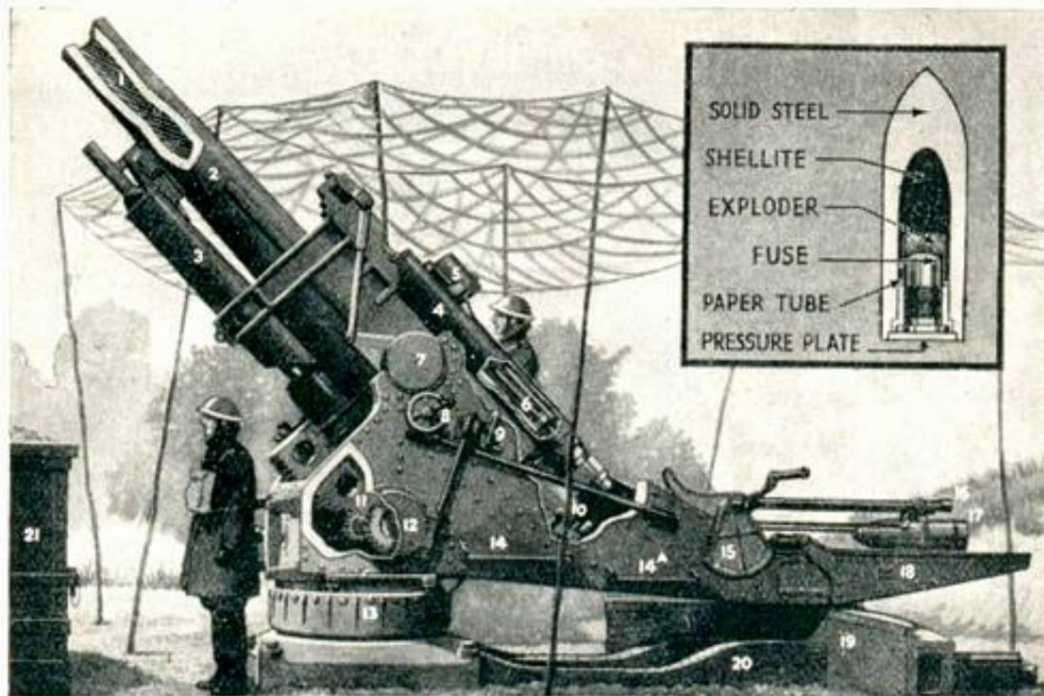


# About the English 9.2-inch howitzer 1914-1940

## Introduction

By the First World War the British Army possessed only a limited amount of heavy artillery, mainly of 6" caliber developed as siege artillery for use by the Army in India.

In 1913, however, trials with a 9.2" howitzer had begun and the model was approved in June 1914. The first copy was sent to France in November 1914, where it was deployed for the first time at Neuve Chapelle; the first pamphlet was later nicknamed "Mother" <sup>1)</sup>.



**BRITISH 9.2-INCH HOWITZER AND ITS SHELL**

**Fig. 3.** The 9.2-inch howitzer has a crew of four men, and can throw its huge shell eight miles. 1, Barrel and interior rifling. 2, Recoil slide. 3, Recuperator. 4, Recoil cylinder. 5, Oil cylinder. 6, Recoil piston and rod. 7, Trunnion. 8, Traversing handle. 9, Elevating handle. 10, Breech. 11, Elevating arc and gears. 12, Gear case. 13, Foundation ring. 14, 14a, Platforms for gunners. 15, Shell loading hand gear. 16, Mechanical loading arms. 17, Shell ready for loading. 18, Shell platform. 19, Traversing platform. 20, Foundations. 21, Earth-filled box which helps to keep the gun steady. Inset are details of the shell.

Principle sketch: 9.2" howitzers [3\)](#).

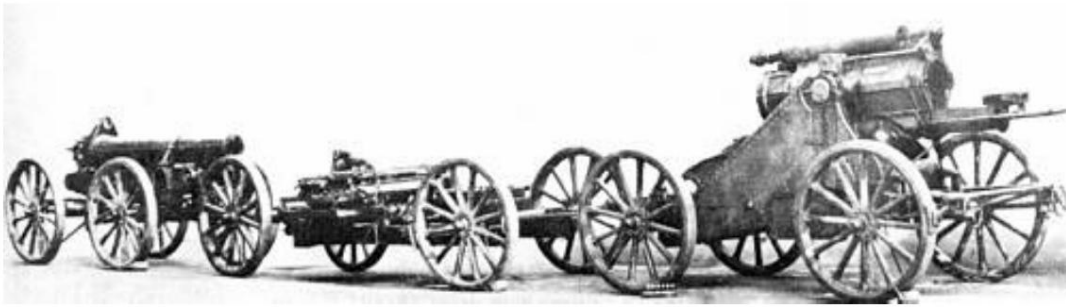
## BL 9.2-in Howitzer, Mark 1-2 [2\)](#)

This heavy howitzer weighed approx. 15 tons.

