



## The Sunbeam Ambulance, The Swastika and The Boomerang

David Neely

The Sunbeam ambulance pictured above was donated by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in World War I and had two emblems on the side, a swastika and a boomerang. The message in 1916 conveyed wishes for well-being from Australia or perhaps come home safely. The fylfot or swastika had been a symbol for good fortune or well-being since ancient times before Hitler appropriated it for destruction and death including the millions murdered in the Holocaust (1933-1945).



**Top:** Photographed here are Australian Imperial Force field ambulance personnel in 1916. The plaque on this Sunbeam ambulance reads "Presented by Australasian Woman's Christian Temperance Union". The swastika depicted above the boomerang was an ancient symbol of good luck before it was hijacked by Hitler for evil. [State Library of South Australia B56723]

**Inset:** A lucky fylfot pendant worn by Pt Arthur Brown, AIF 4<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance. [flickr]

**Left:** A British nurse in Salonica, Greece, in 1916 with medical supplies marked with the fylfot. [flickr]

During the early part of World War I Sunbeam produced ambulances on the 12/16 h.p. chassis. In 1915 the British government decreed that Sunbeam would concentrate solely on the manufacture of aero engines. Production of Sunbeam ambulances was handed over to the Rover Car Company. As a result, most of the ambulances carrying the Sunbeam name in World War I were built in Coventry, England, by Rover.

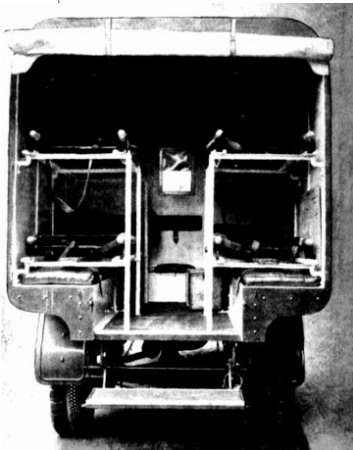


*Above: A Sunbeam ambulance at the British Red Cross Society garage at Boulogne, France, in 1916. [Imperial War Museums Q29202]*

Employees of a munitions factory in Footscray, Melbourne, donated a Sunbeam Ambulance. Always referred to at the time as “motor” ambulances as distinct from the horse-drawn ones which were still in service during World War I. The Footscray (Melbourne) ‘Independent’ reported on Saturday 3 April 1915, “Two spic and span motor ambulances – Footscray’s latest contributions to the field service at the front – were the centre of an interesting ceremony at the Town Hall on Wednesday afternoon. The Minister of Defence, Senator Pearce, came out to formally receive the gifts. One was a Napier car of handsome proportions, subscribed by the citizens of Footscray. It carries an inscription – “City of Footscray – Australian Army Medical Corps, No. 45” The other a Sunbeam car of equally fine construction, the gift of the employees at the Rolling mills at the Colonial Ammunition Co.” The Napier was presented to the minister by Councillor Bell, the Mayor of Footscray, on behalf of the citizens. The Sunbeam was handed over by Mr A R Cartwright, the manager of the Colonial Ammunition Company at Footscray, on behalf of the employees. The local motor body builders of the ambulances were not identified though no doubt they were constructed to military specifications. The work of Mrs Hazel M Lane, the Hon. Secretary of the Motor Ambulance Fund, was acknowledged.

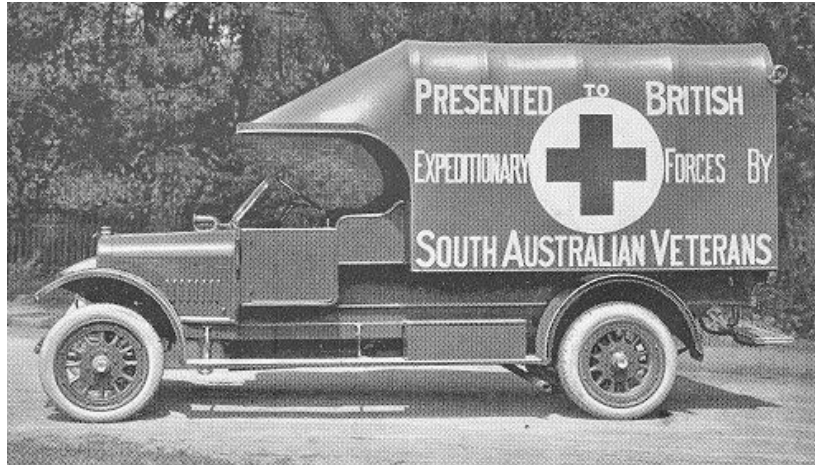
The Colonial Ammunition Company was Australia’s arsenal during World War I, producing all the bullets for the first Australian Imperial Force in Europe and the Middle East. More than two million rounds of .303 rifle ammunition were made every year.

