

## The Royal Army Service Corps

The Royal Army Service Corps (R.A.S.C.) was the branch of the British Army responsible for the distribution of supplies to units in the field. Likewise, in the Indian Army, the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (R.I.A.S.C.) performed the same function. Both corps had the additional responsibility of transporting supplies as far as the front line, where individual units took over responsibility. The corps were also responsible for the administration and maintenance of barracks and quarters.

The R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C. did not issue or maintain weapons, military equipment, or ammunition as this was the responsibility of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. However, the R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C. did transport ammunition from Base Ordnance Depots to Forward Ammunition Points. It was also the task of the two corps to transport and distribute Petrol, Oil and Lubricants, often known simply as 'POL'. Just as important, the R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C. were responsible for supplying the food and water to keep the army personnel and animals fed and watered. The corps provided Field Butchery, Field Bakery and Cattle Conducting Sections. The two corps used vehicles, mules, and aircraft to keep the supplies moving. Railway and shipping transportation were the responsibility of the Royal Engineer Movements and Transportation Branch.

In the 1700's, when the British Army developed into a national army as we know it today, transport was provided by civilian contractors. The first attempt in 1795 to raise a uniformed unit to transport army supplies failed a year later. Another attempt was made during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but the Royal Waggon Train as it was known disbanded in 1833.

It was the Royal Commission formed after the Crimea War of 1854 – 1856 that galvanized further action. In 1855, the Land Transport Corps was formed (later to be called the Military Train), but supply remained the responsibility of uniformed civilians from the Commissariat Department. In 1869, the officers of the Military Train and Commissariat Department merged to form the Control Department. The following year, the Military Train was renamed the Army Service Corps. Various other changes took place during the 1870's and 80's, until finally in 1888 the various branches concerned with supply were merged into the new Army Service Corps.

The Army Service Corps was granted the prefix 'Royal' in 1918 in recognition of its service during the First World War. The R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C. were both highly mechanized by the beginning of the Second World War. The R.I.A.S.C. continued to maintain several Animal Transport units because of the nature of the terrain in the North West Frontier and later the Eastern Frontier of India and Burma.

The R.A.S.C. lost a large number of vehicles with the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force and it took a couple of years to make good the losses. The majority of vehicles used by the R.A.S.C. were British built, but Canada and the Commonwealth also provided a large number of vehicles used in North West Europe, Italy and in South East Asia. There were also problems in late 1944, when hundreds of British built 3 ton lorries were found to have defective engines. It was also discovered that most of the replacement engines in France and Belgium were also defective.

The basic unit within both the R.A.S.C. and R.I.A.S.C. was the Company, which was commanded by a Major. By 1943, the R.A.S.C. had developed a standard establishment for a Company, which was provided with increments depending on the role it was expected to deliver. In contrast to the highly detailed individual war establishment tables for R.A.S.C. units early in the war, there was now a single standard war establishment, and a list of variations for the different types of company. The transport platoon and section were also standardised so that companies could readily re-equip for a different role if required to do so.

#### HEADQUARTERS CRASC.

War Establishment II/261/3. April 1945.

This establishment table contains only five minor amendments from the previous war establishment II/261/2

This headquarters was designed to command and administer two to five transport companies. The companies were of a wide variety of types and could be used in a large number of roles.

#### Personnel

- Lieutenant Colonel, Commander Royal Army Service Corps,
- Major, ammunition, petrol and supplies,
- Major, repair and maintenance,
- Captain, Adjutant,
- 3 x Captains.

Whichever Major is senior will also be second in command

- Regimental Serjeant Major,
- Staff Serjeant Clerk,
- Serjeant Clerk,
- 3 x Corporal Clerks, including one for ammunition and one for supply duties,
- 3 x Privates,
- 7 x Drivers of vehicles,
- 2 x Batman,
- 4 x Batman Drivers,
- Office Orderly,
- Medical Officer's Orderly,
- 6 x Motorcyclists.

