



Incorporated

NEW ZEALAND PERMANENT FORCE OLD COMRADES ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

PO BOX 33-710, TAKAPUNA, AUCKLAND 9

NEWSLETTER No 69

March 1991

A Registered Publication

LAST POST: A. (Alex) Swann, Life Member, 22 Dec 90, at Christchurch.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: are payable in advance, and are now due for 1991.

If you are more than three years in arrears you may be struck off.

In order to become financial to 31 Dec 91 you owe us \$. . . .

Please remit the amount owed to Secretary at above address.

Remember, subscriptions paid in advance escape increases in the intervening years. Current subscription is \$5 per annum.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

Lt Col E.W. Anker to 8 Gannet Pt, Rothesay Bay, Auckland 10.

Lt Col J.S. Heard to 100 Beach Rd, Castor Bay, Auckland 9.

M.W. Ruffell to Unit 1, 34 Eskdale Rd, Birkdale, Auckland 10.

GONE NO ADDRESS:

LAST KNOWN LOC

Major D.S.J. Dwane

384 Great South Rd, Auckland.

T. (Tawhiwhi) Brown

14 Tekoa Rd, Panmure, Auckland 6.

Anyone knowing present locations please inform Secretary.

CHANGE IN PHONE NUMBERS: Secretary's phone number will change to: 445-3567 from 2200 hrs 5 April 1991.

COMMITTEE MEETING: The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at the Birkenhead RSA, Recreation Drive, Birkenhead, on Saturday 13 April 91, commencing 1000 hrs. Non-committee members are welcome to attend.

AUCKLAND GUNNERS DAY SOCIAL: Will be held at the Birkenhead RSA on Wednesday 22 May 91 from 1100 hrs. A comprehensive luncheon menu is available for \$6-70 all items (same price as last year!). A special invitation is extended to all ranks 16 Field Regiment RNZA. Our widows are also cordially invited (a separate invitation will be sent to each of those in the Auckland area). Any non-Aucklanders who may be in the area on 22 May are, of course, also welcome to attend. If you are coming please inform Alf Smith (Auckland Rep) on 410-4564, or Secretary on 445-3567 not later than Monday morning 20 May so we can keep the caterer happy.

REUNIONS:

14 NZ Light AA Regiment Assn: 12-14 Apr 91. Contact Secretary, P. Turner, Box 528, Levin, Phone 069/81046. Also advertised in Newslett No 68.

5 Field Regiment Assn: Sunday 28 May 91, 1100 hrs to 1600, Hutt Valley RSA. Registrations to Les Sheehan, c/o Hutt Valley RSA, Box 30 052, Lower Hutt.

NZ Korea Veterans Assn: 17-18 Oct 1992 at Christchurch. Contact Gina Wall, Box 1765, Christchurch.

3 NZ Div: 19-20 Oct 1991 at Ellerslie Racecourse, Auckland. Contact Trevor Whaley, 300 Sunset Rd, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 10.

REUNIONS (Cont.): 93 Bty 15 Heavy AA Regimtny (stationed at Orakei 1943-44. Contact Ray Clark, 9 Palmers St, Warkworth.

AMENDMENT TO NEWSLETTER No 68: Add to roll of Life Members: 1612 H.B. Anderson. Congratulations, Harry!

NEWS FROM AROUND AND ABOUT: Our condolences are due to George Blandford Life Member, who lost his good lady, Olga, on 4 March 1991.

Slim and Mollie Cumming's grandson, Corporal Michael Perring RNZ Sigs, has been selected as a member of the Quarter Guard to accompany the New Zealand commemorative party to Crete during May this year.

Members who served in Waiouru during the 1950s will remember Jim Page, PT expert. Harold Nicholson recently 'caught' Jim just as he was about to depart for Australia. If you wish to contact him his address is: J.J. Page, Unit 35, Marrabeem Retirement Village, 1259/65 Pittwater Rd, Marrabeem 2102, N.S.W.



GOLDEN GLOW: Mollie and Jack Cumming after 50 years marriage.

Nothing's changed

Mollie and Jack Cumming celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in the dance hall where they met more than 50 years ago.

The only difference is that the old dance hall where Mollie met Jack at an army dance during the war has been revamped into a kiosk.

"It is the same place where we had our wedding reception as well," says Mrs Cumming. "We really like it."

Mrs Cumming (70) says the marriage has had its ups and downs but she and Mr Cumming (80) have coped.

