



THE RECONNAISSANCE CORPS



BRITISH ARMY

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Introduction

This bolt action supplement is designed to allow players to deploy platoons based on the Reconnaissance Corps from WW2. The Corps eventually provided units to all British infantry divisions in all campaigns from Mid 1942 onwards and given its important role on the battlefield it is remarkable the regiments are not better known (likely not helped by its post war disbandment).

Recce Corps units would fight in North Africa, the Middle East, Burma, Italy and finally Northern Europe with great distinction. The dedicated recce role meant the units were very well equipped with fast, mobile, light armour as well as having a lot of firepower, needed as the regiments were likely to find themselves engaging enemy units independently.

This supplement will look at the first actions of the Recce Corps when fighting in Tunisia and then Sicily, later expansions for Italy, W Europe and Burma are planned.

The corps role was to gather “vital tactical information in battle for infantry divisions”.

“Only the enemy in front” was to become its regimental motto



Formation



The Reconnaissance Corps was formed after a review of the Blitzkrieg campaign revealed serious deficiencies in recon capability in the British Army for its infantry divisions. Recce provided by mechanised cavalry formations having proven inadequate.

The new Corps was initially allocated 12 battalions, one each for every operational army corps but with the intention that in time every single division would receive its own recce regiment. To muster these forces, the army either converted existing infantry or anti-tank battalions. Training of these soldiers in their new roles commenced from April 1941, with an IQ exam needing to be passed to stay within the regiment; recce infantry were expected to be able to show initiative and also needed to be able to drive and maintain vehicles.

They were also noted for their proficiency in radio operation, fieldcraft, map reading and skill-at-arms.

Initially the corps was considered an infantry formation despite its role and use of light armoured cars. This changed formally in January 1944 when the corps was absorbed into the Royal Armoured Corps which also entailed the switch from their khaki berets to the black ones worn by tankmen (though many veterans hung onto their beige berets for as long as possible).

As early as June 1942 however nomenclature was changed from infantry to cavalry, thus battalions became regiments, Companies were squadrons and platoons troops. A private soldier became a trooper. Cavalry nomenclature will be used here on in.

Early History and tactical use

The first Recce formation to fight was the 18th battalion. This was to be shipped to N Africa in October 1941 but was diverted to Singapore and tragically destroyed there in February 1942, serving as infantry. Next in the firing line was 50th Recce which was wiped out at the battle of Gazala in May 1942 in a defensive infantry role and was then never reformed.

44th Recce was converted to mine clearing duties supporting the Royal Engineers at El Alamein before switching back to its Recce role for the 56th division in the Middle East.

After this inauspicious start the Corps began to make its mark on the battlefield; The activities of other historic units will be included in the army list sections.

Roles that developed for the Reconnaissance Corps included:

- Probing and general reconnaissance
- Aggressive patrolling, keeping enemy units occupied and unable to take the initiative
- Flanking and covering infantry division advances
- Supporting forward deployed and isolated allied units in something of a fire brigade role
- Securing and defending rear areas
- Providing forward defensive screens as slower moving units came up in advance, often in the infantry role



Heroes of War

Lt Colonel Kendal Chavasse

DSO



A photo of LtCol Kendal Chavasse (third from right). Note the darker green berets of the officer on the left in contrast to the khaki berets of the other ranks on the left (Taken from The British reconnaissance Corps in WW II).



Chavasse was the CO of a squadron of 56th Recce which was attached to the 56th Infantry division but then transferred to the 78th in time for the Tunisian campaign. Chavasse's squadron was known as Blade force but would become known as 'Chavasse's Light Horse'.

He had been borne in Waterford, Ireland in a military family with a Major for a father and brothers all in the armed forces. Having graduated from Sandhurst in 1926 by the time of WW2 he had already served in Egypt, Sudan, Malta and Palestine during the Arab revolt.

Chavasse's own LRC was painted with the Gaelic motto "Faugh A Ballagh!"- Clear the way!.

