

Tactical Structure in World War II

Belgium

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GENERAL

The Belgian Army emerged from the First World War as profoundly influenced by the presumed lessons of that conflict as the French. Convinced that firepower would henceforth be incontrovertibly ascendant over maneuver, the Belgians placed their faith in fortifications and a well-armed, if tactically sluggish, army. The basic tenets of Belgian Army doctrine can be summarized as (1) careful and methodical operations, (2) the dominance of firepower over movement, and (3) cooperation between the arms.

In defense the forces were to organize a succession or series of echelons of defense, using natural or man-made obstacles and ensuring full cooperation between the infantry and the artillery. In case of an enemy penetration of the front the textbook procedure was to first stabilize the breakthrough, then counterattack. This delay of the counterattack was in keeping with the emphasis on methodical operations but gave the enemy plenty of time to dig in along his flanks and prepare his own defense.

Periodic reviews of the Army's efforts to maintain an effective deterrence were held in the form of Mixed Commissions convened in 1920, 1928 and 1936. These commissions generally reflected the levels of concern at their times, with the 1920 Commission setting the groundwork for the inter-war Belgian defense plans but without any great sense of urgency, the 1928 Commission limiting itself to minor modifications and approving the procurement of a new family of weapons (without, however, providing the money for them), and the third starting to show some real concern for the state of the nation's defense.

As the Belgian defense plan finally crystallized before the German invasion, the linchpin was a strongly fortified line along the Albert Canal from Antwerp to the junction of the canal and the Meuse, then south and south-west along the river to Namur, forming a crescent with its open end to the west. At its eastern apex the line came to within about 20 kilometers of the German border and large areas of Limburg and Antwerp provinces in the north-east and the Ardennes area in the south-east were not covered by this line. These two areas were to be occupied by light mobile troops, cavalry in the north and the *Chasseurs Ardennais* in the south, which would slow any advance and force the development of the German attack. To this end the Belgians formed two cavalry divisions, mixed motorcycle and bicycle units, and two divisions of *Chasseurs Ardennais*, light infantry lacking artillery support. The center portions of the fortified crescent were to be held by the twelve active and first reserve infantry divisions. The northern flank of the line and internal security and lines of communications duties were to be

the responsibility of the second-reserve infantry divisions. The active and first reserve divisions were quite well equipped for their time, boasting a twelve-gun 47mm anti-tank company in each infantry regiment and two more in division support (including one self-propelled). The Belgians were among the first to provide their infantry with submachine guns and although artillery support at the division level was somewhat weak corps artillery could probably make up for the deficiencies. The second-reserve divisions, unfortunately, were a different matter entirely, lacking anti-tank guns entirely, very weak in artillery, and possessed of no corps artillery support.

The crescent defense line was anchored in three places by fortified areas, each manned by a brigade-sized unit in carefully prepared positions: the fortified regions of Antwerp, Liege and Namur. It had been envisioned that the Germans might well break through this line, so a second defensive line was created further back than ran from Antwerp to the east of, and then around south of, Brussels. Should a withdrawal to this line become necessary the cavalry would again be called upon to screen the infantry units from the brunt of the German assault until the second line was fully established.

During the years before the outbreak of World War II the Belgian Army enjoyed the enviable felicity of knowing both where and against whom their next war would almost certainly be fought. Facing a re-arming Germany they were able to draft comprehensive defense plans which, although they placed excessive reliance on the French as events turned out, were generally realistic given the manpower and budgetary limitations of the time. The Belgian emphasis on defense, however, was elevated to a virtual monopoly position in tactical thought by the political atmosphere of the time which demanded not only neutrality of Belgium, but ostentatiously nonthreatening neutrality. Indeed, the only tanks possessed by Belgium were twelve Renaults purchased in 1937, which were denounced in Parliament at the time as “offensive weapons” not suitable to Belgian neutrality, and which were allowed to rust in outdoor storage until 1940 because no one wanted them or knew what to do with them. With an infantry dominated by doctrines of defense and firepower and a cavalry shorn of all offensive capabilities in favor of light screening missions, the Belgians had to rely on the French to restore any tactical situation that went bad. Unfortunately, the French were little better prepared.

INFANTRY

Pre-War Structure

The interwar Belgian infantry was organized along triangular lines. Each of the three infantry regiments in the infantry division was made up of three infantry battalions, each of which in turn consisted of three rifle companies and a machine gun company. Until the 1937 reorganization each of the rifle companies had a wartime strength of 221 men divided into three platoons, each of which fielded four sections. An infantry section consisted of a sergeant section leader and two squads, a light machine gun squad of six men with an old Chauchat light machine gun, and a rifle grenadier squad of eight men one of its riflemen equipped with a French VB rifle grenade launcher. Thus, of the 63 men in each rifle platoon, only twenty (fire in each rifle grenadier squad) carried the designation riflemen, the rest being machine gun crew, grenadiers, ammunition bearers, NCOs, etc. The machine gun company had a wartime strength of 177 men in three platoons, each of which manned four water-cooled Maxim machine guns. There were no support weapons in the infantry regiment other than the battalion-level machine guns, such weapons being concentrated in divisional machine gun and heavy weapons battalions.

The rearming and increasingly aggressive posturing of Germany in the mid- and late-1930s forced a reexamination of the organization and equipment of the infantry. The resultant loosening of the purse strings allowed the replacement of a number of older weapons by items previously approved in 1926 but for which funds had not been available, including the old Model 1889 rifle with the Model 35 Mauser¹, the rifle grenade launchers with the DBT 50mm mortar with its range of 585 meters, and the adoption of the Schmeisser Model 34 submachine gun. Nor were the infantry heavy weapons neglected, their number being increased and control decentralized.

The new TO&E published in March 1937 abolished the old divisional machine gun and heavy weapons battalions and directed the formation instead of regimental heavy weapons battalions, each to consist of a machine gun company, a 76mm infantry gun company and a 47mm support/anti-tank company. In February of 1938 a bicycle reconnaissance platoon was added to the regiment and the number of platoons in the 47mm company was increased from two to three. These changes yielded a regiment with

¹ Production of the Mauser Modele 35, however, was slow in getting started and only about 40,000 to 45,000 had been built by FN by May 1940. To compensate about 100,000 old Model 1889 weapons were rechambered from 8mm to the new standard 7.65mm and otherwise modified by La Manufacture d'Armes de l'Etat and Anciens Etablissements Pieper and redesigned the Model 36. This sufficed for the needs of the active and first-reserve divisions, but the second-reserve formations continued to use the Model 1889, ex-German Mod.98, and assorted other older weapons.

a peacetime strength of 106 officers and 1,473 enlisted, with companies averaging 90 men.

There were eighteen such regiments in the active Belgian Army during peacetime, each of which was charged with the responsibility of supervising the training of and, if necessary, mobilization of a first-line reserve infantry regiment (which had the same organization and equipment as the active parent), a second-line infantry regiment (which retained the pre-1937 TO&E and hardware), and a depot regiment to provide training for recruits and a centralized replacement pool. Phase A of the mobilization, ordered on 26 August 1939, brought the active regiments up to wartime strength, Phase B (28 August) added reservists to fortress units, Phase C (1 September) activated the first-line reserve regiments and divisions, and Phase D (11 September) saw the activation of the second-line reserve units. Once mobilized the infantry regiments (eighteen of each type) formed six active, six first-line reserve and six second-line reserve infantry divisions.²

The Infantry Battalion

The wartime TO&E for the active and first-line reserve infantry provided for a rifle section made up of a sergeant, a five-man light machine gun squad armed with a pistol, four rifles and an FM30 light machine gun (a modified version of the BAR), and a rifle squad of six men, all armed with rifles. The rifle platoon was made up of a lieutenant, a bugler, a runner, four rifle sections, and a mortar section of a sergeant and three 3-man teams, each with a 50mm DBT light mortar. The rifle company had three rifle platoons and a headquarters platoon with command, resupply, and trains sections. The command section included a 3-man observer team and a 5-man signal team. The latter relied primarily on two 130mm signal lamps for communications, supplemented by the signal boards and flare pistols that were also distributed to the platoons and the observer team. For telephone communications the company had to rely on attachments from battalion HQ. The resupply section carried the company's ammunition reserve, including 200 hand grenades and 240 rounds of DBT ammunition, on its wagon and brought the ammunition forward using nine porters. The trains section was provided with a baggage truck and two 2-horse wagons for kitchen equipment and rations.

The battalion machine gun company was made up of a headquarters platoon and three machine gun platoons. The HQ platoon was generally similar to that of the rifle company, but added four more signallers and six range-finders to the command section and more than doubled the size of the resupply section to offset higher ammunition

² It should be noted, however, that a portion of these reservists had to be released because of damage to the national economy. Farmers were released for harvest, miners for coal, teachers for school terms, etc., all for varying lengths of time. Since the regiments were locally recruited this often wreaked havoc on unit integrity.

expenditure. The expanded signal squad enabled the company to operate its own telephone facilities, consisting of seven field phones and a six-line switchboard, along with two 130mm signal lamps.

The range-finder team operated an optical rangefinder with a .7 or .8 meter base and an aiming circle for indirect fire. Each of the MG platoons consisted of a lieutenant, a bugler, a runner, and two machine gun sections, each of which included a sergeant, a wagoner for an ammunition wagon, and two eight-man crews with Maxim machine guns. The platoons were capable of indirect fire, with each platoon HQ having simple FDC equipment, including a surveyor's plane table and an alidade, and each gun being equipped with aiming stakes with night lights. In the event, indirect fire does not seem to have been much used by the Belgian machine gunners, or by anybody else's machine gunners for that matter.

Company Headquarters Platoon	
Command Section	1 OFF: Company Commander (P) 1 SGT: Company Clerk (R) 2 CPL: 1 signaller (R), 1 observer (R) 7 PVT: 1 runner (SMG), 1 clerk (SMG), 4 signallers (R), 2 observers (R)
Resupply Section	1 SGT: section leader (R) 11 PVT: 1 armorer (R), 1 wagoner (R), 9 ammunition bearers (R) two horses and one wagon
Trains Section	2 SGT: 1 first sergeant * (P), 1 clerk (R) 1 CPL: general duty* (R) 8 PVT: 3 cooks (*1)(R), 1 tailor (R), 1 shoemaker (R), 2 wagoners (R), 1 driver (P) four horses and two wagons one baggage truck
Three Rifle Platoons, each	
Platoon Headquarters	1 OFF: Platoon leader (P) 2 PVT: 1 bugler (R), 1 gunner (R)
Four Rifle Sections, each	1 SGT: section leader (R)
Light Machine Gun Squad	1 CPL: Squad leader (R) 5 PVT: 1 gunner (LMG), 4 ammunition bearers (1 P, 3 R)
Rifle Squad	1 CPL: Squad leader (R) 5 PVT: riflemen (R)
Light Mortar Squad	1 SGT: Squad Leader 9 PVT: 3 gunners (50mm DBT & P), 6 ammunition bearers (R)
*on bicycle	
(P) = pistol, (SMG) = submachine gun, (R) = rifle	

Rifle Company, 1940

The infantry battalion headquarters was a relatively small unit, slightly less than half of whose members belonged to the 24-man signal section. This section manned eight field telephones and a ten-line switchboard. Presumably, some of these telephones with their personnel were to be attached to the rifle companies, as the companies had no organic telephone assets themselves. The section also manned three 130mm signal lamps and also had the usual complement of 25mm flare pistols, signal panels, and other miscellaneous equipment. In addition, each infantry battalion could expect the attachment of an *ERTP* transceiver for communication with the regiment HQ, along with personnel, from the divisional signal company. The battalion HQ was thus the lowest level of maneuver unit in the infantry division to have a radio. Transport for the battalion HQ consisted of a field car, four trucks (one each for equipment and baggage and two for tools), and two horse-drawn wagons (one for ammunition and one for signal equipment).

