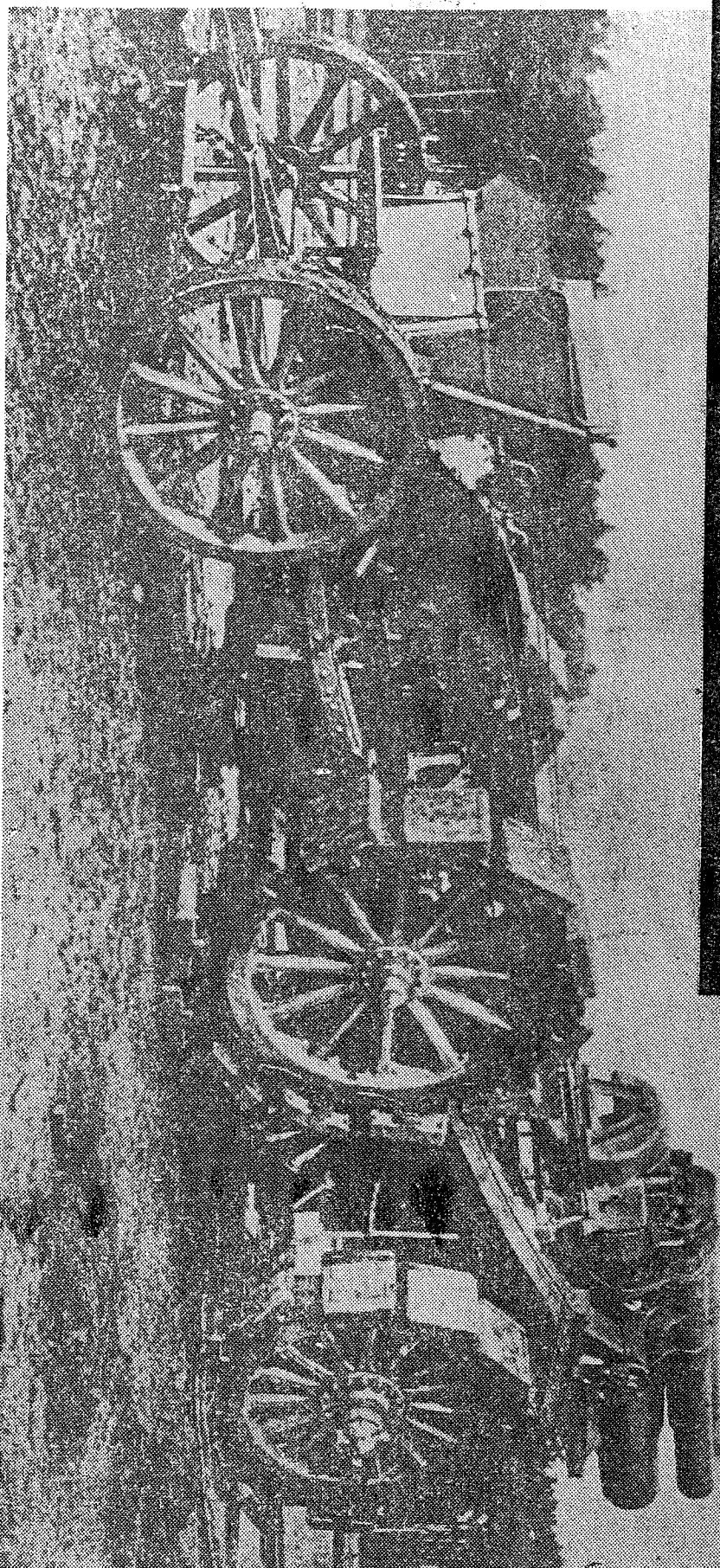


The terror of Liege

16/4/78. 2C.



Amputated, emasculated, truncated — it hardly looks like one of the fearsome siege weapons that battered the Belgian forts of Liege, Namur and Mauberge into submission and paved the way for the German sweep into France in 1914.

Nevertheless, the old siege howitzer on the foreshore at Kawarua Park and now enjoying a new lease of respectability since its recent restoration by City Council staff, still retains enough of its original framework to uphold the reason for its being here.

At the time of its return to its pedestal at Kawarua Park after its refurbishing, it became apparent from the publicity that it received that New Plymouth had all but forgotten not only what the monument was, but also what it stood for. One lone voice was raised in memory of the men and the times that it stands for

— that of Mr Tom Bates, a former member of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade to whom the gun had personal memories.

Towards the end of August 1918, having captured the town of Bapaume, the Rifle Brigade continued its advance towards Frein-court. During the 3rd Battalion of the NZRB overtook and formally captured a 21cm (8.4") Krupp siege howitzer which had been abandoned intact on the roadside by the fleeing Germans. Soon after the end of the war the Government brought back to New

Now a silent watcher of children at play

Zealand a large collection of captured German weapons, ranging from eleven big siege guns, down through a selection of field pieces of various sizes and trench mortars, to more than 1500 machine guns. These trophies the Government decided to distribute throughout the country as "a small recognition of the services of the people in connection with the war."

