

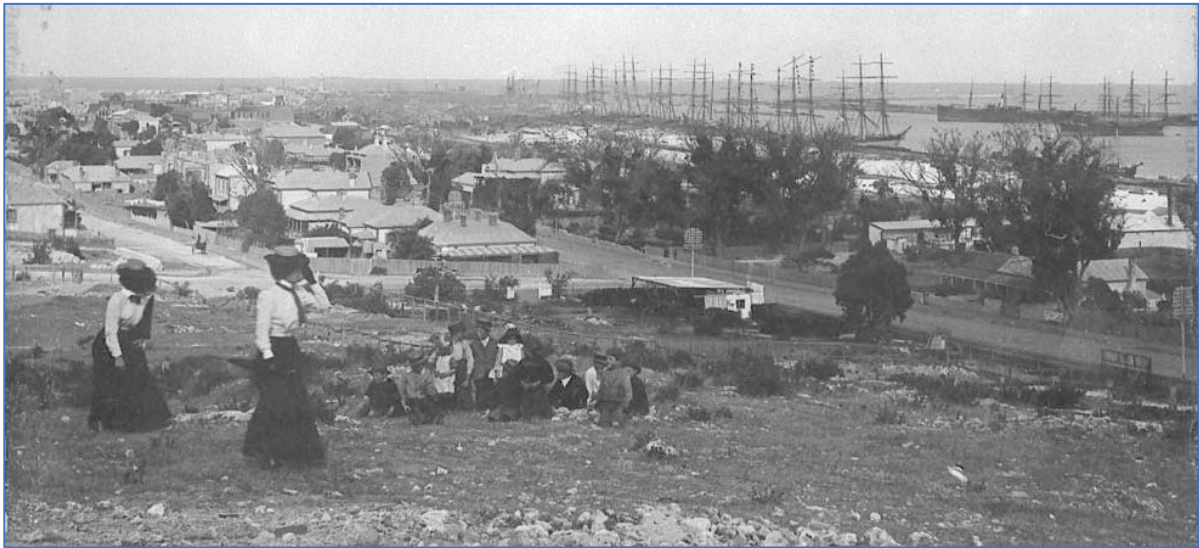
# YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT – 83

## TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

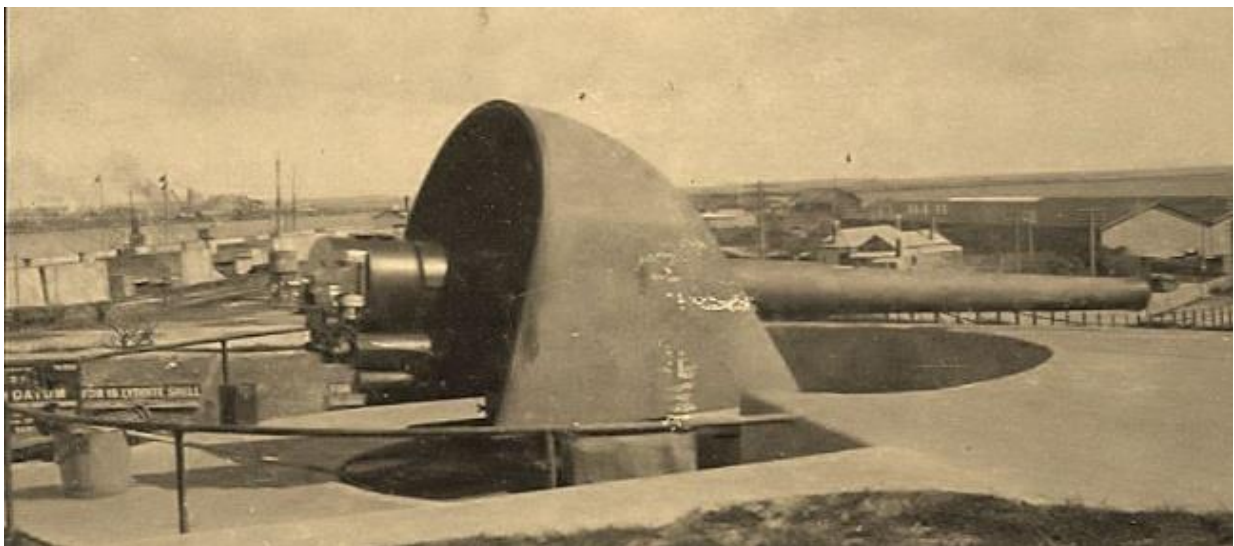


*Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.*

### Artillery Barracks



Our Museum home, Artillery Barracks, sits on the southern side of Cantonment Hill, the prominent limestone rise near the mouth of the Swan River overlooking the Port of Fremantle. Between 1906 and 1908, coast defence batteries were commissioned at Fort Arthurs Head near the Port and Fort Forrest a few kilometres north. The Barracks were built between 1910 and 1913 to provide a home for the gunners who garrisoned these forts.



