

British Motor Battalion (Middle East)

War Establishment reference VI/559/2

Notified 28th July 1943, effective 16th October 1942

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Composed of;

Battalion Headquarters	10 Officers, 110 men
Three Motor Companies, each	6 Officers, 158 men
Company Headquarters	(2 Officers, 46 men)
Scout Platoon	(1 Officer, 37 men) – (13 carriers)
MG Platoon	(1 Officer, 29 men) – (four MMGs)
Two Motor Platoons, each	(1 Officer, 23 men)
Anti-tank Company	7 Officers, 146 men
Company Headquarters	(3 Officers, 30 men)
Four Anti-tank Troops, each	(1 Officer, 29 men) – (four 2-pdr or 6-pdr guns)
Total strength	765 all ranks (35 Officers and 730 men)

Summary Table, British Motor Battalion (Middle East), October 1942

Detail	Battalion Headquarters	Three Motor Companies, each				Total, Motor Company	Anti-tank Company		Total, Anti-tank Company	Total, Battalion
		Company HQ	Scout Platoon	MG Platoon	Two Motor Platoons (each)		Company HQ	Four Troops (each)		
i). Personnel										
Officers	10	2	1	1	1	6	3	1	7	35
Warrant officers	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	7
Staff-serjeants	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Serjeants	9	1	4	2	1	9	1	5	21	57
Corporals	7	2	4	2	3	14	5	4	21	70
Privates	90	41	29	25	19	133	22	20	102	591
Total, all ranks (including attached)	120	48	38	30	24	164	33	30	153	765
ii). Transport										
Motorcycle	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Car, 2-seater	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cars, 5-cwt, 4x4	9	1	2	1	1	6	3	2	11	38
Trucks, 15-cwt	9	5	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	27
Trucks, 15-cwt (armoured), wireless	2	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	11
Trucks, 15-cwt, water	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Lorries, 3-ton	14	4	1	2	2	11	3	1	7	54
Portees (anti-tank guns), 3-ton	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	17	17
Carriers, Universal	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	0	0	33
Armoured observation post	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
iii). Weapons										
Pistols										
Rifles										
Machine carbines										
Light machine guns										68
AA light machine guns										14
Medium machine guns	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	12
Anti-tank rifles, .55-inch										54
2-inch mortars										8
3-inch mortars	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
2-pdr or 6-pdr anti-tank guns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	16	16
Cup dischargers (rifles)										43
Signal pistols (total)										30

Notes

Attached personnel consist of 1 Officer, 3 Serjeants, 3 Corporals and 12 Privates (included in above).

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

Of the total Privates (excluding attached) 41 may be Lance-corporals.

Battalion Headquarters (10 Officers, 110 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	13		
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		
NCO i/c stretcher bearers	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		
Orderly room clerk	Serjeant	1		
Technical storeman	Serjeant	1		
Transport	Serjeant	1		
Blacksmith	Private	1		
Clerk	Private	4		
Driver-operator	Corporal	1		
Driver-operator	Private	2		
Equipment repairer	Private	1		
Fitter	Private	1		
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Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Vehicle mechanic	Private	2		
Technical storeman	Corporal	1		
Technical storeman	Private	1		
Batman	Private	1		
Butchery duties	Private	1		
Postman	Lance-corporal	1		
Sanitary dutyman	Private	1		
Storeman	Private	2		
Water dutyman	Private	1		
Officer's mess waiter	Private	1		
Armourer (REME)	Serjeant	1		
Armourer (REME)	Corporal	1		
Armourer (REME)	Private	1		
Officers' mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	1		
Rank & File mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	3		
Batman-driver	Private	9		
Driver-mechanic	Private	2		
Driver, I.C.	Corporal	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	31		
			Car, 5-cwt	9
			Car, 2-seater	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	6
			Truck, 15-cwt, armd (wireless)	2
			Truck, 15-cwt, wireless	2
			Truck, 15-cwt, water	1
			Truck, 15-cwt (cable laying)	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	14
			<i>Light machine gun</i>	8
Total, all ranks		120	*see notes re weapons	

