'Where right and glory lead'

Fig 1. The gold plated cap covering the muzzle opening of the18-pr.[1]

On an overcast day in Fairbairn ACT on 15 April 2015, a small group of artillery enthusiast was busy putting the final touches on a magnificently restored World War One (WW1) 18 pounder (18-Pdr) Quick Firing (QF) gun. Today, marked the day that the 18-Pdr was to be presented and blessed by the Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove. A project instigated by members of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company (RAAHC) that drew together master carriage builders, a master horse trainer and carriage driver, and military enthusiasts with one common goal; to create a living piece of Australian military history.

The 18-Pdr and its ammunition limber required an immense amount of work for it to be restored to its original WW1 condition. It is only one of a handful of 18-Pdr guns remaining in Australia and the 100 years of work and wear had taken its toll. The accumulation of rust, in

[1] Mark Jamieson, personal photograph taken 15 April 2015.

positioned in an area that is now known as Macquarie Place with a purpose to command and defend the approaches to Sydney Cove.[4] This first deployment of guns represents the formation of Artillery in Australia and following on from this, Artillery units began arriving in Australia from 1856.

The evolution of the artillery gun is worth understanding and especially the importance of the 18-Pdr Q.F to Australian military history. With the invention of rifling in the barrel, the smooth bore and muzzle loading guns became obsolete, the newly developed guns were classified 'rifled-muzzle-loading' (R.M.L). These were subsequently succeeded by the 'rifled-breech-loading' (R.B.L), to be later known as 'breech-loading' (B.L). The 18-Pdr 'quick firing' gun (Q.F) was applied to the guns that were able to sustain a higher rate of fire than the B.L guns.[5] The classification of the gun is also important. The 18-Pdr got its name from the size of the projectiles weight that it fired. This was a common way of distinguishing the guns used British forces. This method was quickly adopted by the Australian Artillery, and therefore, the guns were referred to as the 12- Pdr, 18-Pdr, and 25-Pdr.[6]

In 1903 there were only 48 15-Pdr B.L's available in Australia, and this was considered to be inadequate. In 1905 a decision was made to purchase 24 of the newly developed 18-Pdr Q.F. guns.[7] At the outbreak of WW1, Australia had now purchased 116 18-Pdrs. One third of these were soon to be sent with the First Division, Australian Imperial Forces (A.I.F).[8]

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[4] Christopher Jobson, *Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery: Customs and Traditions* (Manly: Directorate of Artillery, Artillery Centre, 1997), p. 9.
[5] S.N.Gower, *Guns of the Regiment,* (Canberra: The Australian War Memorial, 1981), p. 13.
[6] *ibid*.
[7] *ibid.*, p. 37.
[8] *ibid*., p. 40.

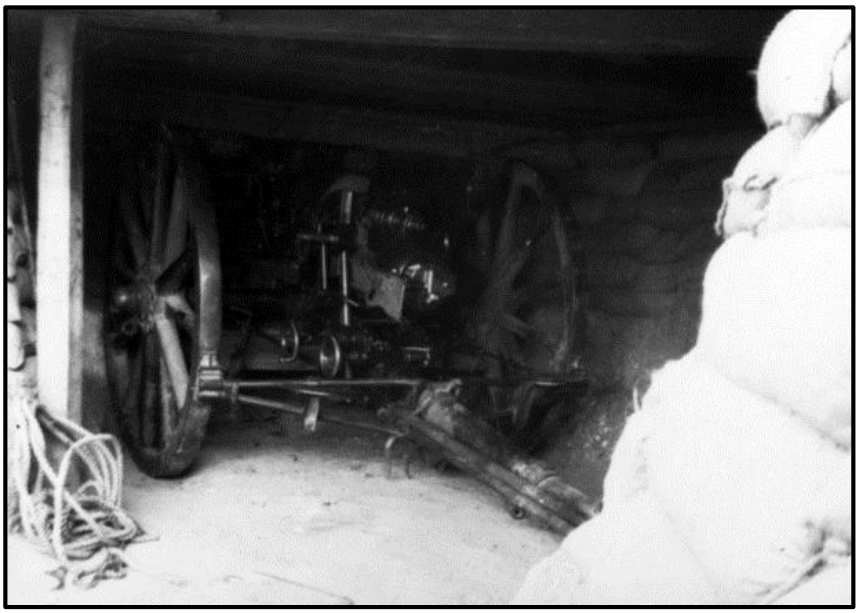

Fig 2. One of the 4th Battery guns, 2nd Field Artillery Brigade in its pit at Anzac.[9]

Steeped in history the 18-Pdr was the workhorse of the Australian Artillery throughout WW1, with Gallipoli marking the beginning of its inclusion in the war by the Australian batteries. It is recorded that a single 18-Pdr from the 4th Battery Australian Field Artillery (AFA) was dragged ashore and was positioned on a knoll south of the beach. The gun fired its first salvo at 6.pm, much to the delight of the troops. The following day more field artillery began arriving from the 7th Battery AFA.[10]