The unit was likely the first to enter Tunisia and quickly ran into strong defences from German Armoured Cars and tanks. The unit was used to screen 78th Division's right flank in the push for Tunis and would advance to within 15 miles of the Town. In December 1942 the unit would lead a rescue mission of the 2nd Parachute Battalion which found itself cut off in the Sloughia area. Under his command the squadron participated in actions as part of a mixed force with No. 3 Commando and the Special Raiding Service securing forward advanced positions.

It was during its time in Tunisia that the Reconnaissance Corps was to develop its strategy, tactics and upgrade its equipment, becoming an aggressive mobile asset for the British Army.

Unit structure and organisation

Regiments were organised to have three Recce Companies, with a HQ company in control and providing Mortar and AT support. The Recce Companies consisted of three scout platoons and one assault platoon (after June 1942 the platoons should be called Troops).

Scout Troops started their war with a section of 4 LRCs and two carrier sections with 3 Carriers each. However, lessons learnt in Tunisia made it clear the platoons would need more of an AT capability and so 4 LRCs became 3 LRCs with 2 Humber Armoured Cars. The Bren guns in the carrier section were typically crewed by three men and were used in a recce role not a transport one. However, it was not uncommon for the carriers to switch to transport roles to bring support into dangerous combat situation.

Assault Troops were there to provide back up and secure objectives when the regiment ran into dug in defence. Such troops were typically equipped with five 15 CWT trucks, a jeep and two motor cycles and would number 41 men including drivers. Early experience in Tunisia increasingly led to their use at night setting up observation posts, ambushes and holding objectives such as bridges.

Recce units were remarkably mobile. In total, a Regiment could be expected to field around:

Vehicles	Number
Armoured cars of all types (initially LRCs then some HACs)	45
Staff cars	6
Carriers	67
15 CWT trucks	71
3 ton lorries	6

Weaponry was light but numerous for the Regiment, with 126 Bren Guns and initially 48 AT rifles which were later upgraded for 2/6 pdrs and PIATs. 18 2in mortars along with 2-6 3in mortars were also held at HQ for support. Given the regiment typically had 770 men, it was fielding a Bren gun per every seven men.

Taking the above into account it is clear that although part of the infantry, Recce Troops should be considered tank platoons for game purposes. However if an army list is based on an Assault platoon, it would be an infantry list.

Notable units of the reconnaissance corps

Note that most regiments served as the recce element for the division with the same number but were often detached and committed to other parent units.

1st Reconnaissance Regiment- Served in Tunisia March to May 1943, Italy from November 1943 (including Anzio). This was the first Recce regiment formed, from the AT companies of 1st Division and other men transferred in. At one point in Tunisia it actually operated as the recce force for 19th French Corps; when contacting US forces as part of 19th Corps, the regimental history recorded that "Difficulties with language were noted, although it was not recorded whether those difficulties were with French or American Troops." (Only the enemy in front, P56).

1st Airborne Reconnaissance Regiment- Formed to serve the 1st Airborne division, serving in Italy in 1943 then virtually destroyed at Arnhem with its parent formation.

3rd Reconnaissance Regiment- landed on Normandy with the Ironsides and served until the end of the war in North West Europe.

5th Reconnaissance Regiment- The most travelled recce regiment of the war, being shipped to S Africa, India, Iraq, then to N Africa before fighting in Sicily 1943. Shipped to Italy from September 1943 to July 1944, then in Palestine. Back to Italy in February 1945 then to Germany from March.

6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment- designated a recce regiment from January 1944, landed by glider on D Day. Served later in Belgium then Germany from March 1945.

15th (Scottish) Reconnaissance Regiment- Landed in Normandy in June 1944 serving until the war's end in Europe.

44th Reconnaissance Regiment- In N Africa from July 1942 and converted to a mine clearance unit for El Alamein. Later served in Tunisia and Italy. Notable for its use of Marmot Herringtons rather than LRCs.

45th Reconnaissance Regiment- Served in India then converted into 45 and 54 columns for the Chindits 16 Brigade in Burma.

