

Port Hope's Town Square Artillery Pieces



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Local History

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Introduction

Originally, this research was started back in the early 1990's. Life got in the way, and I got back to it in 2023. I mention this because some of my sources may have passed away, but I still want to recognize their contribution.

I start the book by giving a brief history of the Crimean War and Sebastopol, and how a Crimean cannon got to Port Hope. The markings tell us a lot and are discussed. Carriages are mentioned with their variations and uses.

I then turn to our second artillery piece, the WWI German Field Piece. I speak of its capture, placement in Port Hope, and the dedication ceremony. Then the parts and markings are discussed, ending with the actual Battalion and place it was captured.

Part 1: Crimean War Cannons Taken

In the 1980's, I took this photo of the Port Hope cannon with the plaque in front of it (Figure 1). The photo up close tells us the cannon was used during the Crimean War (Figure 2).

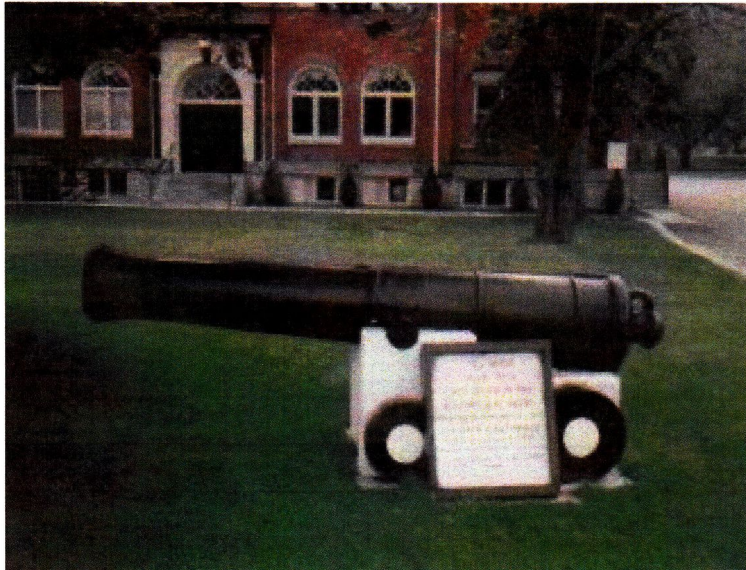


Figure 1: Port Hope Cannon with Plaque, author's own photo

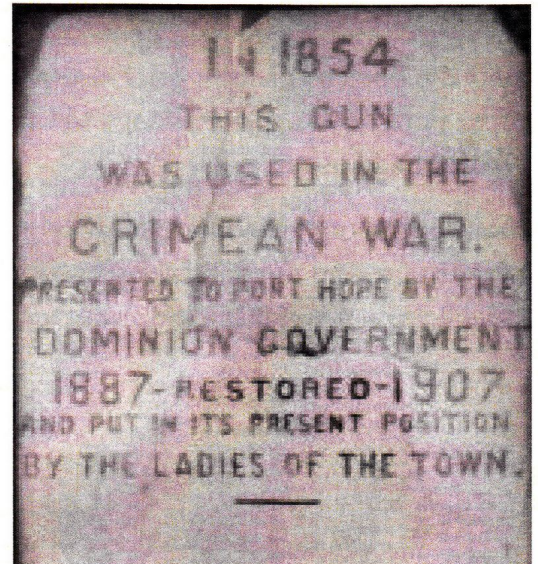


Figure 2: Close-up of Plaque, author's own photo

The war was fought from 1853 – 1856. The British, French, Sardinians, and the Turkish Ottoman Empire were fighting against the Russians, all with their own agendas.

The battle of interest to us is the Battle, and Siege, of Sevastopol, or Sebastopol as it is written in English. Sebastopol was a very strategic port and city. The Tzar's Navy sat in its harbour.

To help defend the city, the Russians sank all the ships in the harbour, after removing all the guns and supplies, to help fortify the city. The sailors now became marines to help with the city's defenses. The harbour with all its sunken ships made the harbour unusable by the British and Allies to bring in troops and supplies.

When the battle and siege were over, the Russians, before retreating, tried to destroy all of the cannons. In the takeover by the British and Allies, they found several hundred cannons untouched. Most of these were shipped back to England, along with the British cannons that were worn out. They were placed in storage where they remained for a decade plus.

Part 2: From England to Port Hope

It was decided to offer the old cannons for war memorials to Canadian towns and cities that had supported the war effort.