"I suppose it is unusual for couples to be together as long as we have nowadays but we have had to give and take a little," she says.

Mr and Mrs Cumming have lived in Devonport all their married life and celebrated their anniversary last weekend in Cheltenham.

I thought this too good to miss!

Acknowledgments to North Shore Times Advertiser, 7 Mar 91.

I am sure all members will join with me in congratulating Slim and Mollie. Sec.

BOOT AND SADDLE

Continued from Newsletter No 68

By Jim Gilberd.

Duties:

Soldiers joining the Troop can either work with horses or be employed as saddlers, farriers, clerks, storemen and batmen, but every soldier in the Troop must learn to ride - military style.

Those who work with horses are given riding and driving instructions by the Troop Equitation Instructor. Those with less riding ability may take longer to qualify and become stablemen (responsible for preparation and feeding), or limber gunners. They all get a chance to ride out on exercise and are allotted horses they are responsible for.

Conditions of Service:

Any man from within the Army or from 'Civvy Street' who thinks he would like to serve as a Horse Gunner is invited to spend a few days at the 'Wood' before he enlists or transfers. This he does at no expense to himself. During his stay he is treated as, and lives the life of, a horse soldier, so that he can see if he likes the life. If at the end of his visit he decides it's not for him or he does not measure up to the standard demanded, then that is the end of the matter. On the other hand if he decides he would like to join and he is considered suitable he can enlist for a normal engagement of three, six or nine years - provided he fits in he can spend the whole of his service with the Troop - most do. Senior NCOs with special skills can serve 20 years at the 'Wood.'

Farriers:

Six farriers are on strength, responsible for shoeing the horses, and work in a very modern farriers' shop. They are trained at the Army's School of Farriery which is run by the Army Veterinary Corps at Melton Mowbray. Farriers regularly attend upgrading courses and there is always one farrier at the Remount Depot at Larkhill. Troop farriers together with farriers from the Household Cavalry also shoe the 300 horses belonging to the Metropolitan Police.

Horses:

Of the 120 or so on strength, 13 are Officers' chargers and the remainder are designated 'ride and drive' animals. Like the Household Cavalry the horses came from Ireland - the colours favoured by the Troop are light and dark bays, browns and blacks. Various-sized horses are required, 16 hands for chargers and lead horses, 15.3 hands for the centres, and the wheelers (nearest the limber), 15.2 hands. The training of remounts (replacements) is carried out at Larkhill, the home of the Royal School of Artillery. What a sight for the School staff, all going about their business of modern gunnery, to see Gun Teams from the past going by.

The Guns:

The Troop has ten 13-prs all of which saw service during the Great War of 1914-18. During World War II after Dunkirk the Gunners were short on 'pieces of ordnance' and they again saw service for a time.

The 13-pr gun owes its origin to the 'Horse and Field Gun Committee' which was convened as the Boer War drew to a close. The Committee drew up specifications for two new guns, the result being the 13-pr (Horse Artillery) and its larger brother the 18-pr (Field Artillery); these became the main armament for the Great War. They came into production about 1904 and were joined later by 4.5-inch howitzers.

Administration:

The Troop is administered by Troop HQ which is made up of the C.O.,

Adjutant, RSM, supported by the RQMS, Chief Clerk and their respective staffs.

There is a 'staff employed section' headed by the Troop Captain (2 I/C); this group includes farriers, fitters, wheelwrights, tailors, cooks and the like.

The Troop on Parade:

When on parade there are five Officers, 48 soldiers, 71 horses and six 13-pr guns.

The Musical Drive:

During the summer the Troop performs the musical drive at the Royal Tournament and at various agricultural shows and military tattoos. The Drive has also been performed abroad. It is an exciting and spectacular display of horsemanship carried out at the gallop, culminating in the dangerous scissor movement when the teams cross in the centre of the area with no visible gap between them.

Six 13-prs plus 36 horses take part.

Mountain Gunner:

From Rudyard Kipling - 'Screw Guns.'

"Smokin' my pipe on the mountings, sniffin' the morning cool,
I walks in my old brown gaiters, along o' my old brown mule
With seventy Gunners behind me, an' never a beggar forgets
It's only the pick of the Army that handles the dear little pets."

Tailpiece:

So ends my abridged version of 'Boot and Saddle.'* There is much more to be told of the lives and times of the Horse Soldiers and their 'long-faced friends.' Perhaps at another time we may continue the story.