52nd Lowland Reconnaissance Regiment- Planned as a mountain warfare unit then converted to an air mobile role before serving in N W Europe from October 1944 to the war's end. The unit was the only one to be equipped with Valentine tanks (initially) and also made heavy use of Dingo Scout Cars, something not done by any other regiment.

53rd (Welsh) Reconnaissance Regiment- Landed in Normandy in June 1944 serving until the war's end in Europe.

56th Reconnaissance Regiment- The first to see action in its intended role in late 1942 once it was dispatched from Colchester for overseas service. It was very active during the Tunisia campaign before joining the Sicily invasion and then serving in Italy. The officers of the 56th wore green berets instead of khaki and the unit equipped itself with cavalry trumpets.

61st Reconnaissance Regiment- Supported 50th Infantry division at Normandy and until January 1945 when broken up to form reinforcements.

81st and 82nd (West African) Reconnaissance Regiments- Served in Burma in the Arakan campaigns from January 1944.

ARMY SPECIAL RULES



Recce army lists exchange the British special rule for the following special rules but retain access to a free FAO or can instead take a free air observer in some selectors.

Only the enemy ahead.... every other beggar behind

Units can flank when the scenario allows (EG typically from turn three) 12" further in then the scenario specifies; So 36" in from the board edge, not 24" on turn 3, then from anywhere on turn 4). Recce units do not get the usual -1 to order rolls to come in from reserve or flanking

Beaten paths are safest- All Recce Regiment units can spot hidden enemy units from 18'

Gun Dogs- Recce units that disembark from a transport Bren gun carrier with a pintle LMG may detach and bring the gun with them. To represent this, pay for the LMG for the Bren Gun Carrier, and any unit that starts the game embarked in the Bren Gun Carrier when disembarked gets a to take the LMG with them (the pintle mount on the Bren gun however can no longer be used).

Aggressive patrolling- Once a transport Bren gun carrier's passengers disembark, the vehicle does not count as an empty transport. Therefore it is not removed from the table if an enemy unit finishes the turn closer to it than allied units. Note however the vehicle DOES NOT gain the recce rule, the reduced crew (to two men rather than the Recce Corps usual three plus) means the vehicle is unable to spot incoming attacks in the way a fully crewed carrier could.

Army Lists

Tunisia and Sicily



The Reconnaissance Corps is somewhat unique in that it is an infantry formation with armoured cars at its core. A historically accurate Troop would be either a Scout Troop which is clearly a tank platoon or an Assault Troop which is clearly an infantry platoon. However as noted these platoons would usually operate with each other, with the assault Troop supporting the Scout Troops (and then add in Company HQ assets!). With this in mind the following army selectors will offer the option of running a tank platoon or a platoon acceptable for use as an infantry platoon.

The following lists are suitable for campaigns set in Tunisia late 1942 to May 1943 and for Sicily.

Tunisia December 1942- May 1943

The Tunisian battlefields were the place where the Regiment began to build its reputation (see the earlier history section for more details). Several regiments would see service here, with the most prominent being 56th Recce.

Active regiments 56th Recce, 46th Recce, 1st Recce, 40th Recce, 44th Recce (which was now supporting the 56th division).

The Recce regiments in North Africa suffered from having to take on German armoured units where they were outgunned and Montgomery took the view these units were not suitable for the desert campaign. Come Tunisia however and 56 Recce played an important role in the advance on Tunis. A squadron of 56 Recce was also to support US troops at Kasserine Pass. Other actions included rescuing the 2nd Parachute Bn in December 1942 and saving No. 6 Commando in February 1943. Supporting cut off units was to become something of a specialty for Recce Regiments as would putting enemy soldiers "in the bag" as prisoners with fast moving advances to cut off lines of retreat.

During this time in Tunisia the Regiments also developed an aggressive patrolling role backed by infantry support to stop the enemy seizing the initiative at the front. During this campaign the Corps also recognised it needed heavier weaponry than just Humber LRCs and so the Humber Mk II, III, and IV appeared with its light AT gun or Auto cannon options. This can be reflected in lists that want to be more historically accurate, with Humber Mk II and Mk III only added to late Tunisian and Sicily lists.

