

Organization of the British Motor Battalion 1938 to 1945

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Introduction

This is my attempt at analysing the evolving organization and transportation of the British Motor Battalion during the Second World War.

It covers three distinct periods in the development of the Motor Battalion structure; the early war organization of 1938 to 1941, which gave way to a heavily modified version used in the campaign in North Africa, before a return to a more conventional war establishment as used in Italy and Northwest Europe. After some debate the North African models of the Motor Battalion are covered in a separate Annex B, rather than included in the main text.

As far as possible, the information included here is obtained from contemporary documents, with a list of sources and acknowledgements given at the end.

A quick note on spelling; I have gone with the contemporary Serjeant rather than the modern Sergeant, and organization rather than organisation, as that was how the British Army spelled it in the 1930s and 1940s (which likewise extended to mechanized and motorized).

This document gives an outline of the development of the Battalion, before looking at its component subunits in more detail. Complete descriptions of the various Motor Battalions discussed here are available in PDF files accessible from the below linked area of the site.

[British Army organization during the Second World War](#)

This is another step in replacing my defunct www.bayonetstrength.150m.com site, which had wandered around the internet since about 2000. This new attempt represents the content and detail I would have very much liked to have been able to include from the outset, but has taken a great deal more time, effort and of course expense to pull together than I ever imagined.

There are always gaps in my research and this is particularly true of the Motor Battalion. After the sources and acknowledgements section there is a list of topics that I am still searching for information on. If anyone reading them can give me a pointer on where to look, or more direct assistance, I would be very interested to hear from you. See the Home page for contact info.

I hope this proves of use to anyone interested in the subject.

Gary Kennedy

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British Army Ranks

The British Army rank system is effectively divided into two parts; Officers and Other Ranks (ORs). Officers include all commissioned officers. Other Ranks include all Warrant Officers (WOs), all Serjeants and Staff-serjeants, and all Rank and File. Rank and File includes Corporals and Privates

The full rank structure for commissioned officers in the British Army in the Second World War (from most senior to most junior) is given below.

Field Marshall
 General
 Lieutenant-general
 Major-general
 Brigadier
 Colonel
 Lieutenant-colonel
 Major
 Captain
 Lieutenant
 2nd Lieutenant

For the purposes of this piece the most senior rank to be found in an Infantry Battalion was a Lieutenant-colonel. British Army Officers below the rank of Captain were normally referred to as Subalterns.

The full rank structure for Other Ranks in the British Army in the Second World War (from most senior to most junior) is given below.

Warrant Officer, Class I
 Warrant Officer, Class II
 Warrant Officer, Class III
 Staff-serjeant
 Serjeant
 Corporal
 Private

All of these ranks would be found within a Motor Battalion and some require a little more explanation.

Warrant Officer - within the Battalion the post of Regimental serjeant-major (RSM) was held by a Warrant Officer, Class I, and those of Regimental quarter-master serjeant (RQMS) and Company serjeant-major (CSM) by Warrant Officers, Class II. From the late 1930s there also existed the post of Platoon serjeant-major, which ranked as Warrant Officer, Class III. This rank was abolished by 1941, when all Platoons became an officer's command.

Staff-serjeant and Serjeant - within the Battalion the post of Company quarter-master serjeant (CQMS) was held by a Staff-serjeant. A Serjeant could append his particular specialism to his rank, as in for example Provost Serjeant or Intelligence Serjeant, but his rank was still Serjeant.

Corporal - a Corporal could be appointed a Lance-serjeant, indicating he held rank over fellow Corporals, but he was not an actual Serjeant and remained a member of the Rank and File. Within a Battalion a set number of Corporals could be appointed as Lance-serjeants; it tended to be used where a Section included several Corporals and their seniority needed to be defined.

Private - similarly, a Private could be appointed a Lance-corporal, indicating he held rank over fellow Privates, but again he was not an actual Corporal. Within a Battalion a set number of Privates could be appointed as Lance-corporals.

In the British Army Private was the lowest rank a soldier could hold. Not all arms of service used the term Private, and not all Regiments of the Infantry did either. Exceptions to the term of Private within the Infantry are given below.

Regiments of Foot Guards	Guardsmen
Regiments including the title Fusiliers	Fusilier
Regiments including the title Rifle	Rifleman

British Motor Battalion structure and terminology

The British Army used an organizational approach that was different in a number of respects to those of its allies and enemies. (This was also reflected in its Commonwealth contemporaries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand).

In the United States, Germany and the Soviet Union, the Infantry Regiment was a tactical organization, generally composed of a Headquarters, at least two Battalions and often various types of Companies providing specialised support.

In the British Army, the Infantry Regiment was not a distinct tactical unit. An Infantry Regiment would consist of multiple Battalions, but these would not necessarily serve alongside one another. For example, in 1942 a Regiment might have one Battalion in the United Kingdom, another in the Middle East and another still in the Far East. All of these Battalions were part of their parent Regiment, and each would be likely to think of itself as 'being' the Regiment; it is not unusual to see a unit refer to itself in a war diary or history as 'the Regiment' rather than 'the Battalion'.

A Battalion was a unit, the constituent parts of which were subunits. Its principal subunits were Companies, which in turn were subdivided into Platoons, which were subdivided into Sections (not Squads). In some cases Sections were further divided into Sub-sections or Detachments.

The Rifle Companies of a British Infantry Battalion were normally identified by letter, usually, but not universally, A to D inclusive. There were several variations in Company designations used by units that served in the Motor Battalion role.

1st Battalion, The Rifle Brigade, lettered its four Motor Companies as A, B, C and I, with B Company taking on the role of Support Company during 1943. 2nd Battalion used A to D, with D becoming the Support Company.

The London Rifle Brigade lettered its Companies as A to D in 1st Battalion and E to H in 2nd Battalion. These designations were retained when the two Battalions became 7th and 8th Battalions, The Rifle Brigade, in 1941. E Company became Support Company in 8th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade.

In both the Grenadier Guards and the Coldstream Guards, Rifle Companies were numbered, not lettered, being No.1 Company to No.4 Company inclusive. In the Scots Guards the first Rifle Company in a Battalion was designated as Right Flank and the last as Left Flank. In 1st Battalion, Scots Guards, the intervening Rifle Companies were lettered B and C, while in 2nd Battalion they were lettered F and G.

The Battalions of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (it would appear) kept faith with Companies A to D inclusive, with D Company becoming Support Company in 1943.

Regiments with Battalions serving in the Motor Battalion role

The King's Royal Rifle Corps and the Rifle Brigade

As will be seen in the following section, the number of Battalions that operated in the Motor role was relatively small. Initially these were drawn from just two Regiments, namely the Rifle Brigade and the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

The King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) traced its history back to the 60th (Royal American) Regiment of Foot, formed in the 1750s. It added a 5th Battalion in 1797, which was raised from men of various European states. In 1798 the Battalion adopted the distinctive 'green jacket' and swapped its muskets for rifles. They were subsequently retitled the Duke of York's Own Rifle Corps in 1824, before becoming the King's Royal Rifle Corps in 1832.

In 1800 the 'Experimental Corps of Riflemen' was formed, which in 1803 became the 95th Regiment, also known as the 95th Rifles. It was granted the title of The Rifle Brigade (abbreviated as RB) in 1816.

Both these Regiments fought extensively throughout the Napoleonic Wars, being at that time the only British units routinely armed with rifles rather than muskets.

In the late 1930s the formation of the Mobile Division saw the introduction of the Motor Battalion role. 1st Battalion, The Rifle Brigade and 2nd Battalion, The King's Royal Rifle Corps became the Motor Battalions of the UK based Mobile Division, which was retitled 1st Armoured Division in 1939. There was also a Mobile Division in Egypt, which in January 1940 became 7th Armoured Division. 2nd Rifle Brigade and 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps provided its two Motor Battalions.

Both the RB and the KRRC were regular units of the British Army, and each had units of the Territorial Army affiliated with them. During 1941 these Battalions were retitled as either KRRC or RB units, and adopted new Battalion numbers.

1st Battalion, Queen Victoria's Rifles, became 7th Battalion, KRRC

2nd Battalion, Queen Victoria's Rifles, became 8th Battalion, KRRC

1st Battalion, The Rangers, became 9th Battalion, KRRC

2nd Battalion, The Rangers, became 10th Battalion, KRRC

1st Battalion, Queen's Westminsters, became 11th Battalion, KRRC

2nd Battalion, Queen's Westminsters, became 12th Battalion, KRRC

1st Battalion, London Rifle Brigade, became 7th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade

2nd Battalion, London Rifle Brigade, became 8th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade

1st Battalion, Tower Hamlets Rifles, became 9th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade

2nd Battalion, Tower Hamlets Rifles, became 10th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade

The Brigade of Guards

Various Guards Battalions also served in the Motor role. 3rd Coldstream Guards and 2nd Scots Guards were both part of 22nd Infantry Brigade, which was formed in North Africa in early 1941. It became 22nd Guards Brigade around a month later and in January 1942 was redesignated 200th Guards Brigade. In April 1942 it was reorganized as 200th Guards Motor Brigade Group, and a month later became 201st Guards Motor Brigade Group. On 20th June 1942 the Brigade, less 3rd Coldstream Guards, was captured with the fall of Tobruk.

A new 201st Guards Motor Brigade was formed in August 1942, including the 3rd Coldstream Guards and a reconstituted 2nd Scots Guards. They were joined in early October 1942 by 6th Battalion, Grenadier Guards.

In the United Kingdom the Guards Armoured Division was formed in early 1941. It initially had two Motor Battalions in 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards and 4th Battalion, Coldstream Guards. 4th Coldstream Guards was de-motorised when its parent 6th Guards Armoured Brigade left the Division at the start of 1943 to be converted to a Tank Brigade. 5th Guards Armoured Brigade served in the Northwest Europe campaign with 1st Grenadier Guards as its Motor Battalion throughout.

County Regiments

9th Battalion, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry served as the Motor Battalion of 2nd Armoured Brigade from August 1942 until June 1943. The Battalion was formed from the 'dismounted' Yorkshire Dragoons, a pre-war Cavalry Regiment that was expected to transition to armour but instead became a Motor Battalion.

14th Battalion, The Sherwood Foresters were originally part of 8th Armoured Division, but as a standard Infantry Battalion within its Support Group. In August 1942 they joined 7th Armoured Brigade and became its Motor Battalion, then transferred to 9th Armoured Brigade in January 1943.

Organization of the British Motor Battalion

1938 to 1945

The evolution of the British Motor Battalion during the Second World War can be effectively considered in three phases.

1938 to 1941; the original pre-war organization and its subsequent amendments.

1941 to 1942; a very different organization developed by units in North Africa.

1943 to 1945; the final version of the Battalion, as used by units in Northwest Europe.

Overview

The Motor Battalion as detailed herein was to be found as part of an Armoured Division Support Group then latterly an Armoured Brigade. In North Africa there was one Motor Brigade, made up of two or three Motor Battalions, with another formed briefly in Italy, following changes in the organization of Armoured Brigades in that theatre.

Outline development - 1938 to 1945

During 1938 the British Army began to issue War Establishment tables for the Mobile Division, which was the precursor to the Armoured Division. The Mobile Division underwent many changes in structure during its development, and in late 1938 was to consist of two Mechanized Cavalry Brigades, one Tank Brigade and various supporting arms, the latter including two Motor Battalions.

The first model of the Motor Battalion consisted of a Battalion Headquarters, a Headquarter Company and four Motor Companies. Headquarter Company was made up of the Signal Platoon and the Administrative and Transport Platoon. Each Motor Company contained a Scout Platoon and three Motor Platoons. Each Motor Platoon had a Headquarters and three Sections, with each element being carried complete in its own 15-cwt truck. Each Motor Section was authorised both a Bren light machine gun and a Boys anti-tank rifle, while Platoon Headquarters added a 2-inch mortar. The Scout Platoon had eleven of the recently introduced Carriers, two in Headquarters and three each in three Sections. Each carrier had an LMG and an anti-tank rifle.

In early 1940 a revised War Establishment was issued, which increased strength slightly and added 14 scout cars to the Battalion; two for Battalion Headquarters, one per Motor Company Headquarters and two per Scout Platoon.

By this time the Mobile Division had become 1st Armoured Division. It was built around a Light Armoured Brigade and a Heavy Armoured Brigade, with the other combat elements being found in the Support Group. The allotment of two Motor Battalions in the Division remained unchanged. The most significant change to the Motor Battalion during 1941 was the addition of a 3-inch Mortar Detachment per Motor Company.

Before the outbreak of war there was another Mobile Division in existence, based in Egypt, which became 7th Armoured Division. Through 1942 and into 1943 a total of six British Armoured Divisions fought in North Africa, five under 8th Army (1st, 2nd, 7th, 8th and 10th Armoured Divisions) and one under 1st Army (6th Armoured Division).

The Motor Battalions in 8th Army were subject to a fundamental organizational change in 1942. In brief, this saw each Motor Company convert one Motor Platoon to a Medium Machine Gun Platoon, and another to an Anti-tank Platoon. It was not until late 1942 that these local adaptations were authorised via a Middle East specific War Establishment table.

In late 1942, a revised Motor Battalion organization was introduced in North Africa. This concentrated the Anti-tank Platoons of the Motor Companies into a dedicated Anti-tank Company with four Platoons each of four guns. Initially these were the 2-pdr but by the end of 1942 Motor Battalions were being equipped with the 6-pdr as well. Completing the Battalion were three Motor Companies, each consisting of two Motor Platoons, an MMG Platoon and a Scout Platoon.

Meanwhile, back in the United Kingdom, a new War Establishment was being prepared for the units that would take part in the liberation of Northwest Europe. This organization consisted of a Battalion Headquarters, Headquarter Company, a Support Company and three Motor Companies. Headquarter Company continued as simply the Signal Platoon and Administrative Platoon. Each Motor Company retained the overall format of 1940, with three Motor Platoons (each of three Sections) and a Scout Platoon (with eleven Universal carriers). Company Headquarters now had a Detachment of two 3-inch mortars. Each Motor Section had a light machine gun, and Motor Platoon Headquarters both a 2-inch mortar and the recently introduced projector, infantry, anti-tank (PIAT). In the Scout Platoon each carrier had a light machine gun, and in each Section of three carriers there was both a 2-inch mortar and a PIAT. Scout Platoon Headquarters also included a scout car. The Support Company consisted of three Anti-tank Platoons, each with four towed 6-pdr guns, and two Medium Machine Gun Platoons, each with four Vickers MMGs mounted in carriers.