Napier

April 1990.

* 'Boot and Saddle' was a trumpet call. When sounded the horse soldiers were to be 'booted and spurred,' their mounts saddled up and ready to move off in mounted order.

Concluded.

THE STORY OF THE TWENTY-FIVE POUNDER

By W.L. Ruffell

From about the year 1700 until the adoption by the British of the metric system of measurement in ordnance manufacture, field guns have been designated by the weight of their standard projectile. In the case of the 25-pr it is the high explosive (HE) shell, hence the title. I use the present tense because the 25-pr is still in use in a number of other countries.

The 25-pr also fires solid armour-piercing (AP) shot plus carrier shell, e.g. smoke, but these are non-standard because they weigh less than 25 pounds (lbs), and do not behave in the same way ballistically.

Guns have been engines of war for over 600 years. During that time succeeding generations of field Gunners have sought to improve their pieces and thus the effectiveness of their primary role in action - close support of the Infantry.

Designers of a new field gun are naturally influenced by lessons learned from experience with its immediate predecessors. Therefore, to relate the story of the 25-pr we must start with the equipments it

superseded, the QF 13 and 18-pr guns, and the QF 4.5-inch howitzer, introduced in 1904 and 1910 respectively. All three remained in service until the first year of World War 2. The 13-pr was really a lighter version of the 18-pr issued to the Royal Horse Artillery only and will not be further considered in this article.

Between the two World Wars a New Zealand Field Artillery Brigade comprised three batteries of 18-prs and one of 4.5-in howitzers, each battery consisting of six equipments, reduced to four in the peace establishment. This mixture of guns and howitzers dated back to the smooth-bore era when batteries were composite units of the two types.

The 18-pr, having a comparatively flat trajectory was suitable only in open country with few significant hill features as in much of western Europe or Africa. When high-angle fire was required in more hilly or mountainous country the 4.5-in howitzer was employed. If the target could not be engaged by the 18-prs they 'stood easy.'

The first lesson was hammered home on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Field Artillery support should have been delivered from the beaches at the outset, but the only guns ashore by the evening of the landing were two Indian Mountain batteries plus one solitary Australian 18-pr. The former did good work but were far too few in number, while the latter was of little use; it could not clear the crests immediately behind the beach. The one New Zealand 4.5 howitzer battery available was not brought ashore until the day after the landing, while of the two New Zealand 18-pr batteries one arrived on 27 April, the other not until the 30th.

To be of any use at all the 18-prs had to be manhandled up precipitous cliffs by literally hundreds of Infantry - who could have been much better employed on other tasks - in an exercise which took ten days to complete.

The positions the Gunners were obliged to occupy were considered 'impossible' by ordinary standards. Virtually the only targets they could engage were those visible from the gun positions. To make matters worse both guns and howitzers were starved of ammunition.

Thus many of the casualties suffered by the Infantry in that ill-managed campaign were directly attributable to the dire shortage of suitable supporting Artillery. The nature of the country demanded a preponderance of guns capable of high-angle fire which the planners neglected to provide.

France delivered the second lesson. Under normal conditions, i.e. with the gun on a level platform, the range of the 18-pr was 6,500 yards because the pole-type trail limited the elevation of the piece to 16° . Greater ranges with the Marks 1 and 2 guns could be achieved only by digging the trails down a foot for each additional 1000 yards range desired and laying by field clinometer, the maximum practicable being three feet for 9,500. This exercise was irksome and time-consuming, of little use when fire was needed in a hurry.

The 4.5 carriage permitted an elevation of 45° , but the maximum range was no more than that of the 18-pr, i.e. 6,500. Even this elevation sometimes proved insufficient to clear crests.

Now there were occasions in France during World War 1 when attacking Infantry attained objectives beyond which their supporting Artillery were unable to engage targets, e.g. to deal with enemy counter-attacks, because the guns did not have the range, nor were they always able to move forward to new positions owing to the state of the battlefield which gunfire from both sides had churned into a morass in which guns and horses got hopelessly stuck. Thus Gunners were sometimes unable to provide support for their Infantry when it

was sorely needed.

Therefore, said the experts, field guns must have greater range - and more versatile trajectories.

