

EMBARGO 2.30pm, 15 April 2015

Canberra Welcomes WWI Field Gun

A World War I 18-pounder field gun that will lead the march in the ANZAC Day centenary commemoration at the Australian War Memorial has been officially welcomed to Canberra in a ceremony at Fairbairn, Canberra Airport.

The Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) and Her Excellency Lady Cosgrove were in attendance, along with Member for Eden-Monaro Dr Peter Hendy MP, representing the Prime Minister, Member for Canberra, Ms Gai Brodtmann MP, Director of the Australian War Memorial, Dr Brendan Nelson, parliamentary guests, and current and former members of the Australian Defence Force.

The gun and ammunition limber is original World War 1 equipment which has been restored by Tim Frecklington who is best known for his work on the coach presented to Her Majesty The Queen on the occasion of Australia's Bicentenary and has recently completed a coach which has been presented to Her Majesty for her Diamond Jubilee. The horses and riders have been trained by Max Pearce from Goulburn, one of Australia's premier carriage and harness trainers.

To further commemorate the ANZAC centenary an actual round retrieved from each battlefield of WWI will be restored and held in the ammunition limber.

"It is not often you see a gun that is 100 years old and I thank the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company project team for bringing to life what most of us have only seen in paintings and photographs," the Governor-General said.

"This is indeed a unique tribute to all of those who fought in the 'War to end all Wars' and I commend everyone involved."

Dr Nelson said: "It is of particular significance to the Australia War Memorial to have this gun lead the march with its very close association to the Australian experience at Gallipoli. It will provide a stunning, memorable and evocative dimension to the ANZAC March."

Project Manager of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company's ANZAC Centenary 18 Pounder Project, Colonel Ian Ahearn (Retd), said: "This has been a massive undertaking and could not have been achieved without the drive and energy of the volunteers involved.

"Jim Frecklington has produced no less than a national icon and Max Pearce has provided the expertise that has produced a horse and driver team that combines with the gun and limber to produce the living memorial to ANZAC that we have strived for.

"To see it on parade gives me goosebumps."

Canberra Airport Chairman Terry Snow said: "I have a particular interest in horses and we've been delighted to host these magnificent animals and this historic equipment at a place like Fairbairn with such a strong military history. It is quite fitting as well to have done this during Heritage Week."

The horses, gun and limber are being kept at Fairbairn in the lead up to ANZAC Day, after which the gun will be housed temporarily in the arrivals hall at Canberra Airport.

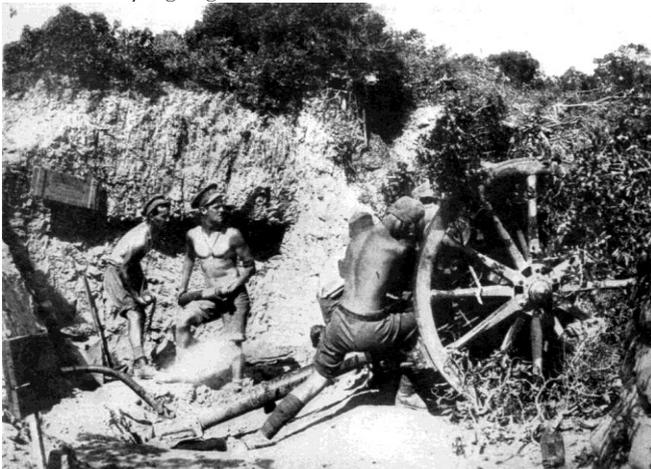
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THE STORY OF THE ORDNANCE QF 18-POUNDER

The **Ordnance QF 18 pounder**, or simply **18-pounder Gun**, was the standard British Empire field gun of the World War I era. It formed the backbone of the Royal Field Artillery during the war, and was produced in large numbers. It was used by British and Empire Forces in all the main theatres, and by British troops in Russia in 1919. Its calibre (84 mm) and hence shell weight were greater than those of the equivalent field guns in French (75 mm) and German (77 mm) service. It was generally horse drawn until mechanisation in the 1930s.

Australia and the 18 Pounder

By 1914 there were one hundred and sixteen 18 pounders in Australia. Thirty eight guns were sent away with the 1st Division Australian Imperial Force (AIF). All nine batteries of the 1st Division AIF served on Gallipoli. A further thirty eight guns were sent with the 2nd Division in November 1915.



No 4 Gun, 9 Australian Field Artillery Battery in action on M'Cay's Hill, Gallipoli 19 May 1915

In 1916 the AIF was expanded to five Divisions. From the existing eighteen field batteries a total of sixty field batteries and twenty howitzer batteries were raised each with four guns/howitzers. To fill the ranks men were transferred from the infantry and light horse and they needed to be trained in the specialist tasks of the gunners. For the next three years the artillery provided support during all of the major battles undertaken by the AIF in France and Belgium. Artillery played a dominant role in World War I to the extent that it was called the 'Gunners' War'.

One hundred and sixteen Mark I and Mark II 18 pounders were brought back to Australia when the AIF returned. None of the original seventy six guns were included.

The 2nd AIF used the 18 pounders in the Middle East, Malaya and New Guinea until they were replaced by the 25 Pounder. The guns were retired from service in 1945.

World War I

The 18 Pounder Horse-Drawn gun and its 2-wheeled ammunition limber were towed by a team of six vanner horses (light draught) in pairs - lead pair, centre pair, wheeler pair. A driver rode the left horse of each pair. The 2-wheeled ammunition limber was hooked up to the horses and the trail of the gun was hooked up to the limber, so the total weight of the gun and trail was supported on 4 wheels. The gun detachment all rode into action either on their own horses or on the limber and wagons, led by the No. 1 (the detachment commander, a Sergeant) on his own horse.

When World War I began, British field guns (13 pounder and 18 pounder) were equipped solely with shrapnel shells which contained 374 small spherical bullets. High Explosive TNT rounds, which exploded on impact, were first fired in action on 31 October 1914 on the Ypres front and were successful.



Australian Gun team in typical traveling formation crossing the Canal du Nord, 1918

At Villers Bretonneux during the German 1918 spring offensive, massed 18-pounders were used effectively against the attacking Germans. On 4 April the Germans made their final attempt to break the Allied line. Brigadier-General Edward Harding-Newman, Commander Royal Artillery issued the following order *"This attack must and can be stopped by artillery fire. If any battery can no longer effectively stop the enemy from its present position, it will at once move forward to a position on the crest, to engage the enemy over open sights. It is essential that the artillery hold the line and they will do so."* Fire from several artillery brigades, mostly with 18-pounder batteries, stopped the German advance, effectively ending the offensive.



Australian gun firing, showing the characteristic long recoil, Passchendaele October 1917

At the Armistice there were three thousand one hundred and sixty two 18-pounders in service on the Western Front and they had fired approximately 100 million rounds.