

British Infantry Battalion (Middle East)

War Establishment reference VI/587/2

Notified 3rd February 1943, effective 30th November 1942

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Composed of;

Battalion Headquarters	5 Officers, 46 men
Headquarter Company	11 Officers, 288 men
Company Headquarters	(2 Officers, 10 men)
Signal Platoon	(1 Officer, 34 men)
Anti-aircraft Platoon	(20 men)
Mortar Platoon	(1 Officer, 45 men) - (six 3-inch mortars)
Carrier Platoon	(2 Officers, 41 men) - (13 Carriers)
Anti-tank Platoon	(3 Officers, 69 men) - (eight 2-pdr guns)
Administrative Platoon	(2 Officers, 69 men)
Four Rifle Companies, each	5 Officers, 103 men
Company Headquarters	(2 Officers, 10 men)
Three Platoons, each	(1 Officer, 31 men)
Total strength	782 all ranks (36 Officers and 746 men)

Summary Table, British Infantry Battalion (Middle East), November 1942

Detail	Headquarters Company								Total, HQ Company	Four Rifle Companies, each		Total, Rifle Company	Total, Battalion
	Battalion HQ	Company HQ	Signal Platoon	Anti-aircraft Platoon	3-in Mortar Platoon	Carrier Platoon	Anti-tank Platoon	Administrative Platoon		Company HQ	Three Rifle Platoons (each)		
i). Personnel													
Officers	5	2	1	0	1	2	3	2	11	2	1	5	36
Warrant officers	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	1	8
Staff-serjeants	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Serjeants	4	0	1	1	4	4	10	6	26	0	1	3	42
Corporals	2	0	2	2	6	8	8	8	34	1	3	10	76
Privates	39	8	31	17	35	29	50	54	224	7	27	88	615
Total, all ranks (including attached)	51	12	35	20	46	43	72	71	299	12	32	108	782
ii). Transport													
Bicycles	3	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	1	5	31
Motorcycles	5	0	3	1	3	0	2	2	11	0	0	0	16
Cars (2-seater)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cars, 5-cwt, 4x4	2	1	0	4	0	0	5	1	11	0	0	0	13
Trucks, 15-cwt	2	3	2	2	3	1	2	4	17	2	1	5	39
Lorries, 3-ton	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13	15	0	0	0	16
Portees (anti-tank guns), 3-ton	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	9	0	0	0	9
Carriers, Universal	1	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	13	0	0	0	14
Carriers, Universal, 3-inch mortar	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	7
iii). Weapons													
Pistols	11	2	4	5	4	15	12	4	46	2	4	14	113
Rifles	38	10	31	15	42	28	57	67	250	10	25	85	628
Machine carbines	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	3	9	41
Light machine guns	1	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	13	0	3	9	50
Twin light machine guns	0	0	0	4	0	0	7	0	11	0	0	0	11
Anti-tank rifles, .55-inch	0	0	1	4	3	12	0	1	21	0	0	0	21
2-inch mortars	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	8
3-inch mortars	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
2-pdr anti-tank guns	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	0	0	0	8
Cup dischargers (rifles)	0	0	0	0	0	13	8	0	21	0	3	9	57
Signal pistols (for carriers)	1	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	13	0	0	0	14
Signal pistols (issued as required)	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24

Notes

Attached personnel consist of 1 Officer, 4 Serjeants, 2 Corporals and 14 Privates (included in above).

Of the total Corporals (excluding attached) 14 may be Lance-serjeants.

Of the total Privates (excluding attached) 48 may be Lance-corporals.

