

World War I Field Gun

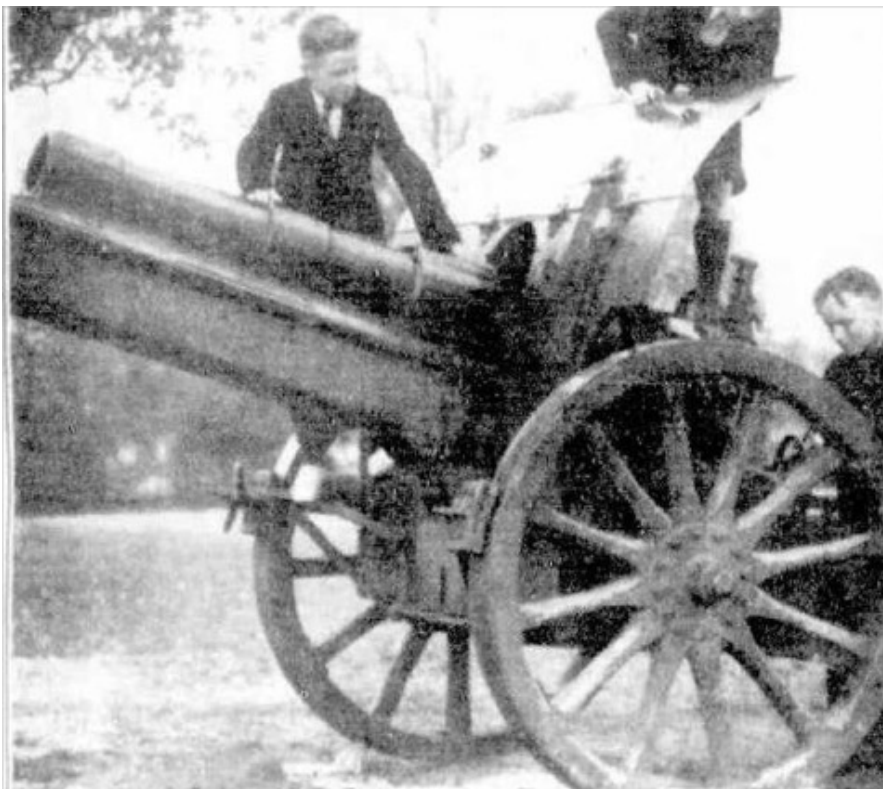
This trophy gun was situated in the Darling Gardens, Clifton Hill for over 90 years. Manufactured by the German firm Krupp in 1915, this 150 mm Heavy Field Howitzer became the Imperial German Army's principal gun of battle in World War I. Australian soldiers respected this weapon for the damage it was capable of inflicting on front line trenches and on artillery batteries behind the front lines.

This gun, serial number 548, was captured by Australian troops in northern France under Lieutenant general Sir John Monash in September 1918. As part of an Allied offensive, the 1st and 4th divisions of the A.I.F. took a major part in attacking and breaching the Hindenburg Outpost Line. The Australians' striking success in breaking through German defences, supported by British and French forces, opened the way to a direct assault on the main German defensive position. The Allied offensive persisted until the German command agreed to an armistice on 11 November 1918. On 18 September alone, Australian forces suffered over 1260 casualties, but succeeded in taking 4300 prisoners and 76 guns like this one.

The gun arrived in Melbourne in 1919 and was stored in the Domain on St Kilda Road with other captured weapons. The Commonwealth Trophies Committee was responsible for allocating trophy guns to local municipalities. The howitzer was offered to Collingwood Council in 1921 in recognition of the municipality's huge contribution to the war and accepted unanimously. It was placed on a high point on the east side of the Darling Gardens, facing towards Hoddle Street.

Local communities widely regarded war trophies as a recognition of their contribution to

the war. But the gun also attracted anti-war sentiments. In 1933 Cr Laurie Marshall described it as 'a relic of barbarism' and urged its removal. The community was split: celebrating violence and conflict, or reflecting soldiers' sacrifices and achievements. Cr William Ruthven, VC, attempted reconciliation, describing the gun as both commemoration and a warning about the horrors of war.



The gun in 1933



Large weapons of war by their nature deteriorate: wooden wheels fall apart, metal parts rust and corrode. Yarra City Council removed the gun from the Gardens in 2013 and reviewed its future. The Richmond RSL and Richmond and Burnley Historical Society advocated for the restoration of the gun and its installation near the City of Richmond's memorial to soldiers in the Barkly Gardens.

For those of us who played on the bare burnished gun with our children and grandchildren in years gone by, it is almost unrecognisable in its restored state, especially given the repainting of the camouflage scheme, reproduced with reference to original photographic sources and museum pieces from the Australian War Memorial.



The gun November 2019, Barkly Gardens