

A Military Tournament had been held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington since 1880, the first two ended as financial disasters, as a result the organisers, lead by General Burnaby, decided to change the format from a skill at arms competition, which was repetitive, had obtuse rules and was difficult for the public to follow, to a field artillery competition including a musical ride by the 1st Life Guards, the change proved an immense success, visitors flocked to the show. The following year 1883 the Tournament was well established and keen interest was shown by the Royal Family, Her Majesty heading the list of patrons which included the Lord Mayor of London. Sadly General Burnaby died before the 1883 tournament, but by now the tournament was fully supported by the press, senior army officers and public servants and by the end of 1883 had become the Royal Military Tournament.

The Royal Navy was first mentioned in 1884 when boys from the Royal Navy School at Greenwich and the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea, provided the Guard of Honour for the Duke of Cambridge who opened the show. This year was even more popular the Committee further reducing the individual contests from the arena and introducing more bands and displays. In 1886 the Royal Navy made its first appearance in the show as part of a combined display introducing new weapons. The Royal Navy was not to appear again until 1896 when 40 ratings from HMS Excellent provided the first all naval display in the form of gun and cutlass drill.

The Royal Military Tournament of 1900 featured men from HMS Powerful parading a 4.7 inch gun called 'Joe Chamberlain' one of the guns used in the defence of Ladysmith weighing 2.1 ton with wheels weighing nearly a further 0.5 ton. It was brought into the arena by four pan of oxen, brought to action, one round fired and then man handled out of the arena by the Blue jackets as sailors were called, all to a standing ovation the audience. This popular display continued as the Navy's contribution to the Royal Military Tournament which moved to Olympia in 1906.

In 1912 a competition replaced the parade for the first time, the three depots of Portsmouth, Chatham and Devonport providing the gun teams. This was the idea of Commander P.H. Hall-Thompson RN, who is regarded as the father of the Field Gun Competition. The 1914-1918 war stopped all such events for its duration but the competition returned with the new Royal Tournament of peacetime. The Second World War also 'stopped play' for a time, the resumption saw two important changes, in 1947 the Fleet Air Arm first entered the competition and the venue moved to Earl's Court in 1950. The newcomers surprised the 'old hands' of the depots by winning the Aggregate Time Challenge Cup and the Fastest Time Cup, in their first year of competition. In 1960 Chatham ran at the Royal Tournament for the last time, throughout the history of the inter-port competition as many as eight crews have competed including Royal Marines in the 1920's.