

About the English 8-inch howitzer 1915-1940

Introduction

The German use of siege artillery in the destruction of the Belgian forts at Liège [1](#)) made a great impression at the time and on the English side it was decided to provide a number of heavy howitzers to match the German ones.



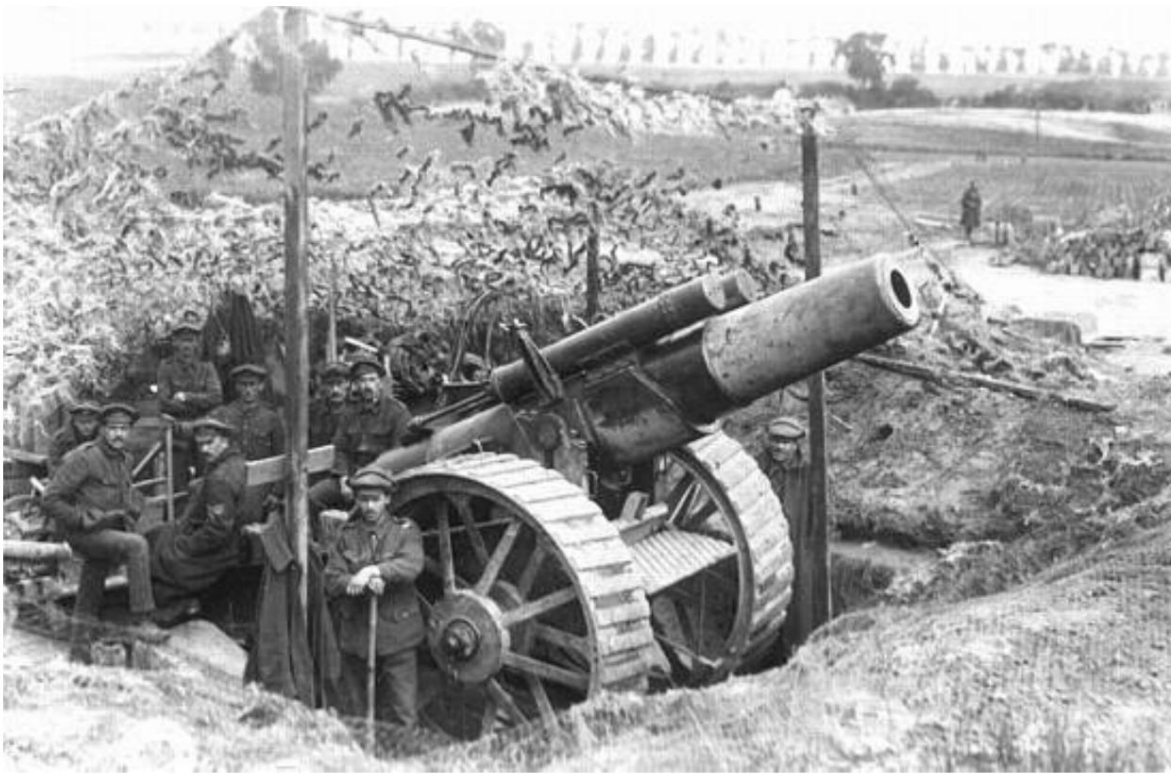
*Two 8" howitzers, Mk 1-5, of the 135th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, La Houssoye, August 1916.
From Source 1.*

BL 8-in Howitzer, Mk 1-5 [2](#))

A number of 6" cannon tubes were taken from stored ship's artillery, which were bored to caliber 8" and 100 pamphlets were ordered.

The Lavettes were manufactured at various English locomotive factories.

Pamphlets and leaflets existed in five different editions, named Mk 1 to 5.



8" Howitzer Mk 1-5, Western Front, circa 1915 3). —

The first pamphlets were sent to France in 1915 and continued in service until 1919, when they were declared obsolete.

The range was approx. 10 km, and the grenade weighed approx. 100 kg.