The Infantry Regiment Base

The headquarters of the infantry regiment consisted of four main functional groups, a staff section of about 35 men, a signal platoon of about 45 men, a band of 39 men, and a trains unit of about 20 men. The signal platoon manned eight field telephones and two ten-line switchboards, along with three 130mm signal lamps and the usual assortment of secondary assets. In addition, the platoon could expect the attachment of an ERTF transceiver and an ER receiver from divisional signals. Of the five horse-drawn wagons

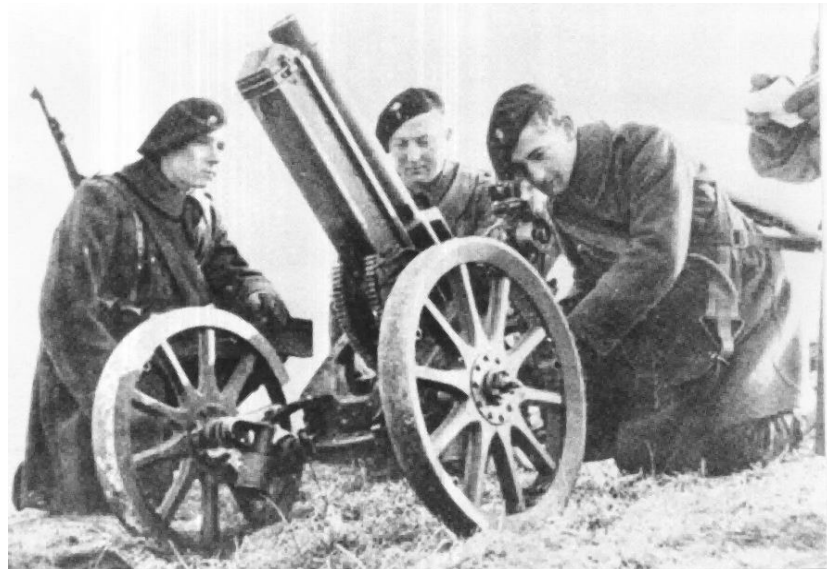
	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Pistols	Submachine Guns	Rifles	Light MGs	Medium MGs	50mm Mortars	47mm AT Guns	76mm Inf Howitzers	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Tractors	Horses & Mules	Wagons	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	10	40	92	23	0	119	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	2	2	0	12	5	24
Reconnaissance Platoon																			
Platoon HQ	1	0	6	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Two Bicycle Sections, each	0	1	16	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
Motorcycle Section	0	1	7	0	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Infantry Battalions, each																			
Battalion Headquarters	5	4	48	10	0	47	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	4	0	5	2	19
Three Rifle Companies, each																			
Headquarters Platoon																			
Command Group	1	1	10	1	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Supply Section	0	1	11	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Trains Section	0	2	9	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	2	4
Three Rifle Platoons, each																			
Platoon HQ	1	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Four Sections, each	0	1	12	2	0	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Section	0	1	9	4	0	6	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Machine Gun Company																			
Headquarters Platoon																			
Command Group	1	1	17	1	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Supply Section	0	4	30	1	0	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	1
Trains Section	0	2	9	2	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	2	3
Heavy Weapons Battalion																			
Battalion Headquarters	5	4	35	7	0	37	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	2	1	17
Machine Gun Company	4	13	164	43	0	138	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	20	6	13
<i>(as above)</i>																			
Anti-Tank Company																			
Headquarters Platoon																			
Command Group	1	3	6	3	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Trains Section	0	1	17	10	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Three Gun Platoons, each																			
Platoon HQ	1	0	12	3	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Two Sections, each	0	3	14	11	0	7	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Infantry Gun Company																			
Headquarters Platoon																			
Command Group	1	2	4	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Trains Section	0	1	12	1	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	8	2	1
Two Gun Platoons, each																			
Platoon HQ	1	1	14	1	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	4
Two Sections, each	0	3	24	11	0	16	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0
Medical Company	6	14	115	n/a	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	19

Infantry Regiment, 1940

held by regiment HQ, one was for signal equipment, two were for the mess section, and two for medical use. The HQ also had two light trucks (one for a forge and one for signal equipment), a fuel truck and a baggage truck. The regimental medical company was divided into platoons to serve on detached duty with the other elements of the regiment. There was a 35-man platoon (including 3 veterinarians) for the regiment HQ, a 33-man platoon for each infantry battalion, and a 4-man detachment for the heavy weapons battalion HQ. For reconnaissance the regiment had a cyclist platoon with two bicycle and one motorcycle squads. The NCOs in this platoon were equipped with submachine guns, the other ranks with rifles.

The regimental 47mm gun company was, at least as events transpired, primarily an anti-tank unit, although it could also be used with HE rounds in the infantry-support role. The company lacked sophisticated fire control equipment for indirect fire, that being the role of the 76mm company, but it could undertake such missions, with each gun having two sets of aiming stakes, with and without alidades, and night lights. Each platoon HQ also had a surveyor's plane table to direct fire. It was the only motorized formation in the regiment, relying entirely on motor transport for its mobility. Each gun section comprised a sergeant and two gun squads, each of a gun commander, three gun crewmen, three ammunition bearers, a tractor with a driver, and a gun. Platoon headquarters included a 7-man signal section with four telephones and a six-line switchboard, a reserve tractor, and a light truck. Company HQ included a mess section with a food truck and a kitchen trailer, two mechanics, a baggage truck, and seven reserve drivers. The basic operational unit was apparently meant to be the platoon, with the company HQ functioning as an administrative group, since the company HQ did not have any signal facilities with which to communicate with its platoons.

The regimental infantry gun company was equipped with small infantry howitzers³. Most of the regiments used the 7.6cm FRC model, which had a practical range of 2,000 meters, but a few



The Belgian 75mm infantry howitzer

³ The Belgians referred to these weapons as mortars, but they had the appearance of small field pieces with a two-wheeled axle, gunshield and split trails.

still used the 7.6cm A model with only half that range. With an elevation of 85 degrees these weapons could, however, be used for high-angle plunging fire like a conventional mortar. Although they could be used singly or in platoons the preferred unit of employment was the two-gun section, each of which consisted of a sergeant section leader and two gun squads, each of a gun commander, a four-man gun crew, seven ammunition bearers, and an animal handler with a two-horse team towing a caisson and the gun. The more sophisticated fire control equipment was held at platoon HQ, with each platoon having an aiming circle and plotting table, but each gun had an alidade and the company had a spare aiming circle and plane table to permit section firing.

Each platoon was provided with a total of 400 rounds of ammunition as its basic load, 80 for the caisson of each gun and another 80 in the caisson in platoon HQ. Platoon headquarters also included an FDC specialist, two observers, and an eight-man signal section with five field telephones and a six-line switchboard, with a 140mm signal lamp as a backup. Companies equipped with the older 7.6cm A model weapons were similarly organized, but the signal personnel were concentrated in the company HQ, as was the off-piece ammunition reserve, which was held in a wagon in company HQ rather than the platoon HQ caissons.

The headquarters of the regimental heavy weapons battalion was somewhat smaller than that of the infantry battalions, and included a 16-man signal section, three motorcyclists, three observers, and drivers for the baggage truck and the signal wagon. Signal assets consisted only of four field telephones and a six-line switchboard and two signal flare pistols. There were no radios in the divisional radio company earmarked for this HQ. The battalion HQ also operated a primitive meteorological service with a thermometer, an anemometer and a barometer for computing met corrections for the infantry howitzers and, in some roles, for the 47mm guns.

In combat the infantry gun and anti-tank companies were broken up and the platoons detached to serve with the infantry battalions, as were some of the components of the machine gun company, leaving the weapons battalion with only one or two machine gun platoons. To capitalize on the potential flexibility this offered the Belgians often practiced cross-attachments in which a rifle company or two from the infantry battalions would be attached to the heavy weapons battalion HQ to form a maneuver grouping known as the fourth battalion. Such practices usually ended after attrition had reduced regimental strength to the point where the three regular infantry battalions needed replacements to retain their effectiveness.

The Infantry Division

Fire support for the division was provided by the artillery regiment, which consisted of three battalions of 75mm field guns (two of type TR and one of type GP) and one of

105mm Rheinmetall M16 howitzers. The battalions were identically organized, consisting of a headquarters and three horse-drawn batteries. The battalion HQ included a 36-man signal section and a machine gun platoon. The former operated twelve field telephones and three switchboards, while the latter provided three bicycle-mounted sections

(each of a sergeant, a corporal and four 2-man teams with BARs) and two motorized sections (each of a sergeant, four corporals, twelve gun crew and two drivers with two light trucks and four medium MGs). These MG sections were distributed to the batteries and the battalion CP as needed for air and close defense.



Weary artillerymen with their 75mm field guns in retreat.

The battery was divided into three groups, a firing battery, a resupply echelon and a trains echelon. The firing battery included the forward command personnel, including the battery commander, four sergeant observers on bicycles, and a sergeant fire direction specialist, along with an eleven-man signal section with eight telephones, a ten-line switchboard, and two 130mm signal lamps.

Back at the gun position were to gun sections, each under the command of a lieutenant, manning two 75mm guns or 105mm howitzers, and taking their orders by telephone from the commander and sergeants forward. Neither the battalion HQ nor the batteries carried substantial reserves of ammunition, the former having no stocks and the latter only that carried in the eight caissons, an arrangement felt suitable for the static warfare envisioned. Ammunition for the regiment was instead carried in the artillery ammunition platoons of the divisional transport group.

The artillery regiment HQ included a signal platoon that manned fourteen telephones and two ten-line switchboards, but the most modern signal facilities were supplied by attachment from the divisional radio company. The radio company included an artillery support group that manned an ERP Model 36 transceiver and an RP receiver for the regiment HQ and an ERTF short-range transceiver and a receiver for each battalion HQ, the connection between the observers at the front and the guns relying on wire.

The divisional reconnaissance formation was the bicycle squadron, consisting of a headquarters platoon, three rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon. The bicycle rifle platoon was made up of a platoon leader, a bugler, two dispatch riders (one on a motorcycle), a mechanic, and two soldiers to guard the bicycles when the platoon dismounted, plus four rifle sections. Each of these sections had a sergeant section leader, a 5-man squad with a light machine gun and a 5-man squad of riflemen. The machine gun platoon had a ten-man HQ and two sections each of 16 men with two medium machine guns, with the two MGs, but not the troops, carried on a light truck. Squadron HQ was divided into a 15-man HQ section (including 7 signallers and 3 observers), an ammunition train with a truck, and a field train with a kitchen truck and a baggage truck. Signal facilities for the squadron were limited to two field telephones, with no specified radio attachments from the divisional radio company, which must have severely limited their ability to deliver timely information to the division commander.

Anti-tank protection for the division was provided by the three regimental 47mm companies and, nominally at least, two more at division level. The divisional towed company, present in all the active and first reserve divisions, was identical to that in the regimental heavy weapons battalion except that a light truck was assigned to each gun in addition to the gun-towing tractor to increase the independence of the unit. The other divisional company was self-propelled using 47mm guns on Carden-Loyd chassis, known as T.13s. This company was not, in fact, present in three of the active divisions or any of the first reserve divisions. It had a nominal organization of three platoons each of two 2-gun sections, but in fact most of the companies seem to have received only about eight weapons. The TO&E called for each platoon to have four SP guns with their crews (with the platoon leader doubling as one of the vehicle commanders), a field car, a motorcycle, and two light trucks. Company headquarters included four signallers, three motorcyclists, a field car for the commander, and three trucks (one each for fuel, baggage, and the kitchen). The self-propelled company had no signal facilities of any kind other than 25mm signal flare pistols.

Divisional engineers were formed into a battalion of two companies and an engineer equipment park. The basic work unit was the section, consisting of a sergeant, a corporal and 18 privates. Three of these formed a platoon, along with the platoon HQ that included two 2-horse wagons for tools and a light truck for sandbags, equipment, etc,

giving a total platoon strength of 70 men. The pioneer company consisted of three such platoons plus a headquarters platoon with a further small pool of tools carried in a 4-horse wagon and another 4-horse wagon carrying rafting materials. The engineer park platoon provided ten heavy trucks (2 for explosives, 2 for AT mines, 2 for entrenching equipment, 1 for bridging equipment, 1 for reserve tools, and 2 with pneumatic tools towing air compressors on trailers) and eight light trucks carrying foot-bridge sections.

The division transport group was composed of a variety of transport units, including five ammunition platoons, a general supply platoon, and an AA machine gun company. One of the ammunition platoons had 51 men with six light and twelve heavy trucks carrying ammunition for the two battalions of 75mm TR guns; one had 61 men with six light and fifteen heavy trucks servicing the 75mm GP and 105mm battalions; one had 57 men with 18 heavy trucks for infantry ammunition (5 for small arms, 3 for 76mm, 9 for 47mm, 1 for machine guns); one had 58 men with 19 trucks for infantry ammunition (6 for small arms, 3 for 76mm, 9 for 47mm, 1 for flares); and one had 97 men with 19 two-horse wagons and 10 four-horse wagons for infantry ammunition plus 15 more two-horse wagons in reserve.

The general supply platoon provided thirty trucks for rations (generally on the ratio of two trucks for each artillery battalion and one truck for each other battalion-equivalent) and twenty-one trucks for other supplies, such as antigas equipment, fuel, etc.

The most notable feature of the transport group was the anti-aircraft machine gun company, which consisted of four platoons, each of 24 men with four machine guns carried on two light trucks. This was supposed to provide air defense protection for the supply columns of the transport group, but the utility of rifle-caliber machine guns in this role is doubtful. It had been planned to equip these units with French 13.2mm weapons, but the funds had not been made available and the first 88 weapons were not ordered until February 1940 and none seem to have been delivered before the start of the campaign.

The infantry divisions of the active army and the first reserve were reasonably well organized and equipped for the type of war they were expecting. With four or five anti-tank companies per division, equipped with sound, modern weapons, they were as well equipped as any infantry divisions in the world and better equipped than most. Forward observer teams were present at almost all levels to ensure close liaison with supporting divisional artillery which, although slightly weaker than its opposing German counterparts, appear to have been well trained. Their reliance on wire communications, however, limited their usefulness in fluid operations. Infantry weapons were generally of good quality and individual equipment practical.

Unfortunately, the war into which these divisions were thrust was not that for which they had been designed. Frequent and rapid movements dislocated their scanty and largely immobile communications nets, reconnaissance proved inadequate and the neglect of maneuver as a combat technique in favor of firepower served them ill once the highly mobile German columns broke through their lines. Largely incapable of mounting coordinated large-scale counterattacks on short notice, they could only retreat in the face of the German advance, hoping to stabilize the situation at the succeeding defensive position.

The Second-Reserve Divisions

The units formed by the second expansion of the army in 1939 were grouped into six infantry divisions of the second reserve. The second reserve infantry divisions consisted of three infantry regiments, a bicycle battalion, a weak artillery regiment and division services. The rifle platoon of the second reserve retained the pre-reorganization composition of the 1930s, not a surprising feature considering these divisions were largely equipped with arms rendered surplus by the re-equipment programs of 1935-40. Except for the retention of the rifle grenade launcher and the absence of the 50mm mortar the rifle company was identical to that of the active division. The battalion machine gun company was similar to that of the active infantry, but in some cases the caissons used to transport the weapons were exchanged for light trucks. None of the regimental support companies found in the active regiments were present in the second-reserve regiments, while the regimental reconnaissance platoon lost its motorcycle unit and a truck and four men from its HQ.

The artillery regiment of the division was reduced to two battalions of 75mm guns. The guns were the TR model in three of the divisions and the longer-ranged GP version in the other three.

