

History behind Childers' cannon

by Max Emery

27th Nov 2014 5:11 PM

AT A BLOODY battle in Flanders in 1916, the Australian Army captured a large German 210mm howitzer.

After a long journey from the other side of the world, and an even longer bureaucratic path, it finally came to rest in Childers.

The story of how this cannon came to be here is one of war and of dogged determination by members of the early Isis Shire Council.

On December 2, 1918, Isis Shire Council's shire clerk Mr H. Epps wrote to the Federal Member for Wide Bay, Edward Corser, asking him to "take such action as will secure to this district, two at least field guns with which to adorn the memorial when erected".

Mr Corser, replying from the Federal Parliament in Melbourne, stated: "The distribution of war trophies will be deferred until the final shipment has been received from overseas".

War trophies were to be allocated according the size and importance of the trophy, with the larger towns having priority.

On this basis, it was considered that Childers did not qualify for the allocation of a large field gun.

But Isis Shire Council argued that "some 360 men enlisted from Childers, with 85 not returning from the war".

Childers was initially allocated a machine gun, much to the council's displeasure.

"To suggest that a machine gun adequately expresses that part this district has played in the Great War ... is so absurd as to only arise from a want of appreciation as to the fact and to the importance of this as the centre," the council responded.

This debate went back and forth between Isis, the Federal Parliament and the Queensland State Trophy Committee in Melbourne.

A letter from Mr Corser dated March 14, 1922, notified the Childers council members they had finally received what they had been fighting for - one field gun.

According to official documentation, the 210mm howitzer was finally allotted to Childers on May 29, 1922 and was despatched in September 1922.

The official allotment form said Childers was also allotted one machine gun on June 27, 1921 and a 75mm trench mortar.

For Mr Epps, the struggle to gain this cannon had been personal.

Two of his sons had enlisted in 1916. Robert, aged 19, was wounded in France and returned to Australia. James was killed in action on February 18, 1917, just short of his 21st year.

Lt James Epps is buried in Armentieres.

Through Mr Epps and local Federal member Mr Corser, Childers gained a major trophy.

Only two 210mm guns were captured and Childers' howitzer is the only one of its type in Queensland.

It is possibly the only one surviving in Australia.

The howitzer was manufactured in Essen Germany in 1916 by Fried Krupp and was captured in Flanders by the Australian Army.

It was presented to the Commonwealth of Australia by the French Government and in 1922 came to Childers to be used as a memorial to the young men who enlisted from the Isis region.

The cannon remains today a strong reminder to all of the commitments and price paid by the young men of Childers and Isis during the Great War of 1914-1918.