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A CONCISE OVERVIEW OF:

BRITISH, AFRICAN & INDIAN INFANTRY BATTALIONS

A concise overview of the organization, establishment, structure, roles, responsibilities and weapons of a British, African and Indian Infantry Battalion during the Second World War.
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A Concise Overview of British, African and Indian Infantry Battalions

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Contents

	<u>Pages</u>
Introduction	3
British Infantry Battalions	4 – 12
Standard Infantry Battalion	4 – 6
Medium Machine Gun Battalion	6 – 7
Motor Battalion	7 – 8
Lorried Infantry Battalion	8 – 10
Parachute Battalion	10
Airlanding Battalion	10 – 12
British African Infantry Battalions	13 – 14
British Indian Infantry Battalions	15 – 16
Battalion Headquarters	17– 21
Headquarter Company	22
Support Company	22 – 23
Signals Platoon	23 – 25
Anti-Aircraft Platoon	26
Anti-Tank Platoon	26 – 29
Mortar Platoon	29 – 31
Carrier Platoon	31 – 34
Pioneer Platoon	34 – 35
Administrative Platoon	35 – 37
The Rifle Company	37 – 39
Operations	39 – 41
The Sniper	42 – 43
Infantry Weapons	44 – 47
Markings	48 – 49
Bibliography and Sources	50 – 54

Introduction

The Battalion was the key unit within the structure of the British Army and the British Indian Army. There were various types of battalion, including:

- Standard Infantry Battalion;
- Machine Gun Battalion;
- Motor Battalion;
- Lorried Infantry Battalion;
- Parachute Battalion;
- Airlanding Battalion;

This document covers the standard infantry battalion in some detail, and covers the others more generally. The structure, organisation, personnel and equipment allocated to a battalion was laid out in a document called the War Establishment Table, and there was a separate document for each type of battalion. In addition, as the war progressed and tactics and equipment improved, the War Establishment of a battalion would change accordingly.

British Army Battalions

Standard Infantry Battalion

Following the experience of the First World War, the standard infantry battalion in the British Army remained with essentially the same structure as before. Each battalion comprised a headquarters and four rifle companies. Each rifle company comprised three platoons, each platoon having three sections. At the outbreak of war on the 3rd September 1939, an infantry battalion had a total establishment of:

- 22 Officers;
- 646 Other Ranks

The support weapons available to the infantry battalion at the commencement of the Second World War were limited. The focus was on anti-aircraft rather than anti-tank defence, as the threat of the tank was yet to be realised.

SEE DIAGRAM 1

In April 1940, the War Establishment was modified with each section being increased from eight to ten men. This development took time to take effect. It is not believed that many, if any, infantry battalions in the British Expeditionary Force in France had time to expand to the new establishment before the German forces launched their offensive in the West on the 10th May 1940.

It was in this structure that the campaigns were fought in the Western Desert, Syria, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Greece and Crete and onto Tunisia. This was also the structure of British infantry battalions in the Far East in 1941 and 1942.

Developments in the War Establishment from 1940 onwards mainly concerned the increased fire support to be found in infantry battalions by the end of the war. Another change was the move away from anti-aircraft defence to anti-tank capability. This was made possible by the increasing Allied air superiority being hard won in the skies above the main theatres of operation and threat of improved German tank design.

This led to the creation of a separate Support Platoon in late 1943 to command the anti-tank, mortar, carrier and pioneer platoons. By late 1943, the War Establishment of an infantry battalion had grown to:

- 35 Officers;
- 809 Other Ranks.

The revised tables of War Establishment II/233/2 issued in April 1943, saw a significant change in the structure of the standard infantry battalion. In November 1944, War Establishment II/233/3 issued that month provided minor changes to the structure, mainly in respect to the snipers in the battalion.

SEE DIAGRAM 2

The establishment shown below relates to the campaigns in North West Europe and Italy. It appears that the majority of British infantry battalions that saw active service in North West Europe from June 1944 onwards conformed to the authorised war establishment. Of course, casualties in battle would reduce the strength of a battalion, but were brought up to strength again when circumstances allowed.

The British Army battalions in India, Malaya, Hong Kong and Burma conformed to the 1940 War Establishment until 1943. All the battalions involved in the campaigns in Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma suffered heavy losses right from the early stages of the battles. The circumstances of the campaign and the general shortage of men and materiel in the theatre meant that initial losses were difficult to repair. In consequence, many battalions either merged or continued to be understrength.

Even as late as September 1942, the 1st Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment had not received sufficient reinforcements to allow 'B' Company to be reconstituted, so it continued to operate with just three rifle companies. After the First Burma Campaign, it had an anti-tank platoon instead of carriers, although this was abolished in April 1943 to be replaced by a medium machine gun platoon. At this date, the battalion had no less than eight-two universal carriers on strength.

From then on, the establishment of British Army infantry battalions in Burma varied according to the nature and terrain of their deployment. The experience of the First Arakan Campaign in early 1943 led to fundamental changes in training and

deployment of British, Indian and Commonwealth forces in Burma. One of the major variations concerned the mode of transport; either animal (mule) (A.T.), motor transport (mainly jeeps) (M.T.), or a combination of both. For example, in July 1943, the 2nd Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment was organised on a combined A.T. and M.T. establishment.

In January 1944, the 2nd Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment had followed Indian practice and had gained a Guerilla Platoon instead of a Pioneer Platoon. The Headquarter Company also had a mortar, carrier and signals platoon. The Administrative Company was commanded by a Captain, with a Captain as M.T. Officer and a Lieutenant as A.T. Officer. The R.S.M. was on the strength of the Administrative Platoon. By July 1944, the 1st Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment was similarly organised to its sister battalion.

Medium Machine Gun Battalion

In 1938, the British Army decided to designate certain infantry battalions as medium machine gun units, with one such battalion being allocated to each infantry division. At first, a variety of regiments provided such battalions for conversion, but by the commencement of the Second World War, these types of battalions were provided in the main by just four regiments, namely:

- The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers;
- The Cheshire Regiment;
- The Middlesex Regiment (including the Kensington Regiment);
- The Manchester Regiment.

The establishment of a machine gun battalion was twenty-nine officers and seven-hundred and eleven men. The battalion had a headquarter company and four machine gun companies. Each company comprised a headquarters and three platoons, each platoon having two sections, each of two Vickers medium machine guns. The platoon also had an anti-tank rifle. The headquarter platoon had a signals and administrative platoon, with an anti-aircraft platoon until circa 1943.

SEE DIAGRAM 3

In the Tunisian campaign, the battalions deployed there were reorganised into three 'Groups'. Each Group comprised one machine gun company, an anti-aircraft company (equipped with 20 mm Hispano cannon) and a heavy mortar company. This organisation continued into use until the Anzio landings in early 1944.

Those battalions serving with the 21st Army Group and those in Italy with effect from June 1944 were reorganised. A four company structure was used again, with three machine gun companies and a heavy mortar company of four platoons.

SEE DIAGRAM 4

This revised establishment remained in place until the end of the war.

Motor Battalion

SEE DIAGRAM 5

The British Army developed Motor Battalions to serve with armoured brigades. A Motor Battalion was a specialised infantry unit intended for the close protection of armoured units. When first introduced in 1939, it was to be included in the support group of an armoured division. There were then two motor battalions in each support group, so in effect one per armoured brigade. In 1943, the establishment of an armoured division reduced from two to one armoured brigade, with the motor battalion was included in the armoured brigade. This applied to all armoured brigades in an armoured division, plus independent armoured brigades intended to support armoured divisions.

At first, it was intended that the motor battalions should be formed from cavalry regiments. However, these motor battalions were provided (in the main) by the Regular and Territorial Army battalions of the following regiments:

- The King's Royal Rifle Corps;
- The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own).

The Guards Armoured Division found their own motor battalions from the 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards and 4th Battalion, Coldstream Guards.

From the start, the transport of the motor battalion was the 15 cwt truck carrying an eight man section, including the driver. This number was not increased in line with standard infantry battalions and the section remained at eight men until the end of the war. By 1943, increasing use was made of the American 15 cwt halftrack, which was very roomy since it was designed for twelve men.