Evolution of the British Motor Battalion, 1938 to 1945

Detail	1938	1940	1941	1942(a)	1942(b)	1943	1944
i). Personnel							
Officers	26	26	34	34	35	38	38
Warrant officers	15	15	7	7	7	7	7
Staff-serjeants	5	5	5	5	5	6	6
Serjeants	29	30	34	59	57	49	49
Corporals	63	71	76	68	70	89	89
Privates	619	653	685	607	591	665	665
Total, all ranks (including attached)	757	800	841	780	765	854	854
ii). Transport							
Motorcycles	57	57	64	0	1	57	49
Cars (4-seater) (or other type in ME)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cars, 5-cwt, 4x4	0	0	0	36	38	5	8
Trucks, 8-cwt (6-seater)	9	10	6	0	0	0	0
Trucks, 8-cwt (wireless)	6	6	10	0	0	0	0
Trucks, 15-cwt	70	70	74	28	32	16	16
Trucks, 15-cwt, personnel	0	0	0	10	11	53	53
Lorries, 30-cwt	13	15	15	0	0	0	0
Lorries, 3-ton	0	0	0	53	54	23	23
Portees (anti-tank guns), 3-ton	0	0	0	17	17	0	0
Carriers, scout	44	44	44	0	0	0	0
Carriers, Loyd	0	0	0	0	0	24	24
Carriers, Universal	0	0	1	44	33	53	52
Carriers, Universal, 3-inch mortar	0	0	4	0	0	6	6
Scout cars	0	14	14	0	0	4	6
Armoured observation post	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
iii). Weapons							
Pistols	92	150	157	81		38	38
Rifles	665	650	648	659		515	518
Machine carbines	0	0	36	40		247	244
Light machine guns	86	104	108	26	82	86	87
Medium machine guns	0	0	0	16	12	8	8
Anti-tank rifles, .55-inch	90	94	98	12	54	0	0
Projectors, infantry, anti-tank	0	0	0	0	0	30	30
2-inch mortars	12	12	12	0	8	30	30
3-inch mortars	0	0	4	4	3	6	6
2-pdr anti-tank guns	0	0	0	16	16	0	0
6-pdr anti-tank guns	0	0	0			12	12
Cup dischargers (rifles)	0	0	0	4	43	0	0
Signal pistols	39	39	39	30	30	38	50

Comments

1. Types 'a' and 'b' are theatre specific War Establishments used in the Middle East (North Africa).
2. Truck, 15-cwt, personnel, refers to US supplied M3A1 White scout car.
3. Motor Battalions in 21 Army Group replaced the M3A1 with US supplied halftracks, of various types, on a one-for-one basis in the months before the Normandy assault landings.
4. Support weapons totals for 'a' version in North Africa appear to exclude those on carriers.
5. No figures available for individual weapons in 'b' version of the North African Motor Battalion.
6. Motor Battalions could use a mixture of 2-pdr and 6-pdr anti-tank guns in North Africa.

The elements of the Battalion, 1938 to 1945

Overleaf follows a more detailed examination of each subunit (defined herein as Companies, Platoons and Sections) within the Battalion. As some of these changed relatively little over the course of time a single description will suffice while for others their evolution requires greater depth.

Comment – I can say with certainty that this particular piece has proven the hardest one to write to date, and I think I should expand on why that it, as it impacts the layout of this piece compared to others.

In previous pieces I have tried to follow the chronological development of the unit type being examined. I usually find, when researching such things, there is far more information to be found for the later years of the war, particularly 1944 and 1945, compared to the early years of the conflict. When it comes to the British Motor Battalion, however the trend is entirely different.

The bulk of the information available to me when I started work on this piece, in terms of War Establishments and associated material, concerned the Motor Battalion of 1940. In the course of writing the piece, I have actually stumbled across a series of items, which combined have helped to clear up many quibbles and queries I had regarding changes in the Motor Battalion during 1944 and 1945.

Nothing I have found to date however, has aided in deciphering the great enigma of the Motor Battalion in North Africa. There were two War Establishment tables issued during late 1942 for Motor Battalions serving in 8th Army, both of which described an organization that differed markedly from any other British infantry unit of the day. Neither of these tables though offers any insight into subunit organization, and the first of them is superficial in the extreme.

As a result of this I've opted to examine the North African model of the Motor Battalion in a separate Annex. The main text will then look at the Motor Battalion under its early 1938 to 1941 War Establishment, before moving to its reorganization during 1943 and the important changes made in 1944 ahead of the campaign in Northwest Europe.

This does make it easier for me in writing the piece, as the evolution of the Motor Battalion of 1942 to that of 1943 is a far more natural transition. So I will accept the compromise to advance the project, with the following descriptions excluding any reference to the North African model of the Motor Battalion, which is detailed separately in Annex B.

Battalion Headquarters (1938 to 1945) (*North Africa excluded*)

Motor Battalion Headquarters was originally somewhat smaller in size than its equivalent in the Infantry Battalion. The Motor Battalion was commanded by a Lieutenant-colonel, with his Second-in-command being a Major, and a Captain or Lieutenant serving as Adjutant.

Also included in Motor Battalion Headquarters was the Technical Officer, sometimes referred to as Technical Adjutant. In an undated document, which refers to the Battalion in its 1940 incarnation, his role is described as being to collate reports of broken-down vehicles and arrange for their recovery. In the 1943 Military Training Pamphlet for the Motor Battalion his duties are given as covering all aspects of 'maintenance, inspection and repair' and overseeing the unit maintenance records.

Absent from the Battalion until late 1941 is the familiar post of an Intelligence officer. On the War Establishment tables issued for the Motor Battalion in 1938 and 1940 there was instead a Liaison officer, who acted as a contact between the Battalion and the Headquarters of the Armoured Brigade it was assigned to support. He also had another duty, that of supervising the Battalion Intelligence Serjeant in maintaining intelligence related records, such as the diary and map.

Until late 1941 there were no other intelligence personnel to assist the Intelligence Serjeant. This was because the Scout Platoons of the Motor Companies were expected to be in a better position to obtain information rather than a half dozen other ranks on motorcycles. It was not until September 1941 that five men were added to Battalion Headquarters to finally constitute an Intelligence Section, with the Liaison officer now being referred to as the Intelligence officer.

Completing the usual elements of Battalion Headquarters were the Regimental Police (the Provost Serjeant and two policemen) and the Regimental Serjeant-major.

Battalion Headquarters transport underwent a number of changes. In 1938 it included a 4-seater car for the commander, two 8-cwt trucks (one each for the Second-in-command and the Technical officer) and two 15-cwt trucks. One truck acted as the Battalion office, under the direction of the RSM, while the second carried both a Bren light machine gun and a Boys anti-tank rifle. This latter truck was fitted with a Motley mounting, which allowed the Bren to be used in the anti-aircraft role.

The superseding 1940 War Establishment added two scout cars, each armed with a light machine gun, to Battalion Headquarters transport. In late 1941 these were supplemented by the addition of a Universal carrier, for use by the Battalion commander when undertaking personal reconnaissance.

In mid-1943 a new War Establishment was issued for the Motor Battalion, initially used by Home Forces. This retained the same key officer posts, the Intelligence Section and the Regimental police. Added were a mechanic and a fitter (attached from the REME), in a 5-cwt car, the official British Army nomenclature for the US supplied Jeep.

Transport for Battalion Headquarters was now a 4-seater car and three 15-cwt personnel trucks (see later for more on this vehicle). There was also a scout car and a Universal carrier, each vehicle carrying an LMG.

In early 1944 a revised War Establishment was issued for the Motor Battalion. This added a 15-cwt truck to Battalion Headquarters, equipped to serve as the office vehicle, while the Universal carrier was replaced by a second scout car. Another change made in this establishment was the replacement of eight solo motorcycles (five for the Intelligence Section and three for the Regimental Police) with four Jeeps, each carrying two men from one or other of these two sections.

Headquarter Company (*North Africa excluded*)

Headquarter Company, in its 1938 and 1940 incarnation, consisted of the Signal Platoon and the Administrative and Transport Platoon. Headquarter Company disappeared from the Motor Battalion organization used in North Africa in 1942 and 1943, but was present in both the 1943 and 1944 War Establishments.

Signal Platoon (1938 to 1945) – the Signal Platoon of 1938 had two 8-cwt and two 15-cwt trucks. Each of the former was equipped with a wireless (radio) set, either the No.1 or its successor, the No.11. The Platoon commander travelled in the first 8-cwt and the Platoon Serjeant in the second. The two 15-cwt trucks each carried signal stores, including a hand cable layer on the first truck for use in laying line for field telephones. Five motorcycle orderlies completed the Platoon. The revised War Establishment of February 1940 added a third 8-cwt truck

Moving forward to mid-1943, the new War Establishment saw the Signal Platoon actually reduced in size. There were now just five motorcycles (for four orderlies and the Signal Serjeant) and three 15-cwt trucks (two general service and one personnel). Of the two GS trucks, one was the cable layer and the other carried stores.

Methods of communication (see Annex A for more detail)

The Motor Battalion used the same basic methods of communication as the normal Infantry Battalion, these being messengers, field telephone and wireless. From the outset, wireless played a major part in communication within the Motor Battalion. There were ten wireless sets authorised under the 1938 establishment, two with the Signal Platoon and two with each Motor Company, with a third set added to each Motor Company under the 1940 organization. The Wireless Set No.1 was the original set, this being gradually replaced into 1940 by the improved No.11 set.

During 1942 the Battalion moved onto the No.19 set, which would become almost universal in British Army armoured fighting vehicles during the later war years. This was supplemented by the No.18 set and No.38 set for dismounted use. As of 1944 the Motor Battalion was authorised over 60 wireless sets of various types. See Annex A for more details on the distribution of wireless sets throughout the Battalion.

Administrative Platoon (1938 to 1945) – this was the other constant of Headquarter Company (outside of North Africa) and was initially termed the Administrative and Transport Platoon, before becoming the more usual Administrative Platoon by 1943.

Initially the Platoon had two 8-cwt trucks (one each for the Quarter-master and the Transport officer), six 15-cwt trucks and nine 30-cwt (1½-ton) lorries. Of the 15-cwt trucks, three were for the Medical Officer and the Battalion's stretcher-bearers, one for AA and anti-tank defence (with a Bren gun and an anti-tank rifle), one for stores and finally one as the water truck. The nine 30-cwt lorries carried various types of stores as well as ammunition and reserves of clothing and equipment.

The revised War Establishment of February 1940 made some changes to this transport. The Medical officer was now provided with a 30-cwt lorry, and another lorry was added for ammunition, giving the Platoon eleven 30-cwt vehicles.

There was a long wait until the next War Establishment appeared in June 1943, and it naturally brought some updates with it. Principal among these was the replacement of the 30-cwt by the 3-ton lorry, which had taken place throughout the Army in general.

Under the June 1943 organization, the Administrative Platoon had two 15-cwt trucks, one each for rations and ammunition, with the former carrying the Quarter-master. There were three 15-cwt trucks (personnel) for the stretcher-bearers and a total of thirteen 3-ton lorries, one of which was a mobile cooker and towed a water trailer.

With the February 1944 War Establishment, the transport of Administrative Platoon was slightly changed, with the second 15-cwt truck being deleted. Under both the 1943 and 1944 organizations the Transport officer and Transport Serjeant rode motorcycles.

An outline of the loads for lorries under the 1940 establishment is given below;

- 1 for Medical Officer and medical equipment
- 1 for MT stores and fitters' tools
- 1 for Quarter-master stores and baggage
- 1 for Pioneer stores
- 1 for Officers' mess equipment and baggage
- 1 for cooking set
- 2 for ammunition reserve
- 2 for anti-gas capes, and reserve of clothing and web equipment
- 1 unspecified (was fitted with LMG on AA mounting and carried an anti-tank rifle)

The February 1944 establishment listed the following loads;

- 1 for Medical Officer and medical stores
- 2 for MT stores
- 2 for petrol
- 1 for Quarter-master stores
- 1 for Pioneer tools and anti-gas stores
- 1 for Officers' mess equipment and baggage
- 3 for ammunition reserve
- 1 for reserve rations
- 1 for mobile cooker (draws 180-gallon water trailer)

The Administrative Platoon contained the usual mixture of specialist personnel required to keep the Battalion operational, including varying numbers of cooks (originally infantrymen, before transferring to the Army Catering Corps during 1941), sanitary dutymen, clerks and technical storemen. There was also a butcher, a postman and two equipment repairers. In the absence of a Pioneer Platoon, the Administrative Platoon of 1940 included a handful of tradesmen (originally blacksmith, bricklayer, mason and several carpenters) and two Pioneer Serjeants. By 1943 this was reduced to a single Pioneer Serjeant and three carpenters.

Also carried on the strength of the Platoon was the Battalion medical detachment. This was built around the Medical Officer, attached from the Royal Army Medical Corps, assisted by an Orderly, Serjeant and from 1940 onwards 17 stretcher-bearers.

In a unit that was equipped with such a large number of vehicles of varying types, maintenance was a major concern. In 1940, the Battalion was authorised nine men from the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), qualified as armourers and vehicle fitters. From late 1942, vehicle maintenance became the preserve of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), which was created out of the RAOC, and by early 1944 the Motor Battalion included 17 personnel attached from the REME.

Another important maintenance provider was the Light Aid Detachment (LAD) attached to each Motor Battalion. These were originally RAOC units before becoming part of the REME organization. The LADs had their own War Establishment tables, which underwent their own evolution, however I am not including that in this piece. Generally speaking, the LAD for a Motor Battalion in 1940 was one officer and 17 men strong, with two 6-wheeled 3-ton lorries and three 15-cwt trucks. From early 1942 an LAD Type 'B' (armoured) was attached, with one officer and 13 men, with two 3-ton lorries for stores and a 3-ton 6x4 breakdown lorry.

Support Company (1943 to 1945)

Under the June 1943 War Establishment, the Motor Battalion changed from four Motor Companies to three Motor Companies and a Support Company. Support Company consisted of three Anti-tank Platoons and two Medium Machine Gun Platoons.