The only element of the second-reserve division that was stronger than its active counterpart was the reconnaissance unit, which was upgraded to a battalion. The bicycle platoons were similar to those of the active division's bicycle squadron but lacked the motorcycle in platoon HQ and added a two-man rifle grenade team to each rifle squad. The bicycle squadron lacked the machine gun platoon of the active bicycle squadron and as a result lost six of the twelve

Division Headquarters
Signal Company (148)
Bicycle Battalion (625)
Headquarters (67)
Two Rifle Squadrons, each (209) [12 LMG]
Machine Gun Squadron (140) [8 MG]
Three Infantry Regiments , each (3,092)
Regiment Headquarters (126)
Reconnaissance Platoon (37)
Three Infantry Battalions (938)
Headquarters (88)
Three Rifle Companies, each (224) [12 LMG]
Machine Gun Company (178) [12 MG]
Medical Company (115)
Artillery Regiment (1,280)
Regiment Headquarters (32)
Two Field Gun Battalions, each (624)
Headquarters (180)
Three Batteries, each (148) [4 75mm guns]
Engineer Battalion (526)
Headquarters (42)
Two Engineer Companies, each (242)
Transport Group (300)
Intendance Company (110)
Ambulance Unit (80)
Total 12,100 men

Infantry Division, Second Reserve, 1940

ammunition bearers in the ammunition trains. The loss of the machine gun platoons was compensated for by the presence of the machine gun squadron, made up of four platoons, each with 24 men, two medium machine guns and a truck.

Much weaker than its active and first-reserve counterparts in terms of firepower, training and logistic support, the second-reserve divisions had been earmarked for the less trying roles of lines of communications security and duty in the quiet sectors of the front. Of the six second-reserve divisions one was in GHQ reserve garrisoning Ghent and guarding the coast, three were in defenses around Antwerp well inside the country, one was providing a covering screen east of Antwerp to the Dutch border, and one was defending the Albert Canal north of Hasselt. The latter was the only one of the divisions likely to meet the Germans head on, and even it was not in the main path of the German advance. As events transpired, of course, the successive lines of defense fell and the second-reserve divisions had to be thrown into the breach to try and stem the German flow. That they were not notably successful is not surprising given their shortcomings, and they probably continued to exist at all only because the Germans did not use many tanks against the Belgians, for the second-reserve divisions did not have a single anti-tank gun among them.

Plans for the Ardennes

Initial Belgian defense plans called for the Army to contest the Ardennes, and for this purpose they raised two special light divisions, known as the *Chasseurs Ardennais*. The Ardennes were widely regarded as impassible to heavy weapons which would be canalized along the few roads through the forest. It was felt that thus knowing the specific routes of advance of the enemy would enable demolitions to take the place of heavy weapons. Some 322 separate demolitions were planned for the Ardennes and the primary role of the *Chasseurs Ardennais* was to cover these demolitions to prevent the Germans from circumventing or repairing them.

The *Chasseurs Ardennais* went through several reorganizations, there being two major changes in 1937 alone. Although they were recently formed, the first such unit being raised in 1933 through the redesignation and reorganization of the 10th Regiment of Line, expansion was fairly rapid. By early 1937 the *Chasseurs Ardennais* Division had been formed, consisting of three regiments, each of three infantry battalions, a mixed battalion, two bicycle rifle companies of reservists, a 76mm infantry gun company, and an armored car company. Each of the infantry battalions was made up of three rifle companies and a machine gun company. The rifle company had three platoons, each of three rifle sections and a 50mm DBT mortar squad, each rifle section consisting of a light machine gun squad (with two light MGs) and a rifle squad, and the mortar squad with three light mortars. The machine gun company was made up of four platoons, each of two 2-gun sections.

By mid-1937 the *Chasseurs Ardennais* had been again reorganized, this time to consist of three regiments and three groups. Each of the regiments consisted of an infantry battalion, a mixed battalion, and a reserve mixed battalion. The infantry battalion had the same organization as before, while the mixed battalion consisted of two bicycle companies, a rifle company and a weapons company. The cyclist company had two rifle platoons, similar to those in the rifle company but with bicycles, and a machine gun platoon of three 2-gun sections. The weapons company consisted of a machine gun platoon with two 2-gun sections, an anti-tank platoon with four 47mm guns towed by light trucks, an armored car section of two vehicles, and an infantry gun section with two 76mm weapons. The reserve mixed battalion was similar to its active counterpart but lacked the rifle company and portions of the weapons company. Each of the *Chasseurs Ardennais* groups was made up of two infantry battalions, a 76mm infantry gun company with two 4-gun platoons, and an armored car company made up of an armored car platoon with four T.15s and an anti-tank platoon with six T.13s. In addition to the three regiments and three groups the division also now included a 75mm artillery battalion with three 6-gun batteries.

Reworking the Chasseurs Ardennais

This organization proved unwieldy and was completely reworked on mobilization in 1939. The main reason appears to have been the inability of the regiment level active duty soldiers to devote sufficient time to master the complexity of reserve mobilization, but it also seems likely that the six maneuver groupings under division HQ exceeded the commander's span of control. As a result, the *Chasseurs Ardennais* were expanded to a corps, denominated the VII Corps, consisting of two divisions and support troops. The first division, which was assigned the task of covering the Ardennes forest, consisted of active-duty troops on bicycles, while the second division, made up of the *Chasseurs Ardennais* reservists, was assigned to the field army.

The combat power of the First Division was concentrated entirely in its three bicycle regiments, each of which consisted of three cyclist battalions, a motorcycle company, and an anti-tank company. Unlike the regular or bicycle infantry, the *ChA* bicycle platoon was made up of two large rifle sections (rather than four smaller ones) and a mortar squad. Each of these sections consisted of a sergeant, a light machine gun squad and a rifle squad. The LMG squad had a sergeant, two 2-man LMG teams and a five-man ammunition detail, while the rifle squad was made up of a corporal and three riflemen (one of whom had a Schmeisser submachine gun).

Platoon headquarters was made up of the platoon leader, a bugler, a dispatch rider, a bicycle mechanic, and two bicycle guards for when the platoon left its bicycles behind to fight on foot. In addition to the three rifle platoons, each cyclist *ChA* company included a

machine gun platoon with two sections, each of a sergeant and two eight-man crews with a motortricycle for each gun. Platoon headquarters was similar to that of the rifle platoon, but included a reserve motortricycle with a driver. Company headquarters included a seven-man signal section, five observers and four motorcyclists in the HQ section, three light trucks for resupply, and two for trains use (one for baggage and one for a kitchen). The company signal section manned two 130mm signal lamps and presumably also took over telephones assigned by the battalion HQ.

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	50mm Mortars	T.15 Tankettes	T.13 47mm SP Anti-Tank	Motorcycles	Motortricycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	8	12	90	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	9	11	2	24
Three Cyclist Battalions, each														
Battalion Headquarters	5	6	46	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	2	3	46
Three Mixed Companies, each														
Headquarters Platoon														
Command Group	1	1	18	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	16
Supply Section	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	7
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8
Three Rifle Platoons, each														
Platoon HQ	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Two Sections, each	0	2	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Mortar Section	0	1	9	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Machine Gun Platoon														
Platoon HQ	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6
Two MG Sections, each	0	1	16	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	15
Motorcycle Company														
Headquarters Platoon														
Command Group	1	1	22	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	1	1	0	0
Maintenance Section	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Trains Section	0	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each														
Platoon HQ	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	0
Two Sections, each	0	1	19	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
Armored Car Platoon	1	2	14	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
Anti-Tank Company														
Headquarters Platoon														
Command Group	1	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0
Four AT Platoons, each														
Platoon HQ	1	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Two AT Sections, each	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Company	5	15	112	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	101

Chasseurs Ardennais Cyclist Regiment, 1940

The regimental motorcycle company was similar to the bicycle companies in having a platoon with two rifle sections, but lacked the 50mm mortar squad. Each of the rifle sections was made up of a headquarters (sergeant and driver on a solo motorcycle), two LMG squads (each of a corporal, two gunners and two drivers on two sidecar motorcycles), and a rifle squad (a corporal, three riflemen, one with a submachine gun, and four drivers with solo motorcycles). The platoon headquarters included a motortricycle for reserve fuel and two light trucks. The motorcycle company also had an armored car platoon with three T.15 tankettes, two light trucks, and a solo motorcycle. Organic signal assets for the company were limited to signal discs and flare pistols.

The anti-tank company nominally consisted of four platoons each of two 2-gun sections, but at least one of the companies (that of the 1st Regiment) went into the 1940 campaign with only two T.13s per platoon. In addition to the four guns the TO&E called for each platoon to have a field car, one truck each for fuel, kitchen and baggage, and four light trucks. The company used flare pistols for signaling.

The regiment HQ proved eight light trucks and a 35-man signal section. The signal section provided two ERP transceivers to each battalion (one for the forward command post and one for the rear echelon CP), another for the motorcycle company, and three more for the regiment HQ (one forward and two rear), as well as a longer-range ERM transceiver (forward) and two RP receivers (one forward, one rear) as well as eight telephones and two 10-line switchboards. These assets complemented those of the battalion HQs, which maintained thirty field telephones and six switchboards for distribution to subordinate units.

The Second *Chasseurs Ardennais* Division was almost identical to the first, consisting of three line regiments with no combat support units. Each of the three *ChA* regiments consisted of a bicycle battalion (identical to those in the First Division), two non-bicycle *ChA* battalions, an infantry gun company and an anti-tank company. The rifle platoon of the mixed *ChA* company was identical to that of the bicycle version but lacked the three men in the platoon HQ (the mechanic and the two bicycle guards) that were not necessary without the bicycles. The machine gun platoon was also similar but substituted a light truck in each section for the motortricycles of the bicycle company.

The regimental infantry gun company consisted of two platoons, each with four 76mm FRC weapons. The platoon HQ included the platoon leader (on a bicycle), an eight-man signal section (with three bicycles, five telephones and a switchboard), two observers, an FDC specialist, a sergeant, a bugler, a runner and a driver with a light truck. The platoon was divided into two sections, each with a section sergeant, two 12-man gun crews, and two drivers with light trucks.

Initially, the 47mm company had been a mixed unit with two platoons each with four towed guns, one platoon with two T.13 SP guns, and a motorcycle surveyor/scout platoons, but during late 1939 the organization had been changed to delete the SP guns and the motorcyclists. Each of the remaining two platoons was divided into two sections and an HQ element. Each section had a section sergeant, two 4-man gun crews each with a gun tractor, and two 4-man supply teams each with a tractor and caisson. The platoon

HQ consisted of the platoon leader and a driver on a sidecar motorcycle, a bugler on a solo motorcycle, a driver with a reserve tractor and caisson, and a seven-man signal

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	50mm Mortars	47mm AT Guns	76mm Inf Howitzers	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	9	36	94	0	0	0	0	0	7	8	2	2	24
Cyclist Battalion	20	69	625	36	12	18	0	0	24	2	8	12	636
<i>(as in Chasseurs Ardennais Cyclist Regiment)</i>													
Two Infantry Battalions, each													
Battalion Headquarters	5	6	46	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	3	22
Three Mixed Companies, each													
Headquarters Platoon													
Command Group	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Supply Section	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Three Rifle Platoons, each													
Platoon HQ	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two Sections, each	0	2	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Section	0	1	9	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Machine Gun Platoon													
Platoon HQ	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Two MG Sections, each	0	1	15	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Anti-Tank Company													
Headquarters Platoon													
Command Group	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Maintenance Section	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0
Two AT Platoons, each													
Platoon HQ	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	0
Two Gun Sections, each	0	3	14	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	4	0
Infantry Gun Company													
Company Headquarters	1	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Two Gun Platoons, each													
Platoon HQ	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Two Gun Sections, each	0	3	24	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Medical Company	5	15	112	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	46

Chasseurs Ardennais Regiment, 1940

section on one solo and two sidecar motorcycles. Company HQ included three

mechanics on sidecar motorcycles, a light truck carrying fuel, and trucks for ammunition, baggage and kitchen.

The Chasseurs Ardennais Corps

Corps support for the two *Chasseurs Ardennais* divisions was to be provided by an artillery regiment and a motorcycle battalion. The latter had been formed in 1939 and consisted of two rifle companies and a heavy weapons company. The motorcycle company was generally similar to that of the 1st *ChA* Division's regiments but with a 50mm mortar squad replacing the armored car platoon. This squad was made up of a sergeant, two drivers and three 2-man teams on two motortricycles. Within the rifle platoons the rifle squad lost a driver and saw two of its four solo motorcycles replaced by a sidecar motorcycle. In platoon HQ the mechanic and one of the drivers were deleted and the two light trucks replaced by one medium truck. The motorcycle rifle company at this level was thus apparently considered a slightly heavier formation than that in the 1st Division, or at least more likely to operate as a compact whole.

The machine gun company consisted of two machine gun platoons each of two sections, and two anti-tank platoons. The machine gun section was made up of a section sergeant and a driver on a solo motorcycle, a six-man ammunition section with two sidecar motorcycles, and two six-man gun teams each with a motortricycle and a sidecar motorcycle. Platoon HQ included a solo motorcycle, a sidecar motorcycle, a motortricycle, and a truck, the latter for equipment and ammunition. The anti-tank platoons each had four guns each manned by four men in a gun tractor and another four in a tractor with a caisson.

The artillery component for the corps was the 20th Artillery Regiment, the former *Régiment d'Artillerie de la Division de Chasseurs Ardennais*, and consisted of two 2-battery battalions of 75mm Bofors Model 34 field guns and two 3-battery battalions of 105mm GP howitzers. A battery of either type included an 11-man signal section and two 28-man firing platoons, each with two gun tractors (each a caisson and a gun or howitzer) and a reserve tractor. The battery's ammunition trains provided four heavy and four light trucks for ammunition. The battalion HQ provided a 36-man signal platoon and a machine gun platoon with three 9-man squads each with four automatic rifles.