The motor battalion was organised so that each of the three companies could operate independently with one of the armoured regiments in the armoured division. Towards the end of the campaign in North West Europe, it was usual for the lorried infantry battalions of an armoured division to be paired with armoured regiments, in which case the motor battalion was paired with the armoured reconnaissance regiment.

As a Motor Battalion operated closely with armoured units, by 1943 it used the Wireless set No. 19, except the rifle platoons used the infantry Wireless set No. 38.

Lorried Infantry Battalions

Lorried Infantry battalions formed the infantry brigade of an armoured division. Initially, they were organised and equipped the same as other infantry battalions, but were carried on long moves by their own R.A.S.C. troop carrying platoon. Gradually, the tactics of the lorried infantry battalion diverged as they worked more closely with the armoured regiments of the division. This in turn led to small, but significant, changes in the equipment. At battalion headquarters and company headquarters there were armoured 15 cwts, either American White 4 x 4 or halftracks. These gave some armoured protection, but more importantly, they gave greater cross country mobility so that the infantry headquarters could keep up with those of the armoured regiment and squadron with which they were working.

The infantry battalion of an armoured division was trained to cooperate closely with the armoured regiments of the division. Originally, the motor battalion was tasked close protection of the armour, while the lorried infantry were needed largely to secure and hold the start line for attacks, and to occupy and hold ground captured by the armour.

However, much closer working became the norm as the war progressed. New methods were developed and the mixed battle group of an armoured regiment and an infantry battalion plus a motor company, artillery, engineers and services became usual. Since the infantry would be working closely with the armour, some of its command and communications vehicles and equipment were brought into line.

The need to work closely with armoured units made it essential that infantry headquarters could communicate with armour headquarters. To do this the lorried infantry used a large number of Wireless sets No. 19 as used in the armoured regiments. The infantry company still used the Wireless set No. 38 for communication with platoons. Changes in vehicles and wireless sets meant that there had to be changes in the trades that infantry drivers and operators had in the lorried infantry battalion.

Eventually many of the changes introduced in the lorried infantry influenced the standard infantry battalion, which also had more armoured 15cwts and worked more closely with armour from the independent brigades. An infantry battalion in an armoured division was basically the same as that in the infantry division. However, there were small but significant differences:

The detail differences between the 'normal' infantry battalion and the lorried infantry battalion are listed as follows.

Vehicles

- The six bicycles of the intelligence section were replaced by motorcycles;
- One 15 cwt GS at battalion headquarters was replaced by an armoured 15 cwt, officially a White 4 x 4 but eventually a halftrack;
- The battalion headquarters Universal carrier was replaced by a Humber scout car which gave the commanding officer greater battlefield mobility;
- One 15 cwt GS from the signal platoon was replaced by an armoured 15 cwt, either a White 4 x 4 or a halftrack;
- The 15 cwt GS at Support Company headquarters was replaced by an armoured 15cwt;
- One armoured 15 cwt was added to each company headquarters;

- The three bicycles at company headquarters were replaced by one motorcycle.

Later:

- One halftrack ambulance was provided for the Medical Officer;
- One halftrack was provided for the pioneer platoon.

Personnel

- One driver IC was added to each company headquarters to drive the armoured 15 cwt;
- The driver mechanic for the Universal carrier was replaced by a driver operator;
- The signal platoon deleted 2 x drivers IC, 3 x signaller orderlies and 13 x signallers. These were replaced by 18 x driver operators. These men were trained in the use of the Wireless set No. 19 (which replaced the telephones) and infantry Wireless sets No. 18.

Parachute Battalions

During the Second World War, the British Army developed their use of parachute troops as part of independent parachute brigades or of a larger airborne division. The very fact that a parachute battalion was intended to be dropped from aircraft over enemy territory led to significant changes to the establishment of a parachute battalion as opposed to a standard infantry battalion.

The main differences were that a parachute battalion was smaller, with just:

- 29 Officers;
- 584 Other Ranks.

In addition, a parachute battalion had a much reduced scale of infantry support weapons, but a higher scale of Sten guns and Bren guns.

SEE DIAGRAM 6

Airlanding Battalions

Each of the two airborne divisions raised by the British Army had an airlanding brigade in their establishment. These were augmented infantry battalions, tasked with securing and holding ground taken initially by the parachute battalions. There were six battalions that were deployed as such during the war, namely:

- 7th Bn. The King's Own Scottish Borderers
- 1st Bn. The Border Regiment
- 2nd Bn. The South Staffordshire Regiment
- 12th Bn. The Devonshire Regiment
- 2nd Bn. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry
- 1st Bn. The Royal Ulster Rifles

The structure of these battalions was determined by their main form of transport, the Horsa glider. This could carry twenty-five men. Each platoon was to be carried in one glider, limiting each of the three sections to no more than seven men. To balance out the reduced numbers in each platoon, each company had four platoons

There was an agreed War Establishment for an Airlanding Battalion, but the six battalions that undertook this role all appeared to have adopted actual establishments to suit the planned operation.

- Battalion Headquarters – 5 Officers, 30 Other Ranks;
- Support Company – 11 Officers, 187 Other Ranks;
 - Company HQ – 1 Officer, 5 O.Rs.;
 - Signal Platoon – 1 Officer, 36 O.Rs.;
 - Mortar Platoon – 1 Officer, 24 O.Rs.;
 - Reconnaissance Platoon – 5 Officers, 31 O.Rs.;
 - Pioneer Platoon – 1 Officer, 14 O.Rs.;
 - Transport Platoon – 1 Officer, 25 O.Rs.;
 - Administrative Platoon – 1 Officer, 52 O.Rs.;
- Four Rifle Companies (6 Officers, 121 O.Rs.), each comprised of:
 - Company HQ – 2 Officers, 29 O.Rs.;
 - Four Rifle Platoons, each comprised of;
 - Platoon HQ – 1 Officer, 2 O.Rs.;
 - Three Rifle Sections, each comprised of 7 O.Rs.;

- Anti-Aircraft & Anti-Tank Company (6 Officers, 117 O.Rs.)
 - Company Headquarters – 2 Officers, 11 O.Rs.;
- Two Anti-aircraft Platoons, *each* – 1 Officer, 26 O.R.s;
- Two Anti-tank Platoons, *each* – 1 Officer, 27 O.Rs.

Total Strength of 864 all ranks (47 Officers and 817 men)

The differences of note in the establishment was the addition of a Loading Officer within the battalion headquarters. As his name suggests, he was responsible for organising the loading of the gliders, their landing and then reinforcements. The Mortar Platoon was planned to have four, 3” mortars, with each company having two mortars each. In practice, these mortars were combined into one mortar group, under command of the battalion.

The battalion contained a ‘seaborne tail’, which usually comprised elements of the administrative platoon and transport platoon. There does not appear to be any evidence that any battalion actually took any anti-aircraft guns into action, although they may have done. The platoon was equipped with 20 mm Hispano cannon, that were intended for use in either the anti-aircraft or anti-tank role. Instead, it appears that battalion commanders preferred to take into action eight Vickers medium machine guns, usually formed into one group of two platoons. The eight, 6 pdr anti-tank guns were formed into one group, of two platoons with four guns each.

African Infantry Battalions

The battalions of the King's African Rifles, Northern Rhodesia Regiment, Rhodesia African Rifles (ie, those from East and Central Africa) generally conformed to the establishments of the British Army battalions. The main difference was that all the officers were white Europeans (albeit many were resident and some were born and raised in Africa), and all senior non-commissioned officers were white Europeans.

For example, each platoon was commanded by a subaltern, who was white, and also had a white European Serjeant and a Black African Serjeant. This meant that the number of personnel in a British African battalion was greater than that in a standard British battalion.

Those battalions that fought in the East African campaign of 1941 conformed to the general establishment of four rifle companies and a headquarter company. The nature of the headquarter company varied as equipment such as carriers and mortars were difficult to obtain in East Africa. In addition, the troops had to be trained on the equipment, if and when it became available.

