

On English anti-aircraft artillery, 1914

Introduction

A new book from Osprey - *The British Expeditionary Force 1914-15* by Bruce Gudmundsson (Source 1) gives a few details about the organization of the anti-aircraft sections fielded by the Royal Garrison Artillery per 21 August 1914, tasked with providing the infantry divisions in the field with protection against the increasing threat from the air.

It is not a topic that, as far as I know, has been written about much, but by piecing together fragments from different sources, the following outline of the story emerges.



*English 37 mm machine gun
(1-pdr Vickers-Maxim Pom-Pom),
in anti-aircraft kit, approx. 1914.*

From a contemporaneous
postcard found on the website
Browning Machine Gun US Cal. .30.

Organization

Each section numbered 14 men: 1 officer, 3 non-commissioned officers, 7 artillery constables and 4 wood constables.

The section was equipped with 1 pc. 37 mm (1-pdr Vickers-Maxim "Pom-Pom") machine gun, ammunition cart (*cart*) and had a total of 9 horses.

Probably the machine gun is towed by a forge, harnessed by 4 horses, while the ammunition tub is

drawn by other 4 horses; the last horse is given to the section chief.

Source 2 mentions that the section was originally to comprise 2 pamphlets, under the command of a captain. Due to a lack of equipment, however, it was only possible to allocate 1 pamphlet to each of the six infantry divisions.

The first shooting

The first shoot down took place on 23 September 1914, when No. 2 Anti-Aircraft Section, Royal Garrison Artillery (commanded by Lieutenant OFJ Hogg), then attached to 3rd Corps, shot down a German aircraft by firing 75 rounds.

Source 2 additionally states that the German pilot [1](#) was probably at least as surprised by the shooting down as Lieutenant Hogg...

The pamphlet



37 mm (Pom-Pom) machine gun, from the Boer War.

From The Canadian Anglo-Boer War Museum.

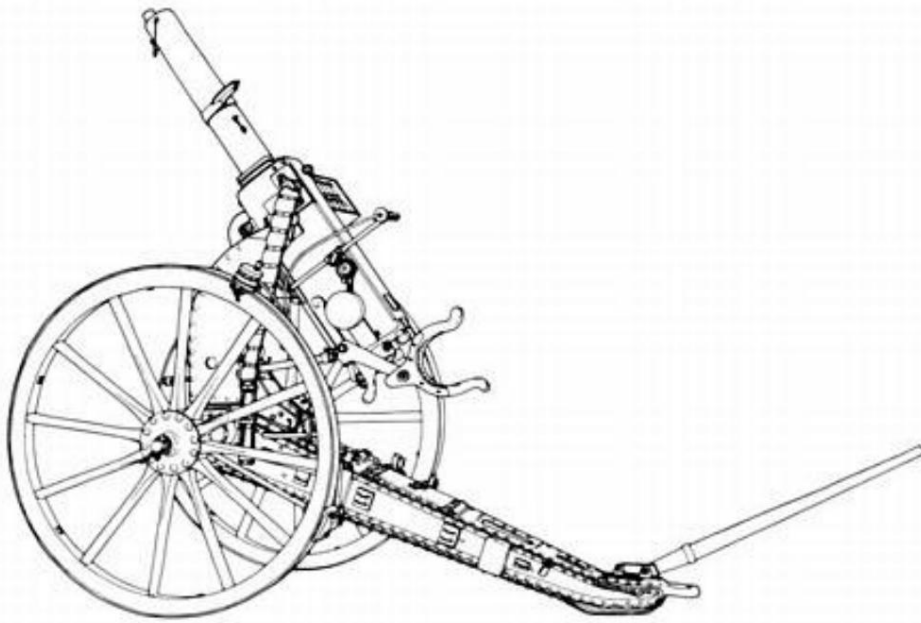
The machine gun was used during the Boer War, first by Boers (manufactured by the Nordenfelt factories); since copied by Vickers) and used by Englishmen.

The nickname *Pom-Pom* is attributed to the sound of the shots.

Paradoxically, in the late 1890s, the inventor, Hiram Maxim, offered the pamphlet to the British army, which was however not interested.

The Transvaal government, on the other hand, was very interested, and permission was given to export a number of pamphlets to South Africa. When the Boer War broke out, English soldiers thus found themselves on the "receiving end" of an English pamphlet!

After the Boer War, machine guns led a somewhat changeable existence, as they did not really belong to either the artillery, the cavalry or the infantry. For a time they were part of the machine gun divisions of the volunteer horse regiments (Yeomanry).



37 mm machine gun (1-pdr Vickers-Maxim Pom-Pom), in anti-aircraft mount.
From Source 3.

In stationary aftuge the pamphlet was included in the Royal Garrison Artillery as an anti-aircraft pamphlet - or anti-balloon cannon, which was the period's term for anti-aircraft pamphlets.

The pamphlet had a range of 3 km. The grenade weighed 0.4536 kg (= 1 pound). The rate of fire is stated as 60 rounds per minute.

The anti-aircraft version, which allowed greater elevation than the "field version", was designated *Ordnance QF 1 pdr Mk 1++ (and Mk 1+++)* on carriage *field QF 1 pdr Mk 2++*.

In the anti-aircraft edition, the pamphlet had a reach of approx. 4 km.



37 mm (Pom-Pom) machine gun, in stationary mount.
From *Battlefield Anomalies, Second Boer War, Artillery*.

