

Tactical Structure in World War II

France

Leland Ness

30 April 2023

Foreign Legion

FOREIGN LEGION

Through most of the 1930s, the fighting strength of the French Foreign Legion was concentrated in five infantry regiments and a cavalry regiment, all based overseas. Morocco was home to the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Infantry Regiments (*Régiment étrangers d'Infanterie* = REI), the 5th REI was based in Indochina, the 1st REI in Algeria (with one battalion in the Levant), and the 1st Cavalry Regiment in Morocco and Tunisia. With the outbreak of war four more infantry regiments were raised along with a second cavalry regiment. One of the infantry regiments (6th REI) was based in Lebanon, formed out of two detached battalions from regiments in North Africa. The cavalry regiment was raised in North Africa, and the three remaining infantry regiments (11th and 12th REIs and 13th Demi-Brigade) were formed in France and incorporated into divisions there.

The Legion infantry regiments in North Africa were not assigned to the first-wave African Infantry Divisions, which were subject to being shipped out to France or other parts of the Empire, but instead were placed under commands that were to stay in North Africa. The bulk of the 1st REI was assigned to the 182nd DIA, the 2nd and 4th REIs to the 2nd Moroccan Division (alternately known as *Troupes de Protection du Maroc*), while the 3rd REI formed a part of the 3rd Moroccan Division. Similarly, the 1st Foreign Legion Cavalry Regiment was assigned as GHQ reserve for North Africa, while the 2nd Cavalry Regiment came under the 2nd Moroccan Division.

The Foreign Legion infantry regiments used two TO&Es. The few regiments employed in France used the normal (non-motorized) infantry regiment organization. Regiments employed outside France, however, used a special "overseas" type TO&E that differed significantly from the metropolitan type.

The rifle platoon was identical to that of the normal infantry regiment. The main change at the company level was the replacement of the 2-horse wagon with pack mules and the addition of pack mules to the signal section (1 mule) and the mortar squad (2 mules). This did not substantially affect the ammunition load except that the number of LMG rounds carried at the company level rose from 6,075 in the regular infantry company to 17,850 in the Foreign Legion overseas-type company.

	Officers	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates	Pistols	Carbines	Rifles	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	60mm mortars	81mm mortars	37mm infantry guns	25mm AT guns	Riding Animals	Draft Animals	Pack Animals	Wagons & Carts	Motorcycles	Cars	Light Trucks	Trucks
Regiment Headquarters	7	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Headquarters Company																					
Headquarters	1	3	2	25	3	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	0
Signal Section	1	2	9	47	3	56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0
Anti-Tank Section	1	2	2	15	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	6	5	3	0	0	0	0
Service Company																					
Company Headquarters	1	2	1	8	2	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Supply & Maintenance Section	0	9	4	26	4	0	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5
Rations Section	1	3	1	30	2	0	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	1	1	13	0
Medical Section	2	4	3	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Pioneer Company																					
Company Headquarters	1	3	1	16	2	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	2	0
Two Platoons, each	1	3	6	54	4	0	60	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Three Infantry Battalions, each																					
Battalion Headquarters & Platoon																					
Battalion HQ	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal Section	0	1	5	25	3	14	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Rations Section	0	1	0	7	2	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
Medical Section	0	1	2	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Companies, each																					
Company HQ & Platoon																					
Company HQ	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal/Scout Section	0	1	0	10	0	6	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	2	16	1	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	10	3	0	0	0	0
Mortar Squad	0	1	1	4	1	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each	1	4	4	32	8	10	23	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Heavy Weapons Company																					
Company HQ & Platoon																					
Company HQ	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal/Scout Section	0	1	0	10	1	4	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trains Section	0	2	3	15	2	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	9	3	0	0	0	0
Three Machine Gun Platoons, each																					
Platoon HQ	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two MG Sections, each	0	1	2	12	4	0	11	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Heavy Weapons Platoon																					
Platoon HQ	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Infantry Gun Section	0	1	1	7	2	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Section	0	1	2	18	4	0	17	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0

FOREIGN LEGION INFANTRY REGIMENT, Overseas Type, from December 1936

The heavy weapons company also adopted a pack transport organization, with each 15-man, 2-gun machine gun section allocated two pack mules to carry the Hotchkiss guns and three more mules with a total of 5,073 rounds of ammunition. In the heavy weapons platoon the 9-man infantry gun squad had one pack mule to carry the 37mm gun and two mules each carrying 96 rounds. The 21-man mortar section had two mules each carrying an 81mm mortar and four mules with a total of 84 rounds¹. No 37mm ammunition was carried at the company level, but 96 rounds of 81mm ammunition were carried in the company's 2-ton truck, and 17,856 rounds of MG ammunition in the truck, the wagons, and the pack mules.