Following their involvement in East Africa, a few battalions were deployed to Madagacar, but then the main deployment was to India and then Burma in 1944. These battalions formed part of the 11th (East Africa) Division, which was tasked with advancing down the Kabaw Valley.

It appears that the carrier platoon was converted into a Defence Platoon in most, if not all, the nine battalions in the three brigades. In addition, I cannot find any reference yet to any anti-tank platoon in any of the battalions fighting in the Kabaw Valley. Due to the nature of the terrain, the division was in part supplied by air, but also had some jeeps and mules on strength.

SEE DIAGRAM 8

The West African battalions of the Nigeria Regiment, Gold Coast Regiment, Sierra Leone Regiment and Gambia Regiment were different again to those from East and Central Africa.

All West African battalions had all white, European officers (including some Polish and Czechoslovak officers) with one exception (the Ghanaian Seth ANTHONY). The key issue was that the West Africans used porters to carry supplies on their heads.

These porter were unarmed soldiers, and were provided with an armed escort. Each battalion had a number of porters allocated to it, so that each company headquarters comprised two officers, two European non-commissioned officers, fourteen African non-commissioned officers and other ranks, and fourteen unarmed soldiers. Each brigade also had an auxiliary group comprising three companies of unarmed soldiers.

SEE DIAGRAM 9

This element made the two West African divisions deployed to Burma reliant to a large degree on air supply, but highly mobile in difficult terrain. This resulted in the 81st (West African) Infantry Division being deployed down the Kaladan Valley on the left flank of XV Indian Corps, and then the 82nd (West African) Infantry Division being deployed further down the Arakan coast and onto the An road.

Each battalion had a Headquarter Company, which comprised the following platoons, namely:

- Signals Platoon;
- Administrative Platoon;
- Mortar Platoon;
- Headquarters Defence Platoon.

There were six, 3" mortars in the battalion, all of which were head loaded.

Indian Infantry Battalions

The battalions of the British Indian Army were mainly configured pre-war for service on the North West Frontier. They had a small headquarters function, with three rifle companies and a medium machine gun company.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the first priority was to mobilise battalions for deployment to the Middle East with the 4th and 5th Indian Infantry Divisions. As the battalions allocated to these formations mobilised, they reorganised to conform with the standard British infantry battalion War Establishment of four rifle companies, and a headquarter company comprising the six platoons (Signals, Anti-Aircraft, Mortar, Carrier, Pioneer and Administrative).

SEE DIAGRAM 10

One difference to that of a British Infantry battalion that appears to have been in place throughout the Second World War was that each Section in an Indian Army infantry platoon comprised twelve men. In addition, most platoons were commanded by Indian (or Gurkha) Viceroy Commissioned Officers (V.C.Os.), with usually a British officer commanding a company but a senior V.C.O. as company second-in-command. This meant that the number of British officers in an Indian battalion could be as few as six to eight.

The process of Indianisation had commenced before the outbreak of the Second World War, with Indians being granted King's Commissions. Those battalions subject to Indianisation had few if any V.C.Os. as they were replaced by Indian officers holding the King's Commission.

Battalions that were mobilised for service in Iraq and Persia in 1941, and also in Malaya and Burma in 1941 and 1942 conformed to the same establishment. Equipment was still in short supply, so many battalions did not have the required number of carriers or anti-aircraft guns for example. During the Arakan campaign of 1943, the battalions deployed there conformed to the same establishment as those that saw action in 1942 and 1943. The performance of the units and formations in this campaign led to a major review and reorganisation of the Indian Army.

Infantry battalions were placed on either an Animal Transport (A.T.) or Motor Transport (M.T.) establishment. Those on an A.T. establishment had an Animal Transport Platoon of ninety-five mules. Those on a M.T. establishment had a Transport Platoon of twelve jeeps and trailers.

When the 14th Army came out of the jungle into the plains of Central Burma, some battalions reorganized onto a Motor Transport establishment. The mules were handed in and carriers reissued. For the drive on Rangoon, the formations equipped on a Motor Transport establishment were grouped together in IV Corps to force their way through to Rangoon, thereby trapping the Japanese 28th Army evacuating the Arakan.

It appears that Indian Army battalions did not conform with the reorganisation of British battalions with the formation of a Support Platoon. It is believed that they retained the Headquarter Company, with a Signals and Administrative Platoon. Most, if not all, Indian battalions had a mortar platoon of six, 3" mortars. These were carried either by mules or jeeps. It was common for battalions to have a Headquarters Defence Platoon, and many had a Guerrilla, Assault or Pioneer Platoon. The situation with respect to anti-tank guns is less clear. The threat from Japanese tanks was negligible in 1944 and 1945, but there are references to 6 pounder guns being used as 'bunker busters' instead. Whether these were battalion weapons or from an anti-tank regiment is not known.

As an illustration, the 3rd Bn. 10th Baluch Regiment serving in Italy in July 1944 had the following number of personnel:

- 14 British Officers;
- 10 Indian Viceroy Commissioned Officers
- 710 Indian Other Ranks.

This battalion had a Support Company with a Carrier platoon with nineteen Universal carriers, an Anti-Tank platoon of eight 6 pounder anti-tank guns, and a Medium Machine Gun platoon under the command of a Subadar. The battalion also had a separate Mule Company within its establishment.

Battalion Headquarters

It was commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel, who had a senior Major as his second-in-command. For Regular Army battalions, the Lieutenant Colonel was usually a career officer of the Regular (or full-time) Army. Pre-war, Territorial Army officers commanded Territorial Army battalions, although during the war this distinction disappeared. By 1944, most infantry battalions in formations on active service were commanded by Regular Army officers.

By October 1941, some two-hundred and sixty-five commanders of Territorial Army units have been removed from command, whereas only one-hundred and thirty-three Regular officers had been removed. This was a consequence of the general lack of training and tactical skills of Territorial Army officers

At the outbreak of the Second World War, most Lieutenant Colonels were aged in their mid to late forties, with over twenty years' Army service. In September 1941, the average age of a commanding officer of a battalion was still more or less the same as it had been pre-war. Of the seven-hundred and seventy-four unit commanders, only one-hundred and ten were younger than forty-one years' of age, with two-hundred and seventy-six being aged forty-six years or older. In 1941, the upper age limit for a unit commander was reduced to forty-five, and then to forty-three in 1943.

As the Second World War progressed, the age of commanding officers of battalions decreased. By October 1942, the average age was now forty-one years, with the average service cut to twelve years. Indeed, within the 21st Army Group no commanding officer of a battalion was permitted to be over forty years' of age.

In action, the Commanding Officer formed a small tactical headquarters containing only the personnel who were required for the task of command. His three operational officers, adjutant, signals officer and intelligence officer assisted in manning the command post.

Although each of these officers had their own special responsibilities they were each capable of manning the command post and of operating flexibly and interchangeably. One of them was always on duty.

The second-in-command was a senior Major with a similar career path to that of his commanding officer. The second-in-command was usually held back in battle to be available to assume command in the event that the commanding officer was killed or seriously wounded.

The Adjutant usually held the rank of Captain and was the commanding officer's senior staff officer. He was responsible to the commanding officer for the organization, administration and discipline of the battalion. In the field, he was also the battalion operations officer, responsible for drafting daily orders and the writing of the battalion war diary.

His operational functions were

- To record the Commanding Officers verbal orders and in writing;
- To implement the Commanding Officers orders, plans and policies;
- To organise the battalion office.

In this last function, he was assisted by the serjeant clerk and two clerks. When the Commanding Officer attended order groups at brigade headquarters, or held his own order groups the adjutant would usually attend. The adjutant would also usually accompany the Commanding Officer on visits.

The fourth officer included in the establishment of a battalion headquarters was an intelligence officer, usually a subaltern. The Intelligence Officer was responsible for:

- Collating information from divisional headquarters and from the forward units and patrols;
- Maintaining the situation map;
- Monitoring messages and reports;
- Briefing the Commanding Officer on intelligence matters.

He was assisted by an intelligence serjeant, intelligence corporal and five intelligence privates.