The Anti-tank Platoon was a variation of that found in the Infantry Battalion, which has already been described in the [Organization of the British Infantry Battalion](#) piece. Each Anti-tank Platoon in the Motor Battalion served four towed 6-pdr anti-tank guns, divided into two Sections, each of two Detachments. Each Detachment was provided with two Loyd carriers (one for the gun and its crew, the other serving as an auxiliary vehicle) and also a Bren light machine gun and a 2-inch mortar (for firing smoke and illumination rounds). Platoon Headquarters added a Universal carrier for the commander and two 15-cwt trucks for stores and supplies.

The two Medium Machine Gun (MMG) Platoons were each equipped with four Vickers machine guns and eight Universal carriers. There was one carrier each for the Platoon commander and Platoon Serjeant, two for the Section commanders and four for the gun detachments.

While termed a medium machine gun by the British Army, the Vickers was analogous to the US M1917A1 or Soviet M1910 heavy machine guns. It fired the same .303-inch ammunition as the Lee Enfield rifle and the Bren light machine gun, and was fed from a 250-round belt. The Vickers was water-cooled, the gun alone weighing approximately 32lbs, which increased to 40lbs with water, while its tripod mount added another 50lbs or so.

For the early years of the war, the Vickers was normally only found in the specialist Machine Gun Battalions, each of four Companies, with 12 MMGs per Company. These were fully motorised units, with six 15-cwt trucks carrying each Platoon of four guns. While this provided MG units with good general mobility, there remained the necessity for detachments to dismount some way short of the forward lines and carry the guns, tripods, ammunition, water and other equipment forward by hand.

In North Africa, in late 1942, at least one Machine Gun Battalion converted one of its four MG Companies from 15-cwt trucks to Universal carriers. The following year, the Machine Gun Battalions in Home Forces began to reorganize as Support Battalions, made up of either two or three Brigade Support Groups, each of which included one MG Company. These new style MG Companies each contained three Platoons, each with four Vickers MMGs and eight Universal carriers.

A new mounting for the Vickers was designed for use with the Universal carrier, sited atop the engine cover that bisected the rear compartment of the carrier. When secured, the gun pointed directly forward, and when released it could be traversed through a full 360 degrees, with some room for elevation and depression. Officially, the gun was only to be fired from the carrier when the vehicle was halted, and ideally

in a hull down position. The normal tripod mounting used with the Vickers was also carried, and was still intended as the primary means of deploying the gun.

There was no special protection afforded to the gunner when firing from the carrier, nor was there a readily available position for him to do so. There was an alternative stowage position for the Vickers inside the carrier, with brackets fitted to the interior of the righthand hull armour. The same brackets could also be used to stow a PIAT. All eight carriers in the Platoon were fitted with the mounting over the engine cover, allowing any of them to operate a machine gun if required.

Shortly before D-Day in Northwest Europe, the MMG Platoons of the Motor Battalions were given the same level of equipment found in the MMG Platoons of the Machine Gun Battalion proper (which unit had been reintroduced in early 1944 to replace the relatively short-lived Support Battalion organization).

The Motor Company (1938 to 1945) (*North Africa excluded*)

A key difference between the normal Infantry Battalion and the Motor Battalion was that the former was expected to fight as a single unit, while the Motor Battalion was more likely to operate dispersed. This resulted in the primary subunit of the Motor Battalion, the Motor Company, being designed to be largely self-contained.

Under the original War Establishment of 1938, the Motor Company consisted of a Headquarters, three Motor Platoons and a Scout Platoon, with four such Companies in the Motor Battalion. This same basic format was retained with the 1940 reorganization of the Battalion, and was carried into the early days of the desert war, before being completely rewritten by units in North Africa (see Annex B for details).

The Motor Platoon of July 1938 was effectively a duplicate of that introduced with the Infantry (Rifle) Battalion a few months earlier and consisted of a Headquarters and three Motor Sections. Headquarters and each Section were transported in their own vehicle, a 15-cwt truck, and Platoon Headquarters included a motorcycle.

Platoon Headquarters was six strong, with the Platoon commander, Platoon Serjeant, two riflemen, a driver for the truck and a motorcycle orderly. Each Motor Section was made up of a Corporal, six riflemen and a driver for the 15-cwt. Total strength of the Platoon in 1938 was 30 men, four 15-cwt trucks and one motorcycle.

In the pre-war years the British Army had introduced the rank of Warrant Officer, Class III, also known as Platoon Serjeant-major. Of the three Platoons in a normal Rifle Company, one would be commanded by an officer and the other two each by a WOIII, and this same arrangement was used in the early war Motor Company. In Motor Platoons commanded by an officer one of the two riflemen in Headquarters served as his batman. The officer was a Subaltern, which was the term used to describe both a 2nd Lieutenant and a full Lieutenant. By 1941 the rank of WOIII had been abolished and all Platoon commanders became commissioned officers.

The firepower of the Motor Platoon was considerable. Each man was armed with a rifle, excepting the Platoon commander and the motorcycle orderly, who each carried a pistol. Each Motor Section had both a Bren light machine gun (with tripod mount) and a Boys anti-tank rifle, and Platoon Headquarters added a 2-inch mortar. This was the same suite of weapons as found in the normal Rifle Platoon, which have already been detailed in the [Organization of the British Infantry Battalion](#) piece. In February 1941, an amendment was issued that replaced one rifle in each Motor Section with a Thompson submachine gun, which would have gone to the Section commander.

Throughout the early years of the war, the Motor Platoon was transported in 15-cwt trucks. The 15-cwt ($\frac{3}{4}$ -ton) was numerically the most important vehicle in British Army service during the war, and was produced by multiple manufacturers including Bedford, Morris and Guy. The same layout was common to all of these, with a front mounted engine and driver's cab with two seats. In some versions the cab was entirely open, with a canvas top and doors that were fitted as required, while later models had metal doors. Behind the cab was the troop-carrying compartment, bordered by low side panels, with entry and exit via a dropdown tailgate. A canvas hood could be fitted that would cover the compartment.

When carrying a Motor Section, the Section commander travelled in the cab, alongside the driver, with the six riflemen riding in the rear. An undated document (probably relevant to 1940 or 1941) gives the following duties for each rifleman in the Section.

No.1 – operates Bren gun

No.2 – assists No.1, carries tripod mount for Bren if directed

No.3 – assists Section commander as runner

No.4 – operates anti-tank rifle

No.5 and No.6 – both riflemen

In Platoon Headquarters, one of the two riflemen was responsible for the 2-inch mortar, and the second rifleman (or the officer's batman) would assist him.

A similar document gives a typical load for the Motor Section's 15-cwt truck as including, in addition to weapons – eight packs, second greatcoats (in bundles), blankets (one per man), three picks, three shovels, one roll of barbed wire (carried on engine grill), one box of small arms ammunition, mines and a petrol cooker.

As might be seen, the dismount strength of the Motor Platoon was quite small. Each truck driver and the motorcycle orderly would remain with their vehicle when the Platoon 'debussed', making for one officer (or Warrant officer) and 24 men. Initially, that was not too far off the equivalent strength of the pre-war Rifle Platoon, at one officer and 29 men (or 28 men with a Warrant officer). By mid 1940 the Rifle Platoon had added nine men, but this increase was not granted to the Motor Platoon.

A feature particular to the Motor Company was its Scout Platoon. This was based on a vehicle that has been examined previously, the Carrier, though the exact type of carrier offers the potential to vanish down a vehicle enthusiast's rabbit hole.

The original Bren gun carrier had a crew of three men, with the driver on the right and the gunner/commander on his left, both men being seated in the forward driving compartment. Normally speaking, the carrier's Bren light machine gun would be mounted in the front aperture in the gunner's position. The engine compartment ran centrally along the length of the rear portion of the vehicle, creating two long, narrow spaces, one on either side. On the Bren gun carrier, there was a single seat for the third crewman in a small compartment situated directly behind the gunner's position. The space on the right side of the engine was turned over to storage and lockers.

Then there was the Scout carrier. This had a different layout, in which the space on the left-hand side of the engine was used for storage and tools, while on the right-hand side there was a larger crew compartment, able to accommodate two men.

The Bren gun carrier was used by the Carrier Platoon introduced with the 1938 Infantry (Rifle) Battalion organization, while the Scout carrier was intended for the Divisional Cavalry Regiment, which was the mechanised reconnaissance unit of the 1939 British Infantry Division. In the Divisional Cavalry Regiment, the Scout carrier had either a crew of four men, or a crew of three and a No.11 wireless set.

Both the 1938 and 1940 War Establishment tables for the Motor Battalion show the Scout Platoon of the Motor Company as being equipped with the 'Carrier, scout', so presumably they were to use the same machine as the Divisional Cavalry Regiment.

During 1940 the Universal carrier began to enter service, which vehicle did away with the differentiations of Bren gun and Scout carriers. The Universal carrier had compartments on both sides of the engine that were equally capable of carrying personnel or equipment, allowing the carrier to seat a crew of three or four men.

Below is the contemporary description given of the Carrier in Motor Battalion service, from a document titled 'Notes on the Organization and Tactical Employment of a Motor Battalion (provisional)'. It is undated but largely refers to the Battalion as detailed in the February 1940 War Establishment table.

"The Carrier

This is an all-tracked armoured vehicle with a crew of three. (The latest model of carrier can take a crew of four, but up to the present the establishment of the Scout Platoon only allows for a crew of three).

The crew consists of :-

Driver,

Commander and forward gunner,

Rear gunner and/or wireless telephony operator.

It has a Ford V8 engine and a total weight of about 3 tons, 5 cwt.

Maximum speed is about 45 m.p.h. on the level. It should not normally, however, be driven at more than 25/30 m.p.h.

It is low and inconspicuous. But, though quiet across country, can be heard on the roads for a considerable distance owing to the noise made by the tracks. It can cross small ditches or larger trenches with sloping banks. It can also cross the average ford or barbed wire apron-fence.

It is armed with a L.M.G. and an Anti-Tank rifle, both of which can be fired from the vehicle. Provision is also made for anti-aircraft mountings for the L.M.G.”

The 1938 organization of the Scout Platoon was somewhat spartan, consisting of one officer and 36 men, with 11 Scout carriers and four motorcycles. Each carrier had a crew of three men and was armed with both a Bren gun and an anti-tank rifle. There were two carriers in Platoon Headquarters, the second fitted with a No.1 or No.11 wireless set, plus a motorcycle orderly. Each of the three Scout Sections had three carriers, commanded by a Serjeant (or Lance-serjeant), Corporal and Lance-corporal respectively, and again there was a motorcycle orderly. The Subaltern and the four motorcyclists were armed with pistols, all other men rifles. More than a little confusingly, one rifle in each carrier (excepting the Platoon commander's) was counted as a vehicle weapon. A 15-cwt truck in Company Headquarters carried the packs of the Platoon.

The Scout Platoon underwent several important changes with the February 1940 reorganization. Both of the Platoon Headquarters carriers now had a No.11 set, one serving as a spare, while a second motorcycle orderly was added. Another addition came in the form of two Daimler scout cars. The Daimler had a crew of two men and carried a single Bren gun. It was noted in the document referred to previously that they were intended to offer an alternative means of carrying messages, when motorcyclists could not be sent, to provide liaison within the Company, or to act as mobile observation posts in defensive situations. The Daimler was lightly armoured, protected effectively against small arms fire and shell splinters, and was much faster than a carrier, being able to reach 60mph on good going.

Another alteration made at this time saw one man in each Scout carrier (nominally the Bren gun number) armed with a pistol instead of a rifle. Both crewmen of the scout cars also had pistols.

Motor Company Headquarters was divided into 'fighting' and 'administrative' portions. The former was based on two 8-cwt trucks and four motorcycles. The Company commander was a Major (though in one Motor Company he would be a Captain) and the second-in-command a Captain. One 8-cwt carried the commander, CSM, a clerk and driver, plus an anti-tank rifle, and the other the second-in-command, two signallers (for the No.11 set) and driver. There were also four motorcycle orderlies.

The administrative portion had three 15-cwt trucks and a single 30-cwt lorry. One truck each was slated for petrol and ammunition, while the third was fitted with a Motley mount. This combined a seat with 360-degree rotation, fixed to the flat rear floor of the truck, and a long arm to which was fitted a Bren gun. It provided a very basic means of air defence, particularly against low level attacks. The truck also carried an anti-tank rifle and, in this instance, the packs of Company Headquarters and Scout Platoon personnel. Similarly equipped 15-cwt trucks were also found in Battalion Headquarters and the Administrative Platoon.

Company Headquarters was slightly altered under the February 1940 War Establishment. It received a Daimler scout car, which was added to the fighting portion, and deleted the fourth motorcycle orderly.

Amendments of 1941

One of the greatest frustrations with this pastime is that, even when you can find a War Establishment table (or its equivalent) for a particular unit type, there is the knowledge that these documents were subject to routine, and sometimes quite considerably, amendment. Tracking down these amendments is another endeavour in itself.

A total of 13 amendments were made to the February 1940 War Establishment table for the Motor Battalion (at least as of February 1942), and at time of writing I have found 12 of these. Many of them are quite pedestrian, and some are simply correcting errors. Some of the more interesting ones, covering the addition of an Intelligence Section and the issue of Thompson submachine guns, have already been detailed. There is though one more change that merits particular attention.

When looking at the Motor Battalion during the early war years, there is an obvious omission from its weapons, namely the 3-inch mortar. In the Infantry (Rifle) Battalion of 1938 there was a Mortar Platoon with just two 3-inch weapons, which was increased to six when the Infantry Battalion was reorganized in mid-1941. The 3-inch mortar however did not come to the Motor Battalion until an amendment of late 1941.

This amendment added a Mortar Detachment to each Motor Company, consisting of a Universal carrier, a 15-cwt truck and a motorcycle. The carrier transported a single 3-inch mortar, its crew and 66 bombs, with a further 90 rounds in the 15-cwt truck, which also carried a light machine gun and an anti-tank rifle. The Detachment was nine men strong, with five in the carrier, three in the truck and a motorcycle orderly.

The addition of a single mortar to each Motor Company, giving the Battalion a total of four, always felt a little odd to me. However, when viewed in the context of the evolution of the capabilities and handling of the 3-inch mortar in the Infantry Battalion, it actually makes more sense. While the British 3-inch mortar was a good weapon, it was for long hamstrung by a short reach of around 1600 yards. As a result, the mortars had to operate in close proximity to the riflemen in order to provide effective fire

support, which meant single Detachments were normally parcelled out to the Rifle Companies, leaving a small balance with the Mortar Platoon commander. The addition of a single Detachment to each Motor Company was then in line with the handling of the 3-inch mortar in the Infantry Battalion proper during 1941 and 1942.