Although Figure 3 is an article on London, it tells us about the transfer from England to Canada.

The cannons were in the care of Johnny Bull and were organized by him and sent on to Canada.

The process would involve both British and Canadian governments agreeing to the transfer, where the Canadian receiving centre would then have to be determined.

In our case, as seen in the news article, it was Quebec. From many articles on other cities I have researched, the government's Members of Parliament were given the job of going to towns and cities under their constituencies to ask them if they wanted a cannon.

In Galt's case, the Governor General Viscount Monck didn't ask; he told them they were receiving one. From what I have found, Port Hope happily received one.

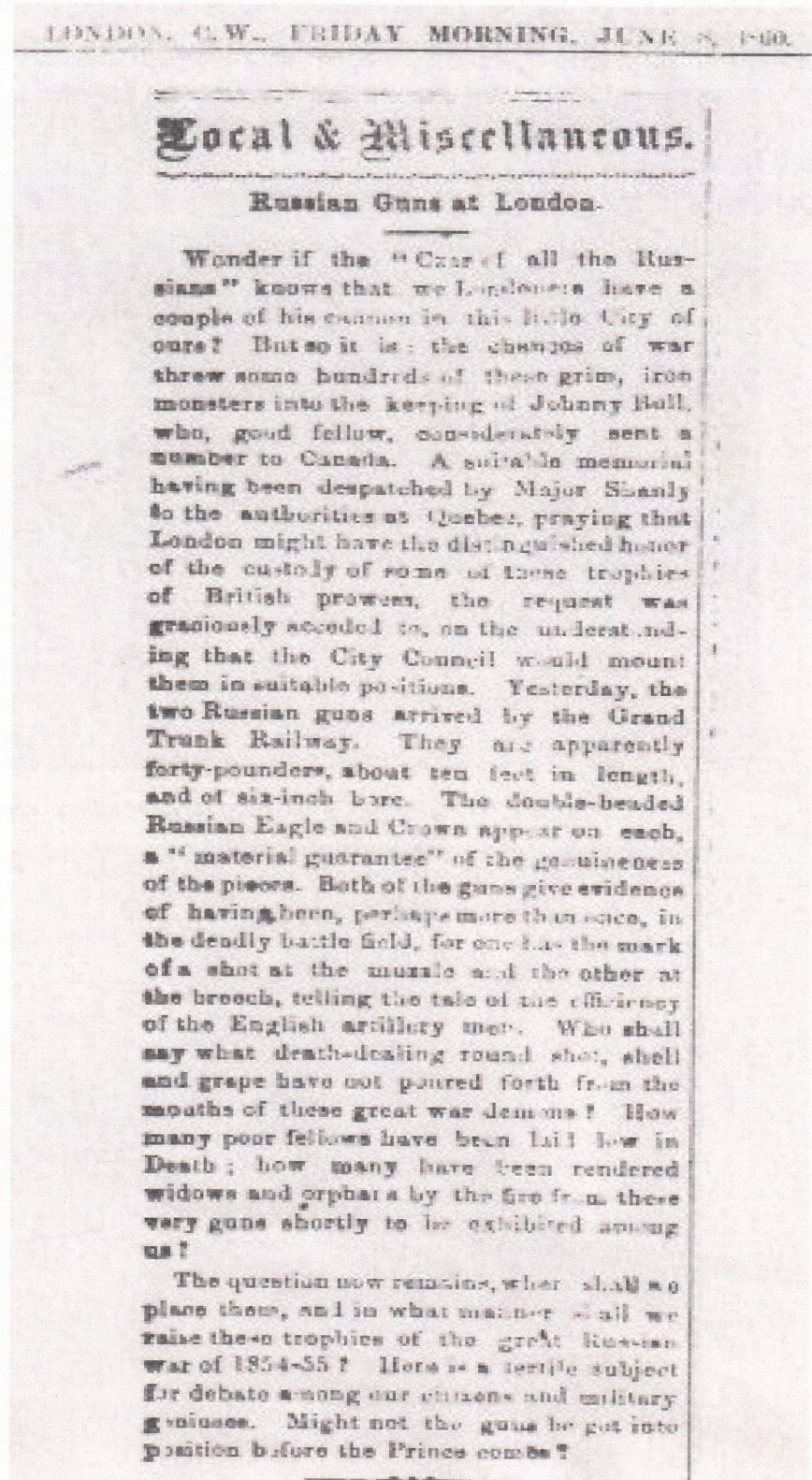


Figure 3: Article on the Cannon Presentation, London Public Library, London Room Archives

Part 3: Placing the Cannon

So, Figure 2 earlier tells us the cannon arrived in Port Hope in 1887. Figures 4 and 5 are postcard photos from 1905, shortly after the cannon arrived on its wooden carriage.