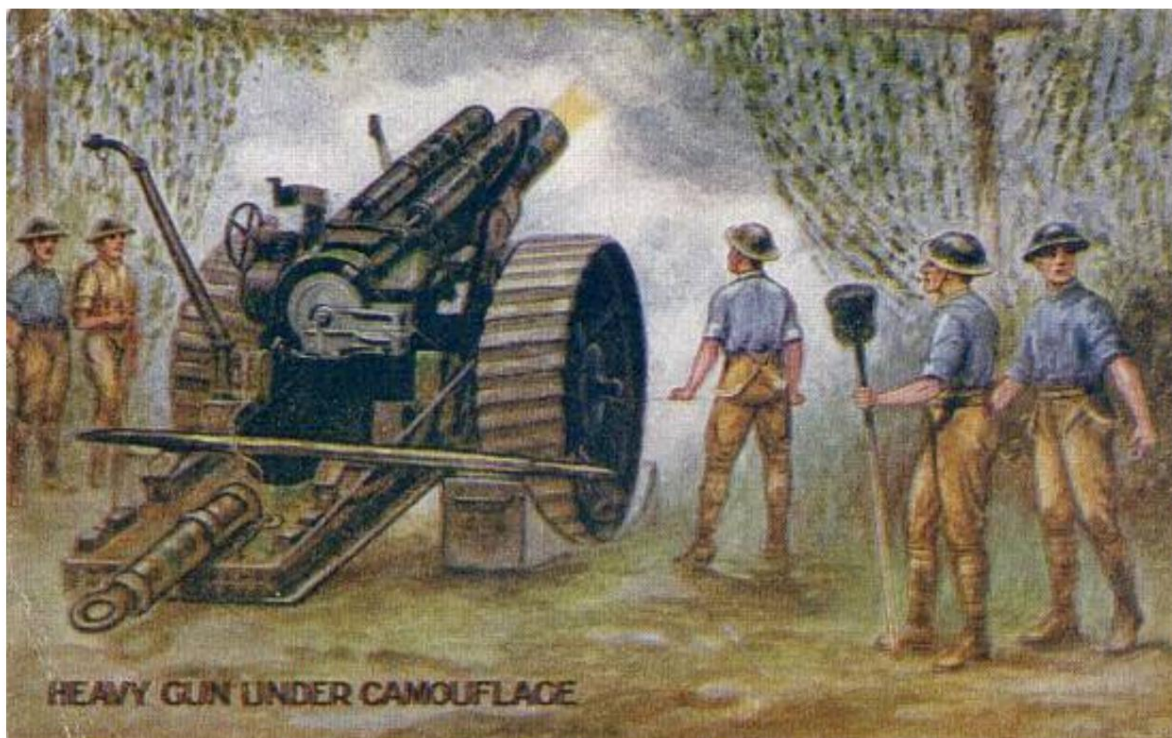
Cannon barrel and made weighed a good 13 t together.



8-in Howitzers, Mk 1-5, of the 39th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, Fricourt Mometz valley of the Somme, summer 1916.

From Source 2.

There are several photos from this shooting; here it looks like a shot has just been fired, after which the crew rushes back to reload.



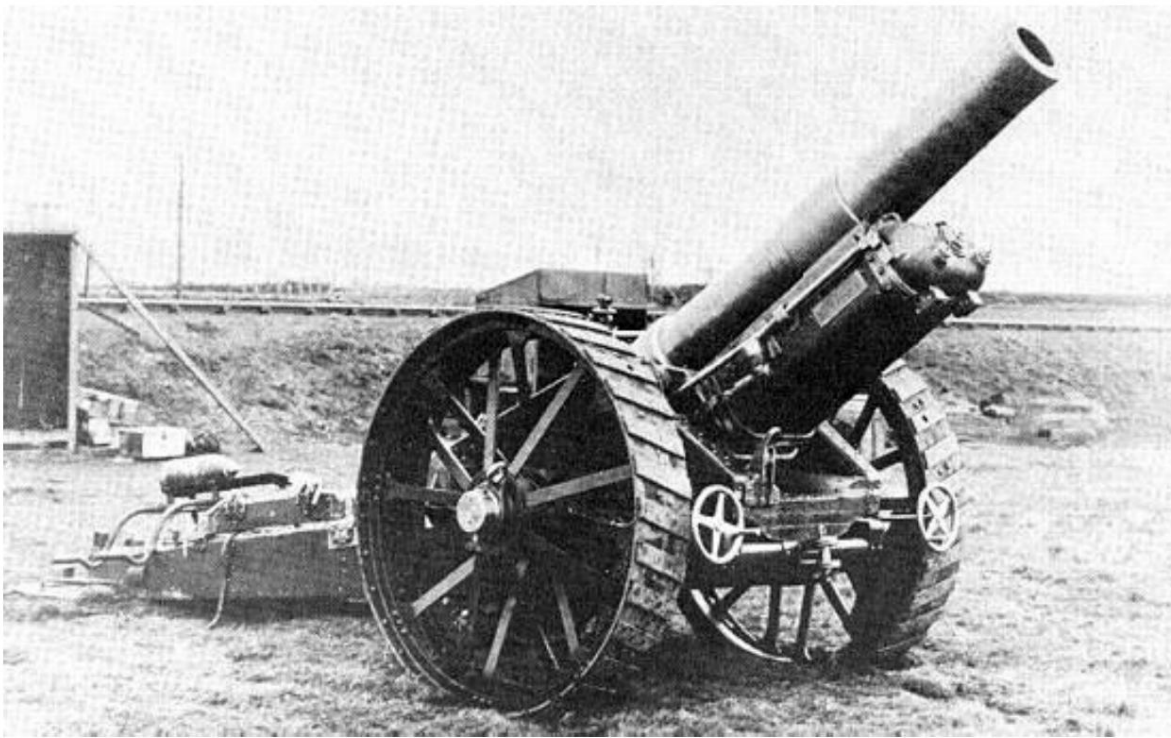
Heavy gun under camouflage, approx. 1916.