The Belgian decision not to seriously contest the German thrust into the Ardennes, a decision much criticized subsequently by the French who claim they were never notified, meant that the VII (Ardennes) Corps never fought as a whole. The 2nd *ChA* Division was pulled back out of the Ardennes completely before the start of the campaign, given the artillery regiment from the 17th Division (which in turn received another) and moved to a defensive line north-east of Namur on the Meuse, employed like a regular infantry division. The 1st *ChA* Division remained in the forest under "Group K", responsible for

screening through the northern two-thirds of the Ardennes. The 20th Artillery Regiment, formerly the VII Corps fire support element, was withdrawn in April and reassigned to the 7th Infantry Division.

Under orders not to become heavily engaged, the 1st *ChA* Division pulled back in the face of the German advance, offering only scattered resistance, and was thereafter used to screen the progressive withdrawals of the Belgian Army through its mobility. The motorcycle *ChA* battalion was also stationed in the Ardennes at the start of the campaign and generally accompanied the 1st *ChA* Division thereafter.

Frontier Bicyclists

Another type of infantry formation created for a specialized purpose was the Bicycle Frontier Units (*Unites Cyclistes Frontiere*). These were raised to provide the forward screen, primarily in the III Corps area east and southeast of Liege and were initially organized geographically into a regiment of four battalions for Liege Province and a separate battalion for Limbourg Province. Each of these battalions was made up of two or three companies. These companies were large units, made up of a variable number of rifle and machine gun platoons carried on bicycles, and had an average strength of 319 men. In addition, each company except those in the 4th Battalion of the *CyF* Regiment had truck-drawn 47mm anti-tank guns, varying in number from three to eight per company. In March of 1940, however, the organization of the Frontier Cyclists was expanded and streamlined. The Limbourg Battalion was expanded to 1,700 men and six companies, while the Frontier Cyclist Regiment was broken up into two 2,000-man regiments each consisting of three 600-man battalions, a machine gun company and a self-propelled 47mm gun company. The battalions were made up of an 82-man headquarters and two mixed companies, each of three rifle and two machine gun platoons. The cyclist machine gun company had 147 men divided into three platoons, while the AT company had 127 men in three platoons each with four T.13 SP anti-tank guns. In addition, the Frontier Cyclists had a separate SP company identical to that in the two regiments.

CAVALRY

The Belgian war plans called for fighting a defensive war on a succession of prepared positions, the first being the Albert Canal, and the second the Dyle-KW line. Since only a small portion of the Albert Canal ran along the Belgian border, and the second line was up to 40 miles behind the first in some places, there was an obvious need for light covering troops who could force the development of German maneuvers before they arrived at the Albert Canal and slow them down once they penetrated that. In some cases these roles were assigned to specialist troops, such as the *Chasseurs Ardennais* for the southern forests and the *Cyclistes Frontiere* for the area east of Liege, but for the most part this mission was entrusted to the cavalry.

Through the 1920s and early 1930s the bulk of the cavalry had been concentrated in two divisions, each of which had a line component of three cavalry regiments. The decision to motorize the cavalry was taken in 1933 and the process begun in 1935. Despite the diversion of funds from fortification the flow of motor vehicles to the cavalry was slow and by 1937 each of the cavalry regiments still retained large numbers of horses. Each of these mixed regiments consisted of a mounted cavalry group, a motorcycle group, and an armored car squadron. The mounted cavalry group was made up of two rifle squadrons, each of four platoons, and a machine gun squadron of four 2-gun sections. The motorcycle group had two rifle squadrons, each of three platoons, and a heavy weapons squadron. The armored car squadron had four platoons, each with two T.15 tankettes and a T.13 SP 47mm gun.

The last of the troop horses were retired in 1938 and the new organization of the cavalry called for two cavalry divisions and a portee brigade, including bicyclists, motorcyclists, truck-borne infantry and a small amount of light armor. The actual mix of elements was dictated largely by the Belgian perception of their relative mobility. Although possessed of the highest degree of operational-level mobility, the truck-borne units were considered to be the least flexible tactically. Doctrine called for the trucks to return without delay once they had dropped off their passengers in order to avoid enemy artillery, and thus the portee cavalry was felt to be useful only in defense in relatively static situations or in a deliberate attack.

The bicycle troops kept their bicycles with them, or at least under their command, so that their tactical flexibility was somewhat greater, but the bicycles were left by the roadside near the road the unit planned to next use, and the unit marched on foot to its combat area, leaving a small guard on the machines. The road-bound nature of the bicycles thus limited their rapid deployment as well. The motorcyclists were expected to ride to combat and could, if need be, fire their automatic weapons on the move, the BARs being mounted on the sidecars. The motorcyclists were also expected to accompany the

armored vehicle units to prevent ambushes. The regulation on light troops stipulated that the mobility of the motorcycle units must be exploited to the fullest and this, coupled with the vulnerability of the men on the machines, made them the lightest of the cavalry forces.

The Cavalry Divisions

A cavalry division of 1940 was organized into three motorcycle regiments which fulfilled the light end of the spectrum of mobile screening and reconnaissance, two bicycle regiments which provided the line strength of the division, an artillery regiment and a SP anti-tank company. Because of the disparity in unit types within the division and the wide frontages that they were called upon to screen the cavalry divisions were often broken up in combat. At the start of the 1940 campaign, for instance, the 1st Cavalry Division had two of its motorcycle regiments at the southern end of the Ardennes, a bicycle regiment about 40 miles north to the east of Namur, another bicycle regiment 40

miles north of that in the northeast corner of the country, and the other motorcycle regiment based at Mons patrolling the French border. Elements of the division were thus scattered along the entire eastern border of the country and halfway back into the interior, falling under various commands. Division HQ itself was in the central Ardennes under *Groupeement K* controlling two motorcycle, one bicycle and the artillery regiment, as well as the division base.

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	50mm Mortars	47mm AT Guns	T.15 Tankettes	T.13 47mm SP Anti-Tank	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Tractors	Busses
Regiment Headquarters	10	15	94	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	3	3	3	0	1
Two Motorcycle Battalions, each															
Battalion Headquarters	6	6	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	4	2	3	0	2
Two Rifle Squadrons, each															
Squadron Headquarters															
Command Group	1	1	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	1	1	0	0	0
Maintenance Section	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	0	0
Three Platoons, each															
Platoon HQ	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0
Two Sections, each	0	1	18	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Section	0	1	13	0	0	3	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Heavy Weapons Squadron															
Squadron Headquarters															
Command Group	1	1	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	1	0	0	0
Maintenance Section	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	4	1	0
Two Machine Gun Platoons, each															
Platoon HQ	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
Two Sections, each	0	1	21	0	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Platoon															
Platoon HQ	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Four Squads, each	0	1	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Armored Car Squadron															
Squadron Headquarters															
Command Group	1	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0
Maintenance Section	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Three Armored Platoons, each	1	2	10	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	2	0	0

Cavalry Motorcycle Regiment, 1940

The motorcycle regiment (*régiment motocyclistes*), not being intended primarily as a line unit, was a binary formation, consisting of two battalions of two rifle squadrons, and a weapons squadron. The heart of the rifle squadron was its three rifle platoons, each of which consisted of a headquarters and two rifle sections. The section was made up of a section sergeant and a driver on a solo motorcycle; two light machine gun squads, each of a corporal, two soldiers and two drivers on two sidecar motorcycles (one mounting a BAR); and a rifle squad of a corporal, three riflemen and three drivers on one sidecar and two solo motorcycles. Platoon HQ consisted of a platoon leader and a driver on a sidecar motorcycle, a bugler on a solo motorcycle, a driver with a truck for ammunition and equipment, and a driver with either a sidecar motorcycle (2nd Division) or a motortricycle (1st Division) with extra fuel. Squadron headquarters included a 2-ton truck for the 8-man maintenance section, another for fuel, and a third for signal equipment, and three-ton trucks for equipment, baggage and kitchen. Squadron HQ also included a five-man observer section on a solo and a sidecar motorcycle, and an 11-man signal section with three 140mm signal lamps, other signal assets being attached from higher formations.

The heavy weapons squadron had two platoons of machine guns and one of anti-tank guns. Each of the machine gun sections consisted of a section sergeant and a driver on a solo motorcycle, two corporals with drivers on solo motorcycles, and six sidecar motorcycles, each with a driver, carrying two 5-man gun crews. As in the rifle platoons, platoon HQ included either a sidecar motorcycle or a motortricycle with reserve fuel and a truck with ammunition and equipment. The 47mm platoon had four gun squads, each



A T-15 "armored car" on parade pre-war

consisting of a squad sergeant, a gunner and a driver on the gun tractor, and the other three men of the gun crew and a driver on a second tractor with an ammunition caisson. Platoon HQ included a seven-man signal squad with three motorcycles and an FDC specialist. Squadron HQ included a twelve-man signal section with a truck and two motorcycles, and a three-man range-finder team with a motorcycle in the HQ

section. Its trains section provided a reserve tractor, a light truck for ammunition, and

trucks for baggage, kitchen, and fuel. Organic signal assets for the squadron included six field telephones and a 6-line switchboard as well as two 140mm signal lamps.

The motorcycle battalion HQ included a medical detachment of one officer, two NCOs and twelve other ranks with an ambulance and a light truck, a three-man observer team, and a 14-man signal section equipped with six field telephones, a 6-line switchboard and three 140mm signal lamps.

The regimental armored car squadron consisted of three platoons and, unlike the units in the *Chasseurs Ardennais*, the squadrons appear to have been at full strength on 10 May 1940. Each platoon consisted of a 47mm T.13 SP gun carrying a driver, a gunner and the platoon leader; two T.15 tankettes (called armored cars by the Belgians) with their two-man crews; three motorcyclists, one carrying an extra soldier as a dispatch rider; and two trucks each with a driver, one for equipment and the other for ammunition. The squadron HQ included a maintenance section with a reserve T.15 and a truck, a T.13 in the HQ section for the squadron commander, and a train with trucks for personnel, baggage, kitchen (two) and fuel. There was no organic signal equipment in the squadron except for ten 25mm signal flare pistols.

For signal facilities the regiment relied for the most part on a preconfigured signal detachment from the division's radio company. Each motorcycle regiment received such a detachment manning a medium-range ERP transceiver in a field car, two ERTTP short-range transceivers on sidecars and an RP receiver for regiment HQ, and an ERTTP for each battalion HQ, rifle squadron, and the armored car squadron. These supplemented the efforts of the organic signal section which manned six telephones, two switchboards and three 140mm signal lamps.

The Bicycle Regiment

The line strength of the cavalry division, such as it was, was to be found in the two bicycle regiments (*régiments cyclistes*) with their combined total of eight rifle and four machine gun companies. Each of the bicycle rifle companies was made up of a headquarters platoon and three rifle platoons. The HQ platoon included a command section with a seven-man signal section with three 140mm signal lamps, an observer squad of a corporal and two privates, a motorcycle dispatch rider and a few assorted minor functionaries. The supply section of the HQ platoon included a mechanic corporal, an armorer, six privates to carry food and ammunition forward on their bicycles, and a truck. The trains section included the unit clerks, three cooks, a tailor, a shoemaker and baggage and kitchen trucks.

Each of the rifle platoons had a platoon headquarters with a platoon leader, a bugler, a runner, a mechanic (for the bicycles) and a two-man guard detachment to watch the

bicycles when they were left behind; four rifle sections and a mortar squad. The rifle section was made up of a sergeant, a five-man light machine gun squad with a BAR, and a five-man rifle squad. The mortar squad had a sergeant and three 3-man teams with 50mm DBT mortars.

The bicycle machine gun company was made up of a company HQ platoon and three machine gun platoons. The company HQ platoon was similar to that of the rifle

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	50mm Mortars	47mm AT Guns	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Tractors	Horses	Wagons	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	10	17	66	0	0	0	0	12	3	0	3	0	0	0	72
Two Bicycle Battalions, each															
Battalion Headquarters	6	5	55	0	0	0	0	4	1	2	4	0	0	0	38
Two Rifle Companies, each															
Headquarters Platoon															
Command Group	1	1	13	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
Supply Section	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	8
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	8
Three Platoons, each															
Platoon HQ	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Four Sections, each	0	1	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Mortar Section	0	1	9	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Machine Gun Company															
Headquarters Platoon															
Command Group	1	1	22	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	21
Supply Section	0	4	24	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	26
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	8
Three Platoons, each															
Platoon HQ	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
Two Sections, each	0	1	16	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	15
Anti-Tank Company															
Company Headquarters	1	4	23	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	3	1	0	0	18
Two Platoons, each															
Platoon HQ	1	0	14	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	10
Two Sections, each	0	3	14	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0

Cavalry Bicycle Regiment, 1940

carry ammunition forward. The machine gun platoon was composed of a HQ and two sections. The machine gun section comprised a sergeant and two eight-man machine gun teams, each including a field car or, more commonly, a motortricycle to transport the machine gun. Platoon headquarters included a reserve motortricycle as well as a three-man bicycle guard detachment.

The battalion HQ was a small affair and included an eighteen-man signal section, a three-man observer team, and light trucks for ammunition and medical supplies, and two medium trucks each for general equipment and tools, as well as a field car ambulance.

company, except that in the HQ section the signal detachment was expanded to twelve men to handle five telephones and a switchboard, and six range-finder personnel with a 0.7 or 0.8 meter optical rangefinder and an aiming circle were added, and the supply section was enlarged through the addition of twelve more privates to

Signal equipment included six field telephones, two 6-line switchboards, and three 140mm signal lamps. The regimental anti-tank company was a semi-motorized formation, with forty bicycles, nine motorcycles and twenty-four motor vehicles. The gun sections themselves were fully motorized, each consisting of a section sergeant and two gun crews, each of eight men with a 47mm gun and two fully-tracked tractors, one for the gun and one for an ammunition caisson. Each platoon had two such gun sections and a 15-man headquarters, of whom one truck driver and three motorcyclists (two mechanics) had motor vehicles and the rest, a platoon leader, a bugler, a runner, a resupply corporal, and a seven-man signal squad (with 4 telephones, a switchboard and a signal lamp), rode bicycles.