One of the siege guns went to the Dominion Museum, the other ten were allotted to Auckland, Nelson, Wellington, Hokitika,

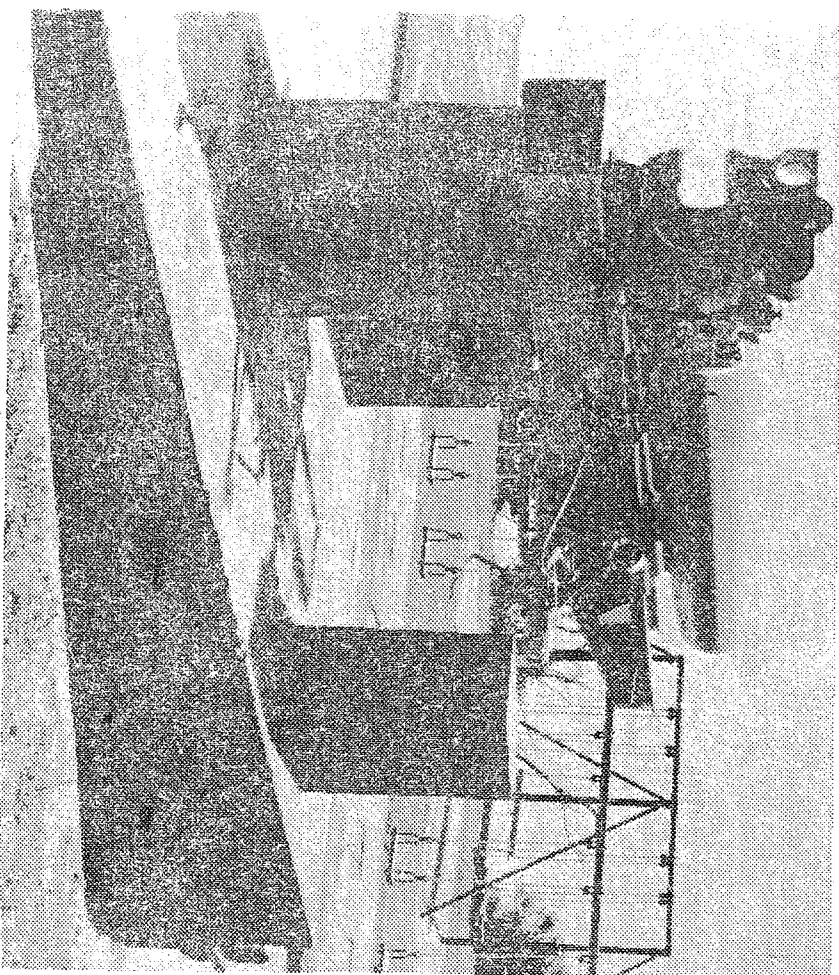
Christchurch, Invercargill, Napier, Dunedin and New Plymouth. The intention was that the guns should be set up in these towns and cities as war memorials to those from the provinces who had served in the war. New Plymouth's siege gun (No. 342, barrel No. 8587) was the one that had been captured outside

Bapaume by D Coy, 3 Bn, NZRB.

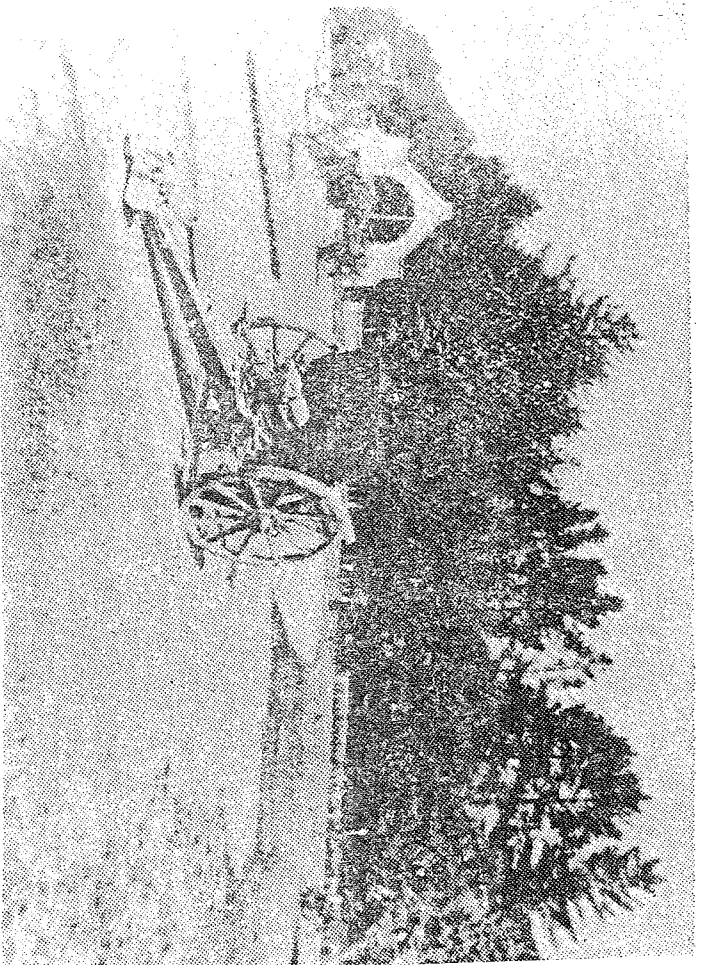
It is worthy of note that field guns were allocated to Stratford, Ellham, Manala, and Opunake. Hawera received a howitzer and trench mortars went to Kaponga, Waitara, Inglewood and Patea. In addition, 18 machine guns were

