



Royal Australian Artillery Association (N.S.W)
Newcastle Sub-Branch

Affiliated with the Royal Artillery Association, Woolwich, London

NEWSLETTER No.2.

June, 1989

Annual General Meeting. Just a reminder that this Meeting will be held at the Adamstown HQ of 113 Field Battery at 1500 hrs on Sunday, 25 June, 1989. The Agenda was set out in Newsletter No. 1 and listed (i) to receive reports & statements for 1988/89; (ii) to elect office bearers for 1989/90; & (iii) to decide upon any proposal or matter, & transact any other business which may be submitted to the meeting. Item (iii) will include such matters as Newcastle Gunner Dinner arrangements (venue, menu, cost, dress, etc); annual subscriptions; and membership drive (there are many ex-gunners in our area who don't know the Association exists or how to become members). As names & addresses of these have "surfaced", extra copies of N/L.1 have been made & posted to them. Also, brief mention was made in that document of some social activities for consideration; to those might be added a gunner re-union (or old fashioned "SMOKO"!). While formal resolutions must be restricted to financial members, we would greatly appreciate general discussion & comments from everyone attending.

Annual Subscriptions. Current members are reminded these are now due; our financial year ends on 30 April. The Treasurer assumes that a few of our regular members have overlooked payment of their subs for '88/'89 and in some cases '87/'88. Although your subs have been outstanding for a year or so, you have been retained on our mailing list and have been treated in all respects as a financial member. The attention of all members is drawn to the final line of this para, and the Committee appeals to all members to send their subs to Maj R. Hitchens, 107 Alton Rd., Raymond Terrace, 2324 or pay him at the A.G.M.

SUBS DUE For 1987/88 \$;for 88/89 \$;for 89/90 \$; TOTAL \$.

"The Inside Story". Pages 2 & 3 of this issue of N/L should be of interest to all gunners, and are included in case you missed them when printed. Registered Nos of three of the four found show they were at Fort Scratchley; while rust has obliterated the No on the fourth gun, it was almost certainly there also. There may be further news about this in the daily press - we hope so!

Lucky find saves historic cannon from destruction



Picture by KEN ROBSON

Balcomb's yard foreman, Mr Murray Cameron, of Beresfield, surveys the cannon on site yesterday.

FOUR historic Fort Scratchley cannon believed to be 117 years old have been saved from destruction.

The five-ton, Monster - size old muzzle-loaders were hidden inside four steel cylindrical tanks demolished at the State Dockyard and sent last Thursday to Balcomb's Wallsend scrap-metal yard.

When three of the tanks were cut open, workers found the 11ft 3in long (about 3.3m) cannon inside in remarkably good condition after apparently being used as hydraulic rams.

The fourth cannon was in jeopardy. The tank containing it had been split and the gun sent to the furnace at BHP.. Fortunately some quick thinking at BHP had saved it.

The Fort Scratchley Military Society curator, Mr Graham Davidson, said yesterday that he believed the 80 pounders built in 1872 were all once erected at the fort.

It seems they were sent to Newcastle to defend the port in the 1877 Russo-Turkish War but all trace of them vanished after 1907.

The cannon and carriages originally sat on 16ft long (4.8m) timber recoil platforms. They were almost identical to other fort guns now at Silo Hill, Stroud.

I hoped that one might be found someday, but to find all four is beyond belief. Mr Davidson said BHP realised the historic value of the find and offered to return their cannon the same day.

The president of the Military Museum Society, Mr David Berriman said the rightful place for the cannon was back within the fort where they could form the centrepiece of an authentic defence exhibit for tourists.

Balcomb's Wallsend manager, Mr Paul Pratten, said the guns were found only after the tanks had been split open on site for easier handling.

"Solid Steel shafts have been inserted up each barrel for them to be used to apparently compress water," he said. "The idea was ingenious. Thank God they were used that way. I suspect the cannon without their gun cradles would be a nuisance and normally they might have been dumped in the river and lost."

A State Dockyard representative said later that apart from surface rust and the blocked barrels, the cannon appeared to be in almost mint condition.

The serial number 87 on one cannon tallies with records.

The cannon were being returned to the dockyard yesterday.

- Mike Scanlon
NEWCASTLE HERALD 16/5/59

Fort likely home for old cannon

THE future of the four historic muzzle-loading cannon found recently in Newcastle is likely to be decided by the Minister for Public Works, Mr Murray.

But it seems certain that they will be eventually returned to Fort Scratchley, where they were first placed in 1877.

The five-ton relics will be cleaned up first by being sandblasted at the State Dockyard, where they were concealed as weights within storage pumps for at least 30 years.