The Quarter-Master was generally a Lieutenant or Captain, who had been promoted from the ranks. They were career soldiers who had risen to the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major from which they were granted a Quarter-Master's commission. He was responsible for all the provisions and equipment required by the battalion.

When on the move or deployed for action there was not a clear cut distinction between Battalion Headquarters and the Headquarters Company. Some of the Battalion Headquarters personnel will be located at rear headquarters and some of the Headquarters Company's transport is used by Battalion Headquarters. Signals vehicles are fully integrated into the headquarters.

The Signals Officer was responsible for:

- Arranging communications from battalion headquarters to the companies, and to rear headquarters;
- Logging outgoing and incoming signals.

The Signals Officer would normally maintain his own list of units and their position, which was updated from signals personnel but also from the adjutant and visitors.

The Second in Command was not normally at the tactical headquarters. In action, he assumed responsibility for all administrative matters thus leaving the Commanding Officer to concentrate on operational matters. He was responsible for the rear headquarters, which held all the battalion elements that were not actively engaged in an operation. This included the transport, supply and maintenance elements. In this, he was assisted by the Quarter-Master and the Transport Officer. The second-in-command had to be fully conversant with the tactical plan so that he could direct sub units to the correct place and so that he could assume command if the Commanding Officer became a casualty.

The Regimental Serjeant Major was responsible for the control of the headquarters personnel and for the layout of the headquarters area. He arranged for the defence of the headquarters area, posted sentries and was responsible for the distribution of reserve ammunition. He also assisted with the distribution of food to forward units. The Regimental Serjeant Major was also responsible for the regimental police.

Officers were cared for by batmen. Field Officers (Commanding Officer and Majors) were entitled to a batman of their own. Junior officers either shared a batman or had a batman driver. The Regimental Serjeant Major also rated a batman driver.

Medical personnel were listed as part of Regimental Headquarters. They were:

- Medical Officer;
- Medical Officer's Orderly/Driver;
- Medical Serjeant;
- Corporal stretcher bearer;
- 19 x Privates, stretcher bearers.

A Regimental Aid Post was set up to the rear and its position made known to all personnel. Here would be a Medical Officer from the Royal Army Medical Corp. He would be a fully qualified doctor and held the rank of captain. The Medical Officer was assisted by a medical serjeant who was trained in emergency treatment and carried a medical hamper with dressings and drugs. There was also a Medical Officer's orderly who was provided by the battalion and acted as driver and general non-medical assistant. Working to the Aid Post were the stretcher bearers who were trained in first aid. They were allocated to companies as required. All stretcher bearers could be armed with a Sten gun for self-defence. In peacetime the battalion band doubled as stretcher bearers.

In action, the battalion chaplain would usually be at the Aid Post where he would assist with record keeping as well as giving comfort. He had a batman driver.

From November 1944, the battalion snipers had been concentrated at Battalion Headquarters. Previously they had been attached to Company Headquarters. This was probably as a result of the experience in Normandy. Snipers were not only skilled marksmen but were also trained in intelligence gathering.

- Serjeant, sniper;
- Corporal, sniper;
- 2 x Lance Corporal, sniper;
- 4 x Privates, sniper.

ORGANISATION – Battalion Headquarters

- Motorcycle 1 – Intelligence Serjeant;
- Motorcycle 2 – Provost Serjeant;
- Motorcycle 3 – Regimental policeman;
- Motorcycle 4 – Regimental policeman;
- Motorcycle 5 – Regimental policeman.

- Car 5cwt 4 X 4 (Jeep)
 - Major second in command, batman driver
- Car 4 seater 4 X 4
 - Lieutenant Colonel (Commanding Officer), Adjutant, batman, driver IC

This vehicle used as Commanding Officers Office, Command Post and sleeping accommodation.

- 15cwt GS truck
 - Intelligence Officer, Regimental Serjeant Major, Batman Driver
 - Carries Intelligence equipment
- 15cwt GS truck
 - Medical Serjeant, 2 x Stretcher Bearers, Driver IC
- 15cwt 4 X 4 personnel
 - Medical Officer, Medical Officer's Orderly Driver
 - This vehicle was fitted with side tents.
- 15cwt office truck
 - Serjeant Clerk, 2 x Clerks, Batman, Driver IC
- Carrier Universal – Carries Bren gun and ammunition, for use of commanding officer for reconnaissance and visiting.
 - Driver mechanic

There were six bicycles for the use of intelligence corporal and intelligence privates. The following personnel had no permanent place in the battalion transport and normally marched.

- Serjeant sniper;
- 7 x Privates snipers;
- 18 x Privates stretcher bearers.

The five companies were each commanded by a Major or Captain. The role of company commander was an appointment, with the rank held by that officer dependent upon their seniority in the Army. The company commander would have a subaltern (Lieutenant or Second Lieutenant) as second-in-command.

Headquarter Company

The Headquarter Company originally comprised six platoons, namely:

- Signals Platoon;
- Administrative Platoon;
- Anti-Aircraft Platoon;
- Carrier Platoon;
- Pioneer Platoon;
- Mortar Platoon.

In the 1943 revision of the War Establishment of an infantry battalion, a new Support Platoon was created, leaving the Headquarter Company with just:

- Signals Platoon;
- Administrative Platoon.

Company Headquarters

- 15cwt truck GS;
 - Captain, Company Serjeant Major, Clerk, Storeman, Batman Driver.

The company quartermaster serjeant travelled in the transport of the Administrative Platoon.

Support Company

In 1943, war time experience showed the need to consolidate the support elements into one cohesive Support Company. This comprised the:

- Pioneer Platoon;
- Carrier Platoon;
- Anti-Tank Platoon;
- Mortar Platoon.

The company headquarters comprised one officer and eight men, reduced to seven men in November 1944. A Major usually commanded the Support Company, although this could also be a Captain. In action, the various sections were dispersed as the tactical situation required. They were then not under the command of the support company although it remained responsible for administration and supply.

Company Headquarters

- Car 5 cwt 4 x 4 (jeep);
 - Major, batman driver;
- 15 cwt truck GS;
 - Company Serjeant Major, Clerk, Orderly, Storeman, Driver IC.

The company quartermaster serjeant was carried in the transport of the administrative platoon.

Signals Platoon

The Signals Platoon was commanded by a subaltern from the regiment. Their responsibility was to maintain wire and telephone communications between the battalion headquarters and company positions. Communications between the battalion and the Brigade headquarters was the responsibility of the Brigade Signal Section manned by men from the Royal Corps of Signals.

In 1940, this platoon comprised one officer and thirty-three men, by 1944 this had risen slightly to one officer and thirty-five men. At the beginning of the Second World War, radio communication was still in its infancy in the British Army. The man portable Wireless Set Number 18 was developed only in 1940.

Platoon Headquarters

- Motorcycle;
 - Signal Serjeant;
- 15cwt truck GS – Carries a PIAT;
 - Subaltern, batman driver,

Wireless Section

- 15cwt truck GS;
 - Corporal signaller, 3 x Signallers, Driver IC.

15 x signallers do not have a permanent place on unit transport and normally march.

Line Section

- Motorcycle;
 - Signaller orderly;
- Motorcycle;
 - Signaller orderly;
- Motorcycle;
 - Signaller orderly;
- 5cwt car 4 x 4 (jeep) – Tows a 10 cwt trailer;
 - Signaller orderly acting as driver IC.
- 15cwt truck 4 x 4 personnel;
 - 2 x Corporal signallers, 2 x Signallers, Storeman, Driver IC.

There were also three signaller orderlies on bicycles. The orderlies were messengers. They performed a similar task to despatch riders but only within the battalion. A Despatch Rider (D.R.) was a Royal Signals trade and thus paid more. The seven signaller orderlies used four motor cycles and three bicycles. Bicycles were for use in the headquarters area and were carried on a 15cwt for longer moves. Bicycle riders carried a rifle. Motor cycle orderlies carried Sten guns. The signals serjeant also had a bicycle and was armed with a Sten gun.

