

**British Motor Battalion (Middle East)**

**War Establishment reference VI/559/1**

**Notified 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1942, effective 15<sup>th</sup> August 1942**

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Composed of;

<b>Battalion Headquarters</b>	<b>10 Officers, 102 men</b>
<b>Four Motor Companies, each</b>	<b>6 Officers, 161 men</b>
Company Headquarters	(2 Officers, 42 men)
Scout Platoon	(1 Officer, 37 men) – (11 carriers)
MG Platoon	(1 Officer, 29 men) – (four Vickers MMGs)
Motor Platoon	(1 Officer, 23 men)
Anti-tank Platoon	(1 Officer, 30 men) – (four 2-pdr or 6-pdr guns)
<b>Total strength</b>	<b>780 all ranks (34 Officers and 746 men)</b>

**Summary Table, British Motor Battalion (Middle East), August 1942**

Detail	Battalion Headquarters	Four Motor Companies, each					Total, Motor Company	Total, Battalion
		Company HQ	Scout Platoon	MG Platoon	Motor Platoon	Anti-tank Platoon		
<b>i). Personnel</b>								
Officers	10	2	1	1	1	1	6	<b>34</b>
Warrant officers	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	<b>7</b>
Staff-serjeants	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	<b>5</b>
Serjeants	11	1	3	2	1	5	12	<b>59</b>
Corporals	8	1	5	2	3	4	15	<b>68</b>
Privates	79	38	29	25	19	21	132	<b>607</b>
Total, all ranks (including attached)	112	44	38	30	24	31	167	<b>780</b>
<b>ii). Transport</b>								
Cars (utility)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Cars, 5-cwt, 4x4	8	1	2	1	1	2	7	<b>36</b>
Trucks, 15-cwt	7	3	0	1	0	0	4	<b>23</b>
Trucks, 15-cwt (armoured), wireless	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	<b>10</b>
Trucks, 15-cwt, water	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	<b>5</b>
Lorries, 3-ton	9	5	1	2	2	1	11	<b>53</b>
Portees (anti-tank guns), 3-ton	1	0	0	0	0	4	4	<b>17</b>
Carriers, Universal	0	0	11	0	0	0	11	<b>44</b>
<b>iii). Weapons</b>								
Pistols								<b>81</b>
Rifles								<b>659</b>
Machine carbines								<b>40</b>
Light machine guns								<b>26</b>
Medium machine guns	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	<b>16</b>
Anti-tank rifles, .55-inch								<b>12</b>
3-inch mortars	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	<b>4</b>
2-pdr anti-tank guns	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	<b>16</b>
Cup dischargers (rifles)								<b>4</b>
Signal pistols (total)								<b>30</b>

**Notes**

Attached personnel consist of 1 Officer, 1 Staff-serjeant *or* Serjeant, 3 Serjeants, 2 Corporals and 15 Privates (included in above).

Of the total Corporals (excluding attached) 11 may be Lance-serjeants.

Of the total Privates (excluding attached) 43 may be Lance-corporals.

### Battalion Headquarters (10 Officers, 102 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Battalion commander	Lieutenant-colonel	1		
Second-in-command	Major	1		
Adjutant	Captain	1		
Technical officer	Subaltern	1		
<i>Role not stated</i>	Captain	1		
Transport officer	Subaltern	1		
Quarter-master	<i>not stated</i>	1		
Signal officer	Subaltern	1		
Signal serjeant	Serjeant	1		
Signaller	Corporal	1		
Signaller	Private	11		
Intelligence officer	Subaltern	1		
Intelligence serjeant	Serjeant	1		
Intelligence	Corporal	1		
Intelligence	Private	5		
Provost-serjeant	Serjeant	1		
Regimental Police	Private	2		
Medical officer (RAMC)	<i>not stated</i>	1		
Medical officer's orderly	Lance-corporal	1		
Stretcher bearer	Serjeant	1		
Stretcher bearer	Corporal	1		
Stretcher bearer	Private	3		
Regimental serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class I	1		
Regimental quarter-master-serjeant	Warrant officer, class II	1		
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1		
Company quarter-master-serjeant	Staff-serjeant	1		
Serjeant clerk	Serjeant	1		
Technical	Serjeant	1		
Transport	Serjeant	1		
Blacksmith	Private	1		
Clerk	Private	3		
Driver-operator	Corporal	1		
Driver-operator	Private	3		
Driver-mechanic	Private	2		
Equipment repairer	Private	1		
<b>Continued...</b>				