No. 5 in contemporaneous series of postcards issued to support the sale of war bonds; the campaign's theme *Feed the Guns with War Bonds* is printed on the back.

BL 8-in Howitzer, Mk 6-8

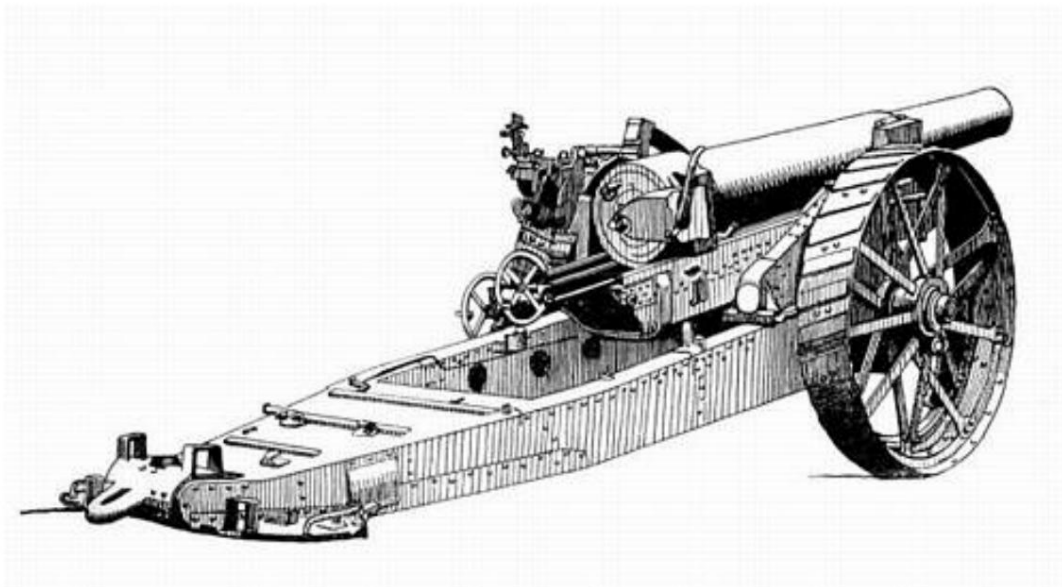
The first editions were gradually replaced from 1916-1917 by newer editions - Mk 6 and Mk 7 and 8.

Data	Weight of the pamphlet	Firing range	Weight of the grenade
BL 8-in Howitzer, Mk 1-5	13 tons	9.4 km	100 kg
BL 8-in Howitzer, Mk 6	8 tons	9.7 km	100 kg
BL 8-in Howitzer, Mk 7-8	8 tons	11 km	100 kg



8" howitzer, Mk 6. From Source 2.

The Mk 6 was phased out in 1926, while the Mk 7 and 8 continued in service until 1945.



8" howitzers, Mk 7 or 8. From Source 6.

In the early 1940s, the remaining 8" howitzers were converted to 7.2" guns, which became the new standard caliber for British heavy artillery and these were used alongside the American 155 mm (*Long Tom*) guns; some even in the same make as the American cannon.