The provision for a bicycle-borne command element to control motorized combat elements, although anomalous and inefficient, was not as ineffectual as might be assumed, since the tractors, Utility Model B produced under license from Vickers, were rather slow in any event. The most serious problem would, of course, arise when the tractors went cross-country where the bicycles simply could not go. The company HQ platoon was not divided into sections as in the other combat companies of the regiment, and included no signal section, that function having been decentralized to the platoons. It did include a reserve tractor with a caisson, two light trucks (one for fuel), a baggage truck, a kitchen truck, and a general supplies truck.

Organic signal assets in the bicycle regiment were limited to telephones, signal lamps, visual panels, and flare pistols, but the regiment could expect a preconfigured radio detachment from the divisional radio company to be assigned for operational purposes. This detachment provided a headquarters section with an ERP medium-range transceiver, two ERTTP short-range transceivers and an RP receiver; and two battalion squads, each with an ERTTP.

Cavalry Division Troops

The cavalry division's mobile anti-tank reserve consisted of a squadron of SP 47mm guns. The squadron had three platoons, each of which had three T.13 vehicles with their three-man crews (the platoon leader functioning as a vehicle commander in one) and a large platoon headquarters including a runner, a platoon sergeant, two corporals, four soldiers, a motorcyclist, a mechanic, a reserve driver, and two drivers with light trucks. The provision for such a large platoon HQ was presumably intended to confer a large degree of autonomy on the platoons to enable them to function independently in support of various parts of the division. Squadron headquarters was divided into command and trains sections, with the command section including a T.13 for the squadron commander, a five-man signal section (with no organic equipment other than flare pistols), and three motorcyclists. The trains section included a light truck and three medium trucks for fuel, baggage, and kitchen use.

Artillery support for the division was quite weak should the divisions be employed as a whole, but since they were called upon to detach large portions of their strength to various screening duties far afield the shortage was not as grievous as might be expected. On 10 May 1940 the 1st Cavalry Division HQ held the artillery regiment HQ and one of the battalions in support of two of the motorcycle regiments in the Ardennes, while the other artillery battalion supported a bicycle regiment further north. The 2nd Cavalry Division used its artillery regiment in support of one of the bicycle battalions and an attached portée cavalry regiment.

The cavalry divisional artillery regiment consisted of a regiment HQ and two half-track-drawn 75mm GP III gun battalions. The combat portion of the 75mm battery was made up of two firing platoons, each with a lieutenant and 27 enlisted with two tractor-drawn 75mm guns and two more tractors with caissons. There was also a support group for each platoon consisting of seven enlisted men with two tractors, one in reserve and one with a caisson. Battalion headquarters provided a machine gun platoon for distribution among the batteries, made up of three 18-man sections each with four BARs; and eleven medium trucks, including three for the MG platoon, one for the kitchen, one for medical equipment, one for baggage and one for fuel.

The division transport group included an anti-aircraft machine gun squadron (six 4-gun platoons and four motor transport platoons, one each for infantry ammunition, artillery ammunition, resupply, and equipment. The infantry ammunition platoon provided 43 two-ton trucks (10 for small arms ammunition, 30 for 47mm ammo, and 3 for grenades), the artillery ammunition platoon 19, the resupply platoon 24 (6 for equipment and 18 for fuel, including eight 3,000-liter tank trucks), and the materiel platoon with 14 assorted vehicles for HQ use and 24 reserve vehicles.

Portée Cavalry Brigade

In addition to the two cavalry divisions the cavalry branch also formed a brigade of portée cavalry. This brigade was to provide some more line muscle for the cavalry, along with operational-level mobility, at the expense of tactical mobility. The brigade consisted of a minuscule administrative HQ of four officers, four NCOs and sixteen other ranks, and two portée cavalry regiment. Each of the regiments, which were deployed separately in combat, consisted of two cavalry battalions, a motorcycle squadron, and a 47mm gun squadron.

The portée cavalry rifle squadron was made up of a HQ platoon and four rifle platoons, each of which consisted of a lieutenant, a runner, a bugler, and a motorcyclist, and two rifle sections. The rifle section was made up of a section sergeant, a light machine gun squad (a corporal, a gunner, three ammo bearers), and a rifle squad (a corporal and four

riflemen). In the squadron HQ platoon the trains section included trucks for baggage and the kitchen, and the command section included a seven-man signal section (with three signal lamps) and a three-man observer team.

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	47mm AT Guns	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	10	16	64	0	0	0	6	3	1	5	21
Two Portee Cavalry Battalions, each											
Battalion Headquarters	6	5	56	0	0	0	2	1	4	3	17
Two Rifle Squadrons, each											
Headquarters Platoon											
Command Group	1	1	15	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	5
Resupply Section	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Four Rifle Platoons, each											
Platoon HQ	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Two Sections, each	0	1	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Machine Gun Squadron											
Headquarters Platoon											
Command Group	1	2	15	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	5
Resupply Section	0	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Four Machine Gun Platoons, each											
Platoon HQ	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Two MG Squads, each	0	1	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorcycle Squadron											
Headquarters Platoon											
Command Group	1	2	14	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	0
Repair Section	0	1	8	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
Trains Section	0	2	10	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0
Three Reconnaissance Platoons, each											
Platoon HQ	1	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Two Recon Sections, each	0	1	20	2	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Survey Platoon											
Platoon HQ	1	0	6	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	0
Three Survey Sections, each	0	1	18	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Squadron											
Headquarters Platoon	1	4	24	0	0	0	4	0	0	5	1
Two AT Platoons, each											
Platoon HQ	1	0	13	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Two Gun Sections, each	0	3	12	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0

Portee Cavalry Regiment, 1940

The machine gun squadron was made up of a headquarters platoon and four machine gun platoons each of two guns. Unlike the rifle squadrons the machine gun squadron included field telephones (five) for internal communication.

Each portée cavalry battalion consisted of two rifle squadrons, a machine gun squadron and a small headquarters with six field telephones, a switchboard, and three signal lamps. The motorcycle squadron was by far the largest company-sized unit of the regiment, with three reconnaissance and one survey platoon, the main function of the squadron being the selection and security of dismount locations for the rest of the regiment. The 47mm gun squadron had eight guns in two platoons, each with its own telephone signal squad. The motorcycle and 47mm gun squadrons each had sufficient organic transport to operate on their own, but the rest of the regiment had to rely on attachments from the cavalry corps. The rifle squadron had three trucks in the trains, but required the attachment of twelve more plus four field cars for complete mobility, while the machine gun squadron required eight trucks and four field cars to supplement their six cargo trucks in the trains.

For signal facilities other than telephones and optical devices the portée brigade similarly had to rely on the attachment of a special group from corps, this time from the corps signal battalion. This group provided five ERP medium-range transceivers (one for brigade HQ and one for each battalion HQ), a longer-ranged ERM transceiver (brigade HQ), eight ERTTP short-range transceivers (two per regiment HQ, one per battalion HQ), and five RP receivers (one for brigade HQ, two for each regiment HQ).

The organization of the portée cavalry regiment was unusual in that on the one hand the *Règlement sur l'Emploi des Troupes légères* of 1939 specifically noted their lack of tactical mobility once deprived of their trucks as called for in the instructions, yet on the other hand they were among the lightest-armed of the cavalry formations, lacking any indirect fire weapons other than the marginally-useful 47mm gun. Further limiting their utility as line troops was their binary organization through the entire brigade. The only concession to their duties as a line formation, in fact, seems to have been their higher basic ammunition load, which was about the same as that of the line infantry.

The Cavalry Corps

The cavalry formations were nominally subordinated to a cavalry corps which, in addition to the two cavalry divisions and the portee brigade, consisted of an artillery regiment, an armored car squadron, an engineer battalion, a signal battalion, a transport group, and small service elements, for a total corps strength of 29,000 men.

The artillery regiment had 2,750 men with four motorized battalions, two each with twelve 75mm GP guns and two each with twelve 105mm GP howitzers. The armored car squadron had two platoons, each with four Renault AGC-1 tanks (with a fifth as a

reserve), an equipment truck and an ammunition truck. In fact, the fifth tank in each platoon was never present, these being broken down, and instead they were carried in pieces on the squadron's trucks as spare parts. This cavalry "armored car squadron" was the only true tank formation in the Belgian Army.

The remaining combat formation in the cavalry corps was the anti-aircraft machine gun company, similar to that in the cavalry divisions. The rest of the transport group consisted of two motor transport companies and five transport platoons. The two companies were each designed to lift a portée cavalry regiment, these units lacking their own organic transport for movement. The motor transport company provided 29 field cars, 87 cross-country trucks, a repair truck, an equipment truck, a baggage truck, and eight trucks for mounting AA machine guns. In spite of these specialized arrangements the cavalry corps did not fight as a whole, instead commanding infantry divisions during the campaign.

ARTILLERY

The Army's artillery was formed into thirty-one regiments on mobilization: twenty-one for the divisions, four for the field corps, one for the cavalry corps, and five under GHQ control.

Corps Artillery

The corps artillery regiment had a nominal composition of three battalions of horse-drawn 155mm howitzers, one of horse-drawn 105mm guns, and one of tractor-drawn 120mm guns, with each battalion having three batteries except the 120mm gun battalion which had two. Due to equipment surpluses, however, there were inevitable variations from the standard as follows:

13th Artillery Regiment (IV Corps)

I, II & VI Battalions: horse-drawn 155mm Schneider M17 howitzers

III Battalion: horse-drawn 105mm L Schneider M13 guns

IV & V Battalions: tractor-drawn 120mm FRC M31 guns

14th Artillery Regiment (I Corps)

I, II & VI Battalions: tractor-drawn 155mm Schneider M17 howitzers

III & V Battalions: horse-drawn 105mm L Schneider M13 guns

IV Battalion: tractor-drawn 120mm FRC M31 guns

15th Artillery Regiment (III Corps)

I, II & VI Battalions: horse-drawn 155mm Schneider M17 howitzers

III Battalion: horse-drawn 105mm L Schneider M13 guns

IV & V Battalions: tractor-drawn 120mm FRC M31 guns

16th Artillery Regiment (II Corps)

I, II & VI Battalions: horse-drawn 155mm Schneider M17 howitzers

III & IV Battalions: horse-drawn 105mm L Schneider M13 guns

V Battalion: tractor-drawn 120mm FRC M31 guns

There was also an artillery regiment assigned to the VII (*Chasseurs Ardennais*) Corps, but this regiment was actually used for division artillery by the 7th Division. The Cavalry Corps had a different artillery organization, with its regiment (19th) consisting of two battalions of 75mm guns and two of 105mm howitzers, all motorized. The V and VI Corps had no corps artillery.

A horsed battery, whether equipped with 155mm howitzers or 105mm guns, was provided with six draft horses to pull each of the four guns, six more for each of eight ammunition caissons, a wagon for the battery HQ, one for a forge, one for kitchen use and one for rations. The battery HQ included an 11-man signal section (with three horses and six bicycles, five of the latter being equipped with wire-laying spools). The battalion headquarters included a 36-man signal platoon (on bicycles), a 69-man machine gun platoon with three bicycle-mounted sections (each 9 men with four BARs) and two

motorized sections (each 19 men, two light trucks and four medium MGs), and a 15-man medical detachment.

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light MGs	Medium MGs	Artillery Pieces	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Busses	Light Trucks	Trucks	Heavy Trucks	Tractors	Railroad Cars	Horses	Wagons & Carts	Bicycles
Corps Artillery																	
HQ, Corps Artillery Battalion (horsed)	12	23	151	12	8	0	2	0	0	6	2	0	0	0	33	3	98
HQ, Corps Artillery Battalion (motorized)	10	24	147	12	8	0	3	2	1	12	2	0	2	0	0	0	13
Battery, 105mm gun or 155mm howitzer (horsed)	3	17	135	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	122	12	18
Battery, 120mm gun or 155mm howitzer (motorized)	3	17	98	0	0	4	2	1	1	2	2	4	10	0	0	0	10
HQ, VII Corps Artillery Bn	10	21	147	12	8	0	3	2	0	15	2	0	2	0	0	0	27
Battery, 75mm gun or 105mm howitzer	3	17	103	0	0	4	2	1	0	2	6	4	7	0	0	0	12
Cavalry Corps Artillery																	
HQ, Cavalry Corps Artillery Battalion	11	27	153	12	8	0	29	3	0	13	2	0	2	0	0	0	7
Battery, 75mm gun or 105mm howitzer	3	17	92	0	0	4	3	2	0	4	10	0	6	0	0	0	8
Army Artillery																	
HQ, Army Artillery Battalion	10	14	74	0	0	0	3	2	0	9	3	0	2	0	0	0	10
Battery 155mm Gun, 155 L. or 155 M.24	3	18	136	2	0	4	1	1	1	1	2	12	5	0	0	0	9
Battery, 150mm Gun, 150 L/43	3	18	147	2	0	4	1	1	1	1	2	12	10	0	0	0	9
Battery, 220mm Mortar, 220 TR	3	18	151	2	0	4	1	1	1	5	2	12	5	0	0	0	9
Battery, 150mm Howitzer	3	18	119	2	0	4	1	1	1	1	2	12	5	0	0	0	9
Railroad Artillery																	
HQ, Railroad Artillery Battalion	8	11	36	2	0	0	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	6	0	0	12
RR Battery, 170mm	3	15	91	4	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	18	0	0	8
RR Battery, 280mm	3	15	152	4	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	27	0	0	8
RR Battery, 12"	2	13	64	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	14	0	0	12
Coast Artillery																	
HQ, Coast Artillery Battalion	4	3	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Coastal Battery, 170mm gun	3	16	127	4	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Coastal Battery, 105mm gun, 105 L.45	3	14	85	4	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Coastal Battery, 47mm gun	2	18	136	0	0	13	11	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	53
Trench Artillery																	
HQ, Trench Artillery Battalion	6	9	45	2	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	25
Trench Artillery Battery	4	16	191	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	2	12	0	0	0	0	14

Non-Divisional Artillery, 1940

A motorized battery, 120mm gun or 155mm howitzer, was built around its two firing platoons, each of 31 men with two gun tractors (each towing a caisson and a field piece) and two ammunition tractors (each towing two caissons). The battery HQ included an 11-man signal section (with four bicycles, two of which were fitted with wire-laying spools), while the ammunition trains provided four heavy trucks for ammunition, one for equipment and a bus for personnel. The battalion HQ was similar to that of the horse-drawn battalion except for the replacement of wagons by trucks and the motorization of the MG platoon with seven light trucks.