Figure 4: 1905 Postcard of Port Hope's Cannon, Michael Wladyka's Postcard Collection



Figure 5: Postcard of Port Hope's Cannon, Michael Wladyka's Postcard Collection

Another piece of proof it was in place on September 4, 1887, is because this was when a dedication for Colonel A. T. H. Williams was held, and the monument is in the background. *Little Tales of Port Hope*, by Arnot Craick, mentions that on September 7, 1860, the cannon was fired for Edward VII.

Mr. Norm Strong said that Mr. Collin Wallace, a relative, told him the cannon on arrival sat on the lot where East Beach is today. This reinforces the theory the cannon came to Port Hope by steamship.

Mr. Strong was also told the restoration was done by the Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire. Mrs. Mulholland was the Regent, or President, at the time. Her husband was Robert Mulholland, a Senator at the time.

Part 4: The British Cannon's History

As explained earlier, it is a British cannon. Thomas Blomefield was appointed Inspector General of Artillery in 1782. The design was named after him, thus, the "Blomefield" (Figure 6).



Figure 6: The Blomefield Cannon, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

This cannon was designed for sea service, but it was also used for garrison duty.

This cannon has a breech loop (Figure 7) which is used for the retaining rope that goes through it to tether the cannon to the side of the ship in rough weather. It also stops the cannon from recoiling too far when fired.



Figure 7: Breech Loop, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

Looking at the cannon from the muzzle, the trunnion, or pin, on the right has the serial number 58697 (Figure 8). Next is the carron name, the foundry run by Blomefield in Falkirk, Scotland.

Below that is the date 1805 when the cannon was cast. The trunnion on the left has 32 P (Figure 9) which tells it fires a 32 lb. ball.



Figure 8: Right Trunnion Markings, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022



Figure 9: Left Trunnion Markings, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

Looking now at the top of the cannon, we see the crest of the reigning monarch, which at the time was George III (Figure 10). Ahead of the crest are two holes. These would be for the front sight.

Still on the top of the cannon, ahead of the crest, is a broad arrow (Figure 11). This tells us it was in government service.



Figure 10: Crest of George III, author's own photo, May 22, 2022

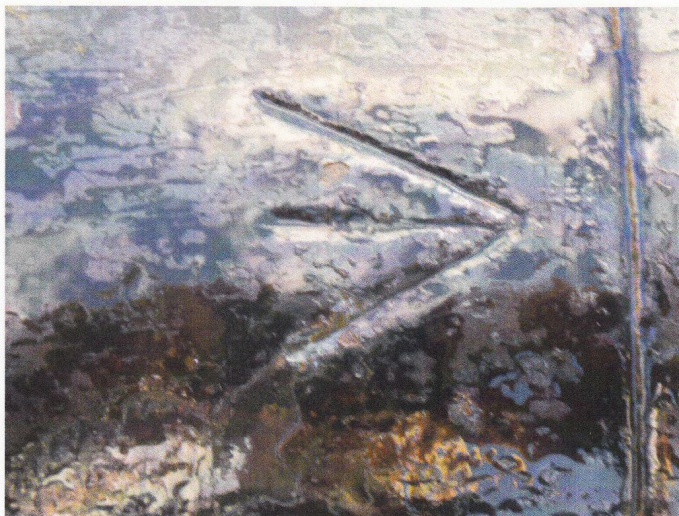


Figure 11: Broad Arrow for Government Service, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

Going now to the back of the cannon, or the cassable, we see two holes at the top. This would hold the back sight (Figure 12). On the bottom of the cassable is the cannon's weight (Figure 13). The weight is calculated in hundred weight, an old system. So, 56-1-14 reads as 56 hundred weight, 1 quarter weight, and 14 pounds. A hundred weight equals 112 pounds, so $56 \times 112 + 28 + 14 = 6,314$ lbs.



Figure 12: Holes on Cassable for Back Sight, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022



Figure 13: Cannon's Weight Marking on Cassable, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

On top of the cannon at the cassable, is the vent field, or where the touch hole is, for firing (Figure 14). You can see the counter-sunk part where powder sits for firing. On the side of the vent field are two holes to hold the flintlock for firing. The flintlock was used for firing on ships because firing tubes, used on land, would corrode from the salt water.