School children in Western Australia donated a Sunbeam ambulance. The Perth 'Western Mail' reported on 1 December 1916, "Our London correspondent, writing under date October 19, says, "This afternoon the Acting Agent-General for Western Australia (Mr. M. L. Moss, K.C.) presented to the War office an ambulance subscribed for by the State school children of Western Australia and it has been allotted by the War Office for use with the Western Australian Ambulance Unit. Colonel Sir Capel Holden, Assistant Director of Transports, attended at the Western Australian offices, Savoy House, Strand, and accepted delivery of the ambulance, which is a very fine Sunbeam fully-equipped four-stretcher motor." It was the eleventh motor ambulance sent from Western Australia.



*Above: The Sunbeam ambulance purchased by the state school children of Western Australia is shown outside the Western Australia Agent General's office in London. [Western Mail (Perth) 1 December 1916]*

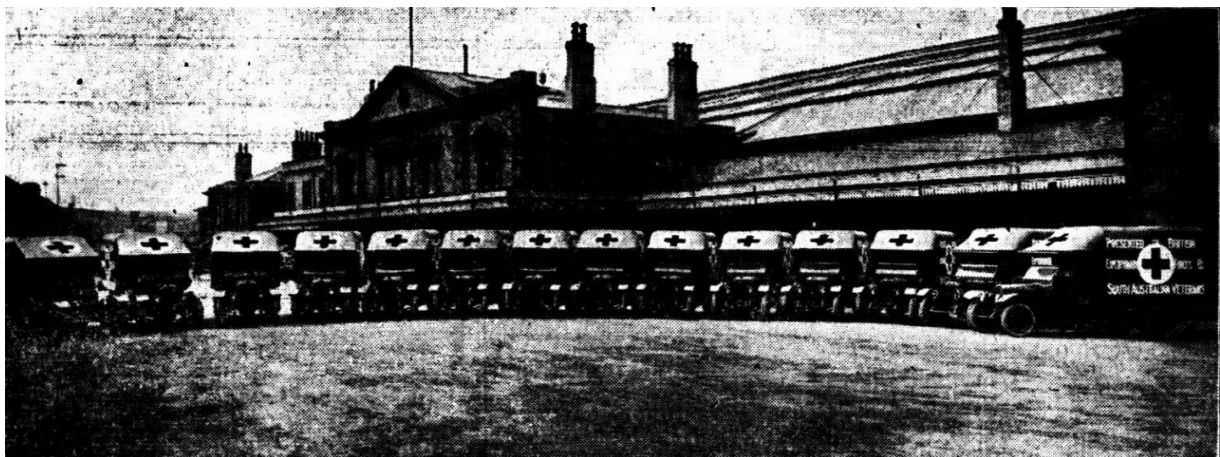
*Left: The four-stretcher equipment can be seen in this photograph. [Western Mail (Perth) 1 December 1916]*

