

Mine At Belt Road On February 15th, 1943, a major emergency arose when an X type, 5 horn mine came ashore below the Belt Road Camp Site in New Plymouth, in a densely built-up area. A freshening northerly sea was pounding the mine on the rocks each time a wave broke. It was considered too risky to attempt to disarm the mine where it lay and access from the land was difficult. 2/C Section secured the mine to minimize the pounding and attached a rope to a lug on the casing so that it could be towed away to a more suitable location. The Pilot Launch stood off shore just outside the breaker line. A dinghy put off from the launch but this could not negotiate the breakers and there was no place to land, either, owing to the rocks. I was a strong swimmer in those days and volunteered to take the rope out to the dinghy. There being no better solution, swimming togs were borrowed from a nearby house. A large bow line was tied in the free end of the rope to enable me to get free, should the rope become entangled in any way. I swam through the breakers to the dinghy which was being rowed by the Harbour Master, Captain McIntyre. I got into the dinghy and after making the rope secure, we rowed to the Pilot Launch which had to stand off well clear of the breakers and rocks. The launch Coxswain, Tom Morris, was an ex-long service Royal Navy Rating before the First World War. The rope and the dinghy were made fast to the launch and the Bomb Disposal Squad assisted the mine back into the water as the launch took up the tow. Once the mine was clear of the breakers, I decided to rejoin the Bomb Disposal Group ashore and, much against the wishes and advice of both Tom Morris and Captain McIntyre, I dived overboard. It was a bad and stupid decision. The sea had risen considerably and the distance over water, always deceptive, was much further than I had anticipated. The mine bobbed past me and I was on my own. Swimming in the rough seas tired me and I swallowed a lot of water. Once in the surf, I was dashed onto the rocks by each wave and but for Sergeant Frank Morine coming to my assistance, I would have probably drowned. Frank entered the surf held my head up and anchored me from a further battering. I was totally exhausted and could not stand up unaided. Frank was knocked about whilst helping me and we were both taken to the New Plymouth Hospital to have our abrasions dressed and to get a tetanus injection each. Later we rejoined 2/C Section on Waiwakaiho Beach. In the meantime, the launch towed the mine to Waiwakaiho Flats where it drifted ashore and was dragged clear of the water. The mooring spindle was bent and again it could not be determined whether the spindle was in or out prior to being bent. Under the supervision of a Naval Mine Disposal Officer from Wellington, an inspection plate on the casing was removed and the internals checked for booby traps. The wires from the horns were cut and the primer charge and detonator removed. Finally, the mechanism plate was removed intact. Because of the risk to property at Waiwakaiho, this mine was not exploded, but dismantled and the blocks of Amatol (main charge) were burnt on the beach nearby. The casing, mechanism plate and primary charge without the detonator, were brought back to Head Quarters for us to study at leisure. There were no unusual fittings on this mechanism plate.

Years later, we learnt of an interesting sidelight to the preceding events. Our O.C.'s wife gave a tremendous amount of support to our Group in an unofficial capacity. She did the typing, the filing and took the telephone messages when required. In this "temporary, acting, unofficial and unpaid clerical position" Mrs Naylor probably knew more about the internal ramifications of the organization, than did the Sappers in the Group. No doubt, some of the things she read would have caused her grave concern. On this occasion, soon after our O.C. had departed for the Belt Road mine site, the telephone rang and it was a very agitated Major Hornibrook (our Commanding Officer) calling from Wellington for the second time. "Is Dick home?" he asked. "No, he left about ten minutes ago," replied Mrs Naylor. "Hell, can you get a message to him? It's urgent," said the Major. "Yes, I'll try. What is the message?" asked Mrs Naylor. "Tell him, whatever he does, for Christ sake don't touch or attach anything to the mooring spindle. It can be lethal. Get that to him quickly," said the Major and hung up. In those days, unlike today, there were few telephones or vehicles available for use in an emergency. Hence, Mrs Naylor took the only option open to her. She strapped the baby in the pram and took off full speed for Belt Road. Being the repository of such life and death information, one can only but speculate at her terrible anxiety. It must have been a thrilling ride for the baby also. Mrs Naylor covered the 2km in record time and passed the Major's message on to the Police who had set up a road block at the bottom of Belt Road. The Police conveyed the message, but as recorded previously, we had avoided the spindle and had attached the tow rope to a lug on the mine casing.