Organic signal assets for the artillery regiment were limited to telephones and visual devices. Each battery had eight telephones and a 10-line switchboard while a battalion HQ had ten telephones and two switchboards. The regiment could, however, expect an attachment from the corps radio company consisting of seven ERP Model 36 transceivers and an equal number of EP receivers (one of each for the regiment HQ and each battalion HQ). Forward observer functions thus had to be carried out either over the normal command net or by telephone, for there were no dedicated radios to send forward.

GHQ Artillery

Army artillery directly under GHQ control was divided into five regiments, armed with the following weapons:

1st Army Artillery Regiment

I Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 155mm L Schneider M17 guns

II Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 150mm L/43 guns

III Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 155mm Cockerill M24 guns

2nd Army Artillery Regiment

I Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 220mm TR Schneider M17 howitzers

II Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 220mm TR Schneider M17 howitzers

III Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 220mm TR Schneider M17 howitzers

3rd Army Artillery Regiment

I Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 155mm L Schneider M17 guns

II Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 155mm L Schneider M17 guns

III Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 155mm L Schneider M17 guns

IV Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each 12 Van Deuren M58L/M70 trench mortars

4th Army Artillery Regiment

I Battalion (mot): 3 batteries each four 150mm L Krupp M17 howitzers

II Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each four 150mm L Krupp M17 howitzers

III Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each four 150mm L Krupp M17 howitzers

IV Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each four 150mm L Krupp M17 howitzers

V Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each four 152mm (6") Vickers M17 howitzers

VI Battalion (horse): 3 batteries each four 152mm (6") Vickers M17 howitzers

5th Army Artillery Regiment

I Battalion (coastal)

II Battalion (Railroad)

6th Army Artillery Regiment (depot/training)

one battery of four 220mm TR Schneider M17 howitzers, one mixed battery

A motorized battery was divided into a firing battery (command group, two firing platoons, and a machine gun section), an ammunition trains and a field trains. The command group included a seven-man signal section (with telephones and three bicycles), while the machine gun section was composed of a sergeant, two corporals, six gun crew, and a driver equipped with two machine guns and a light truck. A firing platoon varied in size slightly depending on the weapon used but the strength for a 155mm M17 gun platoon, probably similar to the 220mm howitzer, was a lieutenant, two

sergeants, two gun corporals, 20 gun crew, 7 drivers (for two Citroën-Kegresse P-14 gun tractors, two heavy trucks and a reserve tractor), a runner, a bugler and a specialist (armorer in one platoon, mechanic in the other). The ammunition trains provided eight heavy trucks for ammunition, one for battery equipment and a further reserve tractor.

A horsed battery of 150mm or 6" howitzers was identical to that of the corps 155mm howitzer battery.

The field support artillery of the GHQ pool was notable mainly for its lack of range. Except for the specialized 5th Regiment no weapon could throw a projectile over 18,000 meters. The most common weapon was the French 155mm L Mle 1917 Schneider gun, a sturdy, serviceable weapon from the First World War, but approaching obsolescence with a range of only 17,300 meters. The other common weapon, the French 220mm TR howitzer, threw a useful, heavy shell but had a range of only 10,800 meters.

Trench mortars had served well in WW I in the specialized operations of trench warfare. The Belgians had developed their own trench mortar, the Van Deuren 58L, an ungainly contraption mounted on a sledge that fired an oversize finned bomb short distances. On mobilization in 1939 a number of these were brought out of storage and assigned to the IV Battalion of the 3rd Army Artillery Regiment and three independent batteries, the latter attached to the 8th Division. In addition, the Liege Fortress Regiment raised a trench mortar battalion of four batteries shortly thereafter, this being expanded in early 1940 to eight batteries under the Liege Regiment and three more under the Namur Regiment.

Coastal & Railway Artillery

Specialized Artillery was concentrated in the 5th Army Artillery Regiment, this consisting of the I (coast artillery) Battalion and the II (railroad artillery) Battalion. The railroad battalion was armed primarily with weapons surrendered by Germany at the end of WW I and comprised three batteries (4th, 5th & 6th) of 170mm Krupp guns, three (7th, 8th and 9th) of 280mm Krupp guns, each of two weapons, and one (10th) with one 305mm (12") Vickers howitzer.

The coastal battalion consisted of the 1st Battery (four 170mm Krupp guns at Bredene and four 120mm de Bange M1869 at Ostende), the 2nd Battery (four 170mm Krupp guns at Knokke), the 3rd Battery (four 105mm L/45 guns at Zeebruges)⁴ and a new 11th Battery (thirteen 47mm guns along the coast).

⁴ The mobilization documents clearly identify the weapons as 105mm L/45 guns, but a post-war history of the artillery refers to this unit as being equipped with 120mm naval guns. see Champagne, P., *Artillerie, Insignes et Traditions*, pp. 27 and 100.

A 105mm coastal battery consisted of a firing battery (command section and two firing platoons), a field train, two machine gun squads and a 3-man medical detachment. A firing platoon consisted of a lieutenant, two sergeant gun commanders, two corporal gunners, 12 gun crew, a sergeant and a corporal manning a rangefinder, a messenger on a bicycle, a bugler and an 8-man ammunition team. The command section included a ten-man signal squad with telephones, while each machine gun squad had a sergeant, two gun commander corporals and six privates with two medium MGs.

The 47mm coastal battery was designed to take advantage of a new piece of equipment, a turret with a 47mm gun and a coaxial machine gun, similar to that used on tanks. These were emplaced on concrete positions sunk into the ground. A gun squad consisted of a sergeant, two corporals and six privates. A platoon HQ comprised a senior NCO as the platoon leader, a motorcyclist, a fire control/signal specialist, a driver with a light truck for ammunition and equipment, and a driver for a sidecar motorcycle for delivering food. For reasons that are not clear, the unit was exceptionally mobile in terms of personnel: all the platoon HQ personnel rode motor vehicles and each gun squad had four bicycles for its nine men. The battery's first (Zeebrugge) and third (Ostende) platoons each had four gun squads, while the second (Breedene) platoon had five.

Air Defense

Defense against air attack was primarily the responsibility of the *Défense Aérienne du Territoire*, which was divided into two functional groupings: the *Aéronautique Militaire*, which corresponded to an air force, and the *Défense Terrestre Contre Aéronefs*, which controlled the field anti-aircraft formations. The *Ae.Mil.* was primarily concerned with flying operations, but its ground staff formations included the *Régiment de troupes auxiliares d'aéronautique* which included two anti-aircraft machine gun battalions for defense of its airfields against low-flying aircraft. Each AA machine gun battalion was composed of a small HQ and four companies. These



A 75mm FRC during trials

companies consisted of three platoons each with four machine guns and were essentially immobile, having only three trucks (one each for rations, kitchen use, and baggage) and a single motorcycle. Armed only with machine guns, their effectiveness was probably very limited.

It was the DTCA upon which most hopes were placed. The single DTCA Regiment formed in 1926 had been expanded to two regiments in 1934, the first regiment consolidating the mobile assets and the second the static elements. Thus, on mobilization the DTCA had the following organization:

1st Regiment DTCA

- I Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm Schneider M34
- II Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm Schneider M34
- III Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M36
- IV Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M36
- VII Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M27
- VIII Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M27
- IX Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M27
- X Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M27
- five batteries 40mm Bofors M35

2nd Regiment DTCA

- XI Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm Schneider
- XII Battalion: 3 batteries 75mm FRC M27
- four batteries 40mm Bofors M35
- XXI Battalion: 3 platoons searchlights
- XXII Battalion: 3 platoons searchlights
- Observer Group

A 75mm M34 or M36 battery was provided with four tractors to tow the guns, eight ammunition trucks (six heavy and two light), five busses for personnel, a recovery tractor, two light trucks to carry the two 10-man machine gun sections, four trucks for material, one for the trailer-mounted acoustic detector, and two for trains use. A 75mm M27 battery was similar but had two additional heavy ammunition trucks and no acoustic equipment. A light battery was made up of three platoons each with two 40mm L/60 M35 Bofors guns. The battery had six trucks for towing the guns, eight heavy trucks for ammunition, four trucks for equipment, four buses for personnel, and four trucks for the trains.

The 1st Regiment provided a 75mm battalion to support each of the six corps and the 40mm batteries were also distributed to the field forces, often split up into 2-gun platoons. All these units were concentrated along the main defensive position, their limited mobility preventing their use with the screening forces operating east of the Albert Canal/Meuse line.

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Medium MGs	40mm AA Guns	75mm AA Guns	94mm AA Guns	110cm Searchlights	120cm Searchlights	150cm Searchlights	Motorcycles	Field Cars	Busses	Light Trucks	Trucks	Heavy Trucks	Tractors	Bicycles
Aeronautique Militaire																		
HQ, AA Machine Gun Battalion	4	2	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
AA Machine Gun Company	4	6	68	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
DTCA																		
HQ, Anti-Aircraft Battalion	7	9	73	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	5	0	0	10
HQ, Semi-Fixed Anti-Aircraft Battalion	7	10	56	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	9
AA Battery, 75mm Models 34 or 36	4	21	184	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	2	8	7	5	4
AA Battery, 75mm Model 27	4	24	184	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	1	5	2	6	10	5	4
AA Battery, 75mm semi-fixed	4	21	178	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	12	0	4
AA Battery, 40mm	4	19	156	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	1	13	8	0	4
HQ, Searchlight Battalion	7	8	54	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	4	0	0	10
Light Searchlight Battery	4	32	274	12	0	0	0	8	4	0	2	4	0	8	4	11	8	10
Heavy Searchlight Battery	4	32	298	12	0	0	0	0	4	8	2	4	0	8	4	11	16	10
Observer Group	5	9	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motor Vehicle Repair Group	1	6	39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	10	0	0	0
Garde Territoriale Antiaerienne																		
HQ, Anti-Aircraft Battalion, GTA	6	7	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	5
AA Battery, 94mm, GTA	4	21	159	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	2	3
AA Battery, 75mm, GTA	4	21	159	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	2	3
AA Battery, 40mm, GTA	5	18	159	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	6	0	4
Searchlight Battery, GTA	4	27	236	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	3	4	0	3	14	9	0	10
Balloon Platoon, GTA	1	12	106	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	11	1	0	7

Anti-Aircraft Units, 1940

The 2nd Regiment provided a portion of the air defense for Brussels and the northwestern portion of the country. Its batteries were "semi-fixed" and were each provided with four heavy trucks to carry guns, six more for ammunition and two more for equipment, along with a light truck for kitchen duties and two more for the two 10-man machine gun sections. It seems likely that a semi-fixed battery could move itself in two lifts.

The two searchlight battalions of the 2nd Regiment were anomalous on two counts: first, they were actually batteries in size; and second, they were fully motorized formations. The XXI "Battalion" was supposed to have two platoons each with four 150cm lights and one with four 120cm lights, but in fact seems to have had only seven of the larger lights and five of the smaller. Each of the larger lights was provided with two tractors: one to tow the light and the other to tow a generator trailer. The smaller lights and their generators were mounted as a unit on the back of a truck. Each platoon also had a trailer-mounted acoustic detector and three heavy trucks for personnel and equipment. The battery included six machine gun squads, each of 10 men with a light truck and two MGs.

The XXII "Battalion" had one platoon of four 120cm searchlights and two each of four 110cm searchlights.

The observer group (*Service de Guet*) was divided into nine batteries, one per province. Scattered observer outposts reported back to the battery/provincial HQ sightings of enemy aircraft over the national telephone network. The HQ would then consolidate the reports and pass them, via radio or telephone, to the central observer HQ in Brussels. The central HQ also provided 21 field cars with radios for distribution as needed to the various batteries.

The 2nd Regiment DTCA obviously could provide little in the way of protection for the national infrastructure. Realizing that additional means must be found the *Garde Territoriale Antiaérienne* was formed on 20 May 1939, an entirely separate organization from the DTA. This was a reservist force, with members required to train two hours per week with a ten-day training camp each summer. The initial appeal for volunteers brought in a thousand men and training started in June. By May 1940 some 4,500 members had been enrolled.

The plan for the GTA envisioned a three-year development program that would have resulted in 1942 in a force of 40,000 men in 12 battalions of 94mm and 8 battalions of 75mm guns, some 200 Bofors 40mm guns, two searchlight battalions, and 18 platoons each with 8 balloons. Needless to say, this objective had not been reached by the time the Germans invaded. The force structure on 10 May 1940 was as follows:

- I Battalion: 3 batteries of 75mm FRC M36
- II Battalion: 3 batteries of 94mm Vickers
- III Battalion: 2 batteries of 40mm Bofors
one searchlight battery
- Group G (Gent)
 - one battery of 40mm Bofors (Gent)
 - two batteries of 40mm Bofors (Anvers)
- Group D (Liege/Namur)
 - one battery of 40mm Bofors (Charleroi)
 - two batteries of 40mm Bofors (Liege)
 - one battery of 40mm Bofors (Namur)

The GTA heavy battery (75mm FRC or 3.7" Vickers) was designed for static defense of homeland targets but could move itself with its two tractors and three heavy trucks, if given enough time. The 40mm battery, with two 2-gun platoons, was slightly more mobile, having a heavy truck for each of its six Bofors guns.