*6 inch Mk VII Coast Defence Gun, Fort Forrest*

The initial buildings constructed in the Barracks complex were two, double storey accommodation blocks housing up to 100 gunners, four houses for married Non-Commissioned Officers, two larger houses for married officers, a Gymnasium, a small hospital, a Quartermasters Store, a horse and cart shed, and an Orderly Room and Guard Room (with two cells) flanking the entrance gate. All remain essentially unchanged in exterior form to this day. A large grassed area on the northern side of the hill was used for agistment of the horses.



*Artillery Barracks accommodation wings 1913*



*Australian Garrison Artillery at the Barracks 1911*

When War was declared in August 1914, coast defence gunners were not allowed to enlist in the AIF. The German Far East Fleet was at large in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and port defences were deemed vital. When this threat was eliminated, many coast defence gunners enlisted and formed the two Australian Siege Batteries which ironically became the first AIF units to see combat



*Australian Siege Battery in France 1917*

By the end of 1914 the Barracks was being used as a hospital, treating recruits from Blackboy Hill Camp sick with infectious diseases such as mumps and scarlet fever. Later, in 1917, when casualties from the Western Front were being returned to Australia, the Barracks became a "Details Camp", a rehabilitation hospital. From January 1919 until 1920, the 26<sup>th</sup> Australian Auxiliary Hospital was established at the Barracks and specialised in the treatment of soldiers, mainly Light Horse troopers who had contracted malaria in the Middle East.



*Artillery Barracks interior 1919*

During World War One, the Barracks was also the site of a “Concentration Camp”. Enemy aliens, mostly men from countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and not naturalised as British citizens, were brought to the Barracks for assessment by staff of Army Intelligence. After the Rottnest Island Camp closed in 1915, the Barracks was used as the site of internment for those not sent to camps in the East.



*Shifting of ordnance – a familiar coast artillery skill and exercise*

By 1920, the gunners returned to the Barracks. It was not until the late 1930s that changes were seen on the site. When Government funding was significantly increased after the lean years of the Depression and as a result of a review of coastal defence, new artillery batteries were established at Oliver Hill and Bickley on Rottnest Island and at Swanbourne. The Barracks was the centre of activity for this work and a number of additional stores buildings were constructed around the parade ground, including the Anti-Aircraft (AA) Gun Park.

During World War Two, with Fremantle Harbour the home of the biggest submarine fleet in the Southern Hemisphere, the Barracks was a main base of work and accommodation for home defence personnel, now including women soldiers. An underground Command Post with a number of tunnels was constructed under Cantonment Hill. From 1944 to 1945 the Barracks was the Headquarters of Fortress Fremantle.

By 1950, missile and aircraft technology had made coastal guns redundant as a form of defence. Even before war's end most coast defence guns had been put on a “care and maintenance” basis. All coast defence guns except Oliver Hill were removed for scrap by 1963. The Barracks had also ceased its original accommodation function by the early 1950s. The former dormitories became classrooms for units of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF). Numbers training at the Barracks were further bolstered by National Servicemen after the scheme was introduced in 1951.



*National Service gunners and 3.7 inch Heavy Anti-Aircraft gun*

Some of the units of both CMF and Regular Army which served at the Barracks between 1951 and 1995 were: 27 Coast Regiment Royal Australian Artillery; 24 Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment; 3 Transport Squadron Royal Australian Engineers; Western Command Field Survey Section; 5 Cadet Brigade; 4 Water Transport Troop; 10 Company Royal Australian Army Service Corps; 7 Field Ambulance; 5 Pay Corps and 5 Electrical and Mechanical Engineer Services. . The story of these units is told in the Post 1945 Gallery at the Army Museum. There were no Artillery personnel serving at the Barracks after 1963.



The Army Museum opened its first gallery in the Barracks in 1995 and in 2005 was granted a licence by the Department of Defence to occupy the site for 25 years with an option to renew for a further 25 years. Initially the Army Museum of Western Australia shared the Barracks the Western Australian University Regiment who have since relocated. With the support of LotteryWest and internal fundraising by the Army Museum of WA Foundation, sole occupancy permitted the Gallery Redevelopment program across the Barracks site, in time for the centenary of World War One. The work continues.

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site  
<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>