The cannon were saved from the furnace late last week.

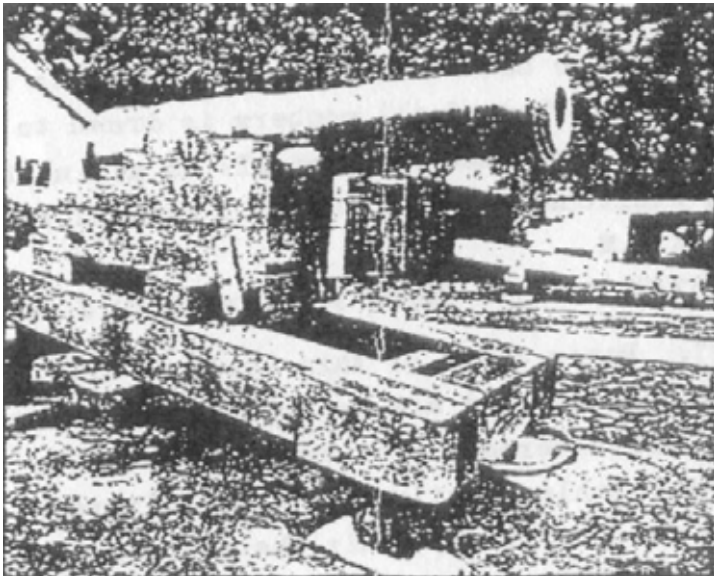
A State Dockyard representative has said it was possible that the storage cylinders dated from the 1950s. It was also possible that the cannons had been rescued from a scrapyard for a second time.

According to military arms expert Mr Graham Davidson, the Gregson Park cannon featured in yesterday's Herald actually came from Fort Macquarie, the original building on the Sydney Opera House site.

"They are 42 pounders as compared to the ones just found, which are 80 pounders." Mr Davidson said. "Two other old Fort Scratchley guns weighing 12 tons were also once set up at a rotunda at Newcastle Beach but these are believed to have been scrapped in World War II.

NH 17/5/59

Pictures and articles by courtesy of Newcastle Herald



Similar cannon restored at Gregson Park, Hamilton

"Non-Concrete" Artillery. Because your Editor spent virtually all his active army life as a "Concrete" Gunner, his knowledge & appreciation of other Branches of Artillery are very limited. So - how about some N-CA news from Bird Gunners, Galloping Gunners and Tank Attack Gunners (what's their nickname?); what were the pro's and con's of YOUR specialty? Is there any special occasion or "story" you'd like to share? Let's hear from you!

"Leaves From Old Files". Where were you at 0220K 8 Jan 1942? At that time the "Battle of Newcastle" had commenced. Japanese sub I 21 was in the process of distributing shells (1916 vintage made in Britain when Japan was an ally, but poorly maintained thereafter), principal targets apparently (i) Steelworks, (ii) Zaara St Powerhouse; & (iii) the coast searchlights. The response was prompt and definite - four rounds of 6 inch HE which a reliable resource later reported had "bracketed" the attacking vessel. The sub commander "got the message" and fled the area - or "shot thru!"

Some aspects of the engagement appear to have been overlooked in the past. First, the success of the response was due to excellent teamwork of all ranks of the Battery under the leadership of Capt (later Major) Wal Watson, ED. It was the first - and also believed to be the only - occasion when an Australian coastal fort engaged an enemy war-vessel. Third, the majority of the personnel involved in serving the guns were members of the oldest Battery in the Australian Army; it was formed as a result of a public meeting held in Newcastle on 1 Dec., 1855, and has an uninterrupted history since then. Originally a Field Battery, it became a Coast Battery in the 1860's and continued in that role until 1962. It then became a Light Anti Aircraft Battery until it resumed its original role as a Field Battery in 1972 at Adamstown. Fourth, the only known "battle casualty" was Bdr (later Capt) the late Stan Newton, ED, who was in Parnell Place returning from leave when one of the few Jap shells to explode stunned him and left him with a small splinter of shrapnel in his face (fortunately only a minor injury).

In the light of these facts, would it not be reasonable to suggest to our City Fathers that an appropriate recognition of the part played by the 113 Battery in answering an attacker might be to extend to the Unit the honour and privilege of "Freedom of the City" - if not immediately, then perhaps on the 50th anniversary of the "Battle of Newcastle"? How about some 'lobbying' of your respective Aldermen!

MARK YOUR DIARIES FOR 25 JUNE - RAA ASSN AGM.

This facsimile copy of the Newcastle Newsletter has been made using OCR - Optical Character Recognition software from an original provided by the Branch. Pagination has been altered slightly and some minor spelling changes have been made by the editor.