Battalion Headquarters (5 Officers, 46 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Battalion commander	Lieutenant-colonel	1	Pistol	
Second-in-command	Major	1	Pistol	
Adjutant	Captain	1	Pistol	
Regimental serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class I	1	Pistol	
Orderly room clerk	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Clerk	Private	2	Rifle	
Batman	Private	2	Rifle	
Intelligence officer	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
Intelligence serjeant	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Intelligence	Private	1	Machine carbine	
Intelligence	Private	2	Rifle	
Intelligence	Private	3	Rifle	
			Bicycle	3
Provost-serjeant	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Regimental Police	Private	3	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	3
Medical officer (RAMC)	<i>not stated</i>	1	Pistol	
Medical officer's orderly	Private	1	Rifle	
Medical serjeant	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Stretcher bearer	Corporal	2	Rifle	
Stretcher bearer	Private	18	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal	1
			Light machine gun	1
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Machine carbine	
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 5-cwt	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 4-seater	1
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS <i>office equipment</i>	1
Continued...				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle Truck, 15-cwt, GS <i>intelligence equipment</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>Medical Officer & equipment</i>	1
			Car, 5-cwt*	1
Total, all ranks		51		

*No extra driver noted for second Jeep; possible Medical Officer's batman may have acted as driver, similar to amendment to II/1931/12F/1

Headquarter Company (11 Officers, 288 men)

Company Headquarters (2 Officer, 10 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Company commander	Major or Captain	1	Pistol	
Second-in-command	Captain	1	Pistol	
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1	Rifle	
Company quarter-master-serjeant	Staff-serjeant	1	Rifle	
Clerk	Private	1	Rifle	
Storeman	Private	1	Rifle	
Orderly	Private	1	Rifle	
Rangetaker	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 5-cwt	1
Batman-driver	Private	2	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	2
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck-15-cwt, personnel	1
Total, all ranks		12		

(No.1) Signal Platoon (1 Officer, 34 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Platoon commander	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
Signal serjeant	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Orderly	Private	3	Rifle	
			Bicycle	3
Orderly	Private	2	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	2
Continued...				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Signaller	Corporal	2	Rifle	
Signaller	Private	19	Rifle	
Signaller	Private	5	Rifle	
			Bicycle	5
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck-15-cwt, personnel	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			<i>signal stores</i>	
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Total, all ranks		35		

(No.2) Anti-aircraft Platoon (20 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
<i>Headquarters</i>				
Platoon commander	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
LMG number and rifleman	Corporal	1	Rifle	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle	
Orderly	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			<i>reserve ammunition</i>	
LMG number and rifleman	Corporal	1	Rifle	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			<i>stores & equipment</i>	
<i>Four detachments, each</i>				
LMG number and rifleman	Private	2	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 5-cwt	1
			Twin LMG	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Total, all ranks		20		

(No.3) Mortar Platoon (1 Officer, 45 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
Platoon commander	Lieutenant	1	Pistol	
Fitter (MV) (REME)	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal, 3-in mortar	1
Platoon serjeant	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Orderly	Private	2	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	2
Mortar detachment	Corporal*	1	Rifle	
Batman	Private	1	Rifle	
Rangetaker	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			72 rounds 3-inch ammunition	
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Mortar detachment	Private*	2	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			72 rounds 3-inch ammunition	
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Mortar detachment	Private*	2	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			72 rounds 3-inch ammunition	
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Six detachments, each				
Detachment commander	Serjeant*	1	Rifle	
Mortar detachment	Private	3	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal, 3-in mortar	1
			3-inch mortar	1
			72 rounds 3-inch ammunition	
Total, all ranks		46		

* The positions of the Corporals are not identified in the W.E and the above are taken from the linked II/1931/12F/2; the February 1943 Mortar Platoon training manual shows one per 15-cwt.

** Detachments Nos.1, 3 and 5 each commanded by a Lance-serjeant (Corporal), and Detachments Nos.2, 4 and 6 each commanded by a Serjeant.

