.

Then came the Evacuation. It was preluded with “driving rain and snow all day; troops suffering from exposure; carpenters erecting bunks in every available space in the dug-outs for the accommodation of frost-bitten men”; and two days later “seventy men suffering from exposure and frost-bite were accommodated in dugout for the night.” The Train was hard at work erecting pier structures and making new landing—or rather embarking—stages. On the 10th and 11th of December it had a variegated programme:

10/11. Finished road ramp to pier; erecting hutting; carpenters completed landing stages, which were towed to West Cove. Davits and all loose iron thrown off pier.

11/12. Erecting hutting; clearing up Royal Engineers’ park, landed cement ex Spinnell, and stacked R.E. stores for shipment. Packs ready for instant removal of unit.

On the 12th they were erecting huts in one place, and dismantling huts for shipment at another. Then began the period of work “all day and all night”; and the sick-list went down from the twenties to 7 and 8. On the 16th

Erecting hutting; completed pier at Suvla Cove. 153 men and 3 officers in charge of Sub-Lieutenant R. L. Buller evacuated in Abbassieh;

and next day

19 Log entry for November 27.
20 Vol. XII, plate 150
C.O., Lieutenant Bond, Chief W.O. Shepherd, and 60 other ranks still at Suvla. Pontoons, buoys, iron, and all other stores destroyed. Enemy shelled base heavily after sunset. Left Kangaroo Beach 7.30 p.m. in our lifeboats; boarded H.M.T. El Kahira. . . . Left Suvla 2 a.m. on 18th.

On the 19th the sick-list was up to 19, and the O.C. was in hospital at Mudros with malaria and jaundice.

For its work in connection with the Evacuation the Train received special commendation. General Bland, enumerating the engineer forces engaged in this work, each of which "during the last fortnight . . . was working in shifts throughout the twenty-four hours daily," singled out for particular praise two units, one of which was the Train:—

Both these units set a fine example of endurance, good organisation, and discipline. Their commanders were indefatigable in anticipating requirements, and assisting whenever and wherever required. I bring them to your notice as two specially valuable and well-commanded units, which can be relied on to do their best under difficult conditions.

The Train now entered upon an entirely new phase of operations. Leaving Mudros on the 17th of January in charge of Lieutenant Bond, it camped four days later on the shores of Lake Timsah in the Suez Canal, and was transferred from the IX British Corps to the I Anzac Corps, as it was to be employed in the area of that corps' command. Its new duties were to comprise bridge-building, the control and manning of existing bridges, the control of certain tugs and store-lighters, and the conveyance of military stores from post to post, within the limits of what was called Suez Canal No. 2 Section, which included Ferry Post, just north of Lake Timsah, and Serapeum, half-way between Timsah and the Great Bitter Lake.

On the 11th of February two parties were detached to the new stations, Lieutenant Bond with 57 men taking over the ferries, bridge, piers, and wharves at Serapeum, and

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19 This was not the final evacuation of the Suvla position. That took place on the night of the 19-20th.

20 The facts in this connection are not quite clear. On reaching Mudros the Train was attached to the 11th Division once more, but on the 26th of December was transferred "temporarily to A. & N.Z. Army Corps." For some time afterwards, however, disciplinary matters were dealt with by Admiral Wemyss. On the 5th of February it was certainly under the direct orders of Gen. Birdwood.
Sub-Lieutenant Hicks\textsuperscript{21} with 65 doing the same at Ferry Post. Lieutenant-Commander Bracegirdle, who had returned to duty on the 31st of January, remained at the central camp. This was a peaceful and healthy, but very monotonous, period; at headquarters the Train seems to have occupied itself mainly in experimenting with iron pontoons for light bridges and helping other parties at the Ismailia Canal Works, while the detached parties ran ferries and punts across the canal day and night, and "formed" and "broke" the big pontoon bridges five or six times a day.

