

EARLY OUTBOARDS SERVED WITH BRITISH ARMY ON TIGRIS RIVER

An early-model Evinrude outboard motor operated at his home on the Lake of Killarney in Ireland before World War I led to another Evinrude engine playing an important part in the Near East during the Great War.

The vital role of an Evinrude outboard in the Mesopotamia of 1915 was recalled by Captain W. J. Kingsmill, retired officer of the Royal Indian Army, who 47 years ago was the private entrusted with running an Evinrude on the Tigris River. Mr. Kingsmill recently wanted to see how the newest Evinrudes were made, and during the course of touring the Outboard Marine of Australia plant at Bankstown, New South Wales, told of his personal experiences with an early Evinrude in action against the Turkish Army.

Purchase of the Evinrude was suggested because the war in that area at that particular time was largely confined to rivers. Several motors were already in service, but their use had largely been restricted to the towing of barges. In December of 1915, however, the British principal force under General Townsend was surrounded at Kut by advancing Turkish forces and a relief expedition was sent to their aid. With this relief group was Private Kingsmill, with an 18-foot dinghy powered by the virtually-unknown outboard motor.

Following this action, which included sorties up the river under enemy fire and the carrying of dispatches, Private Kingsmill with his boat and motor were attached for duty to another group. The boat was called upon to transport all kinds of equipment, including rope, barbed wire, food supplies, plus demolition squads with full gear across the swiftly flowing river which in some parts was more than one-quarter mile wide.

In an effort to hamper British movement on the river, the resourceful Turks made floating mines from dynamite-filled copper canisters. With the detonator arms submerged and the mines disguised to appear as floating debris, the canisters were set afloat upstream. The British Commander soon effected a counter-measure. With Private Kingsmill at the helm, the dinghy was used to gently nose them to the riverbank for disarming. Also, under enemy fire, ammunition and supply barges were towed by the Evinrude-powered boat into the stream to be carried by the current to safer moorings downstream.

On three occasions the boat overturned and the Evinrude was buried in mud. Previous experience in Ireland with Evinrudes enabled the soldier to dismantle the engine, clean it, and get it going again.

This particular outboard motor had the powerhead rigidly mounted to the boat transom, and construction was such that only the gear housing turned. Made of bronze, steel and iron - no aluminum - the engine weighed 72 pounds. Even at that early date, however, Evinrudes were constructed with weedless propellers and flywheel magnetos.

Commenting on his experiences, Capt. Kingsmill said: "When I consider the numerous and seemingly impossible jobs the Evinrude was called upon to perform, operating against a mighty current under extremely difficult weather conditions and using whatever fuel mixture was available, I realized that I had a motor that was really built."

Capt. Kingsmill's World War I experience with the Evinrude outboard recalls an article in the May 1961 edition of News and Notes, in which Lieutenant Commander G. Rawson (Royal Indian Marine Corps. Retd.), told of his acquaintance with Evinrudes.

Commander Rawson wrote, in part:

"Back in 1915 I was serving as transport officer on the Tigris River during the British Army advance on Baghdad. My principal concern was to move and keep moving a flotilla of large lighters known as Maheilas, which were laden with military stores and equipment. These craft were towed by ropes hauled by Arab workers along the river's banks, or sailed when northerly winds prevailed."