OTHER METROPOLITAN UNITS

The linchpin of the Belgian defense plan was the series of fortifications that covered the northern two-thirds of the country from attack from the east. They were divided into five fortified positions (*positions fortifiées*): Anvers (PFA) forming a semi-circle 40 km in length running around Antwerp from about 11 o'clock to about 4 o'clock; Liege (PFL) running 105 km along the west bank of the Meuse from Eben-Emael south to the southern outskirts of Liege; Namur (PFN) forming a semi-circle 30 km in length to the east and south of that city; the Koningshooikt-Wavre (KW) line running 60 km south from the southern PFA defenses to south-east of Brussels; and the Tête de Pont de Gand (TPG) of 20 km protecting the southern approaches to Gent. The following summarizes the fortifications involved:

PFA: 17 forts and 11 redoubts dating from 1916, 197 modern firing points and 630 firing points constructed by the Germans in 1918.

PFL: organized into five defensive positions:

Fort Eben-Emael

I Group (Vise-Comblain): 3 modern forts, 179 firing positions

II Group (Barchon-Boncelles): 6 modernized old forts, 61 firing positions

III Group (Vise-Argenteau-Jupille-Angleur): 42 firing positions

IV Group (Meuse): 2 modernized old forts, 50 firing positions

PFN: 7 modernized old forts, 148 firing positions

KW: 235 firing positions

TPG: 227 firing positions

These positions were manned by troops from the infantry and the artillery, referred to as Fortress Troops (*Troupes de Forteresse*). The artillery troops were concentrated into two units, the *Régiment de forteresse de Namur* and the *Régiment de forteresse de Liège* each of which included, in addition to the normal static artillery, a company with three platoons each with four T.13 SP anti-tank guns and a signal company. The fortress infantry (*unités spéciales de forteresse*) was distributed between PFA (regiment HQ, five battalion HQs and 27 companies), PFL and PFN (each one battalion HQ and four companies).

It should be noted that in addition to the PFs there were further defensive lines which provided 478 further prepared firing positions for the regular infantry units assigned to those particular sectors. These lines connected the various PFs to each other.

The one type of maneuver element that did not fall within the inspectorates of cavalry or infantry was the light regiment of the Gendarmerie. Under the Army reorganization plan of 1926 each of the three active corps was to receive a light regiment consisting of a group of three mounted squadrons, a bicycle squadron and an armored car platoon. The regiments were reorganized in 1933 into an armored car platoon and two line groups, each with one mounted and one bicycle squadron. The final change to the TO&E took place in 1937 when the number of regiments was reduced from three to two and motor vehicles replaced horses and bicycles. Employment and doctrine for the light regiments was identical to those of the cavalry motorcycle troops and were governed by the same *règlement*.

Each light regiment in 1940 consisted of two battalions, each of which was made up of two motorcycle rifle squadrons, a machine gun squadron, and an armored car platoon. The motorcycle rifle squadron was identical to that in the cavalry motorcycle regiment except that it had one less platoon with a concomitant slight decrease in squadron HQ manpower. The machine gun squadron was also identical to that of the cavalry motorcycle regiment, except that it had one less man in the squadron maintenance section and two extra trucks in the squadron trains to carry ammunition. The armored car platoon nominally consisted of three Berliet VUDB vehicles, each with two light machine guns, a 47mm T.13 SP gun and a light truck, but in fact three of the VUDBs were detached to guard the Belgian GHQ and the others were often broken down with age, leaving the armored car platoons with only their T.13s. The pioneer platoon transported most of its personnel in three large busses but also had a heavy truck to transport anti-tank mines. The signal platoon included an ERG transceiver (range 200 km) in a truck and nine ERTM transceivers (range 5-8 km) on motorcycle sidecars for distribution to the regiment, battalion and squadron HQs. At the time of the German invasion neither light regiment was in a forward position, with the 1st Light Regiment based at Charleroi patrolling the French border and the 2nd in the western part of the country, but as the Germans advanced the two regiments entered combat in traditional cavalry screening roles.

The peacetime holdings of vehicles, including the sidecar motorcycles, the armored cars, T.13s, kitchen trucks and the 18 GMC armored trucks used for the 47mm guns, were all designed to military specifications. The majority of the trucks, however, were requisitioned civilian vehicles, along with the solo motorcycles and buses.

Other types of unit that should be mentioned were the seven regiments of auxiliary troops (*Régiments de Troupes Auxiliares*) and the Marine Corps. Each corps was assigned an auxiliary regiment, the main function of which was to prepare field fortifications. Each regiment had a 21-man headquarter and three 870-man battalions, each of which in turn had four 215-man companies. The troops were for all practical purposes unarmed,

having an average of only ten rifles per company. The *Corps de Marine* was actually a patrol boat unit, having its battalion HQ and one squadron in Ostend and the other squadron in Antwerp. A third squadron was authorized, but apparently not raised. The Ostend squadron had 209 men with eight patrol boats and the Antwerp squadron 101 men with seven somewhat smaller boats.

COLONIAL TROOPS

In common with other colonial powers, the Belgians were extremely reluctant to allocate metropolitan troops to the defense of their African colonial holdings. Formed in 1880, the *Force Publique* answered the need for a security and defense force, and by 1897 it numbered some 14,000, all but 2,000 of whom were Congolese. During the 20th Century the number of European officers serving with the FP numbered only in the hundreds, in spite of the fact that even up to that late 1950s indigenous blacks were ineligible to become officers.

Following the mutinies in 1895 (Luluabourg), 1897 (the Dhanis column), and 1900 (Boma) the Belgian authorities embarked on a thorough program of tribal integration within the FP in order to prevent any single ethnic group from dominating any military unit, from squad level up. Further, the syncretistic religious movements, essentially tribal in nature, that predominated in the political area from the 1920s onwards kept European fears alive. In spite of this, carelessness seems to have crept into the recruiting of PF units, one of the results of which was the Luluabourg mutiny of 1944. As a result of this mutiny, new regulations went into effect shortly thereafter which specified that there must be at least four tribal groups represented in each platoon.

Force Publique units fell into two categories, established in 1926. Field units (*Troupes campées*) were organized and equipped for the defense of the Congo from external enemies, while Territorial units (*Troupes en Service Territorial*) were designed for the internal security role. The peacetime organization for the FP in effect at the outbreak of the war had been established in 1932 and consisted of three “groups”, each responsible for two of the Congo's provinces. In each group was a complement of field troops consisting of two infantry battalions, an artillery battery, a bicycle company and an engineer unit; and territorial troops consisting of two battalions (one for each province), each of which consisted of one company based in each administrative district, averaging six companies per battalion. One independent unit not under a group was the *defense du Bas-Fleuve*, which guarded the Congo River estuary. This unit was made up of one company and one platoon of field infantry, one territorial company, and the Shinkakasa fort with two 3pdr naval guns and two 120mm howitzers.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 plans were laid to mobilize the *Force Publique*. The mobilization, which was to convert each of the FP groups into a mixed field brigade, went slowly, however, due to the lack of white officers. The limited white population of the Belgian Congo meant that drafting sufficient whites for the FP would have stripped the colony of its technical and managerial talent and proven disastrous to the economy, thus expansion had to wait until expatriate Belgians could be brought into

the FP and replacements trained for the indigenous whites in managerial positions in the Congo.

The mobilization, which was finally completed in January 1941, saw the conversion of territorial units to field units through retraining and reequipping, and the replacement of the territorial units in the internal security role by activation of the *Garde Territoriale Volontaire* (natives) and semi-vigilante white groups. The three field brigades formed each consisted of two infantry regiments (each with three infantry battalions), a bicycle company, a field artillery battery, a mortar company, a pioneer company, a motor transport company, and porter and base units for a total strength of 6,000 soldiers and 4,000 porters.

The basic tactical unit of the FP was the rifle section, which consisted of a native sergeant, a rifle team and a light machine gun team, each of which was made up of a corporal and five privates. The basic weapon was the 7.65mm Belgian Mauser, with one man the rifle team having a grenade launcher adapter. The light machine gun team served a bipod light MG for fire support. Three rifle sections plus a headquarters of a platoon leader (a white officer), a bugler and a runner made up the rifle platoon, for a total of 43 men. There were three platoons to the rifle company. Three rifle companies and a machine gun company made up the infantry battalion. The machine gun company had three platoons, each with two air-cooled Hotchkiss machine guns, a weapon highly regarded by the FP officers. Logistical support was provided by a few trucks to bring supplies to a head, and then human porters, usually on the basis of about 3:2 soldiers to porters, to bring it the rest of the way.

A headquarters and three battalions made up the FP regiment, for a total strength of 2,000 men. Fire support was concentrated at the brigade level, where there existed a mortar company with 81mm Stokes mortars and an artillery battery with four obsolete 70mm St. Chamond weapons. Although the St. Chamonds were designed as pack weapons, the FP did not use them as such, instead towing them with two draft mules apiece. The brigade bicycle company was organized similarly to the rifle company. The motor transport company was equipped with civilian-model vehicles rather than the more expensive cross-country trucks favored by most armies, in light of the Belgian experience that motor transport in the Congo was limited to the roads in any event, regardless of the type of truck used. Other transport for the brigade was supplied by porters, who carried 30 kg each.

For operations against the Italians in East Africa, the FP expeditionary forces were organized into "contingents", closely following the lines of the field organization. BCS1 (Belgian Contingent in the Sudan 1) consisted of 3rd Company of the 6th Battalion, arrived in Jaba, Sudan on 6 February 1941 and was assigned to guard the airfield there.

Later the 1st Company of the 18th Battalion arrived and took over that duty. BCS2, consisting of the 11th Battalion, was formed on 26 January 1941, and arrived in Jaba in February where it was assigned to guard the lines of communications for the 2/6th King's African Rifles. Through March of 1941 it was used against Italian forces in the upper Nile sector, including the battle of Gambala.

The main force sent against the Italians by the FP was BCS3, which was essentially a regimental combat team. BCS3 consisted of the following elements:

- HQ, 3rd Brigade
- 5th Infantry Regiment (HQ, 5th & 17th Battalion)[+11th Battalion already in the Sudan as BCS2)
- 3rd Bicycle Company
- 3rd Mortar Company
- 3rd & 4th Artillery Batteries
- 3rd Pioneer Company
- 3rd Motor Transport Company (-6th Regimental Section)
- base & service elements

The total strength of BCS3 (not including the 11th Battalion) amounted to 132 Europeans, 2,298 indigenous troops, and 1,889 porters. Created 26 February 1941, the contingent was moved to the Sudan in April and participated in battles against the Italians through April and June. BCS3, including the 11th Battalion, reached its peak strength on 25 June with a strength of 190 Europeans, 3,380 native troops, and 2,328 porters. After the cessation of hostilities in East Africa the FP elements of the Allied Forces were returned to the Congo in stages between July and September 1941. The FP had been spared heavy casualties in the campaign due to the poor quality of Italian resistance, particularly from the colonial units, and suffered only two Europeans, 42 native troops and 4 porters killed in action.

On the return of BCS3 from East Africa the FP was significantly re-organized, largely due to British and American donations of weapons. This was driven in large part by the experiences of preparing to operate outside the Congo. Clearly, additional transport had to be acquired.

A more complex problem was ammunition. The FP used the standard Belgian Mauser rifle but in 7.65mm caliber, with their BARs and Hotchkiss machine guns similarly chambered. With the fall of the homeland the FP was cut off from its supply of this unusual ammunition. Stocks held in the Congo had never been great and in fact would only suffice for a single battalion in a combat zone. Thus, the relatively small size of BCS 2.

The Second Generation – Early 1942

The British and Americans were unwilling to divert precious ammunition capacity to this unique round, so the only alternative was to re-equip with different weapons. In December 1940 the US offered 7,100 surplus M1917 Enfield rifles in US .30-06 caliber and these were quickly delivered. To complement them the Government in exile ordered 300 Colt R75 and R80 (versions of the BAR), and 130 Colt machine guns, but this time in .30-06 caliber. That was followed by eighteen 81mm mortars, and in January 1941 they requested 225 60mm mortars. By the time the light mortars, along with 20,000 rounds of M49A1 HE ammunition, were ready the Lend Lease act had come into effect and they were delivered that way in 1941. The British contributed Boys AT rifles and Sten submachine guns. South Africa provided four 3.7” howitzers and some 81mm (3”) mortars.

With a portion of the new equipment available revised organization tables were released in January-March 1942.

	White		Indigenous																
	Officers	Sergeants	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates	Beaters													
Battalion Headquarters																			
Command Group	4	1	0	1	9	0	5	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Signal Section																			
Wire Squad	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Optical Signal Squad	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Echelon Supply	0	0	0	1	4	112	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorised Trains	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	0	0
Medical Section	1	2	0	1	16	0	2	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Three Rifle Companies, each																			
Company Headquarters	2	0	1	2	15	0	2	1	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Three Rifle Platoons, each														0	0	0	0	0	0
Platoon Headquarters	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Sections, each	0	0	1	2	10	0	0	0	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grenade Launcher Section	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Echelon Supply	0	0	0	1	4	79	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorised Trains	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Machine Gun Company																			
Company Headquarters	2	0	2	1	20	0	2	1	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Three MG Platoons, each	0	1	1	3	19	0	1	0	20	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Echelon Supply	0	0	0	1	5	114	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorised Trains	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

FP Infantry Battalion, from January 1942

A rifle section consisted of a sergeant and two 5-man squads, one of which included a BAR light machine gun. The platoon also included a grenade launcher section of a three 3-man teams with a PFC in charge, centralizing these weapons.

As before, maintenance of the company in the field was via bearers under the supervision of five soldiers. Fifty-one of the bearers carried field camps, including tents and baggage, one carried water filters, fifteen carried ammunition, one carried BAR magazines, and three carried haversacks for resupply. The motorized trains carried mostly ammunition, along with office equipment. In total, the company carried 48,240 rounds of small arms ammunition, of which 7,200 were on the heads of the bearers and 22,000 in the trucks. Also carried were 900 grenades for the launchers, with 96 on the bearers and 575 in the trucks.