Role of the Motor Battalion

The British Armoured Division underwent multiple reorganizations between 1938 and 1945. Among the few constants was that the Armoured Brigade was based on three Armoured Regiments, and that for each Armoured Brigade in the Armoured Division there was one Motor Battalion. Initially the Motor Battalions were counted as part of the Support Group, which also contained the Divisional artillery and engineer units. Then from late 1940, the Motor Battalions were removed from Support Group and one became part of each Armoured Brigade in the Armoured Division. The majority of Independent Armoured Brigades did not normally include a Motor Battalion, however there were exceptions, such as 4th and 8th Armoured Brigades in 21 Army Group.

The basic role of the Motor Battalion was to provide an armoured formation with a unit that was highly mobile and capable of undertaking tasks that tanks alone were unsuited for. This included all forms of dismounted action, such as operations in close country or fighting in urban areas, the necessity to hold particular ground or terrain features, or to provide security for tanks in harbour.

The Motor Battalion could be deployed as a whole under its own Headquarters, or more commonly one or more Motor Companies would be detached from it and attached to support one or more Armoured Regiments. The format of four Motor Companies used from 1938 into early 1943 allowed for one Motor Company to support each Armoured Regiment, with one more held in Brigade reserve.

Each Motor Company was self-contained in terms of transport, firepower and administration. Within the Motor Company, there was a tactical differentiation in the handling of the Motor Platoons and the Scout Platoon.

The Motor Platoons were to fight the traditional infantry battle, 'on their feet', as the literature of the day stressed. This meant that the riflemen would be carried forward in their 15-cwt trucks before 'debussing' and making the final approach and actual assault on foot. Once out of their vehicles they were very much normal infantrymen, armed with the same weapons, and operated in the same manner. After deploying, the trucks were to withdraw and be ready to collect the riflemen when required for the next move. The 15-cwt was not to be used in forward areas, or in an assault role.

The undated 'Notes on the Organization and Tactical Employment of a Motor Battalion (provisional)' gives the following (abridged) description of the Scout Platoon;

"(a)...Motor Battalions will have to be capable of operating on their own and away from tanks...Each Company must be able to take care of its own protection at all times and for this purpose has been given a Scout Platoon..."

(b). It must be remembered that the main tasks of the Scout Platoon are –

- i). To gather information*
- ii). Protection*
- iii). Covering fire in support of attacking Motor Platoons*

c). The temptation to use the Scout Platoon as a light tank unit must be avoided. There will be, however, occasions on which action from the carrier may be more suitable than ground action.”

In November 1941, Middle East Training Pamphlet No.2 was issued, detailing the training, tactical employment and administration of Motor Battalions in the desert war. This had its own section on the ‘Role of the Scout Platoon’.

“The role of the Scout Platoon will be considered in conjunction with the role of the Companies and the Battalion and will include –

*a). **Reconnaissance.** By day, when in close contact with the enemy, the Scout carrier Platoons are the EYES of the Battalion, will patrol ahead and wide of the main body or of the defensive position taken up by the Battalion.*

*b). **Protection.** They will ward off enemy patrols and deny them information as to the movement, direction and position of the Battalion or of the troops they are escorting: they will form a screen to cover a defensive position or an exposed flank or a withdrawal.*

*c). **Attack.** The carrier platoon may “tap-in” on the enemy defences and succeed in securing a foothold in the enemy position which may subsequently be consolidated by motor platoons. If operating in support of a tank attack they may arrive on the objective soon after the tanks and help to bridge the gap between the arrival of the tanks and arrival of the infantry.*

*d). **Defence.** The Scout platoons are a reserve of fire power and by their ability to move rapidly across bullet-swept ground, may be able to counter infiltration at a threatened point. They will also be used to cover the occupation of the position by patrols forward and on the flanks.”*

Much of this wording was carried over into Military Training Pamphlet No.41, Part 3, The Motor Battalion, issued in June 1943.

“The chief roles of the scout platoon in conjunction with the company and battalion roles are –

*a). **Reconnaissance.** By day, when contact with the enemy is imminent or has taken place, scout platoons are the eyes of the Battalion and will patrol ahead and, in open country, to the flanks of an advancing column or of a defensive position. They must provide the information essential for further action of the battalion, company or force for whom they are working.*

*b). **Protection.** They will ward off enemy patrols and deny them information as to the movement, direction and position of the battalion or of the troops they are escorting. They will form a screen to cover a defensive position, an exposed flank or a withdrawal. They may be used as escorts for OPs, gun positions, etc. In this role they will normally require the support of anti-tank guns.*

*c). **Attack.** Carriers will not be used to assault as tanks; their tasks in the attack will be :-*

i). To give covering fire for assault troops.

ii). In support of a tank attack, to follow closely the leading echelon of tanks, obtain a lodgement on the objective and bridge the gap between the arrival of the tanks and that of the motor platoons or infantry.

iii). To “tap-in” on the enemy defences and endeavour to secure a foothold in the position which can subsequently be consolidated by the motor platoons.

iv). To protect a flank, or cut the enemy’s line of withdrawal.

*d). **Defence.** The scout platoon will be used :-*

i). To cover the move up and occupation of the position by patrolling forward and to the flanks.

ii). As a mobile reserve of fire power, which, owing to its ability to move rapidly across country and over bullet-swept ground, can counter enemy infiltration and be used for harassing.”

It’s interesting to see the evolution of the perceived uses of the Scout Platoon, starting from 1940 and moving through the desert campaigns, before preparing for a return to combat in Europe.

The cautions against using carriers in a manner more akin to light tanks was a familiar one, appearing in various Military Training Pamphlets (MTPs) detailing the use of the Carrier Platoon in the normal Infantry Battalion. It spoke to the tension of giving the infantry something they may regard as an armoured fighting vehicle, which was though effectively only bulletproof. Even this minimal protection could be compromised by armour piercing rifle calibre ammunition, and the armour of the carrier was no match for dedicated anti-tank rifles and guns.

Another common theme of the various MTPs and Infantry Training documents concerning the carrier, was the expectation that the crew would normally dismount to use their weapons. Many of the tasks outlined above though would require the crew to fight from the carrier, particularly in respect of reconnaissance and protection. A single scout carrier with a crew of three could dismount two men at most, and a Section of three carriers a total of six, including the Section commander; the carrier drivers were always required to stay with their vehicles and move them to a place of safety when the remainder of the crew were deployed on foot.

Even so, there was a tacit recognition that there would be occasions when the commander and gunner fight from their vehicle. As the 1940 document quoted earlier noted, '*The armour of the carrier gives better protection than a hedge or other cover from view*'. Mounted action was still labelled as the exception in MTP No.41 of June 1943. This again stressed the need for concealment of the carrier if the crew was operating from the vehicle, in the same manner that the gunner and commander would be expected to fire from cover when dismounted. MTP No.41 did include a passage on the subject of mounted attack.

a). Carriers do not normally make a mounted assault. Such action will only be successful under exceptional circumstances when the enemy is taken by surprise at short range.

b). Scout platoons will normally attack by containing the enemy by fire, using their armour and mobility to outflank him. If acting apart from motor platoons it may be necessary to attack on foot, but the few men available for the assault make this course inadvisable except against small isolated posts.

c). Carriers should be able to get well forward and make for covered positions from which their light machine guns can be brought into action either from the ground or from the vehicle. Section commanders must decide how far forward they can go before the crews dismount. They must keep in mind the vulnerability of carriers to anti-tank weapons and the desirability of getting their weapons into action under cover so that their support fire will come as a surprise to the enemy.

The final line in paragraph 'c' above alludes to a very real change in the battlefield since the introduction of the carrier. In 1940 the typical German Rifle Company had no specialist anti-tank weapons in its arsenal, aside from a limited supply of armour piercing 7.92-mm ammunition. By 1944, a host of handheld anti-tank weapons were available to the individual German soldier, including rifle grenades and the recently introduced *Panzerfaust*. Added to this was the ever-present threat of mines, which could easily disable a carrier without needed to be powerful enough to destroy it.

1943 and the reorganization of the Motor Company

In June 1943 a new War Establishment was issued for the Motor Battalion, with Home Forces units in the UK being the first to adopt it. This changed the organization of the Battalion from four Motor Companies to three Motor Companies and a Support Company.

Under this new establishment, the Motor Company retained the familiar format of a Headquarters, three Motor Platoons and a Scout Platoon. However, the introduction of new vehicles and infantry weapons increased both the firepower and mobility of the Motor Company from that seen previously.

The introduction of armoured transport for the Motor Platoons

One of the key changes came in transport. Since 1938, the Motor Battalion had used the 15-cwt truck to carry its Motor Platoons, with one truck for each Motor Section and Motor Platoon Headquarters. By 1942, both the US and Germany were fielding Battalions of infantry carried in halftracks, which while only lightly armoured in comparison to tanks, afforded some degree of protection to the riflemen inside, combined with an improved off-road capability.

The June 1943 War Establishment table for the Motor Battalion showed the Motor Platoons as being carried in "Trucks, 15-cwt – 4x4, personnel", numbers of which were also provided to each Company Headquarters and Battalion Headquarters. Edition No.1 of Progress Bulletin (Infantry) of July 1943 included the below when discussing the new WE for the Motor Battalion;

"Vehicles

This Battalion is completely mobile.

White Scout Cars are at present in short supply owing to prior demands from other sources, but these vehicles have been included in the W.E. as it is considered that they are the most suitable for the movement of personnel into forward battle areas. It is anticipated that the supply position will have improved by the end of this year (1943) and that it will be possible to meet all demands early in 1944.

Where possible 4 wheel drive vehicles have been provided so that the unit may be able to operate to the fullest extent with the Armoured Brigade."

The 'White Scout Car' referred to here was the United States produced Scout Car M3A1, manufactured by the White Motor Company, which was the final entry in a series of vehicles that had begun production in the 1930s. Despite its designation, the M3A1 was very far removed from what the British Army considered a scout car. It could carry eight men, with two in the forward compartment (driver seated on the left and the commander on the right) and six in the personnel compartment. These latter seats were arranged in pairs, the first pair side-by-side and facing forward, the next side-by-side and facing rear, with the third pair at the rear of the personnel compartment, back-to-back and facing out over either side. There were also two long, narrow storage lockers, one on either side of the rear compartment, running lengthwise. There were further storage sections directly behind the driver's compartment and between his and the commander's seats.

The M3A1 had an armoured body, ¼-inch thick on the engine cover, both sides and the rear, and a windscreen made of shatter proof glass. When required, the two-piece glass windscreen could be removed and ½-in thick armoured shield lowered in its place. There were no doors to the personnel compartment, the occupants needing to climb over the sides to enter and exit. A waterproof canvas cover that extended from front to back could be fitted to offer some protection against the weather.

When the M3A1 was introduced into US Army service, it went to the newly raised Cavalry Reconnaissance units, frequently serving in lieu of a purpose-built armoured car during 1942 and early 1943. In this role it normally had a crew of six men and was armed with at least one .30-cal and one .50-cal machine gun.

Despite seemingly high hopes for the M3A1, the US Army quickly moved away from the design, especially as the M8 armored car and the M2 and M3 halftracks began to enter service. With a great many M3A1s produced, and the US finding no need for them, they found their way to US allies, including Britain and the Soviet Union. In British usage the vehicle received the designation 'White M3A1 truck 15-cwt 4x4 personnel (armoured scout car)'. It bore no relation to any of the 15-cwt trucks in British Army service, and could actually carry a load of 20-cwt (1-ton imperial).

In December 1943, 21 Army Group calculated its requirements for both M3A1 White scout cars and halftracks in its units and formations. This gave a figure of 53 halftracks for each Motor Battalion in Home Forces, which amounted to a straight one-for-one replacement of the M3A1. This not insignificant change appears to have passed without much mention, and does not even rate a paragraph in Progress Bulletin (Infantry), which is the one publication I would have expected to record it.

There were three US halftrack types in service with the British Army, namely the M5, the M9 and the M14, which were all made in the US by the International Harvester Company (IHC). The key distinctions of these are summarised below;

M9A1 – Based on the US M2 (car, halftrack). Seating for ten men with two rows of three seats each in the personnel compartment facing inwards, two seats in the driver's compartment, and two seats back-to-back in the gap created by the pair of large storage lockers behind the driver's compartment. It was fitted with a ring mount for a machine gun above the passenger seat in the driver's compartment. The principal differences from the M2 halftrack were the absence of a continuous rail for machine gun mounts (three pintle mounts being used instead, located one on each side and one at the rear), and the provision of a rear door.

M5 – Based on the M3 (carrier, personnel, halftrack). Seating for 13 men, with three in the driver's compartment and ten in the personnel compartment, in two rows of five facing inwards. Became the M5A1 when fitted with a ring mount on the driver's compartment. Had a rear door, hinged on the right when facing the vehicle from the outside, as on the M9A1.

M14 – The M14 halftrack had begun life as a Multiple Gun Motor Carriage, armed with twin .50-cal Browning machine guns. Those that came to the UK under Lend Lease were divested of their guns and reconfigured as personnel carriers on the same seating format as the M9, however the M14 did not have a rear door. Some M14s were adapted to a command role, with two No.19 sets, a map board and tables.

Another feature particular to the IHC halftracks was their armour. Both the M2 and M3 halftracks and the M3A1 scout car had ¼-inch armour plate on their front and sides, rising to ½-inch for the protective shield that could be lowered when the windscreen blocks had been removed. On the M2 and M3 halftracks, face hardened armour was used, while on the M9A1 and the M5 homogenous plate was used instead, with a thickness of 5/8-inch on the shield and 5/16-inch on the rest of the vehicle. This did not however result in a greater degree of protection, and reportedly the US judged the armour of the M9A1 and M5 halftracks to be inferior to that of the M3 and M2 vehicles.

There are two questions that naturally arise when considering US halftracks in service with British units: with three types of halftracks, which units had which, and what was the situation regarding mounting machine guns on them.

Re the first point, I have yet to see any contemporary analysis showing which units or formations were issued which particular type of halftrack. As of late April 1944, 21 Army Group had a total requirement for 2202 halftracks, and the emphasis seems to have been very much on finding the necessary vehicles, rather than issuing particular types to particular units, despite the benefits this would bring in maintenance.