Additional Special rules for Tunisia

Helping hand- The Recce Regiments often had its squadrons made available to allied units in Tunisia. Therefore when running a double platoon it is admissible to use a Recce platoon paired with a Free French or US platoon serving in Tunisia. 56th Recce A squadron for some time served as the recce force for the US 18th Regimental Combat team and an assault troop supported Free French forces in January 1943.

Sicily July – August 1943

When the British 5th, 50th and 51st Infantry divisions landed in Sicily, 5th Recce and 56th Recce were there with them. Initially the units operated as fast advancing recce for their parent units but once they ran into heavy resistance on the slopes of Mount Etna and around Catania they had to dig in and hold their forward positions; 5th Recce ran into the Herman Goering division. The unit had to adopt a defensive role to prevent counter attacks at this point but not before it had collected plenty of (Italian) prisoners.

Active regiments 5th Recce and 56th Recce- By this stage if using 56th Recce than at least half the force should be veteran to reflect their experience from Tunisia.

Recce Regiment Scout Troop (Tank platoon)

This should be considered a tank platoon for game purposes. All units should be taken as either regular or veteran.



Armoured Cars

3-4 from Marmon Herringtons (Used by 5th Recce and 44th Recce) II-III, Humber LRCs

0-2 Humber Armoured Car Mk II or IV (5th Recce can exchange these for Marmon Herrington Mk II modified)

0-6 Bren Gun Carriers in the armoured car role with no transport capability or as transports (see below)

0-1 Motor bike messengers

Headquarters

0-1 Medic

0-1 Free forward artillery observer

0-1 Forward artillery observer

Infantry

0-5 Recce assault infantry sections, Bren Gun Recce section

0-1 Mortar team, light or medium

0-1 PIAT team (For Sicily only)

Artillery

0-1 2pdr Anti tank gun, 6pdr Anti tank gun, 25 pdr field gun but if a third armoured car has been included in the list then an artillery gun may NOT be taken

Armoured Cars

Special rule- Assault Troops were backed up by Scout Troops and to reflect this may take 0-3 armoured cars from the options below. Note that if a third armoured car is taken, the platoon may not take an artillery piece, reflecting its focus on mobility at the expense of heavier support.

0-3 from:

Marmon Herrington Mk II or III, LRCs, Humber Mk II or IV (Maximum of two Humber Armoured Cars allowed), Motor bike (maximum of one)

Transports and Tows

0-6 Bren Gun Carriers

0-5 15 CWT Trucks

0-1 Jeep

Recce Regiment Assault Troop (Tank platoon)

This should be considered an infantry platoon for game purposes. Note that whilst the unit is an infantry platoon, all troops must have transport as per a tank platoon.

Special rule- Note that the list here, despite being an infantry list, is able to take up to 3 armoured cars but only if an artillery option is not taken. The third armoured car being a substitute for this.

Also note that no units may be taken as inexperienced.

Headquarters

- 0. Second Lt or First Lt
- 1. Medic
- 1. Free forward Artillery Observer
- 0-1 Forward Artillery Observer

Infantry

- 5. Assault Troop sections, Bren gun Recce section
- 1. Mortar team, light or medium
- 0-1 PIAT team (for Sicily only)

Artillery

- 1. 2pdr Anti tank gun, 6pdr Anti tank gun, 25 pdr field gun but if a third armoured car has been included in the list then an artillery gun may NOT be taken

Transports and Tows

- 0-6 Bren Gun Carriers
- 0-5 15 CWT Trucks
- 1. Jeep



Armoured Cars

Special rule- Assault Troops were backed up by Scout Troops and to reflect this may take 0-3 armoured cars from the options below. Note that if a third armoured car is taken, the platoon may not take an artillery piece, reflecting its focus on mobility at the expense of heavier support.