The machine gun company was a straightforward affair with three platoons, each of two teams (a corporal and three privates) with a machine gun, a 13-man ammunition detail, a platoon leader and a messenger. The company held 16,020 rounds of MG ammunition, of which 1,200 were with the bearers and 9,525 in the company trucks.

Signal facilities comprised two runners and a bugler in the MG company, four runners and a bugler in each rifle company, plus the battalion signal section. That section held seven optical signallers and a wire squad with eight field telephones and 24 reels of wire, each 300 m, of which half were carried on the trucks in the trains. The bearers in the battalion HQ differed from those in the companies in that they included nine for telephone wire and 24 as stretcher-bearers, these latter complementing the six medics and 13 stretcher bearers in the medical section.

An infantry regiment consisted simply of three such battalions and a small headquarters of 15 Whites and 53 Blacks, whose contribution to coordination was a signal section with a 3-man telephone central, three 4-man wire-laying teams and four motorcycle messengers. The largest element of the regiment HQ was the medical group, with an officer (doctor), sergeant medic, both White, three medics, and 31 stretcher-bearers, seven of which were soldiers and the rest non-military bearers.

Brigade composition was varied, but usually included an artillery battery, a mortar company, a cyclist company, and an engineer bridging company. A battery had either 85 men with four 70mm St Chamond museum pieces with 1,440 rounds using 14 trucks for transport; or 125 men with four 3.7" howitzers and 1,200 rounds in 15 trucks. In either case communications between the forward observer and the gun position was by telephone with 24 rolls of 300 m wire.

The mortar company was a large unit with six 34-man platoons. Each platoon manned two 81mm mortars with a four-man crew, plus 13 to carry the mortars and 30 rounds. The company also included the inevitable porters, 205 of them, of whom twelve carried

180 rounds. Each platoon included four telephonists, but there were no signallers at the company level.

The cyclist company was similar to the rifle company, but was provided with bicycles and lacked the porters, relying entirely on its two trucks.

On the return of BCS3 from East Africa the FP was largely reequipped with weapons and equipment purchased from the US, including M1917 rifles, Thompson submachine guns, Browning machine guns, 37mm anti-tank guns, and White M3 Scout Cars. In mid-1942 the 1st Brigade of 13,000 men was sent to Nigeria for use against the French in West Africa, but the Allied landings in North Africa caused the Vichyist French local officials to have a change of heart, and the action was rendered unnecessary. The FP group sent to Nigeria was notable for including the first motorized combat unit of the FP, the *Groupe de Chasseurs Motorises*, which consisted of a headquarters, a pioneer platoon, a radio platoon, a reconnaissance squadron (company) with twenty scout cars, and two motorized rifle squadrons on 3-ton trucks.

Third Generation Organization: late 1942

The January TO&Es did not last a year. As new equipment flowed into the Congo revisions were being tried and published. One dramatic change was made to the rifle company when the old grenade launchers were retired and a mortar section added to the company. Not surprisingly, given the lack of motorized support, the section was huge. It consisted of three squads, each of a sergeant, a corporal gunner, a loader and seven soldiers to carry ammunition. That there was no section leader probably indicates that the guns were to be deployed singly.

The battalion machine gun company was changed only in detail. The battalion headquarters, on the other hand, was significantly expanded. An administrative element, including two cobblers, a storekeeper and four cooks, was added to the command section. More importantly, a combat section was added comprising a six-man protection detail with rifles, a patrol element of a sergeant, two corporals and ten privates, and three two-man observer teams. The signal section remained lamentably weak, improved only by the addition of three motorcycle dispatch riders. Provision was made for a battalion radio team, but this had to be attached from PF headquarters. Given the increase in size of the HQ it is not surprising that its trains increased as well. The number of bearers increased to 177, of whom 135 carried the camp gear and 24 were stretcher-bearers.

The original TO&E provided for the optional inclusion of a two-gun platoon of .50cal machine guns in the battalion, but this was eliminated with the decision to centralize those weapons at the regiment level.

A new addition to the regiment was a heavy weapons battalions, the TO&E for which was finalized in December 1942. HE fire support was provided by a mortar company with four platoons, each of two 81mm mortars. The platoons were little changed from their earlier incarnation, being huge units of 32 men, including a rangefinder, two 4-man crews, six mortar carriers, six ammunition carriers and a four-man telephone team. The one major change was that each platoon was allocated a truck from the company trains.

Interestingly, the anti-tank company had no intermediate echelon between the company HQ and the individual guns, each of which was commanded by a White sergeant, except to the extent that one of the sergeants was nominated to command one other piece as well as his own. Anti-aircraft protection was the responsibility of the heavy machine gun company, which featured six light trucks, each mounting a .50cal machine gun.

	White Soldiers	Black Soldiers	Black Porters	Pistols	Submachine Guns	Rifles	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	.50cal Machine Guns	60mm Mortars	81mm Mortars	37mm Guns	Motorcycles	Cars & Jeeps	Trucks	Special Vehicles	Bicycles
Regiment Headquarters	16	128	198	15	28	97	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	13	2	6
Signal Platoon	2	42	0	2	9	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Three Infantry Battalions, each																	
Battalion Headquarters	14	132	177	13	26	102	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	8	3	4
Three Rifle Companies, each																	
Company Headquarters	3	27	0	3	3	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Three Rifle Platoons, each	1	43	0	1	1	39	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mortar Section	0	30	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Echelon Transport	0	4	80	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorized Trains	0	8	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Machine Gun Company																	
Company Headquarters	3	29	0	3	3	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Three MG Platoons, each	1	25	0	1	1	20	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
First Echelon Transport	0	4	112	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorized Trains	0	12	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0
Heavy Weapons Battalion																	
Battalion Headquarters	5	31	0	5	5	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	0	1
Anti-Tank Company																	
Company Headquarters	2	35	0	2	2	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	7	0	0
Twelve Squads, each	1	6	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Maintenance Section	1	3	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mortar Company																	
Company Headquarters	1	11	0	1	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Four Platoons, each	1	32	0	1	1	15	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
First Echelon Transport	0	4	106	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motorized Trains	0	12	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0
Heavy Machine Gun Company																	
Company Headquarters	1	23	0	1	1	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	1	1
Three Platoons, each	1	20	0	1	1	19	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1

FP Infantry Regiment, from October-December 1942

Added to the regiment HQ by the November TO&E was a protection/scout platoon with a White officer with a sergeant, two corporals and ten privates, all with submachine guns. The medical group remained the same, but the number of trucks was increased from eight to thirteen to accommodate extra rations, baggage and medical supplies.

Organic signal assets in the infantry regiment were moderately improved. The earlier three 4-man wire-laying teams were increased to four and three porters assigned to each to carry wire. In addition, the number of motorcycle dispatch riders was increased to six. There were still no radios, however.

When a brigade was designated an expeditionary unit for service outside the Congo, a signal group was attached. This included a platoon for each infantry regiment, such a platoon having six teams with Delco 200 W transceivers mounted in pick-up trucks, one per battalion and two for the regiment HQ. Thus, even in the expeditionary forces radio communications extended no further down than the battalion level.

A few modifications were made to the infantry organization in late 1942 and early 1943. The more significant resulted from the delivery of Boys anti-tank rifles from Britain. Six men in the rifle company's mortar section were reassigned from ammunition carrier duties to form three two-man teams for AT rifles. Two Boys rifles were also added to the regimental HQ's protection and scout platoon.

Third-generation tables were also issued for the brigade-level artillery, although they made only detail changes. The old 70mm St Chamond guns and the new 3.7" howitzers from South Africa were all carried on trucks and signal assets remained weak – twelve 300m rolls of wire (plus another 12 in reserve) and five field telephones (plus two in reserve) in each battery.

	White		Black															
	Officers	Sergeants	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates													
Group Headquarters																		
Command Element	2	1	2	1	7	8	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0			
Signal Element	0	1	0	0	15	11	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1			
Motorcycle Platoon	1	0	3	6	18	1	27	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	1			
Pioneer Platoon																		
Platoon HQ	1	1	0	1	12	5	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1			
Bridge Section	0	0	1	1	24	0	8	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	4			
Pioneer Section	0	0	1	1	26	0	10	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	5			
Intendance Element	1	0	0	2	15	6	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5			
Medical Element	2	1	0	1	23	15	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3			
Maintenance Element	1	1	1	0	11	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4			
Armored Squadron																		
Squadron Headquarters																		
Command Group	1	0	1	0	4	4	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0			
Fuel Section	0	1	1	0	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1			
Trains Section	1	0	1	0	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1			
Three Armored Platoons, each																		
Combat Echelon	1	3	1	1	18	16	8	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0			
Trains Echelon	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2			
Two Portée Squadrons, each																		
Squadron Headquarters																		
Command Group	2	0	0	1	3	4	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0			
Combat Trains	0	0	1	0	11	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	2			
Baggage Trains	0	0	2	0	3	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1			
Three Rifle Platoons, each																		
Platoon Headquarters	1	0	0	0	5	4	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0			
Three Rifle Sections, each	0	0	1	2	14	0	2	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	1			
Anti-Tank Squad	0	1	1	0	4	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0			

note: weapons do not include the three machine guns on each scout car

One specialized unit was formed in mid-1942, although its TO&E appears not to have been published until February 1943. This was the Groupe de Chasseurs Motorisés, a motorized reconnaissance unit that took advantage of the delivery of small numbers of M3 White scout cars and 3-ton trucks from the US. Officers and troops were carefully chosen to represent the elite of the FP, and the unit was very highly regarded by US observers.

The groupe consisted of an armored squadron and two motorized rifle squadrons. The armored squadron was made up of three platoons, each of one M3 with a radio and six men, and three more without radios, each with a commander, a driver, and four crewmen (or infantry if dismounted). Although lightly protected and of mediocre cross-country mobility, with their three .30cal machine guns they were capable of putting down heavy suppressive fire. The platoons being intended for independent operations if need be, each had two 3-ton trucks, one for fuel and the other for supplies.

The rifle platoon of the motorized squadron consisted of a headquarters mounted in an M3 scout car, three rifle sections carried on bench running down the center of the bed of a 3-ton truck, such that the troops faced outward, and an anti-tank squad with two jeeps and a 37mm gun. A rifle section was similar to those of the regular infantry, with a sergeant, a six-man automatic squad with a BAR-type, and a six-man rifle squad, plus a driver. The squadron commander also had a scout car, seemingly the only one with a radio. The US only provided the FP with 21 scout cars, so this allocation of thirteen to the armored squadron and four to each rifle squadron would have used up every vehicle, leaving none for repairs. Thus, the motorized squadron table, but not that of the armored squadron, provided that each scout car could be replaced by two jeeps if needed.

Moving further to the North

An expeditionary brigade had been sent to Nigeria in 1942 when Vichy supporters still ruled part of French West Africa. With the fall of the Vichy regime in November 1942 this became unnecessary. The Allies still needed local defense in Egypt and Lebanon to free up their combat forces, however, and prevailed upon the Belgians in exile to move the expeditionary brigade further north.

What worked in tropical Nigeria, however, would not work in the arid middle east. Clearly the porters would have to be left behind, to be repatriated to the Congo. The combat elements moved to Egypt in April-June 1943.

Most of the brigade elements were already motorized, so the most significant modifications were to the infantry battalions. The infantry retained the general

configuration of its earlier porter-based structure except for the decentralization of the 60mm mortars from a company-level platoon to one squad in each rifle platoon.

The most important change, of course, was to transportation. The rifle company's transportation section held seventeen 3-ton trucks, normally distributed as one per rifle section, one for each platoon's mortar and AT elements, one for the company HQ, three for ammunition, and one each for rations, water, and baggage. The machine gunners were much more crowded, with only one truck per platoon, along with two in the company HQ, three for ammunition and one each for rations, water, and baggage.

	White		Black																
	Officers	Sergeants	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates														
Battalion Headquarters	2	1	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0		0
Headquarters Company																			
Company Headquarters	1	1	0	3	15	2	2	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Signal Platoon																			
Platoon Headquarters	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Telephone Operating Squad	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Wire-Laying Squads, each	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal Squad	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Messenger Squad	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Combat Support Platoon																			
Platoon Headquarters	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Squad	0	0	0	1	5	0	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reconnaissance Squad	0	0	1	2	10	0	7	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Observation Squad	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Platoon																			
Platoon HQ & Chaplain	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Squad	0	2	0	0	7	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stretcher-Bearer Squad	0	0	0	1	30	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Platoon																			
Platoon Headquarters	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Supply Section	0	1	0	1	4	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	3	1	0	51	3	3	49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0
Three Rifle Companies, each																			
Company Headquarters	2	1	0	2	25	3	3	24	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each																			
Platoon Headquarters	1	0	0	0	4	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Three Rifle Sections, each	0	0	1	2	10	0	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Squad	0	0	1	1	5	0	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Team	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Section	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	0
Machine Gun Company																			
Company Headquarters	2	1	0	2	27	3	3	26	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Three Machine Gun Platoons, each																			
Platoon Headquarters	0	1	0	0	4	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Two Machine Gun Squads, each	0	0	1	1	6	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ammunition Squad	0	0	0	1	12	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport Section	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0

FP Infantry Battalion (Motorized Type), from 1943

The brigade supported its two infantry regiments (each of three infantry and one heavy weapons battalions) with three artillery batteries: the previous 70mm battery, 3.7" howitzer battery, and a new battery of 75mm American field guns. For the new battery, each of its two platoons had 20 men with two 75mm guns each towed by a 1½-ton truck. As with the other batteries, communications between the forward observer section and the gun position were by telephone.

The motorized brigade returned to the Congo in late 1944, joining the two other brigades that had not left. In May 1943 the US Secretary of State had inquired as to whether the Force Publique could be persuaded to participate in operations in Burma, but was firmly rebuffed as "Japan is not the natural enemy of Belgium".