(No.4) Carrier Platoon (2 Officers, 41 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
<i>Headquarters</i>				
Platoon commander	Captain	1	Pistol	
Batman	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal	1
			Light machine gun	1
			Cup discharger (rifle)	1
Second-in-command	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
Clerk	Private	1	Rifle	
Fitter (MV) (REME)	Private	1	Rifle	
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
<i>Four Sections, each</i>				
Section commander	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal	1
			Light machine gun	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
			Cup discharger (rifle)	1
LMG number and rifleman	Corporal	1	Rifle	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal	1
			Light machine gun	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
			Cup discharger (rifle)	1
LMG number and rifleman	Corporal	1	Rifle	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Carrier, Universal	1
			Light machine gun	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
			Cup discharger (rifle)	1
Total, all ranks		43		

(No.5) Anti-tank Platoon (3 Officers, 69 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
Platoon commander	Captain	1	Pistol	
Batman-driver	Private	1	Machine carbine Car, 5-cwt	1
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1	Rifle	
Orderly	Private	2	Pistol Motorcycle, solo	2
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle Twin LMG	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>126 rounds 2-pdr ammunition</i>	1
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle Twin LMG	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>126 rounds 2-pdr ammunition</i>	1
LMG number and rifleman	Private	1	Rifle Twin LMG	1
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Portee, 3-ton <i>100 rounds 2-pdr ammunition</i>	1
Fitter, MV	Private	1	Rifle	
Fitter, gun	Private	1	Rifle	
Motor mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
Two Detachments, each				
Detachment commander	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
Batman-driver	Private	1	Machine carbine Car, 5-cwt	1
Continued...				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Platoon serjeant	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 5-cwt	1
<i>Two Sections, each</i>				
Gun number	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Gun number	Private	4	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
			Portee, 3-ton	1
			2-pdr anti-tank gun	1
			100 rounds 2-pdr ammunition	
			Twin LMG	1
Gun number	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Gun number	Private	4	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Portee, 3-ton	1
			2-pdr anti-tank gun	1
			100 rounds 2-pdr ammunition	
Total, all ranks		72		

* The position of the eight Corporals is not identified in the W.E. One per Detachment would seem reasonable but no indication as to what posts they might hold.

(No.6) Administrative Platoon (2 Officers, 69 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Transport	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Transport	Serjeant	1	Pistol	
			Motorcycle, solo	1
Quarter-master	<i>not stated</i>	1	Pistol	
Regimental quarter-master-serjeant	Warrant officer, class II	1	Rifle	
Technical stores	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Batman	Private	1	Rifle	
Butchery duties	Private	1	Rifle	
Clerk	Private	2	Rifle	
Equipment repairer	Private	1	Rifle	
Motor mechanic	Corporal*	1	Rifle	
Motor mechanic	Private	1	Rifle	
Officer's mess servant	Private	1	Rifle	
Postman	Private	1	Rifle	
Sanitary duties	Private	4	Rifle	
Continued...				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Storeman	Private	1	Rifle	
Technical storeman	Corporal*	1	Rifle	
Technical storeman	Private	2	Rifle	
Water duties	Private	1	Rifle	
Bricklayer	Private	1	Rifle	
Carpenter and joiner	Private	6	Rifle	
Mason	Private	1	Rifle	
Pioneer	Corporal*	1	Rifle	
Pioneer	Private	3	Rifle	
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>pioneer tools & stores</i>	1
Shoemaker (RAOC)	Corporal	1	Rifle	
Armourer (REME)	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Fitter (REME)	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Fitter (REME)	Private	1	Rifle	
Serjeant cook (ACC)	Serjeant	2	Rifle	
Other ranks' cook (ACC)	Corporal	1	Rifle	
Other ranks' cook (ACC)	Private	10	Rifle	
Officers' mess cook (ACC)	Private	1	Rifle	
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Car, 5-cwt	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, water (200-gal)	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	3	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS <i>reserve ammunition</i>	3
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>960 rounds 2-inch mortar</i>	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>360 rounds 3-inch mortar</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>officers' mess</i>	1
Continued...				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>MT stores & tools</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	5	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>cooking sets, rations, water tins</i>	5
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>baggage</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>anti-gas equipment</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle Lorry, 3-ton, GS <i>petrol distribution</i>	1
Total, all ranks		71		

* The positions of the six Corporals are not identified in W.E., three are assumed as above, the remainder may have been Drivers, I.C.