Development of a new field gun actually began during World War 1, and by 1918 it was ready. It was the 18-pr Mark 4 on Mark 4 or 5 carriage (both of which had a number of variations). This was not a modified Mark 1 or 2 but an entirely new gun on a new carriage which permitted an elevation of $37^{\circ} 30'$, giving a range of 11,000 yards. A number of Royal Artillery units received the new gun but with the end of the war came the inevitable restrictions on Defence spending by the British Government, so that others had to be content with the old 1904 version. Many of the latter were still in use at the outbreak of World War 2.

We in New Zealand never saw the Mark 4 18-pr, but had to put up with the older Marks 1 and 2 until the early years of World War 2. 2NZEF Gunners will remember training on them until 1941. They had been fitted with pneumatic wheels for mechanical draught, but otherwise were identical to the guns their fathers had manned in World War 1.

New Zealand Governments have never been noted for keeping defence equipment up-to-date - and have always treated the Army as the Cinderella of the services.

The post-war (1920s) period saw a series of post mortems on ordnance, weapons and equipment in the United Kingdom, resulting in recommendations for the improvement of existing armament. As the 18-pr Mark 4 was not deemed suitable for further development, an entirely new equipment was proposed. It was to be a 'gun/howitzer' designed to take the place of both the 18-pr and 4.5 howitzer. Such an equipment would be capable of providing support in any type of terrain (it was thought), and a single nature of ammunition for field artillery would greatly facilitate supply in time of war.

At the same time the shell, the weapon of the artillery, was examined in the light of World War 1 lessons. During that conflict Infantry on more than one occasion found on nearing their objectives that the barbed wire entanglements the Artillery were supposed to have destroyed were still more or less intact. Shrapnel, the sole projectile first made for the 18-pr in the early stages of the war, could not effectively cut this wire. HE was introduced in 1915 but the 18-pr was still found wanting. Shells from the 4.5 howitzer were much better but there were never enough of them.

Shrapnel, once considered the ultimate artillery mankiller, became obsolescent during the trench warfare of World War 1, being replaced by HE, a weapon more efficient in all respects. Not only was HE cheaper to manufacture but Officers needed less practice in its use to become proficient, an important consideration in a war in which the casualty rate among young Officers was inordinately high. It was eliminated from the Royal Artillery field branch in 1935, so the new gun would not fire it.

However, in New Zealand Gunners continued to fire shrapnel for practice until they received 25-prs in 1941.

Royal Artillery experts concluded that a gun of around 3.7 inches (94 mm) in calibre with a range of at least 15,000 yards (13,716 m) firing a shell of from 20 to 25 lbs (9 to 11 kg) weight was needed to replace both the 18-pr and 4.5 howitzer.

Experiments with an 18-pr, a 22-pr, and a 25-pr were carried out in 1933, and in the same year the General Staff agreed a 25-pr be the sole field artillery equipment. In 1934, after further discussion with the War Department on specifications, the Director of Artillery

(United Kingdom) ordered a pilot model.

Then arose the spectre which has forever been the bane of the British soldier in peacetime - a tight-fisted Treasury. The holders of the purse-strings decreed that if the Gunners wanted a new field gun they would have to convert the existing Mark 4 18-prs of which there were large stocks.

Now the Mark 4 18-pr, calibre 3.3 inches (84 mm), was fitted with a loose liner which could be easily removed and replaced, so at first sight conversion appeared simple: change the liner to one of larger calibre. However, 3.45 inches (87.6 mm) was the maximum to which the gun could be relined and at the same time retain an adequate margin of safety. So in 1935 it was officially decided to adopt a 25-pr of 3.45-in calibre. This was the 25-pr Mark 1, often referred to as the '18/25-pr,' indicating conversion. Gunners who served in France and in the Middle East in the early days of World War 2 will be familiar with it.

There was another snag: the 18-pr carriage would not stand a propellant charge powerful enough to send a 25-pr shell the desired 15,000 yards, i.e. it could not fire super. Consequently, a maximum range of 11,800 yards had to be accepted.

About a year later, in 1936, a decision to increase the range to 13,500 carried with it approval to design a new equipment capable of firing super charge.

Early in 1938 a split-trail pilot equipment had passed technical and field tests, had been approved for introduction into the service, and a small order placed. However, at 41 cwt (2087 kg) it was rather heavy; instead the Royal Artillery favoured a box-trail carriage with a firing platform as fitted to an experimental 105-mm gun produced by Vickers in 1922. Production of the split-trail equipment was therefore held up while one of the 25-pr Mark 2 guns was fitted to the Vickers carriage. After a demonstration at the School of Artillery Larkhill,* those taking part voted unanimously in favour of the latter combination. It became the legendary 25-pr Mark 2 on Mark 1 carriage, familiar to all New Zealand Gunners who served from World War 2 to the 1960s.