0-3 from:

Marmon Herrington Mk II or III, LRCs, Humber Mk II or IV (Maximum of two Humber Armoured Cars allowed), Motor bike (maximum of one)

On the new units lists, we used the pictures of models for the LRC and the Marmon Herrington, can we switch these for photos you have taken of the LRC and the Herringtons I dropped off with you?

New Units

Infantry



Assault Troop Section

This represents a section within an Assault troop. These were typically eight man teams which would have supported the Scout Troops and have been transported in 15 CWT trucks.

Cost 50 pts Regular, 65 pts Veteran

Team 5 men

Weapons Rifles

Options:

- May purchase one LMG per section for ten points (Recce Regiments were equipped with 126 Bren Guns, or one for every seven men)
- Add up to three extra men with rifles for 10 points regular and 13 points Veteran per additional Trooper, to a total of eight

Special rules

- This unit must have a CWT 15 truck as transport

Bren Gun Recce section

This unit represents the strengthened crew of a Bren gun carrier when carrying out its aggressive patrolling role. When called for Recce troopers would dismount from the Bren Gun Carrier to support attacks or secure positions.

Cost 30 pts Regular, 39 pts Veteran

Team 3 men

Weapons Rifles

Options:

- Add up to two additional troopers with rifles for 10 points per regular and 13 pts per veteran up to a total of five men
- The NCO may take an SMG for 2 pts

Special Rules:

- Bring the gun boys- Bren Gun Recce teams may take the pintle mount from a Bren Gun with their section when they dismount. This means the Bren gun loses its pintle LMG and players should note this on the vehicle.
- This unit must have a Bren gun carrier as transport

Armoured Cars



Humber LRC Mk II (Nicknamed the Ironside)



Note the commander's head appearing from the hatch above his seat.

The iconic vehicle of the Recce Corps was the Humber LRC which went into service with all regiments from 1941. The typical LRC was armed with a Boys AT rifle in the hull and a Bren gun LMG in the turret whilst armour was a paltry 10mm on the front and 7-9mm on the sides with the turret a similar thickness (though its sloped shape helped it against light arms). What the LRC lacked in weaponry it made up with speed, being able to reach 60 MPH and having a 175 mile range.

This unit is already included in the Armies of Great Britain book but with all variants grouped together
Production 2,400 from 1940 to 1943 (Mk II and Mk III)
Cost 80 pts Regular, 96 pts Veteran

Weapons 1 turret mounted Bren gun LMG and Co Axial AT rifle

Damage Value 7+ (Armoured Car)

Options:

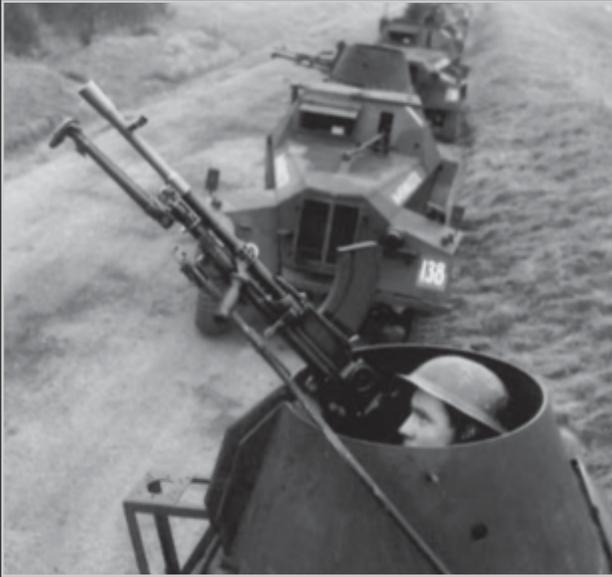
·See LRC Mk III for an alternative vehicle layout

Special Rules

·Recce

·AA role- LMGs in the turrets of LRCs may be used for AA fire

Humber LRC Mk III



A gunner operating his LMG as an AA weapon, note he does not have to expose himself when using the weapon

This was the first Humber LRC to be equipped with four wheel drive, and they were first issued in January 1942 initially to 4th Recce.