Figure 14: Vent Field on Cassable for Touch Hole, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

Part 5: Carriages

The British carriages have two types. The first type is the cast iron carriage, phased out on ships but still available for garrisons (Figure 15). If the cast iron carriage got hit in battle, it would warp or worse, shatter, throwing pieces and killing or maiming anyone near it. In either case, the carriage was not reparable.

The British rule was if a cast iron carriage was in use, a wooden carriage had to be present to replace it, if needed. The other option was to place it where being hit was minimal.

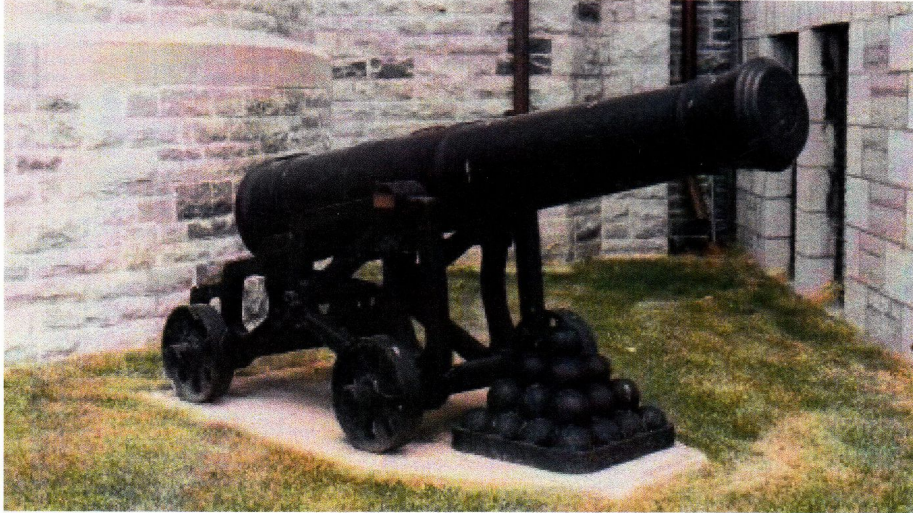


Figure 15: Cast Iron Carriage: author's own photo

The second style was the wooden carriage. It would also shatter and splinter if hit but was not as dangerous. Also, it could be repaired.

There are two variations of the wooden carriage. The first is the cannon carriage Port Hope's cannon came on (Figure 16). You can see it came on cast iron wheels, called trucks. This says the cannon was used at a garrison. It could not be used on a ship because the cast iron trucks, when recoiling from firing, would tear up the deck.

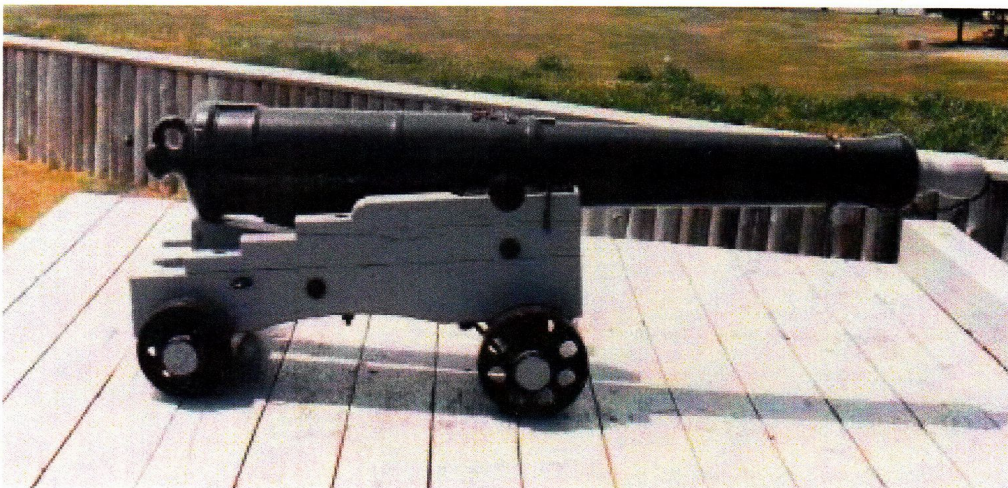


Figure 16: Wooden Carriage with Cast Iron Trucks, author's own photo

The second variation is the same carriage but with wooden trucks, minus the steel rims shown in Figure 17. This is the carriage and trucks used on a ship.



