

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Colonel George John AIREY

(1845-1905)

George Airey commenced his military career in England as a gunnery cadet and later served in the Royal Marines as an artillery officer. In 1868 he served at the Rewa River battle [TBC]. From 1871 until 1876, Captain Airey was the first commanding officer of the NSW Permanent Artillery.

He enlisted for the Sudan Contingent as a major and was appointed Second-in-Command of the Field Battery. On returning from the Sudan he was promoted lieutenant colonel to command the 1st Garrison Division 1890-96, and was promoted colonel in 1891. He retired in July 1896.

SUDAN CONTINGENT

1885

In response to popular sentiment over the death of General Gordon at Khartoum in January 1885, the NSW Government offered the Imperial Government the services of two batteries of its permanent field artillery, guns and horses and a battalion of infantry. This resulted in the very rapid assembly and dispatch of a force to the Sudan of one field artillery battery, one infantry battalion, and an ambulance detachment together with a small headquarters. The contingent of 771 officers and men arrived in Suakin at the end of March.

The field battery was issued with six RML 9 pounder guns to replace the 16 pounders left behind in Sydney for they were too heavy for local conditions. The battery played a protective role for the force and was not involved in any action of note, although they did provide detachments of mounted men to accompany the 20th Hussars on patrol duty. While the battery may not have been exposed to exceptional danger from the enemy there were hazards of another nature attested by the lonely grave at Suakin of Gunner Edward Lewis, who died of typhoid fever. Lewis was the first Australian gunner to die on active service.

The battery, embarked on the transport *Arab* on 17 May, less horses but with their new guns, and arrived in Sydney on 12 June, to be quarantined for 11 days before disembarking and receiving a rapturous welcome home.

Two of the 9 pounder guns are now at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, Kirribilli.

Sources: R. Grebert (Compiler), *NSW Sudan 1885: Some Biographical Details (Statistics)*, NSW Military History Society Inc., p.8; David Horner, *The Gunners: A History of Australian Artillery*, p.15.