



A story from the history of Australian Artillery:
Commemorating 150 years – 1871-2021

Sergeant Simon Hastings RAA
Detachment Commander, Operation Herrick,
Helmand, Afghanistan
‘The "Dragon Gun" of Roshan’



From 2008 – 2011, the RAA contributed successive Troops of 15 gunners to British Royal Artillery (RA) regiments to the UK over six rotations, into Afghanistan. SGT Simon Hastings deployed as part of the 4th Field Regiment's first contribution - known as Wallaby Troop. Embedding with the British 8 (Alma) Battery, 29 Commando Regiment RA, the Australians initially trained in Britain prior to deploying to Helmand Province. Some members, including SGT Hastings were located at FOB *Edinburgh*, Helmand.

In January of 2009, after a difficult reconnaissance that seriously wounded two British gunners from an Improvised Explosive Device (4th Field Regiment's WO2 Boswell was awarded a DSM for his quick and decisive action that day), the composite Battery established a direct fire single gun position at the nearby Roshan Tower, a small clearing atop a feature commanding the Musa Qaleh district.

Under cover of darkness, the gunners and an accompanying platoon from the Royal Gurkha Rifles manhandled a 1.8-ton 105mm British Light Gun (identical to the Australian Hamel Gun) to the top of the steep-sided feature, where it was concealed when not in action. SGT Hastings was the first Detachment Commander of a mixed Australian/British detachment. Many of the Australian gunners rotated through this isolated location for up to a month at a time.

Used in its direct fire role, the gun provided devastating, accurate fire out to 3,000m, dominating the valley below. Freed from the constraints of seeking clear air, SGT Hastings accrued a significant record of targets that were suppressed or destroyed. Even so, it wasn't all one-way traffic for SGT Hastings and the Australian and British Gunners that followed him at Roshan Tower - the Taliban managed to sporadically attack the tiny FOB with machine-gun fire.

Despite the enemy's best attempts, targets that had withstood attack by mortars, 105mm HE, Apache Hellfire missiles and aerial bombs were now dealt with effectively by the gun's direct fire into windows and doorways. The moniker "Dragon Gun" was created by the Taliban who were on its receiving end, and its fearsome reputation passed into local folklore - at least for a time.

Sources:

Hastings, S., photos supplied

DefenceWeb, [Enter the dragon](#), 1 Apr 2009, accessed 19 Feb 2021

Personal Interviews, WO2 S. Wilson

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