On the second point, concerning the arming of British Army halftracks, there is an oft repeated account that I think has had a great bearing on opinion in this matter. Noel Bell served in G Company of 8th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade, which fought as part of 11th Armoured Division, throughout the campaign in Northwest Europe. He wrote an account of the Company's actions from June 1944 to May 1945 titled "From the Beaches to the Baltic", which was published in 1947 and includes this paragraph;

"It was now June the 23rd, and we had been ten days in France. That day we acquired many .50 Brownings, from the 3rd R.T.R., who found them superfluous on their Shermans. We mounted them on our trucks and carriers and even on our scout car. They certainly improved the visual aggressiveness of our vehicles, though from a tactical point of view their field of fire was small in many cases, being limited owing to the inadequacy, and, in some cases, the bad placing of the gun mountings. They gave us, nevertheless, much confidence in our "ack-ack" defence."

The first thing I would comment on is that his account, when read in context, does appear to refer specifically to G Company, rather than to the Battalion as a whole, based on the reference to 'our scout car', of which each Motor Company had one (see below). There is precious little mention of these non-establishment machine guns elsewhere in his book, the only particular reference I can recall being of 'Our own Brens and Brownings...' when describing the events of the crossing of the Weser.

A more informed discussion of the use of machine guns on the halftracks of British Motor Battalions would, I suggest, require a detailed examination of the War Diaries of the Battalions that served in Northwest Europe and Italy. That is (sort of) on my lengthy to 'do list' but remains undone. If anyone reading this can offer any snippets on the subject they would be greatly received, and of course credited.

There is one other armoured vehicle that needs to be considered before turning to the changes in personnel and firepower of the 1943 Motor Company.

The scout car described in the 1940 documentation concerning the Motor Battalion was the Daimler. By the middle of the war a new scout had entered service with the British Army, the Humber. This shared many of the characteristics of the Daimler, in being a four wheeled vehicle, protected against rifle calibre fire and shell splinters (with a maximum of just over ½-inch plate) and with a decent road speed.

The Humber scout car had a larger crew compartment than the Daimler, with two seats forward and a third 'emergency seat' towards the rear, behind the passenger seat on the left-hand side. The Humber was armed with a single Bren light machine gun, which was expected to be deployed primarily as an anti-aircraft weapon, for which role it was carried externally on a PLM mounting. Later models of the Humber were fitted with increased belly armour and dispensed with the PLM to account for the extra weight, meaning the Bren was carried stowed.

Figures of armoured fighting vehicle holdings and entitlements were published for units and formations in 21 Army Group in June 1944. These showed a relatively small number of Daimler scout cars, which were predominantly with the four British Armoured Car Regiments and various higher Headquarters. Each of the three British Armoured Divisions (excluding the specialist 79th Armoured Division) were entitled to just six Daimler scout cars, with none for the two Independent Armoured Brigades that included a Motor Battalion (4th and 8th). An Infantry Brigade in an Armoured Division was authorised six scout cars, the same number as for a single Motor Battalion. Given the absence of the Daimler scout car from 4th and 8th Armoured Brigades, I would assume that the Motor Battalions in 21 Army Group used the Humber scout car, in common with the rest of their parent Armoured Brigade, while the Infantry Brigades of the three Armoured Divisions each had six Daimler scout cars.

The final version of the Motor Company – personnel and weapons

There were changes to personnel as well as individual and support weapons with the introduction of the June 1943 War Establishment.

The Motor Platoon was still organized as a Headquarters and three Sections. Platoon Headquarters now consisted of the Platoon commander, Platoon Serjeant, Numbers 1 and 2 for the 2-inch mortar, a signaller, batman-driver and a motorcycle orderly. Each Motor Section still had a Corporal, six riflemen and a driver. There were sufficient Lance-corporal posts in the Battalion for one to be included in each Motor Section as the second-in-command. Total strength of the Motor Platoon from 1943 onwards was one officer and 30 men, with four White scout cars and a motorcycle, before the M3A1s started to be replaced by halftracks during the first half of 1944.

Armament of the Motor Platoon had also been updated in line with the developments detailed in the [British Infantry Battalion 1938 to 1945](#) section. In each Motor Section

the Corporal and driver were armed with Sten machine carbines, one man with the Bren light machine gun, leaving the remaining five men each with a rifle. In Platoon Headquarters the Subaltern carried the usual pistol, the batman-driver, the motorcycle orderly and the No.1 of the 2-inch mortar each a Sten, and the balance rifles. Support weapons consisted of a Bren gun in each Motor Section and a 2-inch mortar in Platoon Headquarters. There was also a single Projector, Infantry, Anti-tank (PIAT) in the Platoon, which replaced the previously held three Boys anti-tank rifles.

The June 1943 Military Training Pamphlet for the Motor Battalion includes various 'Battle Drills' for the Motor Platoon. These refer to the subdivision of the Motor Section into the usual Bren Group and Rifle Group but do not give an obvious composition for each. Individual duties within the dismounted Motor Section are given as commander, second-in-command, two riflemen, two 'bombers' and the No.1 for the Bren gun.

There was no dedicated training document concerning the deployment of the Motor Platoon, at least none that I can find. Platoon tactics was covered in 'Infantry Training, Part VIII' published in March 1944. This gave the organization of the Rifle Section as consisting of '*The Bren group – No.1 and No.2 on the gun commanded by the second-in-command of the section*' and '*The rifle group – the remainder of the section led by the section commander*'. Applying this same interpretation to the Motor Platoon would mean a Rifle Group of just three men, under the direction of the Section Corporal, and a Bren Group of a Lance-corporal and two men with the light machine gun. Progress Bulletin (Infantry) No.1 of July 1943 notes re the new Motor Battalion that a '*second NCO in each Section has also been introduced*', which would allow for this format.

Once dismounted, the Motor Platoon was effectively a normal Rifle Platoon, with three Sections, three Bren guns and a 2-inch mortar. There was though an important difference, in that the Motor Platoon was already a much smaller subunit than the standard Rifle Platoon, even before casualties and absences were factored in. When the fourth Motor Company was converted into Support Company in mid-1943, the dismount strength of the Motor Sections was reduced from 252 men to just 189 men.

MTP No.41 of June 1943 noted that a characteristic of the Motor Battalion was '*Great fire power and correspondingly weak man power – This makes the battalion particularly suited to a defensive role, whilst weak man power detracts greatly from its value for an attack role*'. It also contained the caution against overworking the Battalion '*to prevent it being dissipated, eliminated, or tired out, early in an operation*'.

There was another, though relatively small, diversion of personnel likely to impact the Motor Platoons. Sniper rifles had been authorised for Motor Battalions in November 1942, on the basis of two per Motor Company. With no snipers provided for on the Motor Battalion WE, units had to find them from their existing strength, which probably meant dipping into the Motor Platoons. In December 1944, an amendment was issued to allow one sniper to be promoted to Corporal and another to Lance-corporal, mirroring but not equalling developments in the Infantry Battalion proper.

The Scout Platoon had too undergone a few changes in vehicles and personnel. It retained the familiar layout of a Headquarters and three Scout Sections, with three Universal carriers per Section and two more in Platoon Headquarters.

The No.1 carrier in each Section now had a crew of four, with a Serjeant, two driver-operators (for its No.19 set) and a driver-mechanic, while the second and third carriers each had two riflemen and a driver-mechanic. There was no longer a motorcycle orderly per Section. Support weapons were now one Bren gun per carrier, plus a PIAT in the Section commander's carrier and a 2-inch mortar in the No.2 carrier. Apart from the one man in each carrier who counted the Bren gun as his personal weapon, each man had a rifle.

In the Scout Platoon Headquarters the key vehicle was the Platoon commander's carrier, with a driver-mechanic and two driver-operators for its No.19 wireless set. The second carrier in Headquarters was slated to carry another Subaltern and his batman, plus a driver-mechanic, however the officer and batman were described as being allowed '*only when specially authorized by the War Office*'. At time of writing I have not seen any explanation of the authorisation referred to, and whether it meant that the post of a second officer in the Scout Platoon was routinely implemented or not. Platoon Headquarters was completed by a 15-cwt truck for kit, two motorcycle orderlies and now just a single scout car, presumably the Humber as discussed earlier.

Motor Company Headquarters now consisted of three elements, the previous 'fighting', and 'administrative' headquarters and a new 3-inch mortar detachment.

Fighting Headquarters remained based on two vehicles, one each for the Major and Captain, plus three motorcycle orderlies for liaison and message carrying roles. The 8-cwt truck of 1940 and 1941 gave way to the White scout car on the 1943 establishment, and then was itself replaced by the halftrack in the run up to D-Day in Northwest Europe. The commander's halftrack carried two wireless sets and a signaller while the second-in-command had a single radio. Both of these vehicles also had two driver-operators. The Company clerk had a seat in the first halftrack and the CSM in the second.

The second element was the 3-inch Mortar Detachment, which is a slightly misleading title as the detachment was actually a Section of two 3-inch mortars. These mortars were organized and equipped as those in the Infantry Battalion, with each mortar crew and weapon transported in a single Universal carrier along with an immediate supply of ammunition, normally speaking 66 rounds. The detachment was completed by a 15-cwt truck, which carried further ammunition and also a PIAT.

The Administrative element of Company Headquarters had three 3-ton lorries, one of these being a mobile cooker which also drew a water trailer. Its personnel included vehicle mechanics and storemen, and the usual personnel attached from the Army Catering Corps and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Changes in the role and deployment of the Motor Battalion in Northwest Europe

As discussed previously, contemporary literature on the employment of the Motor Battalion effectively ends in June 1943 with the publication of Military Training Pamphlet No.41, Part 3. This in many ways reflects what was then the most recent experience of the Motor Battalions in the campaigns in North Africa; indeed, some sections of MTP No.41 are drawn from the Middle East Training Pamphlet No.2, published in November 1941.

In the early years of the war, the British Armoured Division consisted of two Armoured Brigades, each of three Armoured Regiments (tactically equivalent to Battalions), with two Motor Battalions in the Division, latterly allocated one per Armoured Brigade. By 1942, and again influenced by the war in the desert, opinion had changed on the most effective ratio of infantry to armoured units in the Armoured Division (a debate that was being played out in many other armies as well).

In Home Forces, this resulted in the British Armoured Division changing to a formation of one Armoured Brigade, with three Armoured Regiments and one Motor Battalion, and one Infantry Brigade with three Infantry Battalions. The Infantry Brigade was composed of standard Infantry Battalions, made mobile by the provision of 3-ton lorries (Troop Carrying Vehicles), operated by the Division's Royal Army Service Corps component. While this organization was prompted by experience in North Africa, Armoured Divisions there were liable to adopt a more fluid approach in their actual composition.

The three British Armoured Divisions that would form part of 21 Army Group all had one Armoured Brigade, which included a Motor Battalion, and one Infantry Brigade of three Infantry Battalions. The interplay of these two Brigades in the early battles in Northwest Europe has been the subject of much critique, and often outright condemnation. Broadly speaking, the assumption was that the Armoured Brigade would make the breakthrough, while the Infantry Brigade would be responsible for consolidating the ground gained, and also undertaking the reduction of any bypassed pockets of resistance.

In between came the Motor Battalion. It was, unlike the lorry borne Infantry Brigade, better able to keep in close contact with the Armoured Regiments, but it lacked the reserves of manpower necessary to undertake a full-scale assault against a prepared enemy position. The primary expectation remained that individual Motor Companies would be attached to work directly with Armoured Regiments, providing them with the dismount element they lacked to overcome relatively minor enemy opposition that required an infantry solution rather than an armoured one.

While there was now more balance between tanks and infantry in the Armoured Division, so long as the Armoured Brigade and Infantry Brigade were effectively fighting separate actions, the former was still a 'tank heavy' formation, and the Motor Battalion remained its only immediate infantry support.

In late July 1944, 11th Armoured Division made a radical change to its organization. The three British Armoured Divisions in 21 Army Group had all started 1944 with an Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment as Divisional troops, and three Armoured Regiments in their Armoured Brigade. Prior to D-Day, the Armoured Reconnaissance Regiments were reorganized as standard Armoured Regiments, meaning the Division effectively had four such units. During the early months of the fighting in France, each British Armoured Division had an Armoured Car Regiment, which were previously Corps troops, attached to it. This meant there were now four Armoured Regiments and four Infantry Battalions (three standard and one Motor) in the Division, with reconnaissance duties being undertaken by the Armoured Car Regiment.

This enabled 11th Armoured Division to introduce a system whereby one Armoured Regiment was paired directly with one Infantry or Motor Battalion to form a Group. Two such Groups were under command of the Armoured Brigade Headquarters and two more under the Infantry Brigade Headquarters. In August 1944, Guards Armoured Division adopted the same approach. 7th Armoured Division appears to have used a mixture of the two systems.

While the Group system definitely worked, I am not sure it greatly altered the position of the Motor Battalion. On paper, the standard Infantry Battalion had 360 men in Rifle Sections, nearly twice as many as the equivalent 189 men in Motor Sections in the Motor Battalion. There would be some benefits to fighting the Motor Battalion as a single unit, but it was still greatly inferior in manpower when compared to the Infantry Battalion proper, even before losses were incurred.

Other Motor Battalion developments

As mentioned, there were two Independent Armoured Brigades in 21 Army Group, each of which had a Motor Battalion, with 2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps in 4th Armoured Brigade and 12th King's Royal Rifle Corps in 8th Armoured Brigade.

The role of the Independent Armoured Brigade was primarily to provide support to Infantry Divisions, in a similar way to the Tank Brigades, though the Independent Armoured Brigades were equipped with Sherman tanks and the Tank Brigades with Churchill tanks. 4th Armoured Brigade also spent the opening months of 1945 as part of 11th Armoured Division, while its own 29th Armoured Brigade was re-equipping with the Comet.

There was a unique development in 12th KRRC in 8th Armoured Brigade, which saw the Battalion obtain several types of support weapon that were definitely not on its War Establishment. First were six 17-pdr armed M10 'tank destroyers', which in the British Army were only found in Royal Artillery Anti-tank Regiments. These weapons only appear on AFV returns for the last two weeks in March 1945, then promptly disappear until the end of April and beginning in May 1945. The other addition for the Battalion at this time was a 'Platoon' of 4.2-inch mortar. One day I hope to find if the unit's War Diary provides any information on how these items were acquired.

As is so often the case when it comes to the organization of British units and formations, the situation in Italy provides fresh challenges.

At the beginning of May 1944, there was a surprisingly large concentration of Motor Battalions in Italy, consisting of.

