

## YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 42 TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



*Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories.*

*From 7 February, the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia will be open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday . Please check our official web site for the latest updates on opening hours..*

### 2 Pounder Anti-Tank Gun



Waiting for advancing enemy armour in a hastily scraped pit with desert rock as a rudimentary sanger would not be a military definition of an ideal defensive position.

The situation was doubly dubious, if defensive tactics placed your position outside the main defensive location, to a flank and well forward.

It was also common knowledge that your 2 pounder anti-tank gun would only be effective against the expected Panzer III or Panzer IV tanks of the Afrika Korps at a range of less than 450 metres.

Experience had shown that when you did open fire, the muzzle blast and desert sand cloud would immediately disclose your location. In a highly visible manner.

It was small comfort to know that you had an alternate position. and your pit was designed for rapid exit.

Welcome to the situation of an Australian anti-tank gunner in the Western Desert in North Africa in 1941.

## HISTORICAL DETAILS

The 2 pounder anti-tank gun was formally accepted into British service on 1 January 1936. It was developed to provide a lightweight gun capable of being manhandled by infantry units. In service however, it proved too heavy and special artillery units were formed in 1938. At the time of its acceptance into service, it was considered the best anti-tank gun in the world.

By 1940 however, German armoured vehicles were sufficiently armoured to defeat the 40 mm projectile fired by the 2 pr except at very close range, German tanks equipped with a 75 mm gun were able to stand back out of effective range of the 2 pr and shell it into submission. Firing an armour piercing shot, the 2 pr had a maximum range of 7300 metres, however at 900 metres it could only penetrate 42 mm of armour. The German Panzer III had frontal armour of 50 mm and this tank was soon joined by the Panzer IV with frontal armour up to 80 mm thick. It was quickly realised that the 2 pr was inadequate and a heavier 6 pr gun was developed.



Before the 6 pr could be put into production, British forces were forced to withdraw from France and in doing so lost over 500 of the 2-pr guns. To have ceased to manufacture the 2 pr guns would have meant a delay of many months before the 6 pr guns became available so it was decided to keep up the supply of 2 pr to the army. At least this would provide the forces with some means of anti tank defence and the 2 prs were adequate against the Italian tanks being employed in Libya.

The Australian Army asked early in 1940 if it would be possible to produce 1000 of the 2-pr guns in Australia. Three weeks after the evacuation of Dunkirk, a sample gun was received from the United Kingdom with the drawings, upon which to develop a manufacturing base. Some 30 sub-contractors were engaged by General Motors Holden - Australia who had been appointed as the coordinating contractor for the project. At first it was said it could not be done. Australia did not have the machine tools and equipment to manufacture artillery. After all, GMH had basically been a vehicle assembly concern. Naturally equipment could not be acquired from the United Kingdom and major items were not readily available from other industrial countries.

## THE GENERAL MOTORS – HOLDEN RESPONSE

Great ingenuity and skill were shown by what industrial base was available in Australia. A lathe was recovered from a scrap yard in Melbourne where it had lain for more than 25 years. Another recovered from a yard in Adelaide had to be cleaned of an accumulation of soil and vegetable matter before it could be put into operation. A critical lathe, which was reclaimed and modified, for the specialised boring of barrels bore the manufacturing date of 1859. The specialised tools had to be designed and manufactured here in Australia. Despite these handicaps, within seven months of the official order for 1000 guns being placed on 4 September 1940, the first 2 pr gun was handed over to the Army for proofing and testing and passed in April 1941.

In all 1000 guns plus spares were produced for the Australian Army. Units were shipped overseas. Towards the end of the contract, a production rate of 120 guns per month was being achieved. GMH manufactured the barrels, organisations such as Chubb the safe manufacturers, produced the breech blocks, other contractors produced the carriages, and so on. The motif on the top of the barrel identifies the manufacturer. All the GMH barrels seen to date are the Mk 10 which was the Mk accepted for production in 1936. There was very little change after this.

The Australian Army tested a number of variations to the towed version. Some were mounted on “portees” which was a standard truck with the gun mounted at the rear. A number of guns were mounted on bren gun carriers. In the early days of the war with Japan, experiments were undertaken to see if the 2-pr gun could be adapted for use as a light AA gun in view of our complete absence of weapons of this calibre in our inventory. The 2 pr were also used as a sub calibre equipment for the twin 6 pr guns employed in the harbour defence role.



[http://anzacsteel.hobbyvista.com/Military%20Models/morrisporteemb\\_1.htm](http://anzacsteel.hobbyvista.com/Military%20Models/morrisporteemb_1.htm)

The 2-pr gun was a match for Japanese tanks; even one of their heaviest only had frontal armour of about 25 mm.



*A two pounder Anti-Tank Gun of the 4th Anti-Tank Regiment, 8th Australian Division, AIF, directed by VX38874 Sergeant Charles James Parsons, of Moonee Ponds, Vic, in action at a road block at Bakri on the Muar-Parit Sulong Road. In the background is a destroyed Japanese Type 95 Ha-Go Medium Tank.. Sgt Parsons was later awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his and his crew's part in destroying six of the nine Japanese tanks during this engagement.*

The 6-pr gun eventually replaced the 2 pr for tank attack units as they became available. Throughout the time of the AIF in the Western Desert however, it was the 25 pounder field gun used in the anti-tank role which often had to provide the core of anti-tank defences to supplement the bravery of the 2 pounder detachments..

## **LINKS FOR FURTHER ENJOYMENT**

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

<https://armourersbench.com/2019/03/10/the-2-pounder-anti-tank-gun/>

<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a211683.pdf>

<https://www.lonesentry.com/manuals/artillery-in-the-desert/antitank.html>

[http://anzacsteel.hobbyvista.com/Military%20Models/morrisporteemb\\_1.htm](http://anzacsteel.hobbyvista.com/Military%20Models/morrisporteemb_1.htm)