

FORUM

POSTSCRIPT ON SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS

Lt Cdr W. M. Bisset

One of the most fascinating things about South Africa's military history is the often surprising nature of some of its sources. In a short article on South Africa's first anti-aircraft guns which appeared in *Militaria* 8/1, 1978 pages 22-23 the present writer mentioned that he was unable to explain why the fact that two 15-pounder BLC's had been converted to anti-aircraft guns had been given wide publicity or why it had been necessary to undertake their conversion when the Cape Peninsula seemed beyond the range of enemy aircraft.

By sheer good luck I have discovered an explanation for both events. Although this explanation may seem ridiculous to us today, this was not the view of two regimental historians Major General Sir Lothian Nicholson, KCB, DSO and Major H. T. MacMullen, MC and until any further evidence is produced it is hoped that the following paragraph from *The History of the East Lancashire Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918* will prove useful:

From time to time rumours that aeroplanes from German South West Africa had been seen over

the Peninsula caused a certain amount of alarm and despondency among the civilian population; search parties who were sent out all over the Peninsula came to the conclusion that the so-called aeroplanes, generally reported over the Lion Battery were large scavenger hawks; and one plane which appeared at night only, carrying a large searchlight was identified as the headlight of a train.¹¹

The similarity of these reports to the UFO reports of our own times is striking. But it is suggested that this piece of the jigsaw puzzle does fit. It certainly would explain why it was necessary to develop the anti-aircraft guns and to demonstrate one of them in public in the presence of such distinguished guests in September 1914.

(1) Major-General Sir Lothian Nicholson, KCB, CMG, and Major H. T. MacMullen, MC. *History of the East Lancashire Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918*. Littlebury Bros., Ltd, Liverpool, 1936. p 114.

TACTICS – A HISTORIC SURVEY

Lt Col A. G. Johnson MBE ED

The study of military tactics down the ages reveals a surprising lack of innovations and an even more surprising reluctance to follow up those that have been made.

The first recorded unit to be used in a novel way was the *Phalanx*, created by the Greeks in the first millenium B.C., and utilised by Alexander The Great to conquer the then known world. The *Phalanx* in its fully developed form was a body of some 8 000 men, hand picked, trained, disciplined and dedicated, made into a formidable fighting machine such as had never before been known. Tactically it fought as a dense mass, with ranks 16 men deep armed with

spears and long shields and so trained that in action the shield of each man overlapped that of his neighbour. Advancing at a slow ponderous pace it was as irresistible as an armoured brigade, crushing and defeating every enemy it faced.

The *Roman Legion* was formed on the style of the *Phalanx*, but was a more self-contained unit, containing cavalry and other supporting arms, and was a more flexible body. A Legion upon formation was given a number, and men of that legion lived and died within it; married and had sons who in their turn became members of that legion. Even as did the *Phalanx* but with more