To anchor the, in all senses, heavy pamphlet in firing position, a ground anchor was placed in front of the pamphlet, in the form of a "box" (number 21 on the drawing) filled with 9 (Mk 1)/11 (Mk 2) tons of earth .

It took up to 12 hours to get the pamphlet into position, and at least twice as long to get it ready to move.

In July 1916, 233 units had been delivered. and by the end of the war the number had risen to 812. (both versions together).



*9.2" howitzer in transport position.*  
From Source 2.

During the move, the booklet and accessories, as shown in the picture, were transported in three parts.



*Ready to open fire.*

Two 9.2" Mk 1 howitzers photographed at Guillemont (Somme), 4 October 1917.  
From Source 1.

A heavy battery (Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery) numbered 4 pamphlets.

9.2" howitzers were included at various times in the corps artillery, the army artillery and the high command's artillery reserve.

For a discussion of the organization of the heavy artillery at different times of the First World War, refer to Source 3, Appendix E.



*A 9.2" howitzer photographed at St. Jean, Passchendaele, 19 August 1917 [4](#).*

In front of the pamphlet you can see the "earth anchor" - the box for the 9-11 tons of soil.

Note also the highly varying work attire of the artillerymen, there is no doubt that it is hard work to operate such a pamphlet.



*Two 9.2" howitzers in a German-captured battery position [5](#).*





*Preparations are being made to load a 9.2" howitzer.  
The "treadmill" of the grenades is cleaned of dirt with a wire brush.  
From Source 2.*

Considering the position of the pipes, it is quite possible that the artillerymen had the opportunity to destroy the pamphlets before the battery was captured. The picture was probably taken in March-April 1918 during the great German offensive.

Data	Pamphlets weight	Firing range	Grenade weight
BL 9.2-in Howitzer, Mark 1	13 tons	9 km	130 kg
BL 9.2-in Howitzer, Mark 2	15 tons	12.5 km	130 kg

## At war again - 1939-1940

Although time had passed for the semi-mobile 9.2" howitzer, they were part of the British Expeditionary Force in France, 1939-40, where they were subsequently lost.

The pamphlets that were found in England were used in the anti-invasion defence, and were only finally designated as obsolete in August 1945. As far as is known, however, training of personnel to operate these "antiques" already ceased in 1942.

## General Headquarters Heavy and Super Heavy Artillery (British Expeditionary Force 1940):

1st Heavy Regiment	1 battery with 4 pcs. 6" cannon 3 batteries, each with 4 pcs. 8" howitzers
--------------------	---