The 15 cwt 4 x 4 Armoured was a White Scout car carrying wireless sets. It would normally be at Battalion Headquarters and be used by the Signal Officer and working as the battalion signals office. This vehicle was driven by a driver IC.

The signallers were not concentrated at headquarters but dispersed to companies as well. Each telephone link from battalion headquarters to the six company headquarters was manned at both ends by signallers from the signals platoon.

Signallers at the company end of the line were semi permanently attached to the company. Linesmen from headquarters were responsible for mending breaks in the line. These were fairly frequent since they were not only exposed to damage from shell and mortar fire, but unless the line was carefully placed, tracked vehicles would carry them away.

In today's world of instantaneous, worldwide, electronic communications, it has to be remembered that seventy years ago, the early battles in which the British Army fought during the Second World War were fought WITHOUT the use of radio communication within battalions. Commanding officers were heavily reliant on runners and visual signals to find out what was happening. Companies could be sent to attack an objective, with the commanding officer of the battlion unable to ascertain how that company was progressing, or whether it was in trouble.

From 1940 onwards, wireless radio sets were developed, manufactured and issued to infantry battalions. The main ones in use were:

Wireless Set No. 18 was a man pack. short range set for communication between battalion headquarters and company headquarters. It was carried by one man and operated by another. It was often carried in a vehicle, but could be readily dismounted. The set was carried in a case containing a receiver, a transmitter and a dry battery. The case had metal flaps and a canvas hood. An aerial up to eleven foot could be assembled from one foot lengths carried on the side of the case. Obviously, an eleven-foot aerial would be difficult to manage when moving on foot, and in general, the shortest effective aerial was used since they attracted snipers.

The effective range was:

- With 11 foot rod aerial 10 miles using Morse – 5 mile using voice;
- With 6 foot aerial 4 to 10 miles using Morse – 2 to 5 miles using voice;
- With ground aerial 2 to 6 miles using Morse – 1 to 3 miles using voice.

Wireless Set No. 38 was a man pack, short range set for communication between company headquarters and platoons. It was also used for infantry to tank liaison. This was a small set carried on the chest of the operator. A dry battery was carried in a standard small haversack on the back.

A throat microphone and earphones were provided. The controls were on top of the set for easy use by the operator. The weight of this set was 22 lb.

The effective range was:

- With 4 foot rod aerial half a mile, voice only;
- With 12 foot rod aerial 2 miles, voice only.

Anti-Aircraft Platoon

In 1940, the anti-aircraft platoon was commanded by a Platoon Serjeant Major and comprised four trucks each fitted with a single Bren gun on an anti-aircraft mounting. The platoon was also equipped with a Boys anti-tank rifle.

The anti-aircraft platoons in British infantry battalions became obsolete by 1943, as the Allies steadily gained air superiority.

Anti-Tank Platoon

By 1943, in most theatres of operation, the Allies were gaining air superiority and eventual air supremacy. This meant that the anti-aircraft platoon was often of little tactical use in battle. War experience had highlighted the threat of armoured attacks on infantry, so an anti-tank platoon replaced the anti-aircraft platoon.

The anti-tank platoon was often commanded by a Captain, with a subaltern as second-in-command. Each platoon comprised three sections, each equipped with two anti-tank guns, making a total of six in the platoon.

At first, the 2 pounder anti-tank gun was issued to infantry battalions, but experience in the Western Desert proved that this was of insufficient calibre to destroy the Axis tanks by then in use. Gradually as the improved 6 pounder anti-tank gun became available, this replaced the 2 pounder gun in infantry battalions. By early 1944, the 6 pounder had replaced all 2 pounder guns used by infantry battalions in the Italian and North West Europe campaigns. The guns were usually towed into battle by the Universal Carrier or the slightly larger Loyd Carrier.

Headquarters

- Carrier Universal
 - Captain, driver mechanic
- Motorcycle 1;
 - Subaltern;
- Motorcycle 2;
 - Captain's orderly.

- 15cwt truck GS 1 – Carries stores and 6 pdr ammunition;
 - Platoon Serjeant, Storeman, Batman Driver;
- 15cwt truck GS 2 – Carries fitters stores and 6 pdr ammunition
 - Vehicle Mechanic, Fitter R.E.M.E., Driver Batman.

Section 1

Detachment 1

- Loyd carrier 1 – Tows 6 pdr anti-tank gun, carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in four boxes and 2" mortar
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates as Gun Numbers, Driver Mechanic;
- Loyd carrier 2 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Corporal, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

Detachment 2

- Loyd carrier 3 – Tows a 6 pdr anti-tank gun and carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in 4 boxes, also carries a 2" mortar;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates as gun numbers, Driver Mechanic;
- Loyd carrier 4 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries a Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Private as Gun number, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

Section 2

Detachment 1

- Loyd carrier 1 – Tows 6 pdr anti-tank gun, carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in four boxes and 2" mortar
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates as Gun Numbers, Driver Mechanic;

- Loyd carrier 2 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Corporal, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

Detachment 2

- Loyd carrier 3 – Tows a 6 pdr anti-tank gun and carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in 4 boxes, also carries a 2" mortar;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates as gun numbers, Driver Mechanic;
- Loyd carrier 4 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries a Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Private as Gun number, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

Section 3

Detachment 1

- Loyd carrier 1 – Tows 6 pdr anti-tank gun, carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in four boxes and 2" mortar
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates as Gun Numbers, Driver Mechanic;
- Loyd carrier 2 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Corporal, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

Detachment 2

- Loyd carrier 3 – Tows a 6 pdr anti-tank gun and carries 24 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in 4 boxes, also carries a 2" mortar;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates as gun numbers, Driver Mechanic;

- Loyd carrier 4 – Carries 30 rounds of 6 pdr ammunition in boxes plus gun shields, also carries a Bren gun and No.2 cooker;
 - Private as Gun number, Driver Mechanic;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

The officers were armed with pistols, motorcycle orderlies and batmen were armed with Sten guns and others with rifles.

Mortar Platoon

During the early stages of the war, the Mortar Platoon comprised two sections of eight men, under the command of a Platoon Serjeant Major. The platoon had just two 3" mortars on the establishment. A Serjeant commanded each detachment and comprised one mortar, each detachment being carried in a 15 cwt truck.

The 3" mortar proved to be one of the most important pieces of armament available to an infantry battalion during the Second World War. An indication of this is how this element of an infantry battalion developed during the war. Starting off with just seventeen men and two mortars, it ended the war with six mortars (three sections of two mortars each) with one officer and forty-two other ranks.

The 3" mortar was a development of the Stokes Trench Mortar of the First World War. Rounds were loaded singly down the muzzle of the barrel. The mortar barrel weighed 44 lb, the base plate 37 lb and the mounting 45 lb. The range of the mortar bomb at the beginning of the war was 1,600 yards, but improved charges raised this by the end of the war to 2,800 yards. The minimum range was 275 yards but reduced to 125 yards during the war.

Headquarters

- Carrier, Universal – Carries Wireless Set 18 and Wireless Set 38;
 - Subaltern, vehicle mechanic REME, rangetaker, driver mechanic;
- Motorcycle 1;
 - Serjeant;

- Motorcycle 2;
 - Orderly;
- Motorcycle 3;
 - Orderly
- 15 cwt truck GS 1 – Carries 72 rounds of 3” mortar ammunition, two Wireless Sets No. 38 (spare) and a PIAT;
 - Corporal, batman driver
- 15 cwt truck GS 2 – Carries 72 rounds of 3” mortar ammunition, two Wireless Sets No. 38 (spare) and a PIAT;
 - Private, driver
- 15 cwt truck GS3 – Carries 72 rounds of 3” mortar ammunition, two Wireless Sets No. 38 (spare) and a PIAT;
 - Private, Driver;
- 3 ton lorry GS (from headquarters company) – Carries 324 rounds of 3” mortar ammunition;
 - Driver.

Section 1

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

Section 2

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

Section 3

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

Section 4

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

Section 5

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Serjeant, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

Section 6

- Carrier, Universal – Carries 3” mortar and 66 round of 3” mortar ammunition, also carries Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Corporal, 3 x Privates, Driver Mechanic.

