

APPENDIX No. 20.

WORK OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVAL BRIDGING TRAIN.

Among the duties allotted to the Train at Suvla, the following extracts from a report by the O.C. indicate the nature of the work which had at times to be performed.

The operations for the final evacuation necessitated the building of a long and heavy "Crib" pier. Heavy timber was available from Mudros in a few days, but large bolts and iron dowels were unprocurable except from a Mediterranean base. The unit therefore decided to strip a wrecked "sand dredge" and to make the bolts and dowels. A party was sent to cut up the rungs of the engine-room ladders and the round iron forming portion of the deck and bridge railing. This was brought ashore and, with the portable forges and stocks and dies with which the unit was equipped, the necessary bolts and dowels were completed in a few days.

Amongst the salvage operations performed by the unit stands out the salving of "K" Motor Lighter No. 28. This was a twin-screw iron motor lighter with internal-combustion engines, a vessel of great value in such a far-off theatre of operations. She went ashore . . . and the big sea which was running carried her over a shelf of rocks and deposited her firmly aground in a little basin. Before the weather moderated I inspected this motor lighter and was of the opinion that it would be impossible to refloat her; however, when the weather cleared and we were able to wade round her and sound the reefs, we decided to make the attempt. We found it would be necessary to raise her forefront approximately 2 feet to clear her, and with a favourable tide to run out a wire and buoy it, and then one of H.M. ships to pick it up and endeavour to tow her off. The flagship was asked to signal if she could supply certain lengths of heavy timber and some heavy "slipper" wedges. These . . . were obtained from Mudros. . . . By laying down some heavy timber as "side ways" and by driving "slipper" wedges in the following novel method, we were able to lift the fore part of the vessel as desired. A long baulk of heavy timber was placed under the combing of the hatch on one side and inclined over the side of the vessel on the other at an angle of about 45°. From this was slung by balance longitudinally a short baulk of timber approximately 18 x 18 (hardwood). The sling was fastened to the end of the baulk, protruding over the ship's side from the hold, and allowed the heavy piece of hardwood, which we called the rammer, to just touch the water. The wedge was placed in position and the men forming the "rammer's" crew, working waist deep in water, would pull the rammer out, incline the outer end slightly, and force it in; at each blow . . . the wedge was driven in a portion of an inch, sometimes more. This operation was tedious and dangerous, for the position of the wreck was within clear view of the Turkish positions . . . the result

being that more shells were sent our way than was at all pleasant for the carrying out of such work. After approximately four or five days, when the fore-part of the vessel was nearly clear, a south-westerly gale . . . unshipped the chocks and wedges from underneath the motor lighter's bilge and rendered abortive the heavy work of the past few days. Nothing daunted, immediately the weather became moderate, a fresh start was made and in a few days the fore-part of the lighter was "shored" up sufficiently to warrant an attempt at towing her off. . . . We fastened a 3-inch wire rope round the bollards on the lighter's port bow, led it through the fair leads on the port bow down through a shackle . . . and out seawards—which was on her starboard side—and buoyed. At 10 o'clock that night the S.N.O. . . . sent a vessel, which picked up the buoyed wire hawser and after half-an-hour's towing succeeded in pulling the lighter clear of the reefs into deep water. Not a plate had been holed or her twin propellers damaged. The damage mainly consisted of dented plates and a number of bolts which had been "started."

The following is a fair sample of the numerous cargoes consigned to the British forces at Suvla Bay which were discharged, landed, and distributed by the R.A.N.B.T. :—

Munitions and stores discharged from the store-ship *Perdita*, Suvla, September, 1915:—

Bombs, various, cases	..	..	..	..	372
Grenades, various, cases	..	..	..	..	25
Gelignite, lb.	..	..	..	..	150
Ammonal, lb.	..	..	..	..	500
Picks and helms	..	..	..	..	2,100
Shovels, R.E.	..	..	..	..	3,050
Billhooks	..	..	..	..	160
Axes, hand	..	..	..	..	210
Axes, felling	..	..	..	..	349
Barbed-wire, coils	..	..	..	..	320
French wire, coils	..	..	..	..	110
Staples for wire, boxes	..	..	..	..	20
Spikes for wire, boxes	..	..	..	..	25
Corrugated iron, sheets	..	..	..	..	670
Sleepers	..	..	..	..	160
Timber, 6" x 6" x 16', pieces	..	..	..	..	75
Timber, 12" x 6" x 30', pieces	..	..	..	..	50
Timber, 9" x 6" x 12', pieces	..	..	..	..	49
Timber, 6" x 4" x 16', pieces	..	..	..	..	209
Timber, 4" x 4" x 12', pieces	..	..	..	..	410
Timber, 3" x 3" x 12', pieces	..	..	..	..	625
Timber, 9" x 1½" x 16', pieces	..	..	..	..	89
Bolts and nuts, various, cases	..	..	..	..	6
Nails, various, cases	..	..	..	..	14
Spikes, various, cases	..	..	..	..	2
Loophole plates, cases	..	..	..	..	50

The problems connected with the working of the floating bridges on the Suez Canal may be judged from the following extracts from E.E.F. orders:—

Four large square placards, painted white with a broad horizontal black band in the centre, have been placed one on each side of the Canal north and south of the bridges at military posts. That portion of the Canal between the two sets of placards is called the "Bridge Zone"

Vessels approaching a bridge will not go beyond the two placards and enter the Bridge Zone if red flags are hoisted on the poles near the placards. They must tie up and wait until the flags are lowered before proceeding.

Native craft must sail or be towed through the bridges, and must not attempt to drift through with the current.

No vessel is to drop an anchor in the Bridge Zone.

Vessels not wishing to pass through the bridge but wishing to enter the Bridge Zone while the red flags are hoisted will inform the man posted at the flag pole to that effect, and, if necessary, receive instructions from him.

Vessels are not allowed to tie up to bridges or bridge-heads.

Bridges and Ferries.—The bridges and ferries on the Canal are exclusively under the control of the military authorities. No ferries are to cross, nor are bridges to be thrown in front of ships moving along the Canal.

The pace at which large vessels move is deceptive, and it must be explained to all concerned that it is not possible to stop these ships quickly.

Bridges can be thrown during the following hours without reference:—

Kantara	..	..	.	..	0700 to 0830
					1500 to 1630
Ballah	..	..	..	..	0700 to 0830
					1500 to 1630
El Ferdan	..	..	..	..	0700 to 0830
					1500 to 1630
Ferry Post	..	..	..	..	0630 to 0800
					1100 to 1200
					1400 to 1500
					1600 to 1700
Serapeum	..	..	..	..	0600 to 0700
					1130 to 1230
					1700 to 1800
Shallufa	..	..	..	..	0600 to 0900
					1700 to 1800
Kubri	..	..	..	..	0600 to 0900

Bridges can often be thrown at hours other than the above, without impeding navigation. In such cases the wharfmaster will communicate with the head of the nearest Canal Station, who will inform the wharfmaster of the most convenient hour for throwing the bridge. As much notice as possible must be given.

Men-of-war passing along the Canal must not on any account be delayed at the bridges.

It is to be understood that small craft carrying works, material, stones, stores, etc., are not to be held up for a longer period than one hour, owing to bridges being kept in position, and as a general rule such craft are to be given passage as quickly as possible.

Permanent detachments are to be detailed for bridging work in order that they may become expert at their duties.