About the middle of March a curious situation arose out of the wish of several commanding officers to get the Train under their orders. Admiral Wemyss desired to absorb it into the naval forces under his command, and went so far as to suggest that it should be transferred bodily to Mesopotamia, to be there used partly for river-transport work, partly as guns' crews in the auxiliary craft in that theatre of war. The G.O.C. the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force—under whom, of course, the Anzac Corps was at the moment serving—flatly refused to part with the Train; it was engaged, he said, in "special work of a technical nature for which it was considered very suitable." Simultaneously Sir Julian Byng, then in command of the IX British Corps (with which the Train had served at Suvla), asked that it should be returned to him for canal work in the southern section.\textsuperscript{22}

Late in April it became apparent that Byng had gained his end, for on the 26th orders were received by the Train to join the IX Army Corps at Suez. The Serapeum and Ferry

\textsuperscript{21} Sub-Lieut. C. W. Hicks. Draughtsman; of Thornbury Vic.; b. Melbourne, 13 Feb., 1894. (He subsequently served with the Australian artillery in France, attaining the rank of captain.)

\textsuperscript{22} Lieut. Bond was at this time transferred from the Train to the Naval Intelligence Branch at Alexandria, being succeeded as second in command by Lieut C. H. Read (of Randwick, N.S.W.).
Post detachments were handed over to their successors on the 3rd of May, and next day the whole unit reached its new quarters in the southern section of the Canal. This extended from the southern end of the Great Bitter Lake well out into the Gulf of Suez; headquarters were fixed at Kubri West with a large detachment at Shallufa, and minor posts at Kabrit, Geneffe, Gurkha Post, Baluchi Post, El Shatt, Suez itself, Port Tewfik, and the quarantine station on the gulf. With the enlargement of its sphere of operations the Train's duties were also increased; to bridge-building and the control of existing bridges were now added the building of big piers and wharves, the manning of several tugs and lighters, the control of all military traffic crossing the Canal in that sector, and the construction and control of pumping machinery and filter-beds. Byng obviously knew what might be expected of the R.A.N.B.T., and used it to the full.

The control of floating traffic over so long a section required careful organisation, some details of which will be found in an appendix.\(^{23}\) The new surroundings, too, were less peaceful and less healthy; air raids were frequent, and the climatic conditions—which included violent sand-storms—both ran the sick-list once more up into the twenties and much aggravated the discomforts of life. It must be remembered that at this time the Turkish forces were still in touch with the Canal, and occupied themselves constantly with attempts to damage it and blow up vessels passing through; while the British, besides guarding their main line of communication from India and Australia, were trying to push troops farther out into the desert, bringing up railhead just behind them, in order both to thrust the enemy far back from the Canal and to establish a

\(^{23}\) See Appendix No 20.
minor operation—not performed by the Train, but daily under base of operations against Palestine for future use. A typical its notice—may be interesting here:—

Just before sunset each evening a wooden roller—approximately 8 feet across and 12 to 18 inches in diameter, with a chain bridle to which two horses or mules were harnessed tandem—left each bridge-head to proceed towards the next one along the sand parallel to the canal banks. Some rollers were taken clear through to the next bridge-head, others were met by a similar party coming from it. After arrival or meeting, the rollers were taken clear of the rolled track and left on the spot, the men in charge riding back to their posts, but carefully avoiding the rolled track.

At daylight next morning an officer would gallop from one post to the next, to ascertain whether the rolled track was clear—i.e., whether there were signs of any passage across it, such as footprints or hoofprints. On receipt of a “clear” report, headquarters notified the Train’s officer in charge of that section, and thereupon traffic across the canal was permitted normally through the day.

The object of these precautions was, of course, to make sure that no small Turkish raiding party had crept down to the canal banks during the night to place mines or infernal machines of any sort there. Such an attempt had been made, and the mine laid had blown out the forefoot of a large steamer.²⁴

Among the work done at this time which is worth special mention is the construction of certain very solid wharves whereon to discharge the heavy engines needed for the desert military railways. The big piles to carry the decking thus used had to be driven in by special pile-drivers; and the Train took over two large lighters, converted them into floating pile-drivers and workshops, and in one of them installed complete quarters for the artificers as well as the crew, making the vessel self-contained. This, it may be observed, was only made possible by the abundance of supplies, which contrasted most markedly with their almost non-existence at Suvla. There the Train had been notable for its power of extemporising what was needed out of the most unlikely materials. In Egypt there was no necessity to do this, as the British Ordnance and Engineer Base Supply Departments willingly and readily met every demand. “As far as this unit was concerned,” wrote Commander Bracegirdle, “delay in the supply of material was never known to occur, except where it had to be obtained from another Mediterranean base.”