Carrier Platoon

The advent of the Universal Carrier in 1940 was a key moment in the tactical development of infantry battalions. This began in the 1920's with the first development of tankettes for the British Army. This became in 1934 a light tracked vehicle produced by Vickers Armstrong as a commercial venture.

This first batch were intended as light artillery tractors, but one was modified to carry a machine gun and its crew. The suspension was similar to the Vicker's light tanks, with control through a vertical steering wheel.

The armoured front of the carrier contained a section on the left of the carrier jutting out forward in which a Bren gun could be mounted, hence the colloquial name of Bren gun carrier. The commander sat on the left (with the machine gun), the driver on the right. Behind the front compartment of the carrier, the engine compartment was down the middle, with compartments on either side in which men, equipment or supplies could be carried.

The variations in design were standardised in 1940 to produce the Universal Carrier, of which some 57,000 were manufactured by 1945. Canada produced about 29,000 during the war, with Australia producing a much smaller number.

Each infantry battalion in 1940 had ten Universal Carriers on strength. By 1944, this was increased to thirteen. In addition, by 1944 the mortar platoon and anti-tank platoons were equipped with Universal Carriers, making a total of thirty-three carriers per battalion.

Headquarters

- Carrier, Universal – Carries Wireless Set No. 18 and Wireless Set No. 38, also carries a Bren gun;
 - Captain, Batman, Driver Mechanic;
- 15 cwt truck GS 1 – Carries ammunition, blankets and greatcoats, also has Wireless Set No. 38;
 - Subaltern, Storeman, Batman Driver IC;
- 15 cwt truck GS 2 – Carries stores;
 - Vehicle Mechanic R.E.M.E., Driver IC;
- Motorcycle;
 - Platoon Serjeant;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly;
- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly.

The two officers carry revolvers, the batmen and motorcyclists carry a Sten gun, others carry rifles.

Section 1

- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly;
- Carrier, Universal 1 – carries Wireless Set No. 38, a Bren gun, a PIAT and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Serjeant, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

- Carrier, Universal 2 – Carries a Bren gun, a 2” mortar and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 3 – Carries a Bren gun and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic.

Section 2

- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly;
- Carrier, Universal 1 – carries Wireless Set No. 38, a Bren gun, a PIAT and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Serjeant, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 2 – Carries a Bren gun, a 2” mortar and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 3 – Carries a Bren gun and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic.

Section 3

- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly;
- Carrier, Universal 1 – carries Wireless Set No. 38, a Bren gun, a PIAT and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Serjeant, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 2 – Carries a Bren gun, a 2” mortar and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 3 – Carries a Bren gun and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic.

Section 4

- Motorcycle;
 - Orderly;
- Carrier, Universal 1 – carries Wireless Set No. 38, a Bren gun, a PIAT and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Serjeant, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;

- Carrier, Universal 2 – Carries a Bren gun, a 2” mortar and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic;
- Carrier, Universal 3 – Carries a Bren gun and a No. 2 cooker;
 - Corporal, 2 x Privates, Driver Mechanic.

Each carrier carries three rifles, one Sten gun and one Bren gun.

Pioneer Platoon

The Pioneer Platoon was usually commanded by a Platoon Serjeant Major, and provided two assault sections, in effect, battalion personnel trained to undertake simple engineering functions. This platoon had access to three vehicles, usually 8 cwt lorries. This platoon was also responsible for the anti-gas and decontamination duties for the battalion.

The 1944 War Establishment for the Pioneer Platoon was:

Headquarters:

- Car 5cwt 4 x 4 (jeep) – Tows a 10 cwt trailer;
 - Subaltern, 2 x Pioneers, Batman Driver;

Assault Section 1

- Car 5cwt 4 X 4 (Jeep) – Tows a 10 cwt trailer;
 - Corporal, 2 x Pioneers, Driver IC;

Assault Section 2

- Car 5cwt 4 X 4 (Jeep) – Tows a 10 cwt trailer;
 - Corporal, 2 x Pioneers, Driver IC;

At some point during the campaign in North West Europe, it was realised that the pioneer platoon jeeps were overcrowded and 5 x motorcycles were added:

- One for the headquarters which could be used by the subaltern for reconnaissance or liaison. It was used by a pioneer when the subaltern used the jeep;
- Two for each assault section. One was for the section corporal and one for a pioneer.

A section then was:

- Motorcycle;
 - Corporal;
- Motorcycle;
 - Pioneer;
- Car 5cwt 4 X 4 (Jeep) – Tows a 10 cwt trailer;
 - Pioneer, Driver IC.

Tradesmans section

- 3ton 4 X 4 GS – Carries pioneer tools and stores;
 - Serjeant, Bricklayer, 6 x Carpenters and joiners, Mason, Driver IC

Administrative Platoon

The Administrative Platoon provided the administration, supply and maintenance for the battalion. Included in the establishment of this platoon was the battalions motor pool (mainly 8 cwt and 15 cwt trucks), cooks, fitters and tradesmen necessary to keep the battalion working. In 1940, this platoon numbered three officers and ninety-four men, by 1944 it had reduced to two officers and fifty-one men.

The subaltern commanding the platoon was also the Transport Officer. The Quarter-Master might be senior to the subaltern but he was not a line officer. Most Quarter-Masters were promoted from the ranks, having long service and been Regimental Quarter-Master Serjeant or Regimental Serjeant Major. He was responsible for stores and supplies, and most good quarter-masters knew every official and unofficial way of getting the battalion equipment and stores.

- Motorcycle 1;
 - Transport Officer;
 -

- Motorcycle 2;
 - Transport Serjeant;

- Jeep – Tows 10cwt trailer;
 - Quarter-Master, Chief Clerk, Batman Driver;

- 15cwt GS truck – Carries reserve ammunition tows 10cwt trailer;
 - Sanitary Dutyman, Driver IC;
- 15cwt water truck;
 - Sanitary Dutyman, Driver IC;

- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 1 – Carries reserve ammunition and PIAT;
 - 2 x Sanitary Dutyman, Driver IC;
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 2 – Carries reserve ammunition and PIAT;
 - Equipment Repairer, Shoemaker R.A.O.C., Driver IC;
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 3 – Carries cooking sets and rations for H.Q. & Officers Mess;
 - Batman, 3 x Cooks, A.C.C., Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Bren gun & Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from Headquarters Company);
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 4 – Carries cooking sets and rations for Support Company;
 - 3 x Cooks, Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from Support Company);
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 5 – Carries cooking sets and rations for 'A' Company;
 - 2 x Cooks, Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from 'A' Company);
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 6 – Carries cooking sets and rations for 'B' Company;
 - 2 x Cooks, Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from 'B' Company)
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 7 – Carries cooking sets and rations for 'C' Company;
 - 2 x Cooks, Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from 'C' Company)
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 8 – Carries cooking sets and rations for 'D' Company;
 - 2 x Cooks, Driver IC;
 - (Also carries Company Quarter-Master Serjeant from 'D' Company);
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 9 – Carries petrol;
 - Clerk (MT duties), Vehicle Mechanic, Driver IC;

- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 10 – Carries Q.M. stores and Bren gun;
 - Regimental Quarter-Master Serjeant, Postman, Storeman, Serjeant Armourer R.E.M.E., Driver IC;
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 11 – Tows a water trailer;
 - Butchery Dutyman, Cook, Driver IC;
- 3ton 4 x 4 lorry GS 12 – Carries anti-gas stores;
 - Driver IC (acts as storeman for anti-gas stores);
- 3ton 4 x 4 with winch;
 - Serjeant Technical Storeman, 2 x Technical Storemen, Serjeant Vehicle Mechanic R.E.M.E., Vehicle Mechanic R.E.M.E. (acting as driver IC).

The Rifle Company

A rifle company was the basic fighting unit of a battalion.