distributed to local bodies throughout Taranaki.

The records show that three machine guns came to New Plymouth for presentation to the Municipal Chambers, NP Boys' High School and NP Technical School. An interesting sidelight regarding the New Plymouth. Continued on Page 5.



The terror of Liege



Stratford's field gun in King Edward Park, photographed in about 1928.

Continued

machine guns is that two of them were guns captured personally on July 31, 1917, by Corporal L. W. Andrew of the Wellington West Coast Company of the Wellington Infantry Regiment, who was later to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

With the guns being clearly marked as such, they were subsequently recalled by Military Headquarters for presentation to Wanganui, their replacements being two guns of considerably lesser renown.

Because of the comparatively fragile and attractive nature of the machine guns, Defence Headquarters, in advising of the allocation of these weapons, strongly recommended that they not be placed in public parks or other areas where they could be subjected to vandalism. Furthermore, as they were to become the property of the people, it was recommended that local committees consisting of the Mayor, Member of Parliament, chairman of the Patriotic Society and senior officer of the local Territorial Force be formed to decide on where the machine guns would be housed before the

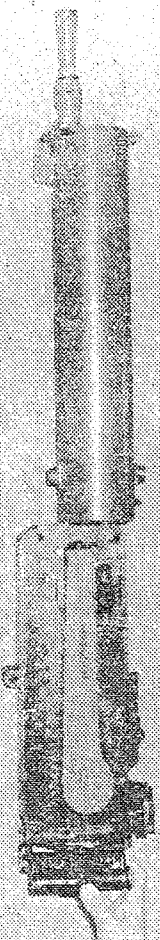
guns of that type in France. In its entirety, a 21cm siege howitzer was a solid and brutish looking thing weighing well over 5 tons, with massive spoked wheels fitted with great steel plates to prevent it from sinking into soft ground. For transporting, it was fitted on to a massive dolly containing two more plated wheels, and was hauled by a tractor.

The gun was capable of hurling a 252 lb shell nearly 9000 yards. Along with its big brother, the 28 cm siege gun howitzer, a relatively simple task of cracking open the concrete and steel forts which made up the strongest of Belgium's defences, but although used extensively in a trench-battering role throughout the remainder of the war, their effect was rather more noise and spectacle than damaging. The shells, known commonly to the British soldier as "Jack Johnsons" or "Black Marias", penetrated deeply into the ground before exploding and sending up the column of thick black smoke and dust which gave them their nicknames.

forth finally clarified the fact that buffers, recoil and recuperator systems were not supplied with trophy guns. As for the carriage, it seemed that the gun as it stood even with so many vital parts removed, exceeded the shipping company's weight limits, so the carriage had been dismantled and left behind in Wellington.

Again the letters flowed, even eventually involving New Plymouth's Member of Parliament, Mr Sydney Smith, but for some unknown reason the carriage never ever did turn up. In the early spring of 1922 the Borough staff therefore went ahead and set the gun up on a concrete base at Kawarua Park, much to the disappointment of ex-servicemen in the town.

Perhaps, however, it was all for the best in the long run. A gun mounted on a carriage might not have withstood the ravages of time and generations of energetic and imaginative children as the simple, solid old barrel has done. In fact, are there any of the other better-mounted war trophies still left on public view anywhere else in Taranaki?



One of the trophy machine guns now held (minus its tripod) at the Taranaki Museum.

trophies were handed over. It would be interesting to know where all of these weapons have gone to after all these years.

New Plymouth's siege gun arrived by sea from Wellington late in December 1920, but not in the form that New Zealand servicemen remembered

When the gun was unloaded in New Plymouth, it looked far from fearsome, with its buffer, recoil, recuperator and carriage systems missing. Considerable correspondence back and

It seems rather a pity that the gun's origins and meaning have been allowed to fade within the lifetimes of many whose services it commemorates. Their war now seems such a long, long way back in history, but unless a future City Council decides that its scrap value is worth more than the space that it takes up on the foreshore, that relic is going to be with us for a long time, and as long as it is there, should be remembered as something more than just an anonymous decorative feature.