²⁴ From an account of the work of the R.A.N.B.T. supplied by one of its officers
It is interesting to note how far entries in the log reflect various episodes of the actual fighting in the Sinai Peninsula. The Turkish raid on Katia in April, and the British counter-attack and re-occupation, mainly affected bases in the northern section of the Canal, though "Artillery and transport to east bank," noted on the 23rd of April, probably had to do with the counter-attack. Just at that moment the Train was moved to the southern section; and, though the Turks had attacked this in 1915, their campaign of 1916 in Sinai was planned along the coastal route, and the main lines of the British counter-movement naturally started from the northern section. Still, on the 1st of July we find an entry "Slight increase in road traffic on No. 1 Bridge," which next day becomes "increase," goes on increasing daily, and on the 10th is "Heavy increase on road traffic of No. 1 Bridge." This bridge, moreover, for the next month is continually under repair. On July 20th—the day of the Turkish attack on the British railhead at Qghratina—there was an "air-raid by Taubes on El Shatt and Port Tewfik"; and two days later "All leave stopped for a week in No. 1 section." Finally on the 4th of August, the day of the great fight at Romani, No. 1 Bridge (which at this period was usually formed for traffic three times a day, two hours each time) "was formed practically all day," from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

But the period of practically defensive warfare on the Egyptian front had lasted too long, and army headquarters was busy on a plan of attack and advance into Palestine. The Train, though still normally occupied with its "back-area" duties on the Canal, was called in to help along the attack also. On the 15th of December the O.C. was entrusted with the particularly difficult, and at the same time essential, task of landing stores on the open coast of the Sinai Desert while a British attack designed to secure that strip of coast was actually going on.

The Turks were still at El Arish, with the British railhead fully twenty-five miles away to the west. An attack on El Arish, therefore, must be a surprise, carried out by the Desert Column and supported by the provision of supplies from seawards, since transport across the twenty-five miles of
Dec., 1916] [THE R.A.N. BRIGADE

The desert could not be assured in sufficient quantities and with the requisite speed. It was known that the bight off El Arish was mined; air-photographs gave exact location of the mines 'like little black pinheads on the white sandy bottom.' To sweep for these mines would, of course, at once disclose the British intentions; the task allotted to the Train was, therefore, to land under fire and at once construct through the mine-field two piers, each at least sixty feet long, with material to be there and then discharged from lighters; after which it would probably be entrusted with the landing of stores and ammunition in an open roadstead, and under Turkish fire, until the light railway could be brought across the intervening twenty-five miles.

As usual during these Egyptian operations, the Train had a free hand to requisition materials and craft; the O.C. was told to take any of the Canal Company's craft, any suitable tug, and all the timber and other material he wanted; and the Navy undertook to sweep the mine-field (a two-days' job at least) at the earliest possible moment. Bracegirdle accordingly took over a naval tugboat (the Sir Hugh Bell) and two 150-ton lighters, got his material down to Kubri, and set to work to cut and fit all piles and decking, make two portable pile-drivers, and devise floating stages and other paraphernalia. This work took from the 16th to the 19th of December, and on the 20th the little expedition left Kubri. At 10 p.m. on the 21st it put out from Port Said for El Arish, 120 miles away, escorted by motor-boats to ward off submarine attack. The subsequent operations are best told in the O.C.'s own words:

The expedition arrived off El Arish without mishap at 3.30 p.m. on the 22nd. . . . The tug, with lighters in tow, was headed direct for the beach, and at a given signal the lighters were slipped to continue their course for the beach through the surf. A heavy anchor with a 5-inch grass line attached was let go from the stern of each lighter, and was "brought to" round the bollards aft just before the forefoot touched the sand. The men promptly waded ashore, and fitted a holdfast to which a line was passed from the bow; by these means the lighters were kept stern on to the surf, and little difficulty was experienced in landing the materials. The tug meanwhile picked up an anchorage well out of the range of enemy artillery.