¹Command of the mortars apparently proved more difficult than originally envisioned, for in June 1938 the gun commander position was upgraded from corporal to sergeant, and the gunner position from private to corporal, yielding three sergeants and two corporals in the section.

The battalion HQ platoon was composed of a 31-man signal section, a 7-man resupply section, and a 19-man medical section. The signal section provided a four-man radio team, a six-man telephone team, eight optical signallers, and two dispatch riders. Since no extra radios were held for distribution radio communications extended down only to the battalion level. Signal facilities at the company consisted of two optical signallers and two "observers".

The overseas-type regiment was made up of three infantry battalions, a headquarters company, a pioneer company, and a service company. The regiment's signal platoon was found within the HQ company and provided four 6-man telephone teams, three 4-man radio transceiver teams, a 3-man air-ground radio receiver team, eleven optical signallers, and two motorcycle dispatch riders. In addition, doctrine called for the attachment to the platoon of a team with a light truck with ER.26bis transceiver from the next higher HQ to establish the higher command net. The HQ company also included the only anti-tank weapons in the regiment in a small AT platoon.

The pioneer company was composed of two platoons, each of three sections, each of which in turn was made up of two 10-man squads. The company was not particularly well equipped with tools, such as were allotted were carried on the six pack mules of each platoon and a 2-ton truck in company HQ.

The service support elements of the regiment were concentrated in the service company. Its rations platoon was divided into two sections: one with ten mule-drawn carts, and the other with ten 2-ton and three 1-ton trucks. The supply/maintenance platoon provided trucks for fuel, armorer's tools, blacksmith equipment, and the postal detachment, while the small 6-man maintenance squad provided limited repair service from its one solo and one sidecar motorcycles.

The overseas-type Foreign Legion infantry regiment was closest in organization to the overseas-type infantry and Zouaves regiments. There were differences, however. The Legion added a 60mm mortar squad to each rifle company and compensated for this with the loss of one machine gun platoon in each heavy weapons company. The only other difference of note was the expansion of the pioneer platoon to full company strength and its replacement in the HQ company by a small anti-tank platoon.

The two Foreign Legion cavalry regiments were identically organized, each consisting of a headquarters, a group (two squadrons) of mounted cavalry, a

group (two squadrons) of AMD armored cars, and a platoon of 20mm Mle.39 anti-aircraft guns. The mounted squadrons probably followed the organizational outline of the overseas-type *Spahis* regiment, while the armored car squadrons probably followed those of the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*.

One break from the normal evolution came in 1939 when the 1st REI, the sole such unit in Algeria was tapped to provide 2,500 of its 3,000 soldiers for duty in France, to provide the cadres for the new 11th and 12th Regiments. Rebuilding the 1st Regiment would take time and an interim TO&E was issued in 1939 for a *Regiment Etranger d'Infanterie – Algerie*. This was largely a garrison force, capable of deploying company-size units, but only for brief periods due to the complete lack of signal and logistical support.

	Officers	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	81mm mortars	37mm infantry guns	Riding Animals	Pack Animals	Light Trucks
Regiment Headquarters	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0
Headquarters Company											
Headquarters	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal Section	1	2	4	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Band/Stretcher-Bearer Section	0	3	4	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobilization Section	1	8	7	53	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trains & Barracks Section	1	6	5	53	0	0	0	0	0	8	4
Mounted Company											
Company Headquarters	1	4	4	45	0	0	0	0	27	25	0
Two Platoons, each											
Platoon HQ	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Machine Gun Section	0	1	3	14	0	2	0	0	12	6	0
Two Rifle Sections, each	0	1	6	30	0	0	0	0	21	0	0
Pioneer Company											
Company Headquarters	1	4	3	27	0	0	0	0	0	20	0
Two Platoons, each	1	3	6	48	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
Three Infantry Battalions, each											
Battalion Headquarters	1	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Two Rifle Companies, each											
Company HQ & Section	1	3	1	17	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Four Rifle Platoons, each	1	3	6	37	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Machine Gun Company											
Company Headquarters	1	3	2	12	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Four MG Platoons, each	1	3	5	29	0	4	0	0	0	5	0
Heavy Weapons Platoon	0	1	2	5	0	0	1	1	0	0	0

Foreign Legion Infantry Regiment, Algeria, 1939

They struggled to meet even these reduced requirements, and by May 1940 the regiment, assigned to the 182nd DIA, had only two of its three regiments.