Figure 17: Wooden Carriage with Wooden Trucks, author's own photo

Due to the deterioration of the wood, Port Hope's cannon was likely placed on a permanent cement base.

Part 6: The German War Trophy

The German gun was used between 1914 – 1918 on the Western Front. It was captured at Vimy Ridge by Canadian troops.

It was drawn into place in front of the Port Hope Town Hall in 1919 by a group of veterans. It was placed to the left of the Colonel A. T. H. Williams memorial (Figure 18). The memorial trophy was dedicated at a ceremony in June 1925. The ceremony was chaired by Colonel (Judge) H. A. Ward. Captain (Reverend) F. W. Anderson was called upon to give the address. He was a Great War veteran.

The Durham Regiment was present and Lieutenant-Colonel E. E. Snider, the Commanding Officer, told the story of the gun's capture.

Reeve Holdaway, in the mayor's absence, spoke a few words and then Mr. J. T. George sang, "Lest We Forget," accompanied by an organ played by Mr. Winfield.

The memorial gun was to be a symbol of the bravery of the soldiers who gave their lives taking it. There were mixed feelings as some thought it inappropriate being a German gun. Right or wrong, it has stood the test of time.

The artillery piece was restored shortly after, and the Rotary Club restored it again in 2000. Afterwards, it was returned to its position on November 11, 2000.

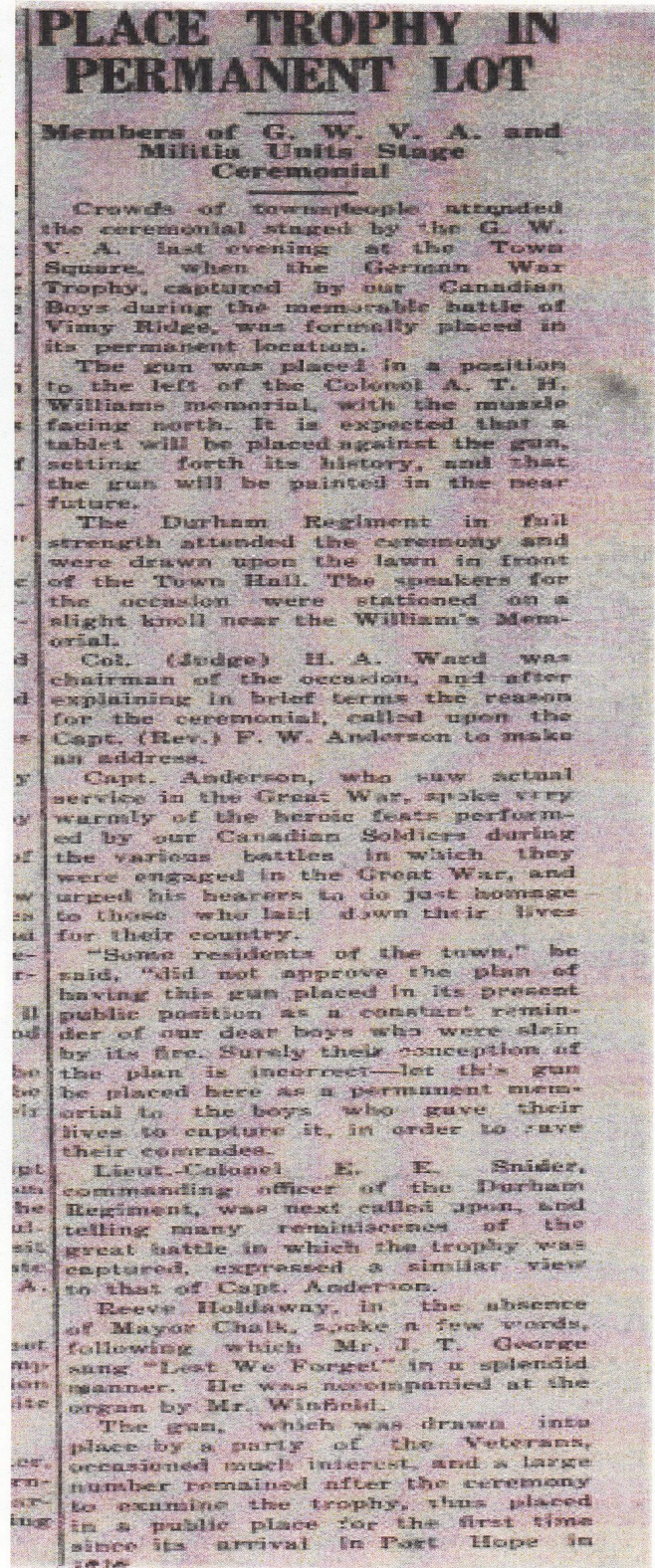


Figure 18: Newspaper Article on Gun's Placement, Port Hope Library Archives

Part 7: The German Field Piece

The German WWI field piece (Figure 19) is a 77mm Feldkanone 16 field gun (Figure 20).