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Fitter	Private	1		
Motor mechanic	Private	2		
Technical storeman	Corporal	1		
Technical storeman	Private	1		
Batman	Private	1		
Butchery duties	Private	1		
Postman	Lance-corporal	1		
Sanitary duties	Private	1		
Storeman	Private	2		
Water duties	Private	1		
Officer's mess servant	Private	1		
Armourer (RAOC)	Staff-serjeant <u>or</u> serjeant	1		
Armourer (RAOC)	Lance-corporal	1		
Armourer (RAOC)	Private	1		
Electrician (RAOC)	Private	1		
Officers' mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	2		
Other ranks' mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	3		
Batman-driver	Private	8		
Driver, I.C.	Corporal	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	24		
			Car, 5-cwt	8
			Car, utility	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	5
			Truck, 15-cwt, armd (wireless)	2
			Truck, 15-cwt, wireless	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, water	1
			Truck, 15-cwt (cable laying)	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	9
			Portee, 3-ton	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	6
	<b>Total, all ranks</b>	<b>112</b>	*see notes re weapons	

**Four Motor Companies (6 Officers, 161 men), each**

**Company Headquarters (2 Officers, 42 men)**

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Weapon/Vehicle/Other</b>	<b>No.</b>
Company commander	Major or Captain	1		
Second-in-command	Captain	1		
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1		
Company quarter-master-serjeant	Staff-serjeant	1		
Clerk	Private	1		
Signaller	Private	4		
Detachment commander	Serjeant	1		
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	7		
			<i>3-inch mortar</i>	<i>1</i>
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	<i>1</i>
Motor mechanic	Private	1		
Technical storeman	Private	1		
Storeman	Private	1		
Stretcher bearer	Private	2		
Sanitary duties	Private	1		
Water dutyman	Private	1		
Fitter, MV (RAOC)	<i>See notes</i>	1		
Other ranks' mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	2		
Batman-driver	Private	2		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	13		
			Car, 5-cwt	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	3
			Truck, 15-cwt, armd (wireless)	2
			Truck, 15-cwt, water	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	5
<b>Total, all ranks</b>		<b>44</b>	<i>*see notes re weapons</i>	

**Scout Platoon (1 Officer, 37 men)**

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Rank*</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Weapon/Vehicle/Other</b>	<b>No.</b>
<b><i>Headquarters</i></b>				
Platoon commander	Subaltern	1		
Driver-operator	Private	1		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
			Carrier, Universal	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
			<i>Anti-tank rifle</i>	1
General duties	Corporal	1		
Driver-operator	Private	1		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
			Carrier, Universal	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
			<i>Anti-tank rifle</i>	1
Batman-driver	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	4		
			Car, 5-cwt	2
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	1
<b><i>Three Sections, each</i></b>				
Section commander	Serjeant	1		
General duties	Private	1		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
			Carrier, Universal	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
			<i>Anti-tank rifle</i>	1
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	1		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
			Carrier, Universal	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
			<i>Anti-tank rifle</i>	1
General duties	Lance-corporal	1		
General duties	Private	1		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
			Carrier, Universal	1
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
			<i>Anti-tank rifle</i>	1
		<b>Total, all ranks</b>		<b>38</b>
*Total 5 Corporal posts			*see notes re carrier weapons	

**Machine Gun Platoon (1 Officer, 29 men)**

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
<b>Headquarters</b>				
Platoon commander	Subaltern	1		
Batman-driver	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	4		
			Car, 5-cwt	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	2
<b>Two Sections, each</b>				
Section commander	Serjeant	1		
Orderly	Private	1		
Rangetaker	Private	1		
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	8		
			Medium machine gun	2
<b>Total, all ranks</b>		<b>30</b>	*see notes re weapons	

**Motor Platoon (1 Officer, 23 men)**

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
<b>Headquarters</b>				
Platoon commander	Subaltern	1		
Platoon serjeant	Serjeant	1		
General duties	Private	1		
Batman-driver	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	2		
			Car, 5-cwt	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	2
<b>Three Sections, each</b>				
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	5		
			Light machine gun	1
			Anti-tank rifle	1
<b>Total, all ranks</b>		<b>24</b>	*see notes re weapons	