Total 37

#### Plus attached

- Medical Officer, Royal Army Medical Corps,
- 3 x Cooks, Army Catering Corps.

**Note:**

2 x Captains and 2 x Clerks may be used to form the nucleus of a new company for detached duty if necessary. Such a company would draw on the existing resources. When the Headquarters C.R.A.S.C. is serving an armoured division, an ammunition adviser Royal Armoured Corps is attached. When the Headquarters C.R.A.S.C. is serving an infantry division, an ammunition storeman is authorised.

## Headquarters of a Mechanical Transport Company

War Establishment II/262/3. March 1945

Designed to command and administer two to five transport platoons RASC. One or more relief driver increments will be added to provide additional drivers and/or loaders. Commodity platoons will be provided according to the role allotted to the unit.

This was a standard headquarters which could, with modifications where necessary, command any MT Company. The composition of the various types of company is shown below:

### Personnel

- Major,
- 2 x Captains,
- Subaltern,
- Company Serjeant Major,
- Company Quarter-Master Serjeant,
- Serjeant,
- Serjeant Clerk, Technical M.T.,
- 4 x Corporals,
- 3 x Lance Corporals,
- 25 x Drivers, Internal Combustion.

Total 40

### Attached

- Serjeant Cook, Army Catering Corps,
- Cook, Army Catering Corps.

Total 42

### Rank and file include

- Administrative Corporal,
- Batman,
- 2 x Batman Drivers,
- Butchery Dutyman,
- Corporal Clerk,
- 3 x Clerks,
- Lance Corporal Driver of vehicle,
- 4 x Drivers of vehicles,

- Corporal, light machine gun detachment,
- Lance Corporal, light machine gun detachment,
- 4 x Privates, light machine gun detachment,
- Lance Corporal Motorcyclist,
- 3 x Motorcyclists,
- Officers' Mess Orderly,
- Orderly,
- Corporal Regimental Policeman,
- Regimental Policeman,
- 2 x Sanitary Dutyman,
- Storeman,
- Water Dutyman.

#### First Reinforcements

- 2 x Rank and File.

#### Notes:

Captains are for allotment to duties with transport platoons as required. For every two transport platoons in excess of one, one captain and one batman will be added to this establishment, except when this headquarters forms part of an artillery company R.A.S.C.. One cook will be added for every two relief driver increments added. Two officers and four men will be trained in bomb reconnaissance duties. One N.C.O. and two men will be trained in anti-gas duties. One additional man will be trained in water duties, and two men will be trained in boot repair.

#### Transport

- 6 x Motorcycles,
- 1 x Car 4 seater 4 x 2,
- 4 x 15 cwt General Service,
- 4 x 3 ton 4 x 2 lorries,
- 1 x Water Trailer, 180 gallon

#### Weapons

- 2 x Bren light machine guns,
- 2 x PIAT anti-tank mortars.

Weapons are not issued when this headquarters forms part of a motor ambulance convoy or ambulance car company R.A.S.C..

## Armoured Brigade Company in an Armoured Division.

Transport for the carriage of 2nd line scales of ammunition, petrol and anti gas reserves, and of supplies on single echelon on unit basis for units of an armoured brigade.

Headquarters Mechanical Transport Company RASC

- 4 x Transport Platoons, each with five sections of 6 x 3 ton lorries (4 x 4) = 30,
- 1 x Transport Platoon, with five sections of 6 ton lorries (4 x 4 – 2 semi trailers),
- 1 x Composite Platoon with A, B, C and D increments,
- 3 x Relief Driver Increment,
- 1 x Workshop Platoon, Serial 5.

On account of its size this company headquarters varies from the basic organisation in having the following additions

- 2 x Captains,
- 2 x Batman,
- 2 x Cooks.

A serjeant, ammunition adviser Royal Armoured Corps is attached.

