**RETROKIT**

**72102 60 pounder Mk II 72102**

Critics often say that armies are always ready for the last war, but never for the next… It must be said there is something ringing true in this statement, particularly if we are talking about the armies at the outbreak of the First World War, who had not really paid enough attention to the lessons from the American Civil War nor the Russo-Japanese War.

Take the example of field artillery in the early 20th Century: it appears well suited for the future conflict, which the belligerents hope to see concluded within a few months. Yet, in practice, it soon appears that a heavier artillery is needed, to break up fortified positions and that a longer range artillery is also required to destroy the enemy’s own artillery positions and cause chaos in the enemy’s rear positions.

Siege artillery is available, but in too few numbers for the whole front, and it does not offer enough mobility because of its very size.

Only the British can field, at the outbreak of the war, the right gun: the 60pdr. The Boer War had showed how badly the Royal Artillery could cope against more modern artillery. This would eventually lead to an official program from which would emerge, in 1904, the 60pdr gun.

However, the need for this new weapon is not felt to be pressing and only 41 60pdr guns are available in August 1914; 13 of them are in the colonies, and therefore only 28 guns are to be found in the Divisional Heavy Batteries of the British Expeditionary Forces that cross the Channel in 1914.

By February 1915, 2 variants of the gun, featuring easier to manufacture tubes, are in production : Gun Mk I\* and Gun Mark I\*\*. The gun carriage is also quite complicated to manufacture : to ease transport (still horse-drawn), the original gun carriage allows for the whole gun to be moved backwards and therefore to spread the weight more evenly over the wheels. This luxury is first abandoned, but requires new, stronger wheels to be fitted. This adds over a ton in weight to the whole weapon system and this requires the Heavy Batteries to be required with HOLT tractors. This becomes the Carriage Mk II.

The state of the battlefield in Northern France and Flanders brings in more troubles, though : the gun becomes very difficult to move or will sink in the muddy ground… Enters Carriage Mk III, still in 1915, featuring a tube can move backwards and lighter wheels with rubber bands. Carriage Mk II are modified into Mk III as and when possible, and are called Carriage Mk II\*.

Alongside those “external” changes, work is continuing on the development of the shells to, principally, to increase the range to 11,240m. A 62pdr Mk III is also being developed, with a longer tube, newer breech, hydro pneumatic recoil system, greater gun elevation and better proportioned tails. Although adopted in June 1917, the tube does not become available until mid-1918 and only 4 Mk III will enter service before the 11th of November 1918. The range has now reached 14,160m.

The 60pdr gun would in any case remain the favoured and most used lighter gun of the British Army heavy artillery. It was used to fire high explosive, fragmentation, smoke and gas shells.

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