

TROPHY GUNS

On Monday June 14, 1920, a CPR freight train hissed into Perth station pulling several freight cars loaded with German artillery pieces. Having been advised the previous Saturday that, after much negotiation, Perth's 'trophy guns' were finally on their way, Mayor John Conway¹ and a small official delegation were on hand to witness the arrival and take possession of the relics of the recently ended war. Once unchained and maneuvered off the flat car, the guns were towed² along Herriott and Gore Streets and, parked in front of the Town Hall, were soon at the center of a large curious crowd.

These were not, however, the guns Perth had hoped for or been led to expect. Initially the Militia Department plan was that trophies would be presented according to the request of the fighting unit that had captured the gun. Having acted on that plan, in November 1918, within a week of the armistice, Perth native Major John Hope³, on duty in France, cabled John A. Stewart⁴, Member of Parliament for the constituency of Lanark, announcing that he had secured two German field guns for the town of Perth.

Those guns were 77mm cannons captured by the 46th Battalion, of which Hope was then second-in-command. They were taken on August 10, 1918, during the battle of Amiens that had launched the final Allied offensive. The guns had been firing point blank at the advancing troops, from cover in the village of Maucourt⁵. As the Canadian infantry closed in, the Germans rushed up horses to haul the guns away, but Hope's 46th Battalion brought machine gun fire to bear, charged the position and captured the guns after killing part of the crew and three of the horses. The guns, the remainder of the crew, including the officer, and one horse of the gun teams, were captured.

However, a few weeks after Hope advised Stewart that he had secured the Maucourt guns for Perth, plans changed. In December 1918 the 'War Trophy Commission' was created at Ottawa, and the new commission decided the scheme to provide trophy guns by request of the men who had captured them, had to be set aside. Director of War Trophies Lieutenant Colonel George Doughty⁶ wrote to Hope explaining that the guns captured and requested by his battalion would not be among those sent to Canada, because many guns captured by Canadian troops were found to be serviceable and were being kept by the British Government for use in coastal defense.

¹ John T. Conway (1881-1950), Mayor 1919-1922.

² For which service George Walter Bates (1860-1940) was paid \$1.00.

³ Then Major, later Lieutenant Colonel, John Andrew Hope DSC, MC, VD (1890-1954) and later still Justice of Supreme Court of Ontario.

⁴ John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922), MP (1918-1922) and Minister of Railway & Canals (1921-1922).

⁵ Maucourt Commune, Somme Department, Haute-de-France Region of Northern France.

⁶ Then Colonel, later Sir Arthur George Doughty KBE CMG FRSC (1860-1936), Dominion Archivist, Controller of War Trophies.

Moreover, when Hope undertook to negotiate replacements for the Maucourt guns, he was initially told that rather than two, only one gun could be allotted to Perth. Hope persevered however and when Mayor John Conway received the June cable from Colonel Doughty he learned that, after all, Perth was to receive two guns. The *Perth Courier* commented that,

*Perth is to be congratulated upon having been successful in obtaining two such valuable trophies. It might be noted that on the car which brought the guns to Perth there was one gun for the town of Woodstock and one for the town of Chatham.*⁷

A total of 316 guns of all sizes, captured by Canadian troops, were shipped to Canada by the British Government as war trophies.⁸ First choice went to the National War Museum at Ottawa and to each of the nine provincial capitals. Those requisitions accounted for 100 pieces, leaving 216 to be divided among the provinces in proportion to the enlistments from each province in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Ontario had furnished 41% of total enlistment, so received 41% of the 216, or 88 guns.



***Captured guns in a French railway awaiting shipment to Canada
(Photo courtesy of LAC)***

⁷ *Perth Courier*, June 18, 1920. Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Lanark Village each received a single 77 mm Field Gun. The Smiths Falls gun having been captured at the same time as the Perth guns, in September 1918 on the Arras-Cambrai Road. Franktown received two machine guns.

⁸ In total 536 artillery pieces, 304 trench mortars, 3,500 light and heavy machine-guns, and 44 aircraft were sent to Canada for various purposes.

The trophy guns allocated to Perth were a 77mm Field Gun (Feldkanone)⁹, model 1896, and a 105mm Light Field Howitzer (Leichte Feldhaubitze)¹⁰, model 1916. Both had been captured by the 3rd Battalion in which a number of Perth men were serving at the time. The guns were seized during the battle of Arras in September 1918, on the Arras-Cambrai Road, northwest of Raillencourt¹¹, when Canadian troops penetrated the Drocourt-Quéant Line.

