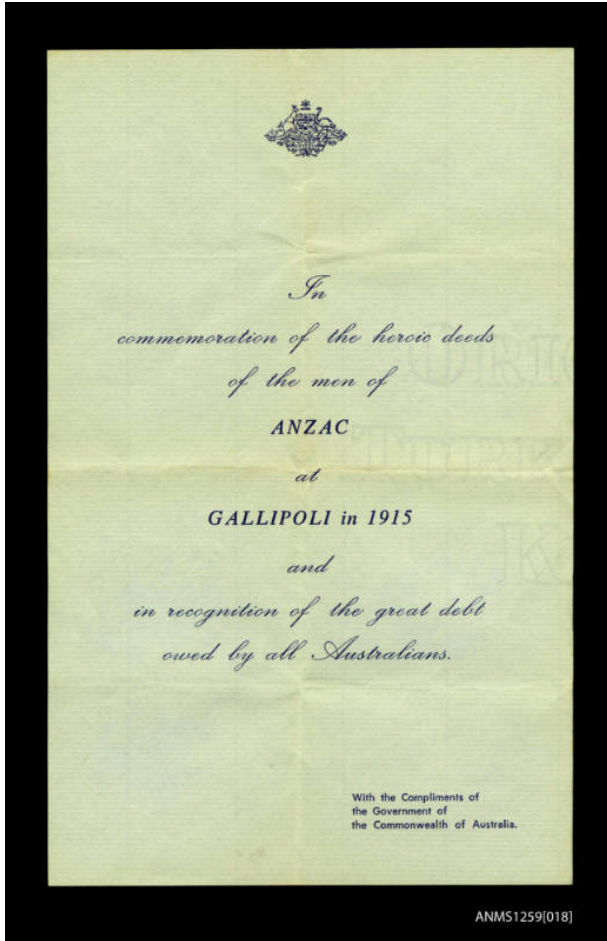


# Basic Detail Report

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## ANMS1259[018]

### Title

Certificate attesting the purpose of the ANZAC Commemoration medallion (1965)

### Date

1965

### Medium

Paper

### Dimensions

Overall: 202 x 126 mm

### Name

Certificate

### History

Australia's role in World War I is well known. The men who fought at Anzac Cove, in the Middle East and on the Western Front have received the lion's share of attention for their heroic deeds. Yet it was a small naval engineering unit, the 1st Royal Australian Naval Bridging

Train (1st RANBT), which was the most decorated unit in the Royal Australian Navy during the Gallipoli campaign. From their commander, Lieutenant Commander Leighton Seymour Bracegirdle, who was awarded a DSO (Distinguished Service Order) and down through the ranks, the men of the 1st RANBT were decorated more than 20 times for their service at Suvla Bay, the Suez Canal and in the Sinai during 1915-1917. The origins of the 1st RANBT lie with the Royal Australian Naval Brigade (RANB) which was the RAN's - primarily non-seagoing - reserve organisation during the First World War. Nearly 3,000 men passed through the Brigade's ranks during the war; at the height of its expansion it included 2,817 officers and men. The brigade provided over 1,500 men for overseas service. A small RANB contingent was sent to assist with the taking of German New Guinea and other German Pacific Territories in September 1914 as part of an Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) The bulk of the men served in the Naval Bridging Train (RANBT) operating at Gallipoli and Egypt; while another contingent of some 300 men were later sent as reinforcements for the AIF. Other naval reservists served mainly in Australian defended ports and carried out a variety of non-seagoing duties, e.g. guarding naval installations, operating harbour patrols, providing inspection ('Examination') services, manning boarding parties, lookouts and wireless stations. Following the loss of the steamship Cumberland to a mine off Gabo Island in July 1917, the Naval Brigade was also tasked with mine- sweeping in waters around Australia's principal ports. The RANB operated 63 vessels and small craft in Australian waters during the First World War. Towards the end of