The construction of a pier immediately commenced, and was continued throughout the night by the aid of acetylene flares. At 4 a.m. 75 feet of pile-driven piering, supporting five bays, was completed. At 7 a.m. the work of discharging the lighters was resumed, and soon (with the assistance of a military fatigue party) both lighters
were discharged, refloated, and manoeuvred seawards, to be picked up by the tug and taken back to Port Said. No one there had ever expected to see them again—if they were not blown up by mines, it was thought, they would certainly become total wrecks on the open beach; but the expedition was important enough to warrant their loss.

Unfortunately the estimated length of pier required to reach deep water was a long way out. In the end the pier had to be made 245 feet long; and even then weather conditions affected the depths so considerably that at the seaward end you could sometimes get 8 feet and sometimes only 4 feet. Once, after an on-shore gale, a reef formed 60 feet off the pier with only 4 feet on it.

During these operations the enemy periodically bombed the vicinity of the camp, in endeavours to destroy the pier, while his long-range artillery made futile efforts to destroy the base.

In actual fact the landing was not so risky—apart from the weather and the enemy mines—as had been expected. Somehow the projected attack seems to have become known to the Turks, and they slipped out of El Arish on the night of the 19th, retiring inland to Magdhaba, from which they were driven by Australian light horse on the 23rd. This retirement, reported almost immediately by airmen, hastened by at least a day the advance of the Desert Column on El Arish, and it had been in British hands a full day before the Train arrived. This, of course, in no way detracts from the credit due for excellent organisation and neat performance of an operation expected to involve great risks.

It is strange to note how, throughout the existence of the Train, it was stationed quite close to A.I.F. troops and yet was hardly ever in contact with them. In Gallipoli, as we have seen, only four miles separated them from the Anzacs; “and yet,” wrote Bean, they are part of a world so separate that I do not think one Australian or New Zealander in a thousand knows that they are there, and they know practically nothing whatever of what happens at Anzac.

Just so in Egypt, though for a few months attached to the A.I.F., their operations had little to do with A.I.F. proceedings until the days of El Arish; and even there it is improbable that cameliers or light horse knew how much their operations depended on the work of other Australians. During the earlier Sinai operations (Romani and Katia) the light horse were

\[33\] Stress is here laid on this point, because for some reason official despatches seem to have ignored the expedition altogether. Thus Sir A. Murray merely says:—

"On the 22nd December... mine-sweeping operations were at once commenced in the roadstead... while the erection of a pier was taken in hand. In forty-eight hours the roadstead was cleared of mines, and the supply ships from Port Said began unloading stores and supplies on the 24th."
necessarily based on railways starting from the northern section of the Canal, well away from the sphere managed by the Train.

The naval character of the Train, also, was rarely if ever recognised. The only English account of its work discoverable—that in Major Gillam's *Gallipoli Diary*—mentions it as military, and "regular" at that:

A pier further up, towards the end of the promontory, is being built rapidly and skilfully by a bridging party of regular Australian engineers. I am told by their warrant officer that there is a regular Australian army, but that it is being jealously guarded in Australia, and that really it is only a framework of an army. The bridging section at Suvla, however, is part of this.

The El Arish operations were the last of any importance that the Train was concerned with. With the advance into Palestine came relief from the necessity for Canal defences, and in January, 1917, it was decided to incorporate the Train into General Murray's army for work along the beaches. By February it was obvious that this work would not require anything like the Train's full strength, and various devices were suggested for reconstituting it and using the surplus personnel in other arms. The result, unfortunately, was that through a series of misunderstandings the Train disappeared as an effective force; about fifty of its strength joined the A.I.F., and the rest embarked at Suez in the last days of May, reached Melbourne in July, and were disbanded.

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26 *This Diary* is worth study by those interested in the Train, since the author was at Suvla on Army Service duty from the 21st of August to the Evacuation, and gives a very graphic picture of the conditions under which beach work went on. He has only one other allusion to the Train as such: "To-day (17/11) it is very stormy, . . . and after it is over there will be much work for the Australian Bridging Section."

27 A fuller account of these events—which need narration in order to do justice to a fine unit of the Australian naval forces—will be found in Appendix No. 53.