## Infantry Brigade Company in an Armoured Division

Transport for the carriage of 2nd line scales of ammunition, petrol and anti gas reserves, and of supplies on single echelon on unit basis for units of an infantry brigade, and transport for the carriage of blankets for the marching personnel of an infantry brigade.

### Headquarters Mechanical Transport Company RASC

- 3 x Transport Platoons, each of five sections of 6 x 3 ton lorries (4 X 4),
- 1 x Composite Platoon with A, B, C and D increments,
- 2 x Relief Driver Increments
- 1 x Workshop Platoon.

This company headquarters varies from the basic organisation in having the following additions

- 1 x Captain,
- 1 x Batman,
- 1 x Cook.



## Armoured Division Troops Company

Transport for the carriage of 2nd line scales of ammunition, petrol and anti-gas reserves, and of supplies on single echelon on unit basis for units of armoured divisional troops, and transport for the carriage of the marching personnel of three infantry battalions of the infantry brigade.

### Headquarters Mechanical Transport Company RASC

- 2 x Transport Platoons, each with five sections of 6 x 3 ton lorries (4 x 4),
- 2 x Transport Platoons, each with five sections of 6 x 3 ton troop carrying lorries (4 x 4 QLT),
- 1 x Composite Platoon with only A and B increments,
- 1 x General Duties Platoon,
- 2 x Relief Driver Increments,
- 1 x Workshop Platoon.

This company has a Captain and a Batman from the Royal Artillery attached to advise on ammunition. An extra jeep is provided.

## **Infantry Brigade Company in an Infantry Division**

The purpose is to provide transport for the carriage of second-line scales of ammunition, petrol and anti-gas reserves, and of supplies on single echelon on unit basis for units of an infantry brigade, and transport for the carriage of blankets for the marching personnel of an infantry brigade.

Headquarters Mechanical Transport Company RASC

- 2 x Transport Platoons, each with five sections of 6 x 3 ton lorries (4 X 4),
- 1 x Composite Platoon with A, B, C and D increments,
- 2 x Relief Driver Increments,
- 1 x Workshop Platoon.