**Anti-tank Platoon (1 Officer, 30 men)**

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
<b>Headquarters</b>				
Platoon commander	Lieutenant	1		
Platoon serjeant	Serjeant	1		
Fitter, gun	Private	1		
AA light machine gunner	Private	1		
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	1
Batman-driver	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	2		
			Car, 5-cwt	2
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	1
<b>Two Sections, each</b>				
Detachment commander	Serjeant	2		
General duties	Corporal	2		
General duties	Private	6		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	1		
			Portee, 3-ton	2
			<i>2-pdr anti-tank gun</i>	2
<b>Total, all ranks</b>		<b>31</b>	*see notes re weapons	

**Notes**

1. One Motor Company is commanded by a Captain.
2. At least one officer and 12 men in the Battalion will be trained in anti-gas duties and decontamination work.
3. No rank is stated for either the Battalion Quarter-master or the attached Medical Officer (RAMC).
4. The NCO ranks for attached RAOC and ACC personnel are given in the WE, however these were not evenly distributed around the subunits of the Battalion. The four RAOC Fitters, MV, included one Serjeant and one Lance-corporal, with one Fitter per Motor Company. The total 13 ACC cooks included two Serjeants and two Corporals, with five cooks in Battalion Headquarters and two per Motor Company Headquarters.
5. Trucks, 15-cwt, armoured (wireless) are assumed to be US M3A1 scout cars.

**Author's comments**

As noted in the main piece on the [Organization of the British Motor Battalion](#) the actual War Establishment table that this piece is derived from omits much basic detail. Another unusual feature of the unit in this format was that it contained a far higher number of drivers than it did vehicles. Roughly speaking there were 223 drivers of all types and 189 vehicles of all types, making for 34 'spare' drivers.



### **Weapons allocation**

There is no distribution given for either support or individual weapons in the original WE, merely a summary of small arms and crew served weapons.

The original author also appears to have excluded weapons in Universal carriers, which results in an unusually small number of Bren guns in particular being shown on the WE for the Motor Battalion.

Below are my observations on these issues.

**81 Pistols** - The previous allocation of pistols within the Motor Battalion was based on one per Officer and the RSM, and one for each gun number in a Scout Platoon carrier. (There was also one per gun number in a scout car and one for each motorcyclist, but these were absent from the Middle East organization as seen here).

Using this same allocation for the Middle East Motor Battalion would make for 34 for Officers, 1 for the RSM and 44 for Universal carriers, which leaves 2 unaccounted for.

**40 Machine carbines** – The previous allocation of Thompsons was 1 per Motor Section, total 36 for the Battalion. There is no natural fit that I can see for 40 Thompson submachine guns with just 12 Motor Sections in the Middle East Motor Battalion.

**659 Rifles** – one for every other man in the Battalion not armed with a pistol or Thompson.

**26 Light machine guns** – As noted, I can only assume that this figure excludes the Bren guns on Universal carriers. The total of 26 I can only suggest *might* have been based on the following;

Battalion HQ	6
1 per Motor Company HQ	4
1 per Motor Section	12
1 per AA gunner	4

This is purely my suggestion, as it follows the outline of the previous allocation.

**12 Anti-tank rifles** – Again, I can only assume this excludes the Boys rifles normally issued one per carrier under Middle East organizations. The total of 12 could be *either* 1 per Motor Section (based on the 1940 allocation) *or* 1 per Motor Platoon, with perhaps 1 per Motor Company Headquarters and a balance of 4 with Battalion Headquarters. I have not yet seen anything that gives an answer.

**Universal carriers** – I would expect each carrier in the Scout Platoon to mount both a Bren gun and a Boys anti-tank rifle, and probably also to carry a discharger cup for one rifle. This was the armament for Universal carriers given in the WE for the Infantry Battalion in the Middle East, and I see no reason why the Scout Platoons of the Motor Battalions would be armed differently.

**Other weapons** – The total of 16 medium machine guns, 16 anti-tank guns and four 3-inch mortars can be reasonably assumed as four Vickers per MG Platoon, four guns per Anti-tank Platoon and one 3-inch mortar per Motor Company Headquarters.