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Pattern: L5 105mm Pack Howitzer. Introduced: 1961. Withdrawn: From 1967

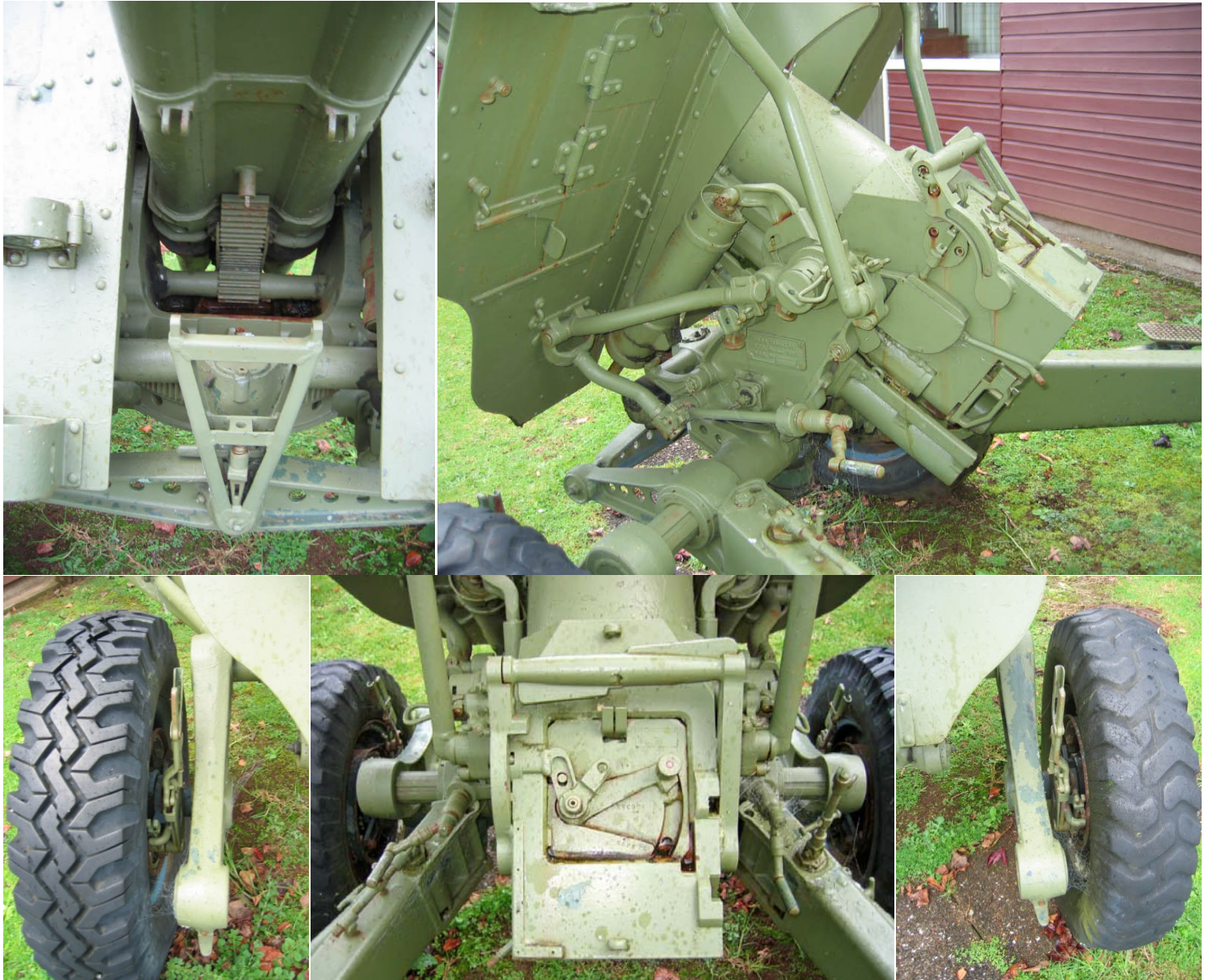
Kaikohe & District Memorial RSA Inc L5 105mm Pack Howitzer



New Zealand purchased 24 L5s in the early 1960s, 5 more later, 6 of which were deployed to South Vietnam from July 1965. Eighty-nine Gunners & about 24 support personnel, who formed 161 Bty RNZA, were attached to the US 173rd Airborne Brigade. 161 Bty RNZA saw its first action with a fire support mission on 19 July 1965. On 8 February 1967 in Vietnam these L5 Howitzers were replaced with US M2A2 105mm Howitzers.



The L5 Pack Howitzer was designed and built in Italy by OTO Melara and was originally known as the Model 56. Specifications for the design stated the requirement for it to be fully transportable throughout the mountainous regions of Italy and Europe. Hence the pneumatic tyres for high speed towing and the ability for it to be dismantled into 112 sections for transport across rough terrain. On occasions, in its very early life, broken down and carried on horseback. It was to be light enough, fully assembled, to be air portable and able to be air dropped. The L5 105 was, light enough to be carried slung underneath the Bell UH1 Iroquois helicopter. Original production began in 1957 and was soon adopted by many countries throughout the world. Production ceased in 1984 with some 4200 L5 105s delivered. It has seen action in many combat areas, including by the British in South Yeman and Borneo, and New Zealand in South Vietnam. Argentina used the L5 105 in the 1982 Falklands campaign. The L5 105 has a very short barrel with a multi baffle muzzle brake, a hydraulic buffer and helical recuperator and a vertical sliding wedge breech block. One of the more unusual features of the L5 105 is the configuration of the wheels and axles. The wheels can be fitted in two positions, the normal field position with the wheels overslung giving an elevation of +65° and a depression of -5° plus a total traverse of 36° (18° left and right). With the wheels underslung the L5 105 assumed an anti tank role, giving an elevation of +25° and a depression of -5°. The main advantage of this configuration was the overall height was reduced from 2m to just under 1.5m, making it much easier to conceal.



The L5 105's normal crew was seven men and was towable by a long wheelbase Landrover. An advantage of the L5 was that it fired the same 105mm ammunition as the American M101 and M102 field guns. This type of ammunition was manufactured world-wide and included High Explosive (HE), smoke, illumination and High Explosive Anti Tank (HEAT). A modification developed during the Vietnam conflict was the Flechette round, designed for local defence, in which a round fired at close range exploded shortly after leaving the barrel, sending out thousands of 2" finned steel darts. The maximum range, at full charge, was 10,575m or 11,565 yards.



Royal New Zealand Artillery 161 Battery Gunners with their L5 105mm Pack Howitzers and 7.62mm Self Loading Rifles (SLRs) in action in 1965, (note heavy barrel SLR light machine gun on bipod bottom center) they cut into virgin Vietnam territory that even the French and Japanese would not go into, the Ho Bo Woods, War Zone C, the Iron Triangle, often they were their own front line and were engaged in many battles during 1965-1966. The Guns were always there. The gunners have no battle honours. The reason is their motto 'UBIQUE' - everywhere - the symbol of the Artillery's service wherever there is fighting.

Acknowledgements and Special Thanks to:-

Kaikohe & District Memorial RSA Inc. Kevin Forde <http://www.riv.co.nz/rnza/hist/l5.htm>

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