The pamphlet was also included in the Navy - the English as well as that of other nations - where it was used both on board ships and at fixed installations on land.

Similarly, the pamphlet was also included in the armies of other nations, e.g. the German and Turkish.

The anti-aircraft sections of the English Expeditionary Force, 1914

The English official history from August-September 1914 [2\)](#) describes [the](#) status of the air force as follows:

"In the matter of anti-aircraft guns, the British ordnance also fell far behind the German. For this service, light quick-firing guns known as pom-poms were sent out from England early in September. It is sufficient to say that they fired a percussion shell, which, as not one in several hundred ever hit its aerial target, fell to earth, frequently at some point in the British lines, and there burst. Not a single enemy airplane was brought down at this period, either by these guns or by rifle fire. Such a state of things, it is needless to say, was neither reassuring nor comfortable."

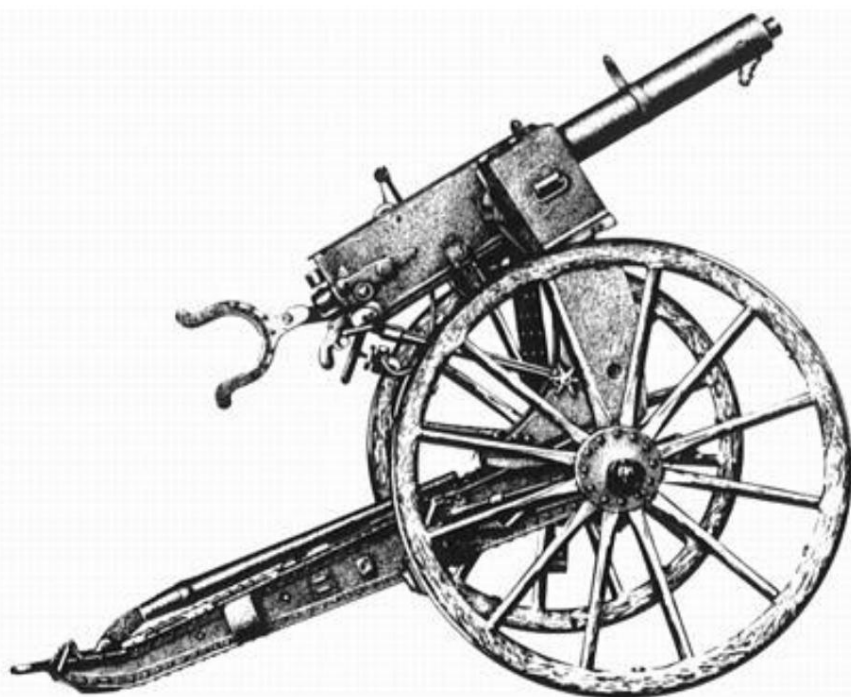
In Appendix 1 on the organization of the Expeditionary Force (not included in the online edition), a note for each infantry division states:

"An Anti-Aircraft Detachment (of 1-pdr. Pom-Poms) was added to the Divisional Artillery in September."

Source 6 mentions the following anti-aircraft sections:

Pom-Pom Section (Anti-Aircraft) In service at...	From...	To...
No. 2 Pom-Pom Section	6th Division	4.10.1914 16.12.1914
No. 4 Pom-Pom Section	4th Division	20.9.1914 January 1915
No. 5 Pom-Pom Section	3rd Division	20.8.1914 3) December 1914
No. 6 Pom-Pom Section	5th Division	12.9.1914 December 1914
No. 7 Pom-Pom Section	7th Division	25.9.1914 20.12.1914
No. 11 Pom-Pom Section	2nd Division	22.9.1914 25.1.1915

There is no information available about the section that was part of the 1st Division.



37 mm machine gun (1-pdr Vickers-Maxim Pom-Pom), in anti-aircraft mount.

From The British Empire.

Closing

In combination with my article On British searchlight units and anti-aircraft artillery during the First World War, an insight is now available into the British Army's earliest anti-aircraft units which they set out on the Western Front.

Interesting, as the approach of a few new pieces of information makes it possible to combine different fragments of the story into a more coherent presentation of the subject ...

Sources

1. *The British Expeditionary Force 1914-15* by Bruce Gudmundsson, Osprey Battle Orders No. 16, London 2005, ISBN 1-84176-902-9.
2. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 1914-55* by NW Routledge, Brassey's, London 1994, ISBN 1-857753-099-3.
3. *Artillery* by John Batchelor and Ian Hogg, Ballentine Books Inc., New York 1973, SBN 345-23499-5-495.
4. *British Artillery Weapons & Ammunition 1914-1918* by Ian V. Hogg and LF Thurston, Ian Allan Ltd., Surrey 1972, SBN 7110-0381-5.
5. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Forgotten Fronts and Home Base, 1914-18* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1988, ISBN 1-870114-05-1.
6. The Storey of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918.

Also see The development of Anti-aircraft Defense by David Hide, Part 1 and Part 2 from The First World War Aviation Historical Society's website The Cross & Cockade International.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) Should anyone know the specific circumstances surrounding this first shooting, I would like to hear about it.
- 2) *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914* by James E. Edmonds, Macmillan & Co., London 1933. Internet edition. The quote comes from Chapter 21. The period referred to covers the time before 16 September 1914, but the first shooting down of a German plane is curiously not mentioned.
- 3) It is probably a typographical error - the correct date must rather be 20.9.1914.