

## Force Publique du Congo Belge <sup>(1)</sup>

1<sup>ère</sup> Brigade Coloniale <sup>(2)</sup>

Headquarters, 1<sup>ère</sup> Brigade Coloniale & Compagnie de Transmissions <sup>(3)</sup>

Compagnie de Défense <sup>(4)</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Regiment d'Infanterie <sup>(5)</sup>

(1, 2 and 8<sup>e</sup> Bataillons)

4<sup>er</sup> Regiment d'Infanterie <sup>(5)</sup>

(3, 4 and 10<sup>e</sup> Bataillons)

Chasseurs un Escadron Blinde <sup>(6)</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Regiment d'Artillerie <sup>(7)</sup>

*1<sup>er</sup> Compagnie Artillerie d'Infanterie* <sup>(8)</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Compagnie de Génie et Pontonniers <sup>(9)</sup>

Groupe de Transport <sup>(10)</sup>

Medical Hôpital Vol <sup>(11)</sup>

Hôpital Mobile <sup>(11)</sup>

3<sup>e</sup> Brigade Coloniale (12)

Headquarters, 3<sup>e</sup> Brigade Coloniale avec Compagnie de Transmissions (13)

4<sup>e</sup> Regiment d'Infanterie (14)

(5, 11 and 17<sup>e</sup> Bataillons)

3<sup>e</sup> Batterie d'Artillerie (15)

3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie Artillerie d'Infanterie (16)

3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de Génie et Pontonniers (17)

Groupe de Transport (18)

No. 1 Vol Hôpital (19)

No. 2 Vol Hôpital (19)

Hôpital Central Mobile (19)

## NOTES

1. Following the Fall of Belgium, the Belgian government fled to the United Kingdom, and established a government in exile in London. The Belgian colonies remained loyal to the Belgian government, the main one in Africa being the Belgian Congo. This included the former German colonies of Burundi and Rwanda, which were passed to Belgian sovereignty by the League of Nations, following the First World War. Within the Belgian Congo, there was a para-military police force, which was called the *Force Publique*. With the fall of Belgium, and the declaration of some French colonies in support of the new Vichy French government, the Force Publique was reorganised into three groups. The first group was based in Elisabethville, covering the provinces of Katanga and the Kasai. The second group was based in Leopoldville, and covered the western side of the country, and the third group was headquartered in Stanleyville, covering the provinces of the Orient and Kivu. Each group contained at least one regiment of infantry, each of three battalions. The first battalion, numbered 1 to 6, were the full-time, or regular unit of that regiment. The second battalions, numbered 7 to 12, were the first-line reserve units, and the third battalions, numbered 13 to 18, were the second-line reserve. In June 1940, the Force Publique reorganised into an operational force, with the creation of three brigades from the three groups. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades, numbering about 6,000 soldiers and 4,000 porters, saw active service in Nigeria, the Middle East, and in Italian East Africa. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade remained in the Belgian Congo. The officers (and some non-commissioned officers were white males, of Belgian nationality, or former members of the French Foreign Legion, while the soldiers and porters were Black Congolese. At the beginning of 1942, the Force Publique had a strength of 2,000 officers, 34,350 soldiers, 5,000 volunteers of the national guard, and 8,200 auxiliaries (porters).
2. This brigade was formed in June 1940 from the District du Nord, ie, the Northern District, from the First Group. The brigade numbered in total about 6,000 male soldiers, and 4,000 porters. It left the Congo in January 1941, to move to Nigeria, where it remained until April 1943. It reorganised in mid-1943, and moved to Egypt in September 1943 as the Middle East Expeditionary Corps, or the Belgian Colonial Brigade *Groupement de Brigade Coloniale Belge*. It served in North Africa and the Middle East until November 1944, when it returned to the Belgian Congo, to be absorbed back into the Force Publique.
3. The Headquarters had attached a signals company.
4. The Headquarters Defence Company had an anti-tank and machine gun platoon.
5. The organisation of the two regiments in this brigade is not confirmed yet, but they appear to comprise of three battalions. It appears that as part of the reorganisation in Nigeria in mid-1943, the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. became a support unit, equipped with twelve 37 mm anti-tank guns, twelve 81 mm mortars, and twelve .50 medium machine guns. The 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment appears to have been disbanded at this time, leaving the Brigade Group with one regiment under command.
6. When the brigade reorganised in mid-1943, it gained an armoured car squadron. It had twelve armoured cars, fitted with a 37 mm guns, and some self-propelled guns.
7. This colonial artillery unit had two batteries equipped with four C70 St. Chamond guns, and one battery with four 37 mm guns. There was also a battery of four C75 artillery guns, another with four C70 guns, and one light anti-aircraft battery with four 40 mm Bofors guns.
8. The Artillerie d'Infanterie was a mortar unit, with twelve 81 mm mortars. It appears it was incorporated into the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. in mid-1943, as its mortar platoon.

9. This was engineers and pioneers company for the brigade. In mid-1943, it was motorised, an engineers' materiel platoon added, and a water platoon.
10. The Groupe de Transport comprised the logistics, ordnance and transport elements of the brigade.
11. The medical services of the brigade comprised a field ambulance, and a field hospital.
12. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was formed in the Belgian Congo in June 1940, and moved to the Northern District in February 1941. Moving by boat, train, and on foot, the brigade advanced into Abyssinia to support the British invasion of Italian East Africa. Having assisted in the defeat of the Italians, it remained in Abyssinia until April 1942, when it returned to the Congo. It was disbanded in the Congo later that month, but was reformed in February 1944.
13. The brigade headquarters including a signals company.
14. The 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment originally had just the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, while the other two were mobilising and training for operations. The 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Abyssinia, with a third battalion (believed, but not confirmed, to be the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion) joining the brigade prior to the final offensive.
15. The artillery battery (the number is not confirmed) was equipped with four 7 cm St. Chamond pack howitzers, carried by mules.
16. The infantry artillery unit was a mortar company, equipped with twelve 81 mm mortars.
17. This was an engineers and pioneer company.
18. The Groupe de Transport comprised the logistics, ordnance and transport elements of the brigade. This brigade made use of porters and mules to carry supplies and equipment, in a similar manner to the West African units of the British Army.
19. The medical services of the brigade comprised two volunteer run field hospitals, and the equivalent of a field ambulance.

#### SOURCES:

VERANNEMAN, Jean-Michel  
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[ISBN 978-1-78377-607-0]

#### Website

WWII F

[www.ww2f.com/topic/18372-belgian-congo-in-wwii/](http://www.ww2f.com/topic/18372-belgian-congo-in-wwii/)

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[www.dday-overlord.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=35&t=2398&start=10](http://www.dday-overlord.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=35&t=2398&start=10)