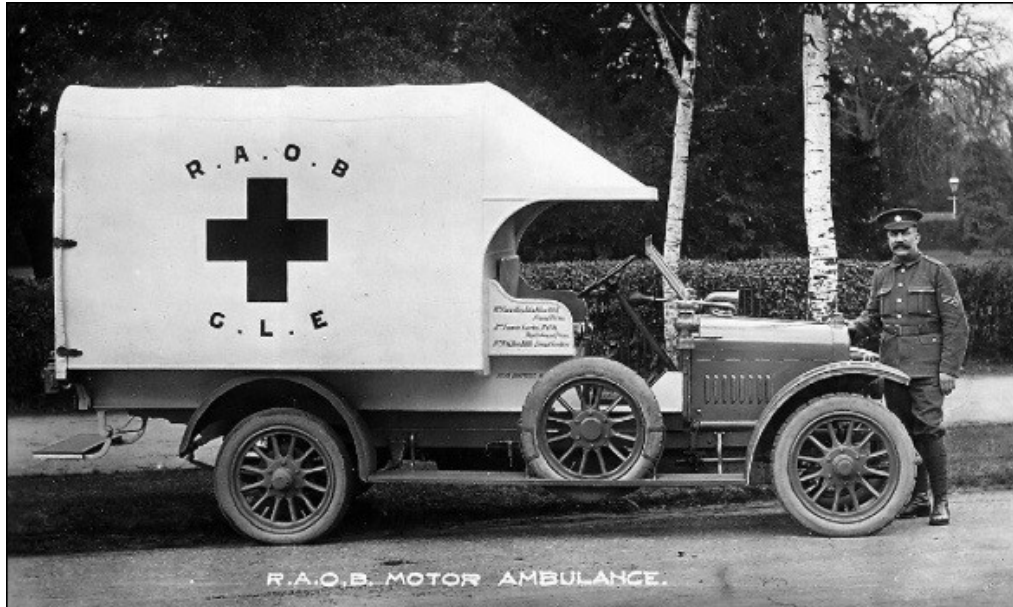


Sir Henry Galway, the Governor of South Australia, led a magnificent fund-raising effort to enable the purchase of 14 Sunbeam ambulances. 'The Register' (Adelaide) reported on Thursday 6 May 1915, "The Private Secretary to the Governor wrote on Wednesday night, "His Excellency the Governor desires me to convey his warm and appreciative thanks to those gentlemen who have so readily responded to his personal appeal on behalf of his South Australian Veterans' Ambulance Fund. In less than a month His Excellency has received a sum of £7,350, which has allowed him to cable 14 motor ambulances to Lord Kitchener. The vehicles are fully equipped, and are 20 h.p. 'Sunbeams' fitted with rear twin wheels, and built in accordance with War Office specifications." As might be expected the list of donors included prominent families. Notably, Mr R Barr Smith and Mr S Kidman contributed two ambulances each while Sir Josiah Symon, K.C.M.G., K.C. and Mr George Brookman funded one each. The ambulance bore the inscription, "Presented to the British Expeditionary Force by South Australian Veterans".

*Above: "A Splendid Gift – Veteran's Ambulance Fund", was the newspaper heading that described the 14 Sunbeam ambulances presented to the British Army from the South Australian Governor's South Australian Veterans' Ambulance Fund. [Internet]*

*Below: This photograph of the 14 ambulances was taken at Wolverhampton Low Level Railway Station. [The Journal' (Adelaide) 28 July 1915]*





Three Sunbeam ambulances donated by the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes – Grand Lodge of England. [Wikipedia]



Patriotism reverberated around the British Empire and India contributed many different makes and a very great number of ambulances, including Sunbeams. The Maharajah Scindia of Gwalior donated a fleet consisting of 41 Sunbeam ambulances, four cars for officers, five motor lorries and ten motorcycles. They were Christmas gifts. At Buckingham Palace in December 1915 they were driven in file past King George, Queen Mary, Prince Henry and the lords and ladies of the household.



*Above and Below: Two views of parts of the procession of the 41 "Scindia" Sunbeam ambulances, the Christmas gift of The Maharajah Scindia of Gwalior as they took part in the drive-past at Buckingham Palace. [‘Chronicle’ (Adelaide) 20 February 1915 and Team-BHP.com]*





*Above: On the left in the foreground is The Rana Ranjit Singh cited here as "H.H. The Maharajah of Barwani with his ambulance cars in France". The two vehicles are marked "Indian Ambulances". They are Sunbeams. The photograph was taken in 1915. [British Library 21(120)]*

The Rana Ranjit Singh was in command of an ambulance train in France having been appointed to the honorary rank of Captain in April 1915. He held this position for 18 months and was rewarded for his services with the title of Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (KCIE). The ambulances which appear to be Sunbeams were donated by a group of Princes from the central Indian state.

Of those who served with the Australian Imperial Force in World War I, 151,948 were wounded. The message on the Sunbeam ambulance from the swastika and the boomerang, conveying as it did best wishes from home, would have brought some comfort to those unfortunate enough to need transport amongst the horrors of war.

*Right: The wartime Sunbeam ambulance featured in advertisements after World War I - "In the after-war productions the name Sunbeam will have a new significance. Inseparable from it will be the records of exceptional efficiency on war service." [Internet]*

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In after-war productions the name Sunbeam will have a new significance. Inseparable from it will be the records of exceptional efficiency on war service.

**THE SUPREME**

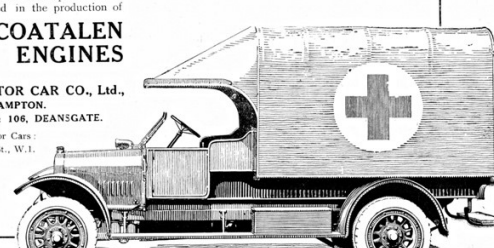
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