Stats are exactly the same as for the Mk II, however with a couple of additional options:

Cost 85 pts Regular, 102 pts Veteran

Weapons 1 turret mounted Bren gun LMG and Co Axial AT rifle

Damage Value 7+ (Armoured Car)

Options:

The Mk IIIA did not mount a hull AT rifle and this version can be used with a reduction in cost of 10 points. The Mk IIIA sacrificed its AT rifle for additional viewing ports and improved visibility.

Special Rules:

- Recce
- Four-wheel drive- The Mk III was fitted with four-wheel drive which allows it to move through difficult terrain with an advance order at half its normal speed, so at 6"
- AA role- LMGs in the turrets of LRCs may be used for AA fire

Motor bike messengers

The Recce Regiments used motor bikes as messengers and scouts to pass urgent back information to parent HQs or check the lie of the land ahead.

Cost 15 pts Regular 20 points Vet

Weapons The motor cycle is unarmed, if dismounted the Trooper is armed with a pistol.

Options:

- An additional motor cyclist may be added for 15 points regular or 20 points Vet to a maximum of two
- The pistol may be replaced by an SMG for 2 points by any trooper

Special rules:

- Dismount- At the beginning of any order the unit can choose to dismount and become a single infantry figure. The motor bike is then abandoned for the remainder of the game
- Messengers not combatants- This unit may not secure an objective, even when on foot
- Note the unit DOES NOT have the recce rule (the Corps used bikes primary to run messages not to scout)

Armour 6

Humber LRC Mk III



Note that the Marmon Herrington is listed in the Armies of Great Britain but with all variants grouped together and not fully reflecting the variety of armaments that were used.

Marmon Herringtons were assembled in South Africa, based on a Ford 3 ton truck chassis with armour added and weaponry from Britain. The model II then added improved suspension on a longer wheelbase with improved welding making it the British army's first true 4 wheel drive vehicle. Standard weaponry was two Bren Guns with one hull mounted and one in the turret but British "Middle East" models were redesigned with a new turret that was armed with a Boys AT rifle and co-axial Bren. Some later versions added a pintle mounted Bren or Vickers MMG to provide AA.

Total produced Mk II 900, MK III 2,600

Cost 80 pts Regular, 96 pts Veteran

Weapons 1 turret mounted Bren gun LMG and Co Axial AT rifle

Damage Value 7+ (Armoured Car)

Options:

- Change the LMG to a Vickers MMG for an additional 5 points to create the Mk III
- Add a pintle mounted LMG for 10 pts or a pintle mounted MMG for 15 points.

Special Rules

·Recce

·Too many machine guns! Trying to fire the pintle mounted LMG/MMG at the same time as the twin turret mounted MMGs guns on a Mk IIIa was difficult to do accurately, if at all. To represent this, it is always necessary to make an order test when issuing an Advance order, even if the vehicle is not pinned if the player is going to use the pintle mount to fire.

Marmon Herrington Armoured Car Mk IIIa



The Mark III was an improved version of the Mk II with production starting from May 1941 and ending August 1942. Of particular note was the Mark IIIa which switched the turret armament for twin Vickers MMGs initially to be used in an AA role.

Total produced 2,600

Cost 80 pts Regular, 96 pts Veteran

Weapons Paired twin turret MMG

Damage Value 7+ (Armoured Car)

Options:

- Change the Mk IIIa armament to a single auto cannon for an additional 10 points (Some Mk IIIa had their twin MMG's replace with captured Breda 20mm or German Flak 38)

Special Rules

- Recce



Sources

Humber Light Reconnaissance Car 1941-45, Richard Doherty, Osprey Publishing

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Only the enemy in front.... Richard Doherty , Tom Donovan Publishing

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Wheeled Odyssey, A R Prince, Publisher not identified

World War II Combat Reconnaissance Tactics, Gordon L Rottman, Osprey Publishing

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