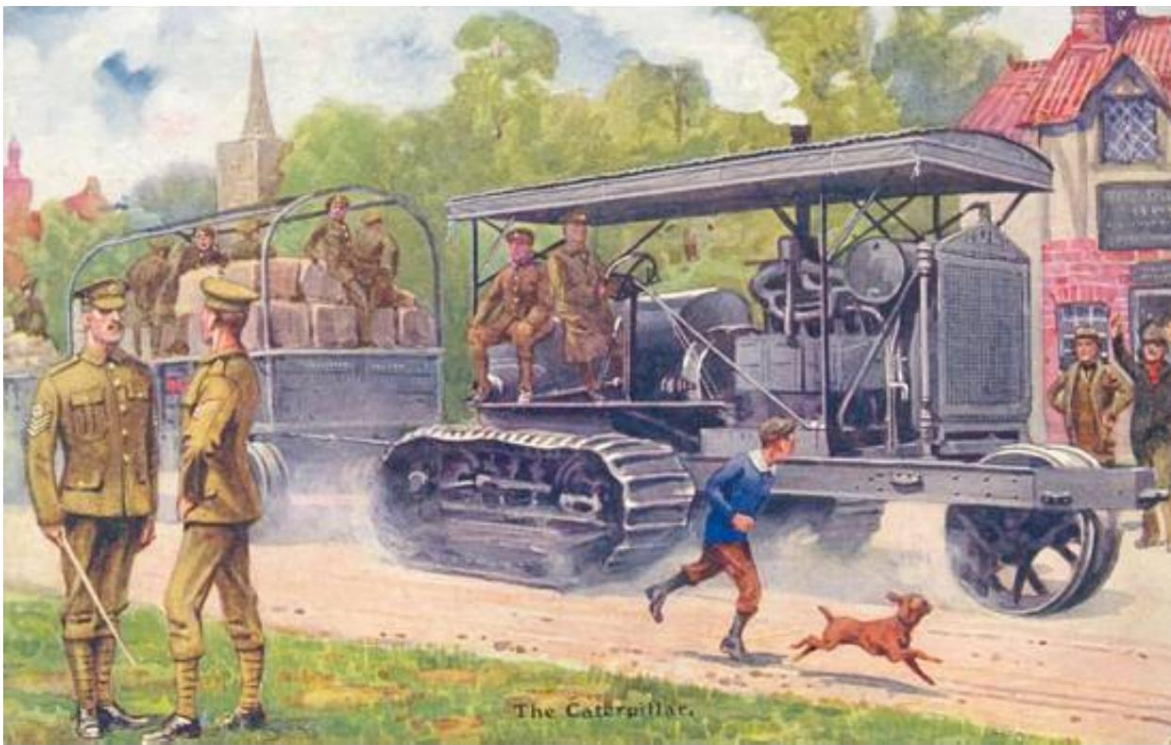


8" howitzers, Mk 7 or 8, France 1939.

From the Illustrated London News, November 15, 1939.

The caption reads: *The Royal Artillery has moved a long way since 1918. The arts learned in the last war, flash-spotting and sound-ranging and firing by "prediction" are all now matters of common practice. Camouflage has become second nature to gunners. The heavy weapons now move on great balloon tires, which are gentle to road-surfaces and protect the gun from being jarred (= tremors, vibrations).*

Cannon tractors



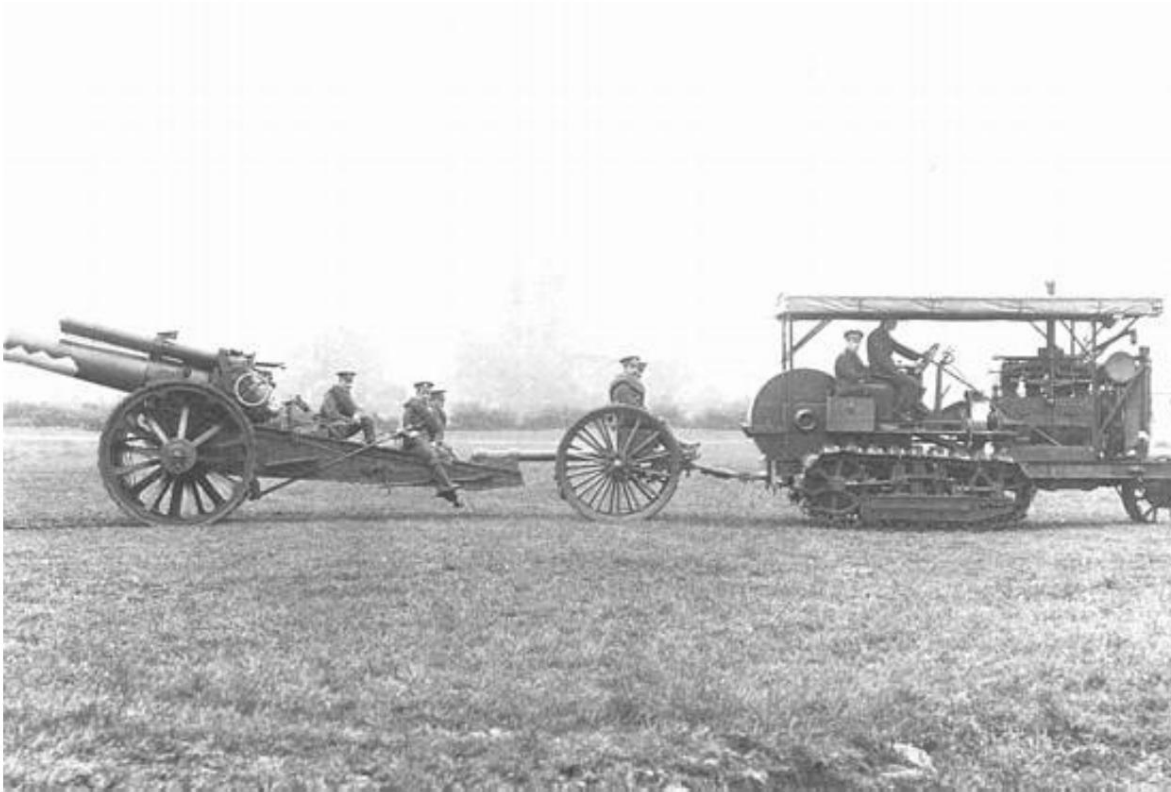
The Caterpillar. Mechanical Transport Branch, Army Service Corps, c. 1914.
From a simultaneous postcard.