Company Headquarters

- Major, company commander;
 - Captain, second-in-command;
 - Company Serjeant Major;
 - Company Quarter-Master Serjeant;
 - Corporal Clerk;
 - Driver Mechanic;
 - 2 x Batman Drivers;
 - 2 x Drivers IC;
 - 3 x Orderlies;
 - 1 x Storeman;
 - 2 x Snipers (until November 1944 when they went to battalion headquarters)
- Car 5cwt 4 X 4 (jeep);
 - Major, Driver IC
 - Carrier, Universal – Carries Wireless Set No. 18, 3 x PIATs, a Bren gun and a 2” mortar;
 - Driver Mechanic;
 - 15cwt GS truck 1;
 - Storeman, Driver IC;

- 15cwt GS truck 2
 - Company Serjeant Major, Corporal, Driver IC;
- 15cwt GS truck 3;
 - Clerk, Driver IC.

There were three bicycles for use by the orderly and two batmen. Officers carried revolvers, warrant officers, staff serjeants and batmen carried Sten guns, others carried rifles. The company quartermaster serjeant is carried in the transport of the administrative platoon.

Each of the three platoons in each rifle company had a subaltern as platoon commander. Prior to the commencement of the Second World War, there was a shortage of subalterns due to the rapid expansion of the army, so a new rank of Platoon Sergeant Major (Warrant Officer Class 3) was created in late 1938.

The infantry suffered the heaviest casualties of any of the arms of the British Army. In the campaign in North West Europe, officers suffered 26.5 casualties per 1,000 men, compared with a rate of 19.6 for Other Ranks. The most dangerous job in the British Army was that of platoon commander. Between June and November 1944, 30% of all platoon commanders became casualties each month. The attrition rate was considerable, so much so that between June 1944 and May 1945, only one platoon commander in the whole of the 3rd Infantry Division remained alive and unwounded. Only two officers with the 4th Bn. The King' Shropshire Light Infantry who celebrated VE Day had landed with the battalion in June 1944. Both had started as platoon commanders but ended the campaign as Majors and company commanders.

Each platoon comprised three sections, each of eight men commanded by a corporal or sometimes by a lance corporal. In April 1940, the War Office approved the expansion of a rifle section to ten men. This comprised the Corporal commanding the section, a Lance Corporal to command the Bren gun group of a Number 1 and Number 2 (loader), with the other six riflemen forming the rest of the section. It is not clear whether this increase in establishment came into effect prior to the German invasion of France and the Low Countries in May 1940.

Platoon Headquarters

- Second Lieutenant armed with a revolver;
- Serjeant with a Sten gun;
- Platoon commanders batman with a Wireless set No 38 and a rifle;
- Platoon commanders orderly with a rifle and a bicycle;
- 2" mortar group consisting of:
 - Lance corporal. Mortar group leader with rifle
 - Mortar No1 with 2" mortar
 - Mortar No2 with rifle

The mortar group leader and No2 carried twelve mortar bombs. The No1 carried six mortar bombs.

Rifle Section

The section of ten men was the basic unit of infantry.

- Corporal. Section commander with a Sten gun
- Rifle group of six men armed with rifles.
- Bren group of three men
 - Lance corporal, Bren group leader with rifle
 - Bren No1 with Bren gun
 - Bren No2 with rifle

Operations

War Establishments generally laid down an organisation for movement, which included a list of vehicles and the personnel that they carried. This is the organisation shown on the pages above. However, Training Manuals included an organisation for manoeuvre which arranged vehicles and personnel in the order in which they would be arranged for operations. For the infantry this included:

- 'R' Group or Reconnaissance Group;
- 'O' Group or Orders Group;
- 'F' Group or Fighting Group;
- 'T' Group or Transport Group.

These may vary for different operations. When deploying for action the following procedure was generally followed; the Brigadier commanding the infantry brigade would have been to division headquarters to receive his orders and then returned to his own headquarters. He would then set out on a reconnaissance of his front. He would be accompanied by:

- Brigade Intelligence Officer;
- Brigade Signal Officer;
- A wireless equipped signals vehicle to maintain contact with his headquarters;
- Despatch riders.

Battalion commanders and other unit commanders may also have accompanied him. While the brigadier was receiving his orders the battalion commanders and the commanders of any attached units would have been called to brigade headquarters. They would either accompany the Brigadier on his reconnaissance or await orders at headquarters.

The battalion commander would usually take his intelligence officer to brigade headquarters to attend the Order Group. They would take a signal vehicle and motorcyclists to maintain communications. The battalion adjutant would remain at battalion headquarters. The battalion commander might also take his company commanders to brigade headquarters. This was then the battalion Reconnaissance Group. While this small body was going on ahead the main body of the battalion required for the coming action would be approaching the assembly area. This was the battalion F Group. Any transport not required for the action was sent back to join the battalion rear headquarters and this was the T Group.

On return to the battalion area, the commanding officer would summon his own R Group and O group. This would consist of those officers who had attended the brigade R and O Groups plus the adjutant and any commanders of subordinate units. Company commanders would be taken to view the ground to be attacked or held plus the positions of flanking and supporting units. They would then be given information and orders at battalion headquarters.

At this time the F Groups were either approaching or were already at the assembly point under company second in commands. After the Commanding Officers order group officers would disperse to their various duties.

- The Adjutant and Signal Officer would choose the site for a command post and establish communications;
- The Second in Command would be arranging the rear headquarters and transport group;
- The Regimental Serjeant Major would be arranging the headquarters area setting up local defence and arranging ammunition supply;
- Company commanders would be holding R Groups and O Groups for their platoon commanders;
- The Medical Officer would be setting up a Regimental Aid post

By now, the rifle companies should be moving to the start line and the support company should be setting up their weapons. If there is an armoured unit in support the infantry and armour should at their various levels be arranging signals etc. All of this will take some time. A properly prepared action might require forty-eight hours planning and preparation.

The Sniper

The sniper was introduced into the War establishment of the infantry battalion in 1943. Originally, there were two per rifle company, but after the Normandy campaign, they were concentrated at battalion headquarters.

Snipers would be assigned to a sector of the battalion front and would then be very much free to decide on their exact positions. Usually leaving before dawn they would select a good position in which to spend the day, there being little chance to return to their own lines before dusk. Ideally, they would select a position from where they could see a section of the enemy line while remaining in good cover. They would also select a number of alternate positions since once they had revealed their presence by firing they could expect machine gun and mortar fire in reply.

The primary function of the sniper was to keep the enemy on edge, never knowing when they might be observed and fired at. The preferred targets were officers or NCOs and communications personnel, but anyone foolish enough to show himself was fair game.

Snipers used two types of rifle in 21 Army Group. The most accurate was the older Rifle No1 MkIII SMLE. However, in the interests of standardisation most rifles were the sniper version of the Rifle No4 (T). The rifle was fitted with a No. 32 MkI telescopic sight. Sniper rifles were carefully selected being provided with a breech cover and a felt valise to protect it from the elements and accidental damage. A special sling was also fitted to the rifle to enable it to be braced for aiming and firing.

Snipers used the standard ammunition pouches containing the following:

- 50 x .303" SAA rounds of ammunition selected by the sniper.
- 5 x tracer bullets
- 5 x armour piercing bullets
- 2 x No36 grenades

Other equipment included:

- A pair of No2 MkII binoculars in a carrying case
- A compass with carrying case

- A watch
- A camouflage net

The sniper could also have a camouflaged Denison smock as worn by paratroops.

In addition to sniping the sniper was a valuable source of intelligence. With his ability to get close to enemy positions, and to observe them with binoculars and telescopic sights, each man would have a detailed knowledge of the sector of the front, and could readily spot any changes. On return, the sniper was debriefed by the intelligence officer.

Of course, the sniper could be almost as unpopular with his own soldiers as he was with the enemy. A persistent sniper would almost certainly bring down mortar fire which would bring down artillery fire which would bring down counter battery fire and generally make life difficult.

Infantry Weapons

The British Army used only a limited range of infantry weapons throughout the war. The main weapon of the rifle section was the 'short' magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) 0.303 rifle. This was a bolt action rifle, with a ten round magazine. The bolt had to be drawn back and then pushed forward each time the rifle was to be fired.