51st Heavy Regiment

1 battery with 4 pcs. 6" cannon 3  
batteries, each with 4 pcs. 9.2" howitzers

52nd (The Bedfordshire Yeomanry) Heavy Regiment 3 batteries,

1 battery with 4 pcs. 6" cannon  
each with 4 pcs. 9.2" howitzer

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Super Heavy Batteries

Each with 2 pcs. 12" howitzer

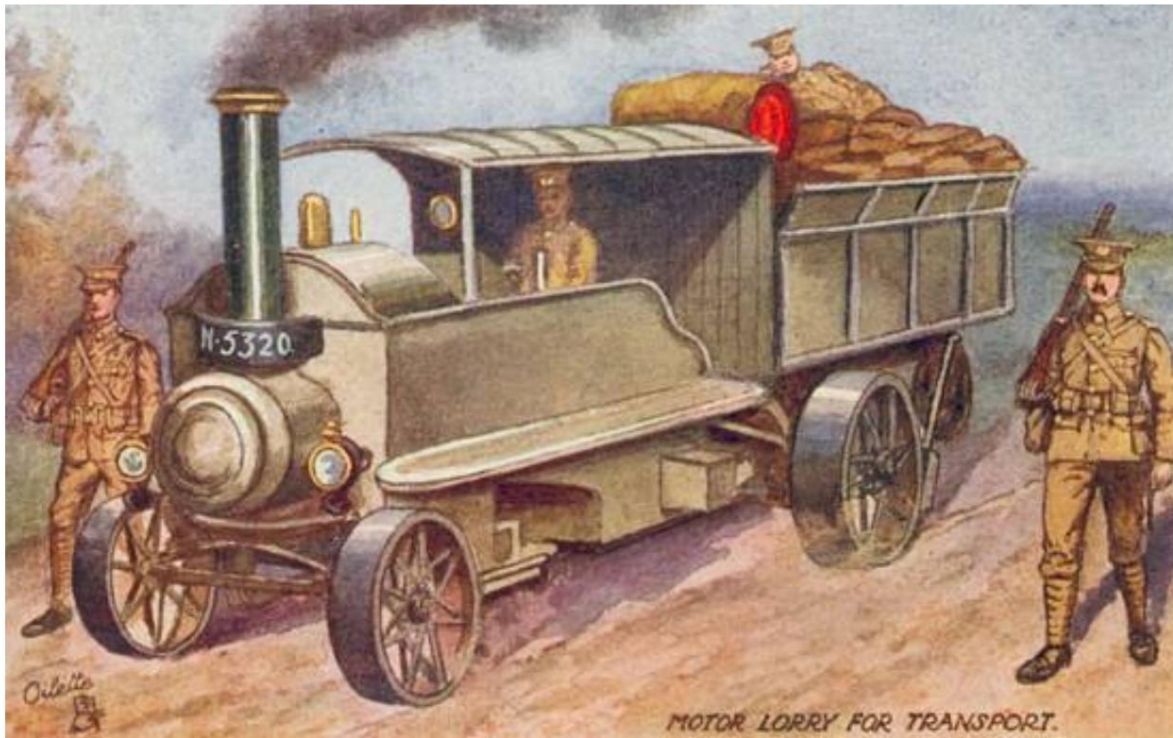
The 12" howitzer referred to was another "handover" from the First World War; in appearance it resembled the 9.2" howitzer, only somewhat larger.

## Transportation

The Long, Long Trail - The Storey of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918 website

contains extracts from the war diaries of 7<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery and 118th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. It mentions, among other things, the many challenges associated with moving heavy artillery over long distances, an exercise that requires a lot of forethought and prior clarification of the route of march. The first 9.2" howitzers were initially included in the 7th Battery, but were later transferred to the 8th. Battery.

In the war diary for the 7th Battery is mentioned, among other things vehicles of the *Foden* type are used for transporting parts of the material. This is *the Foden Steam Lorry*. As early as 1912, the British Army had a number of these locomobiles at their disposal, and after the outbreak of war this number was increased considerably by means of printed vehicles.



*Foden Steam Lorry, approx. 1914.*

From a simultaneous postcard.

The following appears from the back of the card:

Motor Lorry for Transport. The motor transport is comparatively a new system in military service. The

daily run of the motor-lorry may be taken at 90 miles, so that the army could advance at will as much as 45 miles from the railhead without risking regularity of supply. This gives greater range and flexibility to the Army's operations and clears the road of the horse-wagons which formerly impeded progress.

The war diaries do not mention which types of gun tractors were used, but they may be the *Holt 75-hp Petrol Tractors*, which are mentioned in my article *On the English 8" Howitzer 1915-1940*; however, there were also several other steam-powered gun tractors in favor.

## 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 - The Years of Defeat 1939-41* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1996, ISBN 1-85753-080-2.
5. *The Gamers Guide to the BEF in 1940* by Mike D. Taylor, Command Post Quarterly, No. 15 6.
6. *Military Transport of World War I* by Chris Ellis, Blandford Press, London 1970, ISBN 07137-0701-1.
7. *Army Service Corps 1902-1918* by Michael Young, Leo Cooper, London 2000, ISBN 085052-730-9.

Per Finsted

---

## Notes:

- 1) *Mother* is today (April 2005) on display at the Imperial War Museum, London, with the original made and the howitzer tube which in 1918 replaced the original.
- 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) From *Britain's Wonderful Fighting Forces*, Odhams Press Limited, London (no year), circa 1941.
- 4) From *The Third Ypres - Passchendaele - The Day-by-day Account* by Chris McCarthy, Arms & Armor Press, London 1995, ISBN 1-85409-217-0.
- 5) From *World War 1 Trench Warfare* by Michael Houlihan, Ward Lock Super Source Books, London 1974, ISBN 0-7063-1826-9.