(In 1st Armoured Division) 2nd Armoured Brigade, which included 1st KRRC

(In 6th Armoured Division) 26th Armoured Brigade, which included 10th RB

7th Armoured Brigade, which included 2nd RB

9th Armoured Brigade, which included 7th RB

At the end of May 1944, the three Rifle Brigade Battalions, 2nd, 7th and 10th, were removed from the above Brigades and formed into a new 'M' Brigade, which was quickly designated as 61st Infantry Brigade. The new Brigade joined 6th Armoured Division at the end of May 1944, and is generally described as being an Infantry Brigade. However at least one Battalion appears to have maintained its organization as a Motor Battalion, though there is some uncertainty (on my part at least), as to whether this was 2nd RB or 10th RB. 2nd RB fielded A, B, C and S Companies in December 1944, while 10th RB was credited with a D Company at the same time, which would tend to suggest an Infantry Battalion set-up.

1st KRRC remained with 2nd Armoured Brigade until the end of June 1944, then switched to 9th Armoured Brigade, before going back to 2nd Armoured Brigade in mid August and then returning to 9th Armoured Brigade in mid December 1944. In early 1945, 1st KRRC joined 61st Infantry Brigade. It presumably retained its organization as a Motor Battalion when operating with the two Armoured Brigades.

Overleaf is a brief summary of the changes in Motor Platoon organization.

Motor Platoon, under W.E. ref I/1931/8D/1 - July 1938

Personnel	No.	Pistol	Rifle	Bren	2-inch	Boys	15-cwt	m/c*
Platoon Headquarters								
Subaltern or WO Class III	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Serjeant	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Rifleman (see Notes)	2	-	2	-	1	-	-	-
Driver, IC	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Orderly	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total, Headquarters	6	2	4	-	1	-	1	1
Three Motor Sections, each								
Corporal	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Rifleman	5	-	5	-	-	1	-	-
Bren No.1	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Driver, IC	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Total, Section	8	-	8	1	-	1	1	-
Total, Platoon	30	2	28	3	1	3	4	1

Motor Platoon, under W.E. ref I/1931/8D/2 – February 1940 (as amended)

Personnel	No.	Pistol	SMG	Rifle	Bren	2-inch	Boys	15-cwt	m/c*
Platoon Headquarters									
Subaltern	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Serjeant	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Batman	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Rifleman	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
Driver, IC	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Orderly	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total, Headquarters	6	2	-	4	-	1	-	1	1
Three Motor Sections, each									
Corporal	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rifleman	5	-	-	5	-	-	1	-	-
Bren No.1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Driver, IC	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Total, Section	8	-	1	7	1	-	1	1	-
Total, Platoon	30	2	3	25	3	1	3	4	1

Notes

1. In Motor Platoons commanded by a Subaltern, one rifleman acts as batman.
2. *m/c in above is a solo motorcycle.
3. 15-cwt in the above is a 15-cwt truck.
4. February 1940 version incorporates known amendments to end of 1941.

Motor Platoon, under W.E. ref II/231/3 – January 1944

Personnel	No.	Pistol	SMG	Rifle	Bren	2-inch	PIAT	15-cwt	m/c*
Platoon Headquarters									
Subaltern	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Serjeant	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Signaller	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Mortar No.1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-
Mortar No.2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Batman-driver	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	-
Orderly	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total, Headquarters	7	1	3	3	-	1	1	1	1
Three Motor Sections, each									
Corporal	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rifleman	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Lance-corporal	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Bren No.1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Bren No.2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Driver, IC	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
Total, Section	8	-	2	5	1	-	-	1	-
Total, Platoon	31	1	9	18	3	1	1	4	1

Notes

1. PIAT is shown as being carried in the Platoon Headquarters truck only, there is no operator identified.
2. *m/c in above is a solo motorcycle.
3. 15-cwt in the above was the White M3A1 scout car until early 1944. In Motor Battalions in 21 Army Group, these vehicles were replaced by US halftracks on a one-for-one basis in the months prior to June 1944.

Annex A – Signal communication

Detailing the communication equipment of the Motor Battalion presents many challenges of its own, particularly in establishing quantities and distribution. Given that much of the equipment detailed in this section has already been described in Annex A of the [Organization of the British Infantry Battalion](#) piece, the below concentrates more on the allocation of such equipment within the Motor Battalion.

Line equipment

The Motor Battalion used the same range of line equipment as did the Infantry Battalion proper, and it would seem in broadly the same quantities. At time of writing though I have only been able to find a relatively slim amount on the subject of line equipment in Motor Battalions.

The greatest early war detail comes not from British sources but from Canadian Army War Equipment Tables. The Canadian Army fielded Motor Battalions in its Armoured Divisions, and these followed closely the organization used by their British contemporaries. In November 1940, the line equipment authorised for a Canadian Motor Battalion was;

- 2 switchboards, Universal Call, 6-line
- 8 telephone sets, D, Mk V
- 6 Fullerphones, Mk IV
- 2 superposing units (for Fullerphones)
- 10 miles, electric cable, D3, Mk VI

This was in line with the line equipment I reckon to have been available to a British Infantry Battalion from around 1939-40, with the main difference being the Motor Battalion had two more miles of D3 cable for its telephones. The first major change to this allocation, at least for the Canadian Motor Battalion, comes in June 1942, with the addition of two telephone sets 'D' and one-quarter mile of cable D3 to each Motor Company. While it is not stated I would suggest this equipment was for the use of the 3-inch Mortar Detachment added to each Motor Company at the end of 1941, which would allow an observer to go forward a short distance and relay instructions to the mortar crew.

I should acknowledge that there is a danger in assuming that Canadian Army units used exactly the same levels of equipment as their British Army counterparts. There was a very high degree of commonality between the two, however there was not total uniformity. Certainly, from 1944 onwards, the Canadian Army began to introduce aspects of organization and equipment that were particular to it, and not reflected in British Army practise. As of 1940 however, I think the Canadian figures would have simply been lifted from the equivalent British AFG1098 table for a Motor Battalion, as at that point the Canadian Army had very little familiarity with such a unit.

And that is where all detailed commentary on the line equipment of the Motor Battalion (British or Canadian) comes to an abrupt end. While writing this piece I have been able to find overall figures for telephone sets authorised for the Motor Battalion during 1945 and into 1946.

22 telephones	April 1945
34 telephones	July 1945
30 telephones	March 1946

Added to the July 1945 figures are the following other items of line equipment;

2 switchboards, 10-line

12 1/3 miles, cable, D3

16 reels, Assault cable (each reel 1000-yards)

The upgrading of the switchboard from the UC 6-line to the UC 10-line took place in the Infantry Battalion during 1943, and it would be reasonable to assume that the Motor Battalion followed likewise.

Progress Bulletin (Infantry) No.6 of January 1944 noted the addition of 16 reels of assault cable to the Motor Battalion.

When it comes to telephones, I have come to the conclusion that the July 1945 figure actually incorporates an error, and I think I know where this stems from. As noted above, by the end of 1941 the Motor Battalion appears to have been authorised the normal eight sets in the Signal Platoon, with a further eight in the Motor Companies, seemingly for their 3-inch Mortar Detachments.

From 1943, in the Mortar Platoon of the standard Infantry Battalion, each 3-inch Mortar Detachment was provided with a pair of sound powered telephones, which had headphones and a microphone that could be worn on the chest to allow hands free operation. Issue No.13 of 21 Army Group Infantry Notes, July 1945, states that permission was being sought to replace the six 'Head and Breast SP telephones' in each Motor Battalion by telephone sets L. I would assume from this that the Motor Battalions had also switched to the sound powered telephone equipment, probably with the introduction of the June 1943 War Establishment.

I am also going to make a second assumption, in that the Motor Battalion kept its previous allocation of 16 telephones. PBI No.12 of July 1944 stated that each MMG Platoon in the Motor Battalion had been authorised the same scale of equipment as MMG Platoons in MG Battalions proper. This involved the addition of three telephone sets, D, and 2/3 miles of cable D3 to each Motor Battalion MMG Platoon. If my assumed figure of 16 telephones holds true, that would give a new total of 22 sets in

the Battalion, which is confirmed for April 1945. It is the leap to 34 telephone sets a few months later that constantly baffles me.

At the end of 1945, each pair of sound powered telephones in the Mortar Platoon of the Infantry Battalion was replaced by two telephones D or L and 1/3 mile of D3 cable. In the Infantry Battalion, the scale of issue of sound powered telephones was one pair per 3-inch mortar (plus two pairs at Platoon Headquarters), while in the Motor Battalion it would appear to have been one pair per two 3-inch mortars. I think an error crept in, with the assumption that the six 3-inch mortars of the Motor Battalion meant an increase of 12 telephones in the amended post-war allotment. If the correct figure was six, then that would take the total to 28, still two short of the 1946 figure.

Infantry Notes No.13 (21 Army Group), July 1945, states that an application had been made to add a fourth telephone set to each MMG Platoon in an MG Battalion. If this increase was afforded to the Motor Battalion, it would give a total of 30 telephone sets, which is confirmed for 1946 and persuades me that the 34 telephones of July 1945 is an error.

There is some support for this interpretation given the figure of 12 1/3 miles of D5 cable included in the July 1945 source, which could realistically be apportioned as;

Signal Platoon	10 miles
Each MMG Platoon	2/3 mile
Each Mortar Detachment	1/3 mile
Total	12 1/3 miles

I admit this is an esoteric aspect of Motor Battalion equipment, but it is frustrating to not be able to determine the actual figures.

Wireless equipment – 1940 to 1942

When it comes to wireless equipment, there is at least more information available. A new problem arises however, certainly for 1943 onwards, in that many of the contemporary sources actually conflict with one another.

As part of the Mobile Division, the Motor Battalions were perhaps the first infantry units in the British Army to deploy the still relatively new medium of wireless down to Company level. On the 1938 War Establishment the Motor Battalion had ten wireless sets, increased to 14 by early 1940, and up to 18 sets in late 1941.

The first set issued to the Motor Battalion was the pre-war designed No.1. This was able to send and receive in both voice and continuous wave (CW), which employed morse code. Maximum range when stationary for CW was perhaps 8 miles, and for speech around 3 miles. These ranges could be roughly halved if the set was used from a moving vehicle.

By 1938 there was an increased demand for wireless in infantry and artillery units, which was initially met by the No.11 set. This too used voice and CW and came in two forms, a Low Power (LP) and a High Power (HP) set. The Motor Battalion used both versions (see below), the LP sets providing general Battalion communication and the HP sets equipping the Scout Platoons.

No.11 set distribution, Motor Battalion, 1940-1941

Subunit	No.	Comments
<u>Headquarter Company</u> Signal Platoon	2	Truck mounted LP sets
<u>Each Motor Company</u> Company Headquarters	1	Truck mounted LP set
	1	<i>Truck mounted HP set*</i>
Scout Platoon	2	Carrier mounted HP sets
Sub-total, LP sets	6	
Sub-total, HP sets	8	original scale
<i>Sub-total, HP sets*</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>increased scale</i>
Total, No.11 sets	14	original scale
<i>Total, No.11 sets</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>increased scale</i>

*second set in each Motor Company Headquarters authorised from August 1941

In the early war years, the dominant wireless set used by armoured units was the No.9, which during 1942 began to be replaced by the No.19 set. When the Motor Battalion commander received a Universal carrier in September 1941, this vehicle was fitted with a No.9 set, which would have enabled him to net with the Armoured Brigade.

The adoption of the No.19 set by the Motor Battalion would appear to have begun in the first half of 1942. The scale of sets remained effectively the same, with a one-for-one replacement of the No.11 sets and the solitary No.9, plus two spare stations.

No.19 set distribution, Motor Battalion, 1942-1943

Subunit	No.	Comments
<u>Battalion Headquarters</u>	1	Carrier station
<u>Headquarter Company</u> Signal Platoon	2	Truck stations
	2	(spare)
<u>Each Motor Company</u> Company Headquarters	2	Truck stations
Scout Platoon	2	Carrier stations
Total, No.19 sets	21	

When fitted in a tank or other armoured fighting vehicle, the No.19 set actually fulfilled three separate roles. Its 'A' set was used for communication between Troops and Squadron Headquarters, and also between Squadron and Regimental Headquarters. The shortwave 'B' set was intended for intercommunication between the three or four tanks or armoured cars of a Troop, while the IC (intercom) allowed crewmen to talk to one another within their particular vehicle. Given the use of the No.19 set within the Motor Battalion it seems unlikely that anything other than the 'A' set was routinely required.

The above allocations of wireless sets generally allowed for the following links;

Scout Platoon to Motor Company Headquarters – the No.1 carrier in the Scout Platoon Headquarters (with the Subaltern) operating forward with the Scout Sections, and the No.2 carrier remaining with Motor Company Headquarters. Link maintained via the No.11 HP set in each of these two carriers.

Motor Company Headquarters to Motor Battalion Headquarters – the second 8-cwt truck in Motor Company Headquarters (with the Company Captain) acting as the link back to Battalion Headquarters via the No.11 LP set.

Motor Battalion Headquarters to each Motor Company Headquarters – the two 8-cwt trucks from the Signal Platoon, each carrying a No.11 LP set, providing communication forward to the Motor Companies. One vehicle to remain at Battalion HQ site and the other to accompany the Battalion commander should he need to go forward.

When a No.11 HP set was added to Company Headquarters, it was to act as a rear link, seemingly to the Headquarters of the Armoured Regiment the Company was supporting.

The replacement of the No.11 set with the No.19 set meant that Motor Companies as well as Battalion Headquarters could more easily net with Armoured Regiments and their Squadrons, who likewise used the No.19 set.

Wireless equipment – 1943 to 1945

The new War Establishment of June 1943 brought with it a major increase in the wireless equipment of the Motor Battalion, and for the first time introduced manpack sets to the unit.

In the Scout Platoon, each Section commander's carrier now mounted a No.19 set, as well as the Platoon commander's vehicle. There remained one No.19 set in each of the two trucks at Company Headquarters for a total of six per Motor Company. Battalion Headquarters had four No.19 sets, three in 15-cwts and one in the commanding officer's Universal carrier, with one more set each for the Signal Platoon and the commanders of Headquarter Company and Support Company.

