

84 Sub-Area.

Copies :- Mov. Ninth Army. (3)
Colonel Emerson, DD Mov, Levant.

1. At 0415hrs., 11 February 1943, I received information from Navy House to the effect that a 12,000 ton tanker, fully loaded, had been torpedoed off Beirut and was badly on fire.

2. They asked if I could give any assistance with foam as the tanker would probably beach near St. Andrew's Bay. I ordered the Company to stand to, proceed to the Docks and collect all fire-fighting appliances. The corvette "DELPHINIUM" was at East Mole to render assistance.

3. This Company's two trailer pumps (Coventry Climax) were put on board with hose, foam guns and haversacks together with two fire-fighting teams under Lt. Batten. More hose and foam were required but it was necessary for the corvette to leave soonest, so I arranged to follow with the balance of the requirements, also petrol for the pumps, by launch. The corvette left at 0615 hrs. and I left with my RSM and three O.R.s fifteen minutes afterwards.

4. The tanker was already beached and well ablaze. When about three quarters of a mile from the corvette which was then one mile from the tanker, she made signs that somebody was in the water. I turned back and over a square mile, we were able to pick up four of the crew in an exhausted condition. I proceeded to the corvette and discharged these men.

5. The Commander of the corvette required soundings of water near the tanker before risking going alongside, so he lent me two seamen with a lead-line and soundings were made all round the tanker and in the vicinity. The vessel was stem aground with engines still running and propellers going at about half speed. She had apparently made a bed of sand adjacent to her which only allowed the corvette to approach stem to stem. The tanker was ablaze from stern forward covering the complete engine-room deck structure (engines aft) and the hold next forward to the engine-room had exploded and was well ablaze, with flames thirty feet high. I estimate that from aft, one third of the ship was ablaze. When the corvette got her fo'castle alongside the fo'castle of the tanker, it was obvious that our pumps would not reach to the aft of the tanker. Therefore, there was one alternative as the forward part and amidships were not alight, and that was to take the pumps aboard the tanker to the blazing hold. Meantime, the next forward hold exploded and flames 30-40 feet high immediately ensued. Lt. Batten and the two teams, with great alacrity and without hesitation, got aboard the tanker and the two pumps in action with foam guns actually over the coamings of the forward hold, one port and one starboard.

6. The hold was all ablaze under them and they got the foam to the after part of the hold and within twenty minutes it could be seen that the flames at this hold were under control and spreading to the next hold possibly prevented. When this hold was well under control, Lt. Batten put attention to the other hold aft which was likewise conquered as was all the blazing water amidships on the port side. The engine-room deck structure was then almost burnt out but received attention and the job was complete.

7. The ship was absolutely intact from stem to two-thirds aft, including the bridge deck houses, crew's accommodation, captain's quarters, etc.

8. When we boarded the blazing vessel, we found that she had been completely abandoned by the crew and there was not a soul on board.

9. The corvette had no fire appliances for such a job and did not get anything into action. No other assistance came to the vessel and the fire was completely extinguished by the two teams who worked in a way that was exhilarating to see, without the slightest fear of explosions, etc.

10. After seeing that Lt. Batten with the teams were making positive progress against the fire, I took the launch and the same personnel back to the dock to get more pumps and foam if possible. On arrival at the dock, I contacted the Area Fire Brigade whom I congratulate on their efficiency. Within ten minutes they produced at the Docks two more portable pumps, guns, two containers of 250 tins of foamite, and gave me access to some 700 tins if necessary. They were unable to function from the shore as the ship was too far off. On return to the ship, Lt. Batten had got the fire out.

11. After the fire was over, the Shell Coy's fire float came out and assisted in cooling the decks; also the tanker's crew began to filter back.

12. Firstly, I was pleased at the whole Company's turn-out and getting everything ready on the quay, but the main work was done by the crews under Lt. Batten.

13. I would like to mention Lt. Batten's efficiency and cool-control throughout the whole procedure and especially the behaviour of the men, pointing out Cpl Reed, Cpl Hodgson, Cpl Budd and Cpl Wales in particular, who directed the foam guns into the hatches at great risk.

13. The other ranks involved were

RSM McGough	CSM Cowlard
Sgt Haycock	Cpl Budd
Cpl Clark	Cpl Hodgson
Cpl Wales	Cpl Reed
Cpl Jones	L/e White
Spr Stammers	Spr Barrett
Spr Crump	Spr Munden
Spr Tanton	Spr Dixon

(H.C. GAY).

Major R.S.

O.C. 1017 Docks Operating Coy. R.S.

Cpl Jones

406 : BOOKING OF RAILWAY TICKETS FOR PRISONERS

1. The attention of all ranks is drawn to the fact that railway warrants are NOT an authority to travel on trains. Warrants must in all cases be first stamped by the R.T.O. at stations where there are R.T.O. staff on duty, and then be exchanged for a ticket at the booking office. In all cases a ticket must be obtained before a journey is begun.

2. Further to General Order 217 of 1942, Officers' leave passes will be stamped by the R.T.O. before being exchanged for a ticket at the Booking Office.

(54 2420/146/4)

(GRAM/14933/Nov. 7.)

(To be repeated in Detachment Part I Orders)

407 : CHANNEL ISLANDS PERSONNEL WITH RELATIVES IN

1. The British Red Cross Society has received several inquiries from men serving in the Middle East about relatives and friends living in the Channel Islands who it is feared may have been transported to Germany.

2. A cable has just been received in Cairo, which states that the British Red Cross Society has dispatched weekly food parcels for those who have been thus transported and that as soon as buses and camp-dresses come through, the next of kin may send quarterly parcels similar to those sent to prisoners of war and civil internees.

3. Enquiries for families may be made to the British Red Cross Society's Sharif Malik Farid Cairo who will endeavour to trace them. This will inevitably be slow.