Four Rifle Companies (5 Officers, 103 men), each

Company Headquarters (2 Officers, 10 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Company commander	Major or Captain	1	Pistol	
Second-in-command	Captain	1	Pistol	
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1	Rifle	
Company quarter-master-serjeant	Staff-serjeant	1	Rifle	
Batman	Private	1	Rifle	
Clerk	Private	1	Rifle	
Storeman	Private	1	Rifle	
Orderly	Private	2	Rifle	
			Bicycle	2
Orderly	Private	1	Rifle	
Driver-mechanic	Corporal*	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
Batman-driver	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			2-inch mortar**	2
Total, all ranks		12		

* The position of the Corporal is not identified in W.E. and the above is assumed

** Two 2-inch mortars held by Company Headquarters for allotment as required

Three Rifle Platoons (1 Officer, 31 men), each

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
Platoon commander	Subaltern	1	Pistol	
Platoon serjeant	Serjeant	1	Rifle	
Batman	Private	1	Rifle	
Orderly	Private	1	Rifle	
			Bicycle	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	1	Rifle	
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
Three Sections, each				
Section commander	Corporal	1	Machine carbine	
LMG number and rifleman	Private	8	Rifle	
			Light machine gun	1
			Cup discharger (rifle)	1
Total, all ranks		32		

Notes

1. The original War Establishment shows the numbers of Corporals allotted per sub-unit, but does not necessarily identify which particular personnel were to have the rank. Where the rank of Corporal in the foregoing is uncertain I have marked this as assumed.
2. Only a few personnel are positively identified as Lance-corporals. With 48 allowed across the whole Battalion there would be sufficient for one per Rifle Section but this is not explicitly stated.
3. No rank is given for either the Battalion Quarter-master or the attached Medical Officer (RAMC).
4. A batman was provided for each Officer; this also extended to the Regimental Serjeant-major and the attached Medical Officer.
5. Scottish Battalions and Irish Battalions (except the RUR) will be allowed one Serjeant Piper and five Pipers in addition. A Battalion of Foot Guard will be allowed two Drill Serjeants (Warrant Officers, class II) in addition.
6. One Section per Rifle Platoon to be trained in anti-gas duties.
7. In each Anti-tank Gun Detachment one 5-cwt car may be replaced by one motorcycle and one motorcycle will be added to Platoon Headquarters, when the Battalion is operating in close country.

Comments

The original War Establishment does not include a transport table. Given the similarity of the majority of Platoons and Headquarters to those detailed on War Establishment reference II/1931/12F/2, these have been assumed to be carried over. The New Zealand War Establishment No.28 of June 1942 largely underpins this approach, but some sections of that document are obscured in relation to the Administrative Platoon.

The detail of the Anti-tank Platoon is taken from the New Zealand W.E. The NZ table was itself subject to a number of handwritten amendments, all undated, which changed the 2-pdr ammunition carried per 3-ton Portee from 112 rounds to 100 rounds. The NZ table also provides the allocation of twin AA light machine guns not shown in the British original and confirms the addition of a cup discharger for rifle grenades per 2-pdr Gun Detachment.

On the subject of individual weapons, the British and New Zealand W.E.s both include the intention that each man responsible for a Bren gun, or twin arrangement, would now be armed with a pistol rather than a rifle. Given how short-lived this proposal was, appearing in August 1942 and being rescinded by June 1943 at the latest, I have always been of the mind that there was little likelihood of sufficient pistols being made available in theatre to rearm every Bren gunner accordingly, so have shown rifles in the foregoing.