Under the February 1944 establishment, a second scout car was added to Battalion Headquarters, one of which had a No.19 set, replacing that previously found in the now deleted Universal carrier. The scout car added to Support Company

Headquarters also had a No.19 set. In July 1944, each MMG Platoon added a No.19 set as part of its communication kit upgrade. Seemingly after the end of hostilities, the second scout car in Battalion Headquarters was also fitted with a No.19 set.

The No.19 set was always intended to be a vehicle mounted set. This meant that once the Motor Companies dismounted, they were immediately separated from their wireless communications (a situation familiar to US and German units that operated from halftracks). Manpack wireless sets were first introduced to the Motor Battalion under the June 1943 establishment. Two types of set were issued, the No.18 and the No.38, both of which were used by the standard Infantry Battalion.

Each Motor Platoon, each Anti-tank Platoon and each MMG Platoon had a No.18 set. A further such set went to each Motor Company Headquarters and to Support Company Headquarters. A spare No.18 set was also carried by the Signal Platoon.

Each Motor Company also initially had five No.38 sets, with two for the 3-inch Mortar Detachment and one for the Scout Platoon. The remaining two sets appear to have been held by Motor Company Headquarters. The Signal Platoon also had a spare No.38 set. At some point before April 1945, the No.38 set of the Scout Platoon was dispensed with, but when and why I have seen no explanation of.

These allocations of wireless sets generally allowed for the following links;

No.19 sets

Within Motor Company – one No.19 set in Motor Company Headquarters working forwards to the Scout Platoon, and one working back to Battalion Headquarters. Also links within the Scout Platoon between the commander and his three Sections.

Within Motor Battalion – one No.19 set in Headquarters of Headquarter Company and Headquarters of Support Company linking back to Battalion Headquarters. Also one 'Rover' set in Battalion Headquarters Universal carrier, which was subsequently replaced by a scout car.

No.18 sets

Within Motor Company – one No.18 set in Motor Company Headquarters working forward to each of the three Motor Platoons.

Within Support Company – one No.18 set in Support Company Headquarters, which could work forward to each MMG and Anti-tank Platoon. When Platoons from Support Company were attached out to Motor Companies, they would likely net their No.18 set with that of the Motor Company.

No.38 sets

Within Motor Company – two No.38 sets to the 3-inch Mortar Detachment, allowing for one to be taken forward by a Mobile Fire Controller and the other to stay with the firing detachment. Two sets held as spare, for use by dismounted Motor Platoons, or even Sections, as required.

No.19 set distribution, Motor Battalion, 1944-1945

Subunit	No.	Comments
<u>Battalion Headquarters</u>	3	Truck (halftrack) station
	1	Scout car
<u>Headquarter Company</u>		
Company Headquarters	1	Truck (halftrack) station
Signal Platoon	1	Truck (halftrack) station
	2	(spare)
<u>Support Company</u>		
Company Headquarters	1	Truck (halftrack) station
	1	Scout car
Each MMG Platoon	1	Carrier Station*
<u>Each Motor Company</u>		
Company Headquarters	2	Truck (halftrack) stations
Scout Platoon	4	Carrier stations
Total, No.19 sets	30	

*No.19 set in each MMG Platoon authorised from July 1944

No.18 set distribution, Motor Battalion, 1944-1945

Subunit	No.	Comments
<u>Headquarter Company</u>		
Signal Platoon	1	(spare)
<u>Support Company</u>		
Company Headquarters	1	
Each Anti-tank Platoon	1	Carrier station
Each MMG Platoon	1	Carrier Station
<u>Each Motor Company</u>		
Company Headquarters	1	
Each Motor Platoon	1	
Total, No.18 sets	19	

Driver-operators manned the No.19 sets, while Signallers were responsible for the No.18 sets. No.38 sets were operated by riflemen or mortarmen as required.

The Rear Link

The original Armoured Brigade Signals Squadron included one Troop for each Armoured Regiment and another for Brigade Headquarters. It was not until June 1941 that a Troop was added for the Motor Battalion.

This small Troop, only nine other ranks, had a single wireless truck and a workshop lorry. In August 1942 the Troop was expanded with the addition of four 15-cwt trucks, each carrying a charging set. Under the 1943 Armoured Divisional Signals establishment, the Motor Battalion Troop had two wireless trucks, one for Rear Link (with a No.19 set) and one for 'A' Echelon (with a No.22 set), three 15-cwt trucks with charging sets and a 3-ton lorry carrying a technical workshop.

Generally speaking, the Rear Link wireless truck provided the connection between Motor Battalion Headquarters and Armoured Brigade Headquarters. The trucks with charging sets were normally allocated one per Motor Company, and also carried an electrician (signals), while the 3-ton lorry drew a more powerful 6-kw charging trailer. The charging units were used to ensure there were sufficient batteries for the multiple wireless sets of the Motor Battalion, while the electricians and an instrument mechanic assisted in repair and general maintenance of sets and batteries.

Below are some very basic notes on the performance of the various sets referenced. They are derived from a number of sources and it is possible to find quite different, and sometimes contradictory, information on the same set.

See the sources and acknowledgements for links.

No.38 set

Frequency range - 7.3 to 8.8 megacycles

Aerial - section lengths of 4-foot each, maximum of three lengths for 12-foot

Anticipated range - $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile with 4-foot aerial, up to 2 miles with 12-foot

No.18 set

Frequency range - 6 to 9 megacycles

Aerial - section lengths of 1-foot each, maximum of ten lengths for 10-foot

Anticipated range, voice - 2 to 5 miles with 6-foot aerial, up to 10 miles with 10-foot

When using CW range approximately doubled. If set being used while operator is moving the range drops appreciably.

No.19 set ("A" set only)

Frequency range - 2 to 8 megacycles

Aerial - section lengths of 4-foot each, normally three lengths for 12-foot

Anticipated range, voice - up to 10 miles

Annex B – North African variations

Now then, the horrible bit I've been avoiding.

At the outset of the campaign in North Africa, Motor Battalions used the same War Establishment as described previously, namely of four Motor Companies, each of three Motor Platoons and a Scout Platoon, under a Battalion Headquarters and a Headquarter Company. By early 1942, Motor Battalions were beginning to reorganize on a provisional basis to incorporate both anti-tank guns and medium machine guns.

Very many years ago, someone most kindly put together for me a list of what they had found on the subject, from a combination of books, histories and war diaries. The picture for the first few months of 1942 is complex, to say the least.

One constant reference is the issue of anti-tank guns to Motor Battalions during February and March of 1942, initially 2-pdr guns on Portees, before 6-pdr guns were received a few months later. Where figures are given, it is most often stated that 16 anti-tank guns were allocated to each Motor Battalion.

The other weapons added to the arsenal of the Motor Battalions in North Africa at this time were the 3-inch mortar and the Vickers medium machine gun. As noted previously, the 3-inch mortar had already been added to the War Establishment of the Motor Battalion in late 1941, however units in North Africa only appear to have received theirs in early 1942, on the same basis of one per Motor Company. Contemporary descriptions of the allocation of Vickers MMGs to Motor Companies in early 1942 vary somewhat, with references to a 'section' of two guns per Motor Company by some units while others cite a full Platoon of four guns.

The key consideration here, to my mind at least, is that units adopted these new weapons on a provisional basis. There were no new drafts of personnel forthcoming to man them, so if Motor Battalions were to field mortars, machine guns and anti-tank guns, they would have to find the crews for them from existing resources, which inevitably meant raiding the Motor Platoons. It also meant a lack of uniformity in how Motor Battalions reorganized themselves to absorb the additional firepower.

The early approach, it would seem, was to fully equip one Motor Company with anti-tank guns, in four Platoons each of four guns, while each remaining Motor Company converted one Motor Platoon to an MMG Platoon. Subsequently, some Motor battalions switched to four identical Companies, each including an Anti-tank Platoon.

In August 1942, an official War Establishment for a Motor Battalion (Middle East) was published, perhaps in an attempt to address the disparity in organization of such units in 8th Army. The organization given in the Middle East specific war establishment was of a Battalion Headquarters and four Motor Companies, each Company containing a Motor Platoon, an MMG Platoon, an Anti-tank Platoon and a Scout Platoon.

Normally speaking, a British Army War Establishment contained a great amount of detail on a unit's organization and equipment, and from 1939 often included a Table of Organization that gave a suggested distribution of personnel and items of equipment across a unit's vehicles. Unfortunately, the table issued for the Motor Battalion (Middle East) offers very little information. The decision to combine Battalion Headquarters with the previously separate Headquarter Company also erased the old divisions between command, signals and administrative elements.

By comparing the ranks and duties of personnel found under the February 1940 establishment against those in the August 1942 Middle East specific table, there is a surprising amount of continuity seen between the two. Under the preceding Battalion Headquarters and Headquarter Company, there were nine Officer and three Warrant Officer posts, all of which appear in the hugely expanded Battalion Headquarters of the August 1942 Middle East organization. The only Serjeant post to disappear was that of the Pioneer Serjeant.

There were more significant differences in terms of trades and duties of Other Ranks, with the deletion of the bricklayer, mason and carpenter/joiners. The motorcycle orderlies were also dispensed with, as were the previous crews for light machine guns and anti-tank rifles in Headquarters elements. A new feature was that all but one of the batmen were now tasked with driving duties as well. The numbers of many of the tradesmen and non-tradesmen remained the same under both establishments. Stretcher-bearers and sanitary dutymen were now dispersed out to the Motor Companies.

More significant was the change in transport. Motorcycles, 8-cwt trucks and 30-cwt lorries all vanished from the Middle East organization, with the Motor Battalion now having a mix of 5-cwt cars (US supplied Jeeps), 15-cwt trucks of varying types (see below) and 3-ton lorries. Also gone were the Battalion's old scout cars.

The previous eleven 30-cwt lorries of February 1940 gave way to nine 3-ton lorries, which actually resulted in an increase in store carrying capacity, rising from just under 17 tons to 27 tons. An interesting entry in the Middle East Motor Battalion transport table is the 'truck, 15-cwt, armoured (wireless)', with two for Battalion Headquarters and two in each Motor Company Headquarters. After some asking around on www.ww2talk.com and some checking against other Middle East establishments of the period, it does appear the vehicle referred to is the M3A1 White scout car. In the second version of the Middle East Motor Battalion WE, the same vehicle is confusingly referred to as being 4x2 drive, while the White was 4x4. I've come to conclude this is likely to be an error in the table, and another example of the many discrepancies to be found when trying to research the minutiae of the Motor Battalion.

Also included in the significant list of vehicles in Battalion Headquarters was the usual four-seater car for the commanding officer, and also a spare 3-ton Portee, without a 2-pdr anti-tank gun.

There were equally dramatic changes in the Motor Companies. Gone was the established format of a Headquarters, three Motor Platoons and a Scout Platoon. Instead, one Motor Platoon became a Medium Machine Gun Platoon, and another an Anti-tank Platoon, leaving just one Motor Platoon proper and the Scout Platoon.

Motor Company Headquarters suffered from the same loss of detail as Battalion Headquarters, in that the fighting and administrative portions were not delineated on the Middle East specific WE. Key roles remained unchanged, in that the Company commander, second-in-command, CSM and CQMS were all retained, as were most of the tradesmen. Both batmen had become batmen-drivers and two stretcher-bearers were carried on strength.

Lost somewhat in the mix is the addition of the 3-inch Mortar Detachment, serving a single such weapon. Unlike all similar units of this type, the Detachment was not provided with the usual modified Universal carrier, having instead one (or possibly two) 15-cwt trucks. Company Headquarters included a Serjeant and eight General Dutymen, who would appear to have provided the crew. The term General Dutyman replaces the more familiar one of Rifleman. Whether this was a way of recognising that the men of the Battalion now had to think of themselves as more than 'just' riflemen and LMG numbers and be prepared to operate in unfamiliar roles is unclear.

The Platoons

As outlined previously, under the Middle East War Establishment, the Motor Company initially switched from the usual three Motor Platoons and a Scout Platoon to four Platoons each fulfilling a different role, namely one Scout, one Machine Gun, one Motor and one Anti-tank.

The Scout Platoon underwent the least alteration in terms of organization and remained based on eleven Universal carriers. The previously authorised five motorcycles and two scout cars were all deleted under the new Middle East table, while two Jeeps and one 3-ton lorry were added.

Personnel wise, the main changes were the addition of one Serjeant and the deletion of the five motorcycle orderlies, while the batman was made a batman-driver. Even though both scout cars were gone, the Scout Platoon still had four drivers for two Jeeps and a single lorry. The 1940 allocation of five Corporals and 12 Riflemen was replaced by a total of 16 General Dutymen.

The internal structure of the Scout Platoon can only really be guessed at. My suggestion would be the Platoon largely kept the format seen in the February 1940 organization, with two carriers in Platoon Headquarters, each with a wireless and a driver-operator, and three Sections each of three carriers. Within the Sections, each carrier should still have had a crew of three men, including a driver-mechanic and a rifleman acting as gun number. The old ranks had the three carriers commanded by a Serjeant, Corporal and Lance-corporal respectively, with a Lance-serjeant in one

Section instead of a full Serjeant. The addition of a Serjeant rank to the Middle East version of the Scout Platoon would allow for either all three Sections to be commanded by a full Serjeant, or for the NCO in the second carrier on Platoon Headquarters to be bumped up from a Corporal. The balance of a batman-driver and four drivers would then be left for the Platoon's soft-skin transport, though this was not a natural fit with five drivers to three vehicles.

The Motor Platoon was rendered almost unrecognisable by the Middle East reorganization. It was reduced to a Subaltern, Serjeant, three Corporals and 19 Privates, for a total of 24 all ranks. There was one batman-driver, two drivers, IC and 19 General Dutymen in the 22 Other Ranks, and transport was a Jeep and two 3-ton lorries. There is absolutely no indication given of the internal organization of the Platoon, nor its armament.

All I can offer regarding these two points is a guess, and that would be that the Middle East Motor Platoon took the 1940 format and pared it back, in similar fashion to the reductions made in the normal Rifle Platoon of the Infantry Battalion in the Middle East.

Platoon Headquarters – Subaltern, Serjeant, batman and one rifleman retained. The posts of motorcycle orderly and 2-inch mortar man both deleted.

Motor Section – Corporal retained, dismount strength of six Privates reduced to five.

Transport and drivers – The previous four 15-cwt trucks and one motorcycle replaced by one Jeep and two 3-ton lorries. The previous total of four drivers, IC, reduced to two, and batman also becomes batman-driver.

General – all 19 riflemen now designated as General Dutymen.