The 77 mm field gun had been manufactured in Germany in 1914, the first year of the war. It was complete, with the exception of its breach block, sights and range finder, parts that were usually carried off or destroyed by the crew when the enemy forced them to abandon their gun. In the absence of a breach block an artillery piece is essentially useless and cannot be brought into immediate action by its captors.

The larger 105 mm howitzer had been manufactured in Germany in 1918, the final year of the war. The men of the 3rd Battalion had apparently overrun the gun so quickly that its breach block was still in place, although the crew got away with the sights and range finder. The 105 mm German howitzer was commonly known among Allied ranks as the 'whizz-bang', a name derived from the fact that its shells travelled faster than the speed of sound so that soldiers heard the 'whizz' of a travelling shell before the 'bang' of the gun itself. Those on the receiving end had virtually no warning of incoming rounds.



77mm Field Gun
(Photo courtesy of Imperial War Museum)



105mm Howitzer
(Photo courtesy Wikipedia commons0)

As it happened, Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, GCMG, KCB, who had commanded the Canadian Corps in France, was already scheduled to unveil a memorial tablet at Knox Presbyterian Church on the Sunday following arrival of the guns. Arrangements were made for him to remain in town overnight and, at noon on Monday, June 21st, Currie formally presented the Trophy Guns to the Town of Perth.

The guns spent that summer on display in front of Town Hall while Town Council debated whether they might be permanently installed at a site on the Tay Canal bank, or at the Court House, or at some other location. Unable to reach consensus, it was decided in October to store them in the fairgrounds grandstand for the winter.

⁹ Serial # 5096.

¹⁰ Serial # 8335.

¹¹ Raillencourt-Sainte-Olle, Nord department, France.

In the meantime, after long public debate, the citizens of Perth decided they would not follow tradition in honoring the more than 70 area men who had been lost to four years of blood and mud in Europe. There would be no plinth bearing a polished slab of marble or granite, nor would they mount the trophy guns on a dais of cut-stone and brass. Instead, the people of Perth and district chose to create a living memorial in the form of the community's first hospital, a memorial that acknowledged the lives lost, as well as those altered forever by wounds, and all who served their King, Country and Empire.

The driving force behind the plan for a memorial hospital in place of another marble cairn or statue was John A. Hope, the same man who had led the campaign to secure the trophy guns. He headed the committee¹² that rallied public support, led the necessary fund-raising drive and became the first president of the hospital board.

The German guns seem to have remained in storage at the fairgrounds for more than two years until the Perth & District Great War Memorial Hospital (GWMH) opened in 1923.¹³ In June that year the Perth *Courier* reported that,

*The two captured German cannon presented to the town at the end of the war have been placed in the grounds of the Great War Memorial Hospital, some distance in front of the porch. They are emblematic of the initiation of the hospital scheme, and are a fitting feature of the grounds ...*¹⁴



Trophy Guns c1943 in front of the Great War Memorial Hospital
(Photo by Cecil Newman / Courtesy of Jim Winton Collection)

¹² The other committee members were Hugh Anthony O'Donnell (1893-1958), Edwin H. Wilson (1877-1955), Henry M. Shaw (1865-1931) and Edgerton R. Stedman (1872-1946).

¹³ The hospital at 33 Drummond Street West, occupied the former Victoria Hall, home of Judge John Glass Malloch (1806-1873). It opened to patients in 1923 but was not formally dedicated as a tribute to the men and women who served in WW1 until Armistice Day, November 11, 1924.

¹⁴ Perth *Courier*, June 1, 1923.

At the hospital board's next annual meeting its property committee report for 1923 included mention that, "*A start, with some immediate results, has been made on a garden and the two German field guns held as war trophies were mounted on cement bases*".¹⁵ A modest brass plaque affixed to the hospital's stone gate pillar, and a book of remembrance in the lobby, were inscribed with the names of the fallen.¹⁶

[A plaque naming those who died fighting in WW2 was added in 1945.]

The German artillery pieces captured by the Canadian 3rd Infantry Battalion on the Arras-Cambrai Road in 1918 graced the front lawn of the GWMH for the next 19 years, until another war intervened. In 1942 the Town Council and people of Perth agreed that the WW1 trophy guns should be turned over to Local Salvage Committee (LSC) in support of the 1939-1945 war effort. They were melted down and, in some form or other, returned to the battlefield.¹⁷

¹⁵ Perth *Courier*, February 15, 1924.

¹⁶ A plaque naming those who died fighting in WW2 was added in 1945.

¹⁷ At least one letter to the editor of the Perth *Courier* (November 27, 1941) urged that the three-pounder brass cannons at the Court House, veterans of the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812-1814, should also be sacrificed to the LSC. Somehow those guns escaped the WW2 salvage drives.