The Mark 2 gun first saw action in Norway in 1940, and by 1945 over 12,000 had been made.

As we have already seen, the 25-pr fell short of what Gunners felt a field gun should be capable. Nevertheless it proved a robust and dependable equipment, easily handled in action even by a reduced detachment. Its cross-country performance was good, and with reasonable care it gave excellent all-round service.

The strength of the carriage was amply demonstrated in 1943 when the first QF 17-pr anti-tank guns were mounted upon it; it easily stood up to the much more powerful piece.

The Germans appreciated a good gun when they saw one. They put all 25-prs captured in serviceable condition into service in their own forces; they formed whole regiments of 25-prs Mark 2, which they designated 8.76 cm FK 280(e). The 18/25s, many of which were left behind in France by the British in 1940, were designated 8.76 cm FK 281(e) (box-trail carriage), and 8.76 cm FK 282(e)** (split-trail carriage). They were deployed for coast defence.

* Now the Royal School of Artillery.

** FK = Feld Kan i.e. field gun.

Few changes were made to the 25-pr Mark 2 ordnance during World War 2, the principal modifications being the attachment of a muzzle brake to ease the strain on the carriage caused by the firing of super charge (later super plus increment), and the radiusing of the corners of the breech ring to strengthen it and prevent cracking. The latter mod. made the gun the Mark 2/1.

The Mark 3 gun differed in having a slower-coned shot seating to prevent slip-back of the projectile on loading, while the 3/1 was a Mark 3 modified in the same way as the Mark 2/1.

The Mark 4 gun was similar to the Mark 3/1 but of new manufacture.

Towards the end of World War 2 a Mark 2 carriage with a wheel-base of reduced width was introduced to enable the gun to be towed by light vehicles, e.g. jeeps in the jungle, or be carried in an aircraft, but it was far from satisfactory - or popular. Every time the layer turned the traversing handwheel he skinned his knuckles on the left gun wheel!

A Mark 3 version with the same wheel-base as the Mark 2 but with a trail hinged in the centre to bring the maximum elevation up to 55° was introduced for use in mountainous country, e.g. parts of Italy, to overcome the need to dig the trail down. It was a makeshift solution to the problem, clumsy and difficult to handle and maintain in action.

Neither the Mark 2 nor the Mark 3 carriages were procured by the New Zealand Government.

In order that armoured units might be supported by field guns with the same cross-country performance as tanks, several self-propelled (SP) equipments were produced for the Royal Horse Artillery, only two of which saw service. These were the 'Bishop' (25-pr on Valentine tank chassis), and the 'Sexton' (25-pr on Sherman tank chassis).

In September 1942 there arose an urgent requirement by the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) for a gun which could fire a 25-pr shell up to 10,000 yards but be smaller and lighter than the existing equipment. It had to be both air and man-portable, suitable for use in the difficult terrain encountered in places such as New Guinea.

Designers looked at the possibility of re-designing the 25-pr on the basis that no component weigh more than 400 lbs, and that the maximum range be not less than 10,000 yards. Work progressed rapidly, and in just three months the pilot model was ready for proof.

Although not as stable as the full-sized equipment it proved quite satisfactory, particularly at the higher ranges, 10,400 for Charge 3, and 11,500 for Super. Few modifications to the pilot model were necessary.

- The heaviest item was the recoil system at 408 lbs.

More than 200 short 25-prs were produced. They were first used near Lae on 8 September 1943, and then at the landings at Red Beach.

The design and production of this gun was an excellent example of how the cooperation of a dedicated team of user, designer, producer, and inspector could meet an urgent operational requirement.

Examples may be seen at the RAA Museum, North Head, Sydney, and at the RAEME Museum, Bandiana.

With World War 2 long over and the campaign in Korea coming to an end Royal Artillery Gunners tried again to get a field gun with the 15,000 yards range they had sought after World War 1; they longed for that extra 1,500 yards they had had to forego when accepting the 25-pr Mark 2 with its maximum range of 13,500. To the uninitiated 1,500 yards may not seem critical, but it means that with an arc of fire of 120° in action a gun can cover an additional 13 square miles of territory. The significance of that figure should be obvious.

To be continued.