

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 79 TO THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottnest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020.

Now that the normality has largely returned, this Virtual Visits series will be coming to a close with VV 80. Keep informed and enjoy the new History of Heritage series in the Golden Whistler

Understanding Significance Heritage Significance 40 mm Bofors Gun Mk III Serial No P10044



As guides, we use Island structures, objects, flora, fauna and vistas as the basis of our storytelling. It is these connections which underlie the authenticity of our presentations and maximise engagement with visitors. Care is always taken during the development of tours and walks to ensure information is accurate, balanced and understandable. Every object has a story to tell and as highly visible storytellers on the Island, we want our stories to be amongst the best. To maintain this standard, it is useful to understand the concept of significance – what makes the object unique, distinct or historically interesting. A case in point is the 40 mm Bofors gun featured (although due to Covid not this year) at the Island’s Anzac Day commemorations.

History as a Weapon System

The 40 mm Bofors light anti-aircraft automatic gun was used extensively by military forces on both sides during WW2. It was developed by AB Bofors of Sweden in 1929. It was adopted by the British Army in 1938 as a point defence system against low level enemy attack. Mounted on a four wheeled trailer with deployable outriggers, it provided a mobile yet stable platform. It could fire a 1 kg projectile at a rate of 120 rounds per minute using 4 round clips. It had a maximum ceiling of 7,000 metres but was most effective below 3,800 metres.

During World War 2, there was a small number of these guns manufactured in Australia, but most were imported from Canada and England. Approximately 290 guns and 700 spare barrels had been produced in Australia at the Government Ordnance Factory, Maribyrnong when production ceased in mid-1944. The Mk III Bofors gun, serial number P10044, is an example of Australian war mobilisation and production capabilities which had not previously existed.

40 mm Bofors in Australian Service

Initial allocations of Bofors guns were to Australian Imperial Force air defence units in the Middle East. The Army in Australia was issued with the gun beginning in late 1941 and gradually batteries were built up and sent to areas where they might be required.

During 1942 and 1943 elements of the newly formed 116th LAA (Light Anti-Aircraft) Regiment were deployed to Rottneest Island. The Regiment comprised 3 Batteries (171 Bty, 172 Bty and 173 Bty) each of 4 Troops with 3 guns. Three gun Troops were mainly deployed in the defence of the Fremantle Harbour and the American Catalina flying boat base at Crawley Bay. The Troops in each battery were named by letters eg. A, B, C, D and each Troop had 3 mobile 40 mm Bofors LAA guns towed by 4WD trucks. The Regiment had a total of 36 guns.



40 mm Bofors deployed at Crawley Bay

Fortress Fremantle

Though new and manned by young Victorian and WA men, the 116 LAA Regiment was well trained and had a nucleus of battle experienced veterans of the Western Desert campaign (North Africa, Crete and Syria). Their Commanding Officer Lt Col P Stokes had served in the siege of Tobruk. In September 1942, 173 Battery Head Quarters, (Major I Pearman) and B and C Troops (6 guns) were sent to Rottnest Island to provide anti-aircraft defence for the 9.2 and 6 inch coastal artillery batteries. The deployment of 40 mm Bofors guns to Rottnest Island for the point anti-aircraft defence of coast defence batteries at Oliver Hill and Bickley Point is indicative of the significance of these location as part of Fortress Fremantle to defend Fremantle Port as the primary convoy and submarine base in the western half of Australia.



Fremantle Port in early 1942

In January 1943 they were relieved by A and D Troops. On their return on 31st March these gunners sailed through the huge convoy returning the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions from the Middle East. They were relieved by A and B Troops of the 171 Battery (Major A Charles) until July 1943 when they were withdrawn and not replaced. The regiment was then deployed in the defence of Geraldton port and airstrip. The 40 mm Bofors gun sections formed part of the harbour protection of Fremantle to safeguard the convoy of AIF Divisions returning from the Middle East Theatre in response to Japanese aggression and direct attacks on Australia during the Battle of Australia

In early 1943 a single Bofors was allocated to Oliver Hill Battery and to Bickley Battery which was to be manned by the coast artillery gun detachments if needed. They remained with these batteries until they were stood down.

Summary of Significance

In keeping with the principles and criteria of the Burra Charter, the 40 mm Mk III Bofors Light Anti-aircraft Gun Serial Number P10044 is of high heritage significance because:

- It is a rare surviving example of a weapon type used by Australian military forces in the Battle of Australia in World War 2 when Australia was under direct enemy attack for the first time;

- It is a rare surviving example of a weapon type produced in emergency wartime conditions in Australia where previous production capability in design, process, metallurgy and quality control did not exist;
- It is a rare surviving example of a weapon type which is relatively complete, intact and original, including sights, mechanisms, accessories and running gear;
- It is a rare surviving example of one of the three types crew served large calibre weapon which saw wartime service on Rottnest Island;
- It is a rare surviving example of a weapon type which provided an element in the continuity of air, surface and sub-surface defence capabilities within Fortress Fremantle for the protection of maritime infrastructure, convoys and submarines;
- It is a rare surviving example of a weapon presented and specifically dedicated as a memorial to 116 LAA Regiment and its sub-units to commemorate their World War II service on Rottnest; and
- It is a rare surviving example of a memorial weapon which has formed a visible role in Anzac Day and other commemoration ceremonies on Rottnest Island and has become uniquely associated with these commemorations by veterans and the community.

Statement of Significance

This 40 mm Mk III Bofors gun was manufactured with ingenuity and skill to defend Australia from enemy air attack during World War 2. During a time of threat, it formed part of the defences of Fortress Fremantle, including Rottnest Island, protecting the harbour, convoys and the submarine base. Operated by members of 116 Light Antiaircraft Regiment from 1942–45, it is now a memorial dedicated to their service and to all who served in the defence of freedoms we enjoy today.



Lest We Forget

*A Bofors gun of 116
LAA Regiment*