The following appears from the back of the card: *The famous "Caterpillar" Motor Tractor designed for work on roads, over broken ground, or across country. This remarkable engine will easily cross soft or rough ground, where no other type of vehicle could pass, owing to the peculiar manner in which it lays its own track. This revolving track is made of steel, with rails on the inside, on which the driving wheels run. It is petrol driven, and is capable of a speed up to 12 miles an hour.*



Tractor with siege howitzer, approx. 1916.

No. 1 in a contemporaneous series of postcards issued to support the sale of war bonds; the campaign's theme *Feed the Guns with War Bonds* is printed on the back.



Holt 75-hp Petrol Tractor pulling an 8" howitzer, Mk 1-5. From Source 3.

However, other information about the gun tractor is less optimistic about the cruising speed, but the important thing in this regard was also that you could move such heavy things at all, rather than at what speed it happened.

The Holt tractor was also used as cannon tractors for pamphlets of other types, in addition to various other transport services, e.g. supplies, as shown on the postcard.



Holt 75-hp Petrol Tractors pulling a battery of 8" howitzers Mk 1-5 at Amiens, September 1916.
From Source 3.

War Games Organization

1 battery commander 2 medium trucks 1 observer
(mounted) 1-2 supply platoons 1 staff platoons 1
supply truck 1 8" howitzer 1 supply truck
(baggage) 1 gun crew 1 field kitchen 1 tracked gun tractor

Should you be inspired to set up a heavy artillery battery from the period - e.g. as a wargame unit - then Greg Novak in *Spearhead of the Empire - The Canadian Corps in 1918* states this example set-up:

The organization is intended for the World War I edition of the Command Decision rules - *Over the Top*. The organization of a battery equipped with 9.2" howitzers or 6" cannon is similar.

Sources

1. *British Artillery Weapons & Ammunition 1914-1918* by Ian V. Hogg and LF Thurston, Ian Allan Ltd., Surrey 1972, SBN 7110-0381-5.
2. *British & American Artillery of World War 2* by Ian V. Hogg, Arms and Armor Press, London 1978, ISBN 0-85368-242-9.
3. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Western Front 1914-18* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1986, ISBN 1-870114-00-0.
4. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Between the Wars, 1919-39* by BP Hughes, Brassey's, London 1992, ISBN 0-08-04098-9.

5. *8" Mark 5 Howitzer* by Kenn Musgrave, Military Modelling, June 1974.

6. *Taschenbuch der Heere* by Kurt Passow, JF Lehman Verlag, Munich / Berlin, 1939.

7. *Military Transport of World War I* by Chris Ellis, Blandford Press, London 1970, ISBN 07137-0701-1.

Per Finsted

Notes:

1) See e.g. Brave Little Belgium - Liège on the website FirstWorldWar.com.

2) BL - *breech* (= bottom piece) *loading*, means directly translated rear *loader*. In the period used as a designation for a pamphlet in which the projectile and charge bag(s) are separated from each other. The opposite is QF -*quick firing* - where the charge is placed in a brass casing.

3) The image originates from the Imperial War Museum's extensive image collection; I bought mine at a postcard market.