My assumption is that the dismount strength of the Middle East Motor Platoon was based on a small Headquarters (Subaltern, Serjeant and one man acting as orderly), and three Sections, each of a Corporal and five men. Platoon transport was now two 3-ton lorries and a Jeep, so it no longer had tactical transport, with the three Sections and Platoon Headquarters now being carried in mixed order across these vehicles.

In the later version of the Middle East Motor Battalion establishment there was a note. This stated that if Motor Platoons were equipped on a 15-cwt truck basis, the Platoon would have four 15-cwt trucks instead of two 3-ton lorries. There is no indication of which Battalions might have used this alternative transportation, and no mention of an increase being allowed for the additional drivers required. Presumably two of the General Dutymen in the Platoon would be tasked with the job.

The remaining two Platoon types had no precedent in Motor Battalion usage.

First of these is the Machine Gun Platoon, which served four Vickers medium machine guns. In terms of personnel this had a Subaltern, two Serjeants, two Corporals and 25 privates. There were 18 General Dutymen, two orderlies and two range-takers,

plus a batman-driver and four drivers, IC. Platoon transport was a Jeep, a 15-cwt truck and two 3-ton lorries. All I can suggest in terms of internal format is a small Headquarters of Subaltern and batman-driver, with Jeep. Then two Sections, each of a Serjeant, orderly and range-taker, with two detachments, each of five general dutymen and an MMG. Each Section could be carried in its own 3-ton lorry. There would then be a residue of two drivers and one 15-cwt truck.

Somewhat less amorphous is the Anti-tank Platoon. It had a Subaltern, five Serjeants, four Corporals and 21 privates. Within this were 16 General Dutymen, four drivers, IC, two driver-mechanics and a batman-driver, plus a fitter and an AA light machine gunner. Transport was two Jeeps, one 3-ton lorry and four 3-ton Portees, each carrying a 2-pdr anti-tank gun. That would most probably resolve into four Detachments, each of a Serjeant and four men serving a 2-pdr gun, a Portee and driver. The balance of Subaltern, Serjeant, AA gunner and fitter, plus three drivers with two Jeeps and a lorry would then constitute Platoon Headquarters.

Motor Battalion weapons under the August 1942 War Establishment

This subject deserves its own section because it represents the most infuriating aspect of the table concerned.

On page 4 of 4 is the list of weapons allocated to the first version of the Middle East Motor Battalion, which is replicated below.

Pistols, .38-inch	81
Rifles, .303-inch	659
Machine carbines	40
LMGs, .303-inch	26
MMGs, .303-inch	16
Anti-tank rifles, .55-inch	12
Cup dischargers	4
3-inch mortars	4
Anti-tank guns, 2-pdr	16

There is no effort made to show how these weapons were to be distributed among the subunits of the Battalion. A few, at least, can be easily resolved; one 3-inch mortar to each Motor Company, four MMGs to each Machine Gun Platoon and four 2-pdr guns to each Anti-tank Platoon.

On first seeing this list of weapons I plainly recall being dumbfounded by the number of light machine guns and anti-tank rifles in particular. The February 1940 establishment, incorporating amendments into 1942, allowed for a total of 108 LMGs and 98 anti-tank rifles; seeing these figures reduced to 26 and 12 respectively is going over the proverbial cliff edge.

Piling on further guesswork, all I can suggest is that whoever drafted the August 1942 table excluded the LMGs and Boys rifles mounted on Universal carriers. This is not

reflected in any other War Establishment table that I can recall seeing, which all detail the carrier borne weapons. Even then, there is no neat resolution to the disbursement of a mere 26 LMGs throughout the Battalion, nor the anti-tank rifles and cup dischargers. Below is my purely hypothetical outline, based on the previous allocation of such weapons in the Motor Battalion.

HQ, vehicle or sub-unit (each)	LMG (1941)	LMG (ME)	Atk R (1941)	Atk R (ME)
		(suggested)		(suggested)
Carriers	44	44	44	44
Motor Sections	36	12	36	12
Scout cars	14	-	-	-
Battalion HQ	1	6	1	-
Admin Platoon	5	-	5	-
Motor Company HQ	2	1	3	-
Anti-tank Platoons	-	1	-	-
Total	108	70	98	56

The two ME columns in the above are pure guesswork, with nothing in the actual WE to indicate an intended distribution.

The second version of October 1942

Within a few months of being issued, the August 1942 organization was superseded by a new War Establishment for a Motor Battalion in the Middle East. This in itself did not include much more detail than its predecessor, however the total of support weapons was far more realistic for such a unit.

Overall the Motor Battalion now consisted of a Battalion Headquarters, three Motor Companies and an Anti-tank Company. Each Motor Company now had a Scout Platoon, two Motor Platoons and a Machine Gun Platoon. The Anti-tank Company had four Platoons, each with four guns, which could be 2-pdr or 6-pdr pieces.

The removal of the Anti-tank Platoon from each Motor Company and their consolidation into a separate Anti-tank Company lead to the deletion of the fourth Motor Company, but saw each remaining Motor Company add a Motor Platoon, which actually increased the rifle element of the Battalion.

Many of the subunit organizations seen in the August table were carried over unaltered to the October version. The Scout Platoon, the Motor Platoon and the Machine Gun Platoon all retained the same allocation of personnel and transport. In the Scout Platoon the only amendment was the promotion of one Corporal to Serjeant, while each of the Anti-tank Platoons lost their fitter, but were otherwise the same.

Battalion Headquarters and each Motor Company Headquarters added an extra wireless truck, plus signallers and driver-operators. The number of 3-ton lorries remained at 53, though these were distributed differently, and the spare 3-ton Portee

went from Battalion Headquarters to the Anti-tank Company. Also in the Anti-tank Company was an unspecified armoured observation post vehicle.

Now anyone familiar with the Motor Battalion in the Middle East may well have seen another War Establishment produced for such a unit, but not by the British Army. In late 1942, the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2 NZEF) decided to form its own Armoured Brigade, which was to consist of three Armoured Regiments and one Motor Battalion. At this time, 2 NZEF were in effect using British War Establishments with only minor alterations, to allow for differences in arms of service.

The 2 NZEF Motor Battalion establishment was issued in December 1942, and in many ways is a duplicate of the British Army document from October 1942. One crucial difference is that the New Zealand establishment actually includes an organization table, which shows a suggested distribution of support weapons, as well as personnel and load allocations to vehicles.

It is very, very tempting to assume the 2 NZEF establishment can be used to fill in the detail missing from the British version. There is no obvious reason why the New Zealand organization would be practically identical with the British in terms of personnel and transport but profoundly different as regards weapon distribution.

It is an assumption that I do not want to make for some reason, possibly because of the many errors and mistaken assumptions associated with the subject of Motor Battalion organization I have seen over the years.

Below is a table showing the distribution of supports weapons within the Motor Battalion based on the 2 NZEF War Establishment.

HQ or sub-unit (each)	LMG	LMG (AA use)	MMG	Dis-charger cup	3-inch mortar	Anti-tank rifle	Anti-tank gun
Battalion HQ	8	-	-	-	-	6	-
Motor Company HQ	2	-	-	-	1	3	-
Scout Platoon	12	-	-	-	-	11	-
Motor Platoon	3	-	-	-	-	1	-
Machine Gun Platoon	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
Anti-tank Company HQ	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Anti-tank Platoon	-	3	-	4	-	-	4
Total	68	14	12	16	3	54	16

The light machine guns detailed for anti-aircraft use appear to be single rather than twin mounts.

The October 1942 British War Establishment shows eight 2-inch mortars and 43 cup dischargers (the latter for use with the No.68 rifle grenade), while the 2 NZEF table shows nil and 16 of these items respectively. Regarding the 2-inch mortar, I would assume it was issued on a similar basis as in the 1942 British Infantry Battalion (Middle

East), with two held per Company Headquarters for use as required. The extra 27 cup dischargers I would suggest were for the 27 carriers of the Scout Sections.

There is very little that can be said on individual weapons. On the 1940 organization, pistols were issued to all officers and the regimental serjeant-major, one man per scout car and scout carrier (responsible for the Bren gun) and all motorcyclists. The revised October 1942 establishment gives no figures for individual weapons at all.

The 'other' Motor Battalion of the desert war

Both versions of the Middle East specific War Establishment for a Motor Battalion discussed in this section were found in formations of 8th Army. At the end of 1942, a new formation, 6th Armoured Division, arrived in North Africa. It had a single Motor Battalion, 10th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade, and did not use the same WE as units already in the desert.

A discussion on www.ww2talk.com in late 2020 helped to provide some detail on how the Battalion was organized for the campaign in North Africa.

It went overseas using War Establishment II/1931/8D/2, incorporating the amendments regarding the addition of an Intelligence Section to Headquarters and a 3-inch Mortar Detachment to each Motor Company. As with the standard Infantry Battalion of 1941-42, there was an allowance of six 2-pdr anti-tank guns for the Motor Battalions in Home Forces. These were not though written into the establishment, of either Infantry or Motor Battalions. Instead, units issued 2-pdr guns would have to furnish the crews from existing personnel, and create a somewhat *ad hoc* subunit to operate them. 10th Rifle Brigade opted to convert one Motor Platoon in D Company into an Anti-tank Platoon.

In January 1943, D Company was converted into Support Company. This included the Anti-tank Platoon, which had by now been re-equipped with 6-pdr guns. A Machine Gun Platoon, credited with six Vickers MMGs, was also formed, seemingly by converting a second Motor Platoon. It is a little less clear whether the third and final Motor Platoon in D Company was retained, though the Scout Platoon was kept. Finally, the 3-inch Mortar Detachments were removed from the Motor Companies and consolidated into a single Platoon of four weapons.

Overleaf is an entirely speculative organization for a Motor Platoon under the Middle East specific war establishment.

Motor Platoon (suggested), under W.E. ref VI/559/1 – August 1942

Personnel	No.	Pistol	SMG	Rifle	Bren	Boys
Platoon Headquarters						
Subaltern	1	1	-	-	-	-
Serjeant	1	-	-	1	-	-
General Dutyman	1	-	-	1	-	-
Batman-driver	1	-	-	1	-	-
Car, 5-cwt (Jeep)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Driver, IC	2	-	-	2	-	-
2 Lorries, 3-ton, GS	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Headquarters	6	1	-	5	-	-
Three Motor Sections, each						
General Dutyman (Corporal)	1	-	1	-	-	-
General Dutyman	3	-	-	3	-	-
General Dutyman (Bren No.1)	1	-	-	1	1	-
General Dutyman (Bren No.2)	1	-	-	1	-	-
Total, Section	6	-	1	5	1	-
Total, Platoon	24	1	3	20	3	*

Comments

1. Suggested organization only.
2. Possible that Motor Section commanders had rifles instead of machine carbines.
3. Roles within Section based on previous organization and not detailed in any available source.
4. Possible that each Motor Section retained a Boys anti-tank rifle, or equally so that this was reduced to one such weapon for the Platoon.

Sources used and Acknowledgements

War Establishment tables

A Motor Battalion, ref I/1931/8D/1, notified in Army Council Instructions 27th July 1938

A Motor Battalion, ref I/1931/8D/2, notified in Army Council Instructions 21st February 1940

A Motor Battalion, Middle East, ref VI/559/1, notified in Army Council Instructions 23rd September 1942, effective date 15th August 1942

A Motor Battalion, Middle East, ref VI/559/2, notified in Army Council Instructions 28th July 1943, effective date 16th October 1942

A Motor Battalion, ref II/231/2, notified in Army Council Instructions 23rd June 1943, effective date 4th June 1943

A Motor Battalion, ref II/231/3, notified in Army Council Instructions 9th February 1944, effective date 19th January 1944

Amendments to tables I/1931/8D/2 and II/231/3 from Canadian Archives

British Army publications

Progress Bulletin Infantry (PBI), published by the Directorate of Infantry; issues 1 to 20 inclusive, with publication dates of 11th July 1943 to 20th March 1945.

Infantry Notes (21 Army Group); issues 7 to 13 inclusive, with publication dates of October 1944 to July 1945.

Stowage sketches, Universal carriers (various), from Tank Museum, Bovington.

Motor Battalion Standing Orders for use in the Field (As used by 1st Batt. The Rifle Brigade) – undated document but based on the February 1940 organization.

Notes on the Organization and Tactical Employment of a Motor Battalion (Provisional) – another undated document but also based on the February 1940 organization.

Middle East Training Pamphlet No.2 (Notes on the training, tactical employment and administration of Motor Battalions of the Armoured Divisions in the Middle East) – print code gives a publication date of November 1941.

Military Training Pamphlet No.41, Part 3, The Motor Battalion – June 1943**

Armoured Division Formation Staff Equipment Tables, for April 1945 and March 1946, and a Motor Battalion Staff Equipment Table from July 1945. Each includes summary figures of various items of equipment authorised for the Motor Battalion as of these particular dates.

General

Thanks to Paul Goldstone for sharing his information re the various organizations used by Motor Battalions in North Africa.

Signals equipment

Wireless Set No.38 and Wireless Set No.18, and Wireless Set No.19 working instructions* available from -

http://www.vmarsmanuals.co.uk/archive/files_index.htm

Royal Signals Pocket Book Part II - Wireless Diagrams (July 1945)**

Details from several reports compiled during World War Two on signal communications within the Infantry Battalion.

Also thanks to respondents of <https://www.vintage-radio.net/forum> re my numerous queries on line equipment.

Notes

* indicates can be found online

** indicates obtained as reprint from <https://robvanmeel.nl/>

Still searching for...

Below is a list of items I would still very much like to track down.

Army Form G.1098 tables

Also known as War Equipment Tables, these were the documents issued in concert with War Establishment tables. The establishment table showed all personnel, transport and weapons (at least until around 1943, when individual weapons ceased to be included), while the equipment table listed all other items authorised to units.

There were two such tables issued for the Motor Battalion in its 1943 and 1944 versions, reference AFG.1098-701 (October 1943) and AFG.1098-701/1 (October 1944) respectively.

There was also a document titled Loading Tables for a Motor Battalion, based on WE II/231/3, published around June or July 1944, which would contain much the same information. I appreciate that it is highly unlikely either this or the G.1098 tables might still be around but you never know...

Motor Battalion, Middle East organization (1942)

Even less likely is any surviving information on the internal organization and functioning of the Middle East variant of the Motor Battalion, so similarly on the off chance someone may have seen something tucked away in a war diary or such...

Gary Kennedy