Three Motor Companies (6 Officers, 158 men), each

Company Headquarters (2 Officers, 46 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
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	6		
Driver-operator	Corporal	1		
Driver-operator	Private	1		
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>3</i>
Storeman	Private	1		
Stretcher bearer	Private	2		
Sanitary dutyman	Private	1		
Water dutyman	Private	1		
Vehicle mechanic	Private	1		
Technical storeman	Private	1		
Rank & File mess cook (ACC)	<i>See notes</i>	2		
Batman-driver	Private	2		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	14		
			Car, 5-cwt	1
			Truck, 15-cwt, GS	5
			Truck, 15-cwt, armd (wireless)	3
			Truck, 15-cwt, water	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	4
	Total, all ranks	48	<i>*see notes re weapons</i>	

Scout Platoon (1 Officer, 37 men)

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

Machine Gun Platoon (1 Officer, 29 men)

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
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
Two Sections, each				
Section commander	Serjeant	1		
Orderly	Private	1		
Rangetaker	Private	1		
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	8		
			Medium machine gun	2
Total, all ranks		30		

Two Motor Platoons (1 Officer, 23 men), each

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
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
Three Sections, each				
General duties	Corporal	1		
General duties	Private	5		
			Light machine gun	1
Total, all ranks		24	*see notes re weapons	

Anti-tank Company (7 Officers, 146 men)**Company Headquarters (3 Officers, 30 men)**

Detail	Rank*	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Company commander	Major	1		
Second-in-command	Captain	1		
Troop commander	Subaltern	1		
Company serjeant-major	Warrant officer, class II	1		
Company quarter-master-serjeant	Staff-serjeant	1		
Clerk	Private	1		
Signaller	Private	2		
AA light machine gunner	Private	2	<i>Light machine gun (AA)</i>	2
Fitter, gun	Private	2		
Sanitary dutyman	Private	1		
Technical storeman	Private	1		
Vehicle mechanic	Private	2		
Rank & File mess cook (ACC)	Private	5		
Batman-driver	Private	3		
Driver-mechanic	Private	1		
Driver, I.C.	Private	8		
			Motorcycle, solo	1
			Car, 5-cwt	3
			Truck, 15-cwt, water tank	1
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	3
			Portee, 3-ton	1
			Armoured OP	1
*Total 5 Corporal posts	Total, all ranks	33	*see notes re weapons	

Four Anti-tank Troops (1 Officer, 29 men), each

Detail	Rank	No.	Weapon/Vehicle/Other	No.
Headquarters				
Troop commander	Lieutenant	1		
Serjeant	Serjeant	1		
AA light machine gunner	Private	1		
Batman-driver	Private	1	<i>Light machine gun (AA)</i>	1
Driver, I.C.	Private	2		
			Car, 5-cwt	2
			Lorry, 3-ton, GS	1
Two Sections, each				
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 or 6-pdr anti-tank gun</i>	2
			<i>Light machine gun (AA)</i>	1
Total, all ranks		30	*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 ACC personnel are given in the WE, however these were not evenly distributed around the subunits of the Battalion. The total 15 ACC cooks included two Serjeants and two Corporals, with four cooks in Battalion Headquarters, two per Motor Company Headquarters and five in the Anti-tank Company Headquarters.
5. Motor Platoons may be equipped with four 15-cwt trucks instead of two 3-ton lorries. This did not result in additional drivers for the Platoon.
6. 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 215 drivers of all types and 188 vehicles of all types, making for 27 'spare' drivers.

Weapons allocation

There is no distribution given for support weapons and no figures given at all for individual weapons in the original WE, there is merely a summary of crew served weapons.

Below are my observations on these issues.

82 Light machine guns – I can only suggest *might* have been;

Battalion HQ	8
3 per Motor Company HQ	9
1 per Motor Section	18
1 per Carrier	33
1 per AA gunner	6
1 per two Portees (AA role)	8

This is largely based on the distribution given in the 2 NZEF War Establishment for a Motor Battalion, which was effectively a duplicate of the British version.

54 Anti-tank rifles – I can only suggest *might* have been;

Battalion HQ	6
3 per Motor Company HQ	9
1 per Motor Platoon	6
1 per Carrier	33

This is largely based on the distribution given in the 2 NZEF War Establishment for a Motor Battalion, which was effectively a duplicate of the British version.

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 include 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 12 medium machine guns, 16 anti-tank guns and three 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.