Information Data Sheet

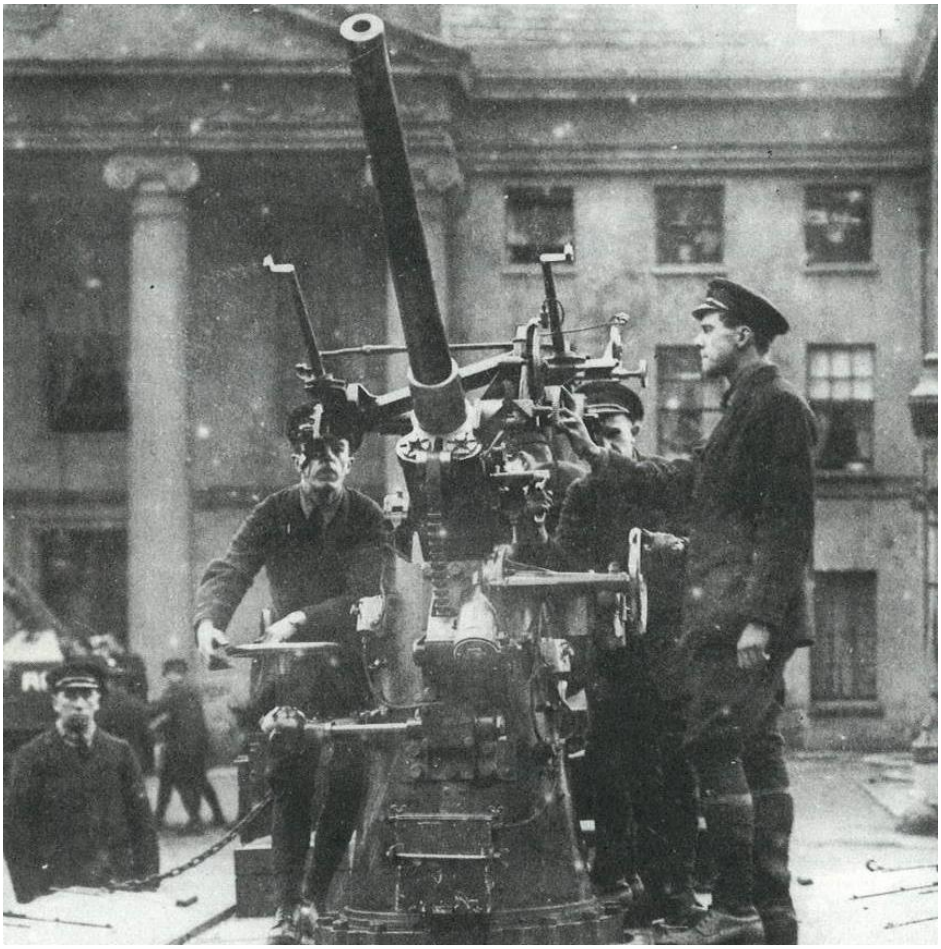
Category Anti-Aircraft Guns

Description

As aerial bombardment first began during WWI, Anti-Aircraft (AA) gun batteries were established throughout much of England to counter German bombing raids. By June 1916, there were approximately 271No. AA guns and 258No. searchlight installations defending London alone.

Common AA defences during WWI included 3-inch, 75 millimetre, 6-pounder and 1-pounder guns. Many of these guns were mobile, being mounted on lorry chassis. They were driven about following the course of an airship and fired from any area of open land.

During WWI, Unexploded AA (UXAA) shells, could land up to 13km from the firing point, although more typically fell within 10km.



3-pdr mobile Vickers AA gun

AA gun batteries were used extensively during WWII to counter the threat posed by enemy aircraft. In many instances, AA shells caused damage to Allied territory and in some areas caused significant numbers of civilian fatalities.

During WWII, AA shells could land up to 27km from the firing point, although more typically fell within 15km. These could be distributed over a wide area.

3No. types of AA batteries existed:

- **Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA)** batteries of large guns (typically 3.7", 4.5" and 5.25" calibre) designed to engage high flying bomber aircraft. These tended to be relatively permanent gun emplacements.
- **Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA)** weaponry, designed to counter low flying aircraft. These were often mobile and were moved periodically to new locations around strategic targets such as airfields. They typically fired 40mm shells and machine gun ammunition.
- **Rocket batteries (ZAA)** firing 3" or 3.7" AA rockets with a maximum altitude of 5,800m and a ground range of 9km were typically permanent emplacements.

WWII LAA gun

Hazard

AA batteries were deliberately targeted by the Luftwaffe and therefore areas surrounding a gun battery have a greater risk of UXB being present.

Munitions stores were established around AA batteries. These stored the shells for the batteries and small arms ammunition for troops manning the position. Such stores were typically removed at the end of WWII, although some disposal may have occurred in the immediate vicinity of the gun battery.

Unexploded AA (UXAA) shells were a common occurrence during WWII and would usually be found in the area surrounding an AA battery, typically some distance from the battery itself. In areas heavily-protected by AA batteries, it is prudent to consider the potential for UXAA shells, taking into consideration the likely extent of area within which shells would have fallen. The chances of finding a UXAA shell immediately adjacent to a former gun battery is less likely.