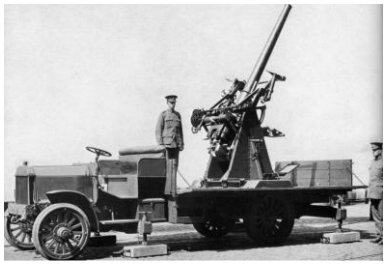
ANTI-AIRCRAFT (AA) BATTERIES

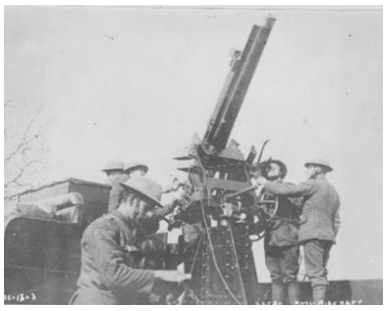
In World War One (WWI) AA batteries were gradually established throughout England to counter German aerial bombardment. These defences were concentrated around London, coastal areas, and cities with significant industry. By June 1916, there were approximately 271No. AA guns and 258No. searchlight installations defending London alone.

Common WWI AA defences included 3", 75mm, 1-pounder (-pdr), and 6-pdr guns. Many of these guns were mobile, mounted on trucks or travelling platforms, to enable them to follow the course of an airship or aircraft.

WWI Unexploded AA (UXAA) shells could fall up to 13km from the AA gun, although they typically fell within 10km.



WWI 3" 20cwt AA gun



WWI 13-pdr 9cwt AA gun

A typical WWII HAA battery layout, with associated accommodation camp

WWII 3.7" AA guns in production

WWII 50-calibre Jeep-mounted AA gun

During World War Two (WWII), AA batteries were used extensively to counter enemy aircraft during bombing raids. Numerous AA guns were established in and around major cities and strategic targets throughout the UK.

3No. types of AA batteries in WWII existed:

- Heavy AA (HAA) – typically 3.7", 4.5", and 5.25" calibre guns designed to engage high flying bomber aircraft. These tended to be permanent gun emplacements.
- Rocket AA (ZAA) – fired 3" or 3.7" AA rockets with a maximum altitude of 5,800m and a ground range of 9km. These tended to be permanent gun emplacements.
- Light AA (LAA) – typically used 40mm shells and machine gun ammunition and designed to counter low flying aircraft. These were often mobile and moved periodically as required.

WWII UXAA shells could fall across a wide area and up to 27km from the AA gun, although they typically fell within 15km.

Hazard

AA batteries had munitions stores for shells used at the battery and Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) for troops manning the position. Stores were typically removed at the end of WWI/WWII, although spillage and disposal in the vicinity of the battery may have occurred and cannot be discounted.

In areas heavily defended by AA batteries, the potential for UXAA shells falling on a site should also be considered, accounting for the likely range of the AA batteries.

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