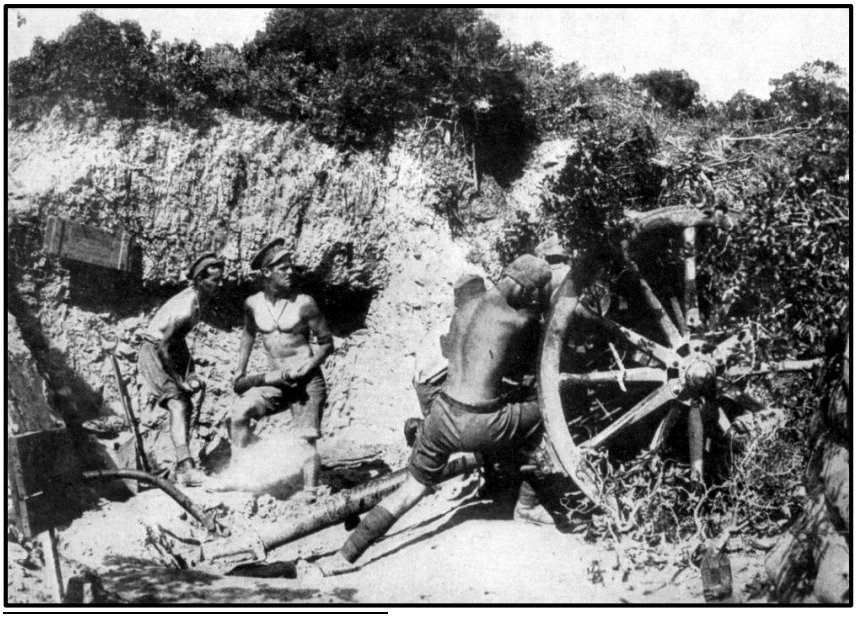

Fig 3. The No.4 gun, 18 pound field gun of B sub-section 9th Battery in action firing from McCay's (M'Cay's) Hill, Gallipoli 19 May 1915. The Australian gunners, all from Hobart Tasmania are stripped to the waist in tough Aussie fighting spirit.[11]

[9] Australian War Memorial collection, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J03272/ (accessed 18 April 2015)
[10] Gower, *Guns of the Regiment*, p. 40.
[11] Australian War Memorial collection, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A00879/ (accessed 18 April 2015).

The 18-Pdr Q.F. gun was far more effective than the French 75mm and the German 77mm, and as a result of this, caused considerable damage to the opposing forces throughout the war. The 18-Pdr was a weapon that provided great protection to the infantry; it was used to bombard the enemy forces, thus providing a protective screen for the advancing troops. This tactic was also well used by the opposing force and a considerable loss of life to both sides was a direct result of artillery fire.

This brings us back to the present day in Fairbairn ACT. Just as the gun and limber was hauled into battle by six horses during WW1, six horses were saddled up with a rider allocated to each two horse team ready to haul the gun and limber down the road to their meeting, not of battle, but for a blessing from the Governor General. The gun detachment dressed immaculately in their WW1 uniforms mounted the horses and formed up around the 18-Pdr and limber and marched forward. With call of 'detachment walk on' soon followed by the calls of 'wheel right' and 'wheel left' as the gun detachment made their way from their holding station, down the roads to their final stop at the old Fairbairn guardhouse. With the call of 'detachment halt' and 'eyes left' echoing, horses and gun detachment promptly halted in front of the Governor General and assembled party.

Fig 4. The gun and limber on its way to be blessed by the Governor General.[12]

[12] Mark Jamieson, personal photograph taken 15 April 2015.

The Governor General then addressed the gathered crowd and spoke of the importance of remembering not only the 18-Pdr and its place in Australian military history, but signifying its importance by stating that 'the backbone of the brigades was the horse drawn artillery'.

The Governor General goes on to say,

> This is a very auspicious day and would I like to congratulate the Royal Australian Artillery Historical team for bringing to life what most of us have seen in paintings or photos, and of course I refer to that iconic scene of the horse, the gun and the limber.[13]

The 18-Pdr gun and limber is now part of the nation's military treasure and we are now able to glimpse back into the history of our nation at war in WW1, and the essential role played by the Artillery of the AIF.

The Governor General finished with 'I will now bless the gun', and with this, the detachment readied itself and the call of 'detachment walk on' could again be heard as the gun and limber moved forward.

Fig 5. Left to right behind the 18-Pdr are Colonel Ian Ahearn (Retd), Kevin Browning RAAHC Director of Collections, Master Carriage maker Jim Frecklington and the Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove.[14]

[13] Mark Jamieson, Recording of the Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove addressing the crowd in Fairbairn ACT, 15 April 2015.
[14] Mark Jamieson, personal photograph taken 15 April 2015.

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Photographs

Ahearn, Ian. Personal photographs (permission to use).

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