

## ROYAL MARINE SUBMARINE MINERS 1914-19

Towards the end of 1914 the realisation of the possibilities of the submarines in their attack on merchant shipping, and the potential activities of " raiders " made the Admiralty anxious to prevent access to certain ports on the east coast of England and Scotland, which could not be protected by booms or where additional protection to the booms was needed.

For this purpose proposals were made to revive the old observation mines, which had been abolished by Lord Fisher, when submarines were first introduced. Now as First Sea Lord he directed that they should be resuscitated and laid in certain places. Captain Fraser, R.N. (retired) who was one of the few naval officers remaining that had any knowledge of the work, was put in charge with the title of Captain of Defensive Mining, and he collected a staff of retired Naval Officers and pensioners to lay the mines. The question then arose of their watching and firing when required ; the Royal Engineer Submarine Miners, Regular, Militia and Volunteer no longer existed, nor were the R.M.A. details who had manned the submarine mines at Esquimalt in the 1890's available, but it was essential that the personnel to fire them should be part of the Fortress Defence Troops.

In these circumstances it was decided that a small force of Royal Marines should be raised for the purpose and the offer of Colonel F. G. Scott commanding the Tyne Electrical Engineers, an old submarine miner, to raise the unit was accepted.

He was given a temporary commission in the Corps as Colonel Second Commandant, Royal Marines, and brought with him a nucleus of officers and men of the Tyne E.E. (T) who were the successors of the Tyne Submarine Miners, and who had had experience of the work.

They were transferred to the Royal Marines on 5th February, 1915, the officers being given temporary commissions in the Corps, and the unit was known as "The Royal Marine Submarine Miners."

Though enlisted into the Corps for short service they were paid at Royal Engineer rates of pay with submarine mining pay; recruiting was opened for the duration of the war and officers were entered who had experience of the sea, or were local yachtsmen with knowledge of the harbours; some were expert electrical engineers, of whom more anon.

The unit was affiliated to the Chatham Division, R.M.L.I, and given Chatham register numbers, but departing from the usual custom of the Corps, the Headquarters of the unit was stationed at Newcastle-on-Tyne, with its own staff and pay office where the recruits were approved and trained and other administration except clothing carried out. Sergeant-Major J. Long, R.M.L.I, was attached for duty as Superintending Clerk and Sergeant-Major ; Lieut.-Colonel J. Martin, an old officer of the Royal Engineer Submarine Miners, was appointed second in command.

The stations were quickly established and were soon in working order ; watch being kept in huts and the men billeted near or quartered in barracks where possible, the old Army Barracks at Tynemouth being used as the Depot. Detachments were also stationed at Cromarty and Sea pa Flow as part of the Royal Marine garrisons.

The station at Felixstowe under Captain Cramer was largely used as an experimental station and during 1917 considerable developments and new inventions came into existence; the value of the work was much increased by the development of the hydrophone, in the use of which officers and men were trained in the Naval Schools.

At the end of 1917 as it was considered desirable that the Headquarters of the unit should be more directly under the Commandant of the Division, the Headquarters were moved to Chatham ; Lieut.-Colonel J. Martin was appointed to command vice Colonel Scott and Sergeant-Major Long was given a commission as Lieutenant and Adjutant.

Consequent on the new inventions, which had been elaborated by Captain Fraser and his staff, assisted by Captain Cramer, R.M.S.M., a considerable number of new stations were opened, and the numbers of the officers and men were increased in order to man them. Several successes against submarines were claimed, notably one attempting to pass into Scapa Flow for which Captain Innes was awarded the O.B.E. As time went on officers and men from other Royal Marine units who had been invalided from the fighting fronts were drafted into the unit. It was, however not until near the end of the war that it was realised what an important part this form of mining was capable of playing in the defence of a port and further, the desirability of the personnel to man the stations being trained Royal Marines.

The R.M.S.M. were trained in repairing cables, laying mines, etc., but as this work was in the hands of the Navy their services were not utilised except towards the end when the new inventions came into use, when the officers and men of the unit erected and fitted out the stations themselves and the organisation was considerably expanded under Rear-Admiral C. F. Dampier, Admiral of Controlled Minefields.

In the autumn of 1918 their work became merged in that of the 5th Royal Marine Battalion but the unit remained distinct and was demobilised at the end of the War and their knowledge and experience was dissipated.

The following Officers were rewarded for their services in this unit. *O.B.E.*—Captain J. H. Morgan for services i/c of a controlled Minefield. Major P. A. Smith for services in Defensive Mining. Captain A. Innes for services in Defensive Mining. Captain F. T. Blumberg for services on the Staff of the Rear-Admiral of the Controlled Minefields.

*[Extract by General Sir H E Blumberg KCB RM (1929)]*