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# His salvo made history . . .

• Colonel 'Jc' Purdue in military regalia.

THE MAN who fired the first salvo to mark Australia's involvement in the first world war has died.

Colonel John Purdue, OBE, of Anglesea, died in the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital on Monday night, aged 89.

His historic shot was fired from the fort at Ft. Nepean on August 5, 1914, the day war was declared against Germany.

The declaration had been made in London at 11.50 pm on August 4 (9.30 am August 5 in Australia).

However, there was no adequate communication between England and Australia at the time and the word was not received by the Australian Government until 12.30 pm.

A German ship, the Phalz, had left the port of Melbourne at 7.30 that morning and the Government ordered that it be stopped.

There was no telephone contact between Melbourne and Fort Nepean, so the Government telephoned the fort at Queenscliff and asked it to signal Fort Nepean with flags.

Fort Nepean received the message, and in turn signalled to the Phalz to heave to or be sunk.

The directive was ignored and Colonel Purdue, who was 24 at the time, was ordered to fire a shot over the bow of the ship, which he did at 12.50 pm.

When captured the Phalz was found to have war-like stores worth 90,000 pounds in its hold, including a number of four-inch guns.

The ship had several gun plates on deck ready to take the guns.

By GEOFF DAVIE

It is believed the Phalz was destined to become a merchant raider in the Pacific.

The ship was later renamed the Boorara by the Australian Government and used to transport troops and horses during the war.

The gun from which the shot was fired is now on display outside the Portsea Officers' Training School.

Colonel Purdue was born at Campdown in May, 1890, and spent most of his childhood at Barwon Downs, Werribee and Neerim.

He was educated in Neerim and was dux of his school in 1902.

His parents were farmers and had their property burnt out several times. They lost everything in a tragic fire which swept Gippsland in 1901.

Colonel Purdue joined the army in 1912, and after the historic firing of the first shot, served overseas for four years.

He was married in England in 1918 and returned to Australia in late 1919, where he was stationed at Queenscliff.

He later returned to London to do a course on munition inspection at the Woolidge Ordnance College.

He also studied chemistry and metallurgy at Melbourne University.

At the outbreak of the second world war, he returned to active service as a colonel and on his return in 1944, was placed in charge of the Department of Inspection of Munitions, which at that stage had a staff of about 8000.

Colonel Purdue built his home at Anglesea in 1930 and was awarded an OBE in the 1952 honours list. He retired in 1955.

He was one of the founding members of the Anglesea Golf Club and was an active member of the RSL and the Anglesea Lions Club.

He was also a member of the United Services Institute, a life member of the United Services Institute. Colonel Purdue's wife died in 1960 and he is survived by a son, Ian, and a daughter, Mrs. Joan Brown, both of whom live in Melbourne.



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