1914 information received from England showed an acute need for engineers and other skilled men ('artificers') - especially bridge and pontoon builders - to provide logistical support in the expanding trench warfare along the Western Front. In February 1915 the Naval Board and Commonwealth Government of Australia offered to the Imperial War Council a mounted engineering and logistics unit - a Naval Bridging Train - made up of RANB personnel. This offer was immediately accepted and RAN lieutenants Bracegirdle and Bond were appointed to command it; both officers had served in the ANMEF's New Guinea campaign, but Lt. Bracegirdle was more senior, as he had also served as a midshipman in the Australian naval brigade contingent that was sent to China during the 'Boxer' rebellion in 1900. The RANBT was officially formed in Melbourne on 24 February 1915 and set up a camp in the Domain Gardens that would eventually house the unit's 350-odd initial complement; here they soon received (loaded on horse-drawn carts and wagons) their first pontoons that were built at the Cockatoo Island naval dockyard. The unit immediately began training in horsemanship, engineering, and pontoon bridge construction, but an acute shortage of material led to delays in training. When the men finally departed from Melbourne on June 3rd 1915 in the PORT MACQUARIE, they had not received all their training, most importantly no training in pontoon construction; it was decided that they would complete training on arrival in England. Immediately problems arose when the ship sailed into tropical waters in the Indian Ocean; many of the recently stalled horses, acclimatized for the Melbourne winter, began to die from heat exhaustion. When the ship pulled into Bombay on 28 June, 79 of the unit's 412 horses were dead. The remainder were offloaded for use by the Indian Army. The ship proceeded from Bombay through the Suez Canal to Port Said where the unit's orders were changed; the Bridging Train was diverted to the Dardanelles with orders to facilitate the landing of British and Commonwealth troops of the 9th Army Corps at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula. From Port Said the unit went to the island of Lemnos, was attached to the IX Army Corps under British command and subsequently underwent seven days' and nights' of training in pontoon-bridge construction on the nearby island of Imbros. On 8 August 1915 the unit landed under fire at Suvla Bay, several miles to the north of the Australian units fighting in Anzac Cove. The unit's talents at bridge and pier building were evident from the moment they arrived when they were ordered to 'Old A' beach in Suvla Bay to install a pontoon pier. They had the pier operational within twenty minutes of towing it to 'Old A' beach. The Bridging Train continued its operations at Suvla Bay for the next five months and in that time it was responsible for a variety of logistical support tasks which included building and maintaining the wharves and piers, unloading stores from lighters, delivering and controlling the water supply for combat troops ashore, and repairing equipment, etc. During their time at Suvla Bay they were regularly under artillery fire which, miraculously, only killed two men. Although sixty men were wounded at Suvla Bay. Despite the occasional arrival of groups of reinforcements from Australia, the unit remained under strength for the remainder of their service. Several more men died from disease or accident. Eventually the Allied forces at Suvla Bay were evacuated from the Gallipoli Peninsula, except for a group of 50 men from the Bridging Train who were assigned to LaLa Baba Beach to maintain the wharf from which the British rearguard units would be leaving. Those fifty men of the RANBT maintained the wharf and at 0430 on 20 December 1915 they were the last Australians to be evacuated from the Gallipoli Peninsula, twenty minutes after the last Australian troops left ANZAC Cove. Upon arrival at the island of Lemnos, the RANBT was stationed in Moudros for the rest of December 1915 and January 1916. The unit received high praise from the English Brigadier General E H Bland, but did irreparable damage to its reputation when 189 men mutinied on 13

January 1916 after not receiving pay for over five weeks. The men were eventually paid and the situation was resolved. In February 1916 the unit was sent to the Suez Canal to operate 'swinging' pontoon bridges across the canal and was once again placed under British command. It is at this point that many of the men began to request transfers to other units either because of lingering resentments from the mutiny or because they found operating and maintaining the Suez Canal bridges boring and beneath them. Eighty eight men were allowed to transfer to the 1st Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and departed for the Western Front, but a second request two months later was refused by Bracegirdle. Action for the men of the RANBT finally came in December 1916 when a detachment of 50 men was ordered to participate in the attack of El Arish by constructing a pier to unload supplies onto the beach. The RANBT detachment also performed well at El Arish and as a result the unit was withdrawn from duty on the Suez Canal to be attached to forces 'advancing into Palestine'. However, they were soon withdrawn because of earlier complaints the men had made about their service on the Suez Canal. It was decided by Federal Parliament to disband the unit and allow the men to join the AIF. On 27 March 1917 the 1st RANBT was officially disbanded; men from the unit transferred to the AIF, the Royal Navy or to other combat units. On 29 May 1917 the remaining 194 men of the unit embarked at Suez in HMAS BULLA bound for Melbourne. The unit arrived in Melbourne on 10 July 1917 and was discharged. However some of the men stayed on by re-enlisting in the AIF or the ANMEF. Bibliography - Bean, Charles. Official history of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. IX- The Royal Australian Navy: 1914-1918, 9th ed. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941. - Frame, T.R. and Swinden, G.J. First In, Last Out: The Navy at Gallipoli. Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1990. - Frame, Tom. 'The Shores of Gallipoli: naval dimensions of the Anzac Campaign'. Sydney, Hale & Ironmonger, 2000 - Swinden, Greg. 'The Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train', General RAN History. Sea Power Centre Australia. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia 2006. <http://www.navy.gov.au/spc/history/general/rain.html>. Accessed 13 February 2007.