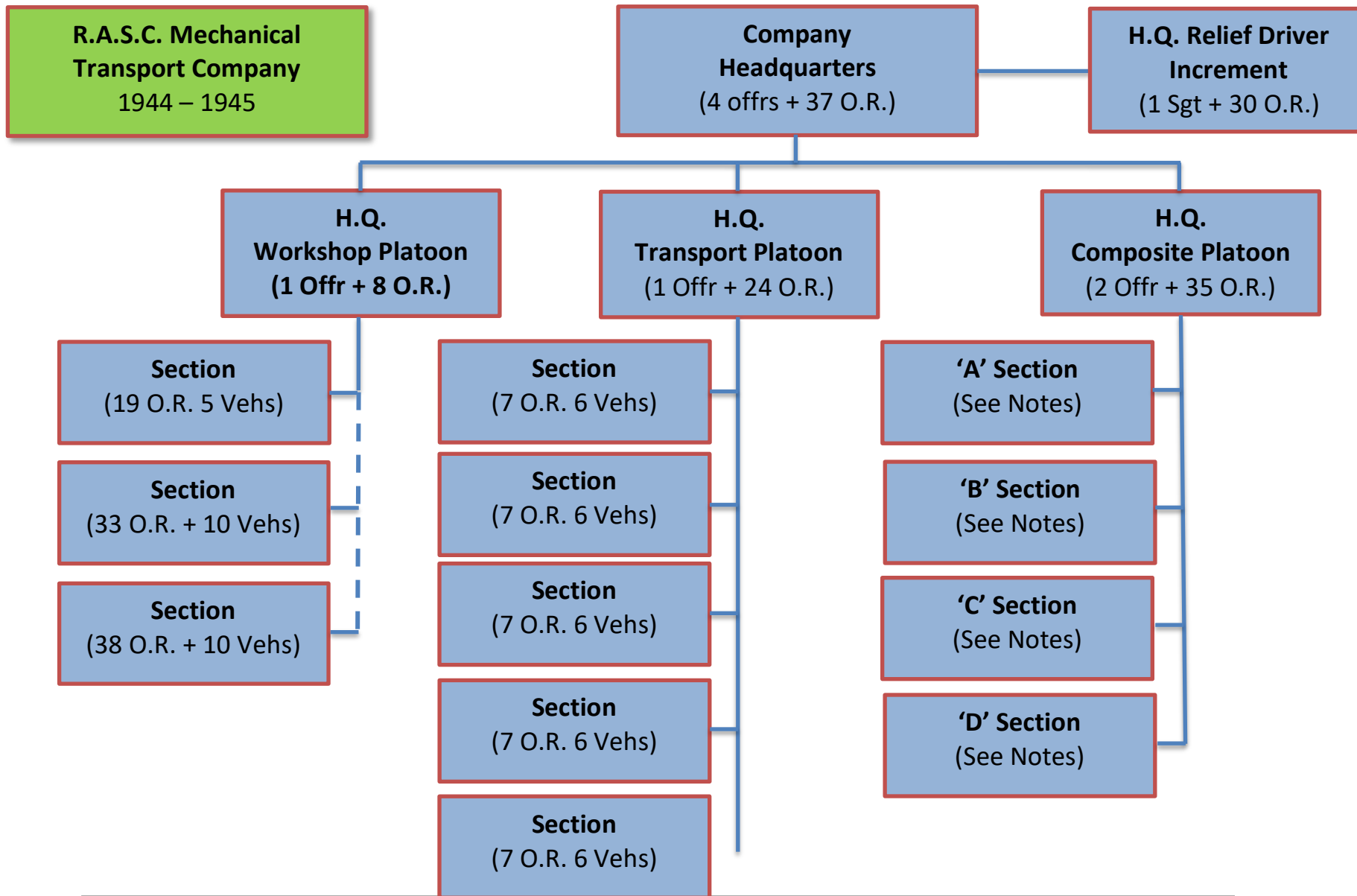
## **Infantry Division Troops Company**

The purpose is to provide transport for the carriage of second-line scales of ammunition, petrol and anti-gas reserves, and of supplies on single echelon on unit basis for units of the infantry divisional troops.

Headquarters Mechanical Transport Company RASC

- 2 x Transport Platoons, each with five sections of 6 x 3 ton lorries (4 x 4),
- 1 x Composite Platoon with A and B increments,
- 2 x Relief Driver Increments,
- 1 x Workshop Platoon.

This Company has a Captain and a Batman Royal Artillery attached to advise on ammunition. An extra jeep is provided.



## NOTES:

1. Each Transport Platoon operates 30 x 3 ton lorries capable of lifting one infantry battalion or 90 tons of stores.
2. The Composite Platoon holds personnel for ammunition, petrol and supply duties. One or more sections are allocated to M.T. Companies on these duties and are designed to provide personnel for issuing and accounting for these commodities.
3. 'A' Section of the Composite Platoon caters for the ammunition, petrol and supply duties for an independent unit up to the scale of a Royal Artillery regiment. 'B' Section increases 'A' Section to cater for a force of about 2,000 personnel, or an Armoured Regiment. 'C' Section increases 'A' and 'B' Sections to cater for a force of about 3,000 personnel, and 'D' Section increased the provision to cater for a Brigade level formation.
4. The Workshop Platoon carries out repairs and maintenance of the vehicles belonging to that Company. It is organised with a Platoon Headquarters and one or more sections, with a sliding scale of Tradesmen and vehicles.
5. The Relief Driver Increment is added as necessary to the H.Q. of a M.T. company.

## SOURCES:

Establishment tables from the National Archives kindly provided by Mile (aka Trux).

A notebook from a Brigade Major who served in Burma, kindly lent by Tom DONOVON.