First introduced in 1902, the main version in use at the commencement of the Second World War was the Rifle No. 1 Mark III. It weighed 8lb 11oz. Although in some terms this rifle was obsolete by the commencement of the war, it was still popular. Those manufactured pre-war were made to a high standard, they were reliable and accurate. The 0.303 bullet was ideally suitable for open warfare, but could be considered over-powered for urban warfare.

The SMLE was accurate over a range of about two-hundred and fifty yards, although its maximum range was about two-thousand yards. By 1944, the standard rifle in use by the British Army was the SMLE No 4. Mark I. This was slightly lighter than the No. 1 rifle, and slightly cheaper and easier to mass produce. The one drawback was the adjustable rear sights on the Rifle No. 1 were not continued on the No. 4 rifle. In battle, this was not much of a disadvantage as few infantrymen actually fired their rifles over any significant distance. Snipers who did require accuracy often continued to use the No. 1 rifle.

By 1944, the No. 4 rifle was in common use throughout the 21st Army Group from the landings in Normandy through to the end of the war. By early 1944, it was also the most common rifle in use during the Italian campaign. In Burma, however, use of the No. 1 rifle continued well into 1944.

The bayonet on the No. 1 rifle was a long, sword type bayonet. Experience showed that this type of bayonet was not so easy to pull out of a person who had been stabbed by one, and often it was desirable in close quarter combat to be able to reuse a bayonet quickly. Therefore, on the Rifle No. 4, a shorter 8" (20 cm) spike bayonet was introduced. This spike bayonet could also be fitted to the end of an entrenching tool and used as a mine probe.

Whilst the SMLE rifle was essentially the same as that used in the First World War, the light machine gun used by the British Army was new. The old Lewis gun was obsolete, with its performance during the 1914 – 1918 war was poor. In 1925, a competition was launched with a prize of £3,000 for a new weapon. The winner was the Czech 'ZB', so the British Army decided to adopt a modified version called the Gun, Machine Gun .303 Mk. 1.

Its more usual and colloquial name was simply, 'The Bren Gun'; this being derived from the first two letters of the town of Brno in Czechoslovakia where the gun was designed and the first two letters Enfield in Essex where it was manufactured.

The Bren gun fired the same .303 bullet used by the Lee-Enfield rifle, but used a thirty round magazine (although usually only twenty-eight were loaded). It weighed about 22 lb and was accurate over a range of five-hundred yards, but could reach two-thousand yards. It could be used in single or automatic types of fire, but it appears that most soldiers preferred the single type of fire as it was more accurate.

Officers, warrant officer and motorcyclists were issued with the .38" Revolver No2 Mk. I (Enfield) or Mk. IV (Webley). The Webley replaced the Enfield from 1942, but both were still in use. The revolver cylinder carried six rounds, and had to be reload singularly. The effective range was thirty yards, so only really in close combat. For this reason, several officers preferred to carry a standard SMLE rifle (which also had a bayonet) or the Sten gun. Sometimes this was carried as well as a revolver. A revolver was simple, effective weapon, but only in limited circumstances.

One area where the British Army did not have as effective a weapon as the German or U.S. Army was in the area of a sub-machine gun or carbine. The 9mm Sten sub-machine gun was designed in 1941. It was designed to be cheap and easy to manufacture, in practice, the early marks bordered on being crude. The main type in use was the Mark 2. The later Mark 5 had a hand grip and could be fitted with a bayonet if required. A thirty-two rounds straight magazine was fitted, so as the gun could fire at a rate of five-hundred and fifty rounds per minute, a magazine would only last for a couple of short bursts. The effective range of a Sten gun was about one-hundred yards, although in practice it was a close-quarter weapon.

The crude manufacture of the Sten gun produced some benefits and other disadvantages. It was quick and easy to produce so was plentiful in supply. It did not need oiling and could fire even when bone dry. The problem was the early versions were unreliable. I have come across an account where an officer armed with a Sten gun threw it at a Japanese patrol and survived when it failed to fire, which apparently was not uncommon.

It also had a tendency to fire at the slightest disturbance. I have read another account where a Regimental Sergeant Major (R.S.M.) jumped into a vehicle and placed his Sten gun, butt down, on the floorwell of the vehicle. The Sten gun discharged, with the bullet entering the face and head of the R.S.M., killing him instantly.

Sten guns were issued widely, in particular to non-commissioned officers, drivers and others who did not need a rifle or where a Sten gun was more practical. Stretcher bearers could be armed with Sten guns for self-defence. The principles behind the Sten gun survived the Second World War, to be incorporated into the 9 mm Sterling sub-machine gun, which lasted well into the 1980's.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the standard anti-tank weapon issued to infantry units was the Boys Anti-Tank rifle. This was in effect a rifle that fired a 0.55 bullet, which could penetrate 14 mm of armour, at 20 degrees, at a range of five-hundred yards. In 1939, these were issued at the rate of one per platoon.

The experience of the British Expeditionary Force in France showed that this weapon was obsolete by 1940. There were still in use in the U.K. until 1942 and in the Far East until 1943.

To replace the Boys Anti-Tank rifles, the Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank or PIAT was developed in 1942 and 1943. This fired anti-tank rockets to an effective range of one-hundred yards when used against armour. At that range, it could penetrate most armour then in service. For use against bunkers etc., the effective range was three-hundred yards. It proved to be highly accurate and was used against snipers, bunkers and other fortified positions.

A PIAT weighed 32 lb and was 39" in length. Although it was a one-man weapon, it was usually operated by two men as it had to be loaded with each individual projectile and 'cocked' each time before firing.

The 3" mortar has been covered above (see Mortar Platoon), but there was another type in use, this being the 2" mortar. This was platoon weapon which could fire high explosive or smoke. The explosive charge was negligible, so it was preferred to fire smoke grenades. This small mortar had a crew of two.

The gunner carried the mortar and a Sten gun, while the No. 2 carried the ammunition and a rifle. The practical range was five-hundred yards and four rounds a minute could be fired.

It was most often used to lay smoke. A smoke bomb could give two minutes of smoke and depending on the wind could give an effective smoke screen fifty yards long. A brave man could fire it horizontally from the hip, as was done by Lieutenant KNOWLAND, V.C. during the battle for Hill 270 at Kangaw in Burma. The official method was to place the mortar on the ground to fire it.

The British Army used three types of hand grenade. The first was the No. 36 grenade. This was the 'traditional' Mills Bomb. It was a fragmentation grenade, which sent steel fragments in all directions when it exploded. It was fused by pulling out the safety pin and releasing the lever. The fuse was timed for four seconds.

The second type was the No. 69 grenade. This was a high explosive grenade in a bakelite casing. The safety cap was removed and the grenade thrown. A weighted streamer unrolled as the grenade flew through the air and this primed the grenade which then exploded on impact.

The third type was the No. 77 grenade. This was a smoke grenade similar in operation to the No 69 grenade.

Markings

Infantry vehicles were not well marked when compared with some other units. All vehicles carried a divisional sign on the nearside front and rear and an arm of service sign on the offside front and rear.

The arm of service sign carried the code number of the battalion. The arm of service sign was a 9" square which was coloured:

- Red for the senior brigade
- Green for the second brigade
- Brown for the junior brigade.

Numbers were

Senior brigade

- Senior battalion 55
- Second battalion 56
- Junior battalion 57

Second brigade

- Senior battalion 60
- Second battalion 61
- Junior battalion 62

Junior brigade

- Senior battalion 67
- Second battalion 68
- Junior battalion 69

Apart from the above markings vehicles carried white stars. On the top surface these were in a circle. If possible, they were painted on the cab roof or bonnet. Carriers carried them on a removable metal plate or canvas disc over the spare wheel. Stars without circles were carried on the vehicle sides or cab doors.

Some units marked vehicles with letters or words which identified them to orderlies etc. 'Ammunition', 'Petrol' and 'LAD' were often carried front and rear to identify these vehicles. Bridge plates were carried on the vehicle front offside and census numbers were carried on the sides or doors.

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