Figure 19: German WWI Field Piece, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

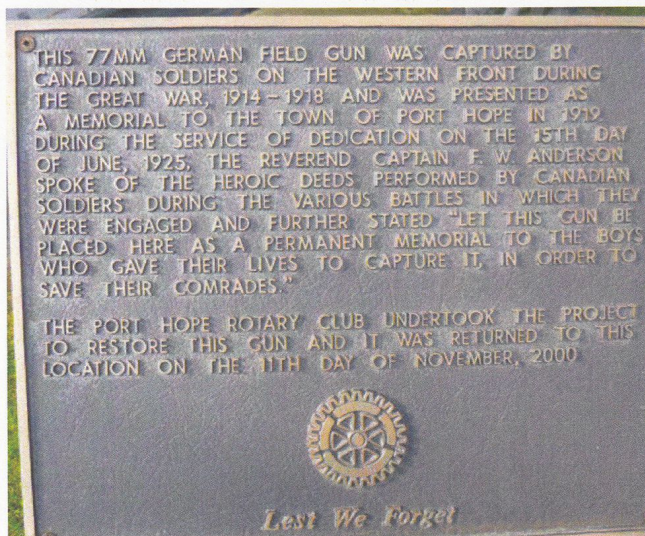


Figure 20: Descriptive Plaque for Gun, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

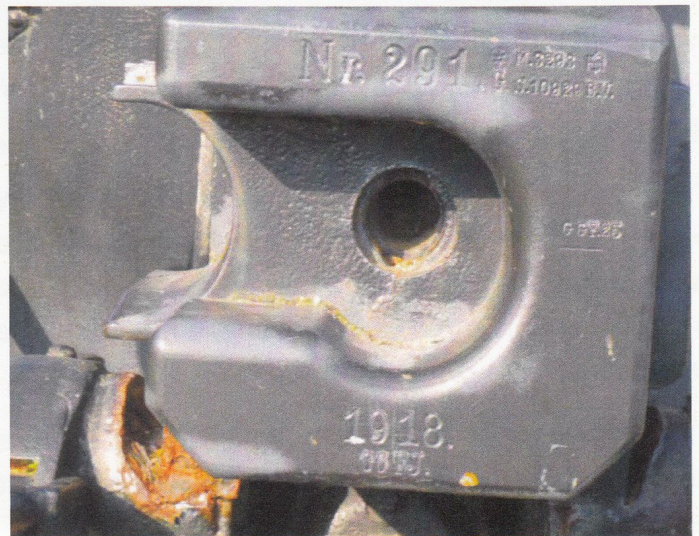


Figure 21: Serial Number on Gun, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

The serial number is 291 (Figure 21) and shows the gun was cast in 1918, making it one of the latest guns cast.

On the left side, one can see the sighting mechanism (Figures 22 and 23).



Figure 22: Sighting Mechanism on Left Side, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

On the tongue of the gun, one can see degrees used to turn the gun to specific compass bearings using the handle in front of it (Figure 24).



Figure 23: Sighting Mechanism, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022



Figure 24: Compass Mechanism, author's own photo, Nov. 1, 2022

In conclusion, the gun was captured by the 116th Battalion near Cambrai, France on the 29th of September, 1918.

Summary

Summing up, we have two artillery pieces from different eras that represent the wins and losses in wars.

The British cannon came on wooden carriage from the Crimean War.

The German WWI field piece represents different things to different people. Some feel it represents a piece won by our soldiers. To others it represents our dark side – the losses it had in capturing it.

Resources

David McConnell, Environment Canada Parks Service, Author, *British Smooth-Bore Artillery: A Technological Study*

S. James Gooding, *An Introduction to British Artillery in North America*, Museum of Restoration Service, Bloomfield, ON

Artillery of Canada, Master List Ontario, website

London Public Library, London Room Archives

Lori Stephenson-Brittain, Port Hope Public Library, Reference, Local History

Mr. Mike Wladyka, postcard collection

Mr. Norm Strong, verbal history