



BRITISH BRIEFING

BACKGROUND

There are several basic tenets and political factors which must be considered during the forthcoming hostilities.

1) **Belgian and Dutch neutrality cannot be violated** by the allied forces; we must await a German attack on Belgium and Holland (or an invitation) before either country can be entered.

2) While we should of course be seen to assist our allies in France, the French do have a very strong army and must be expected to **bear the brunt of the Continental land war**. The primary objective of the British armed forces must remain the defence of the United Kingdom and the Empire.

3) A major **political consideration** must be to remember that the UK government cannot command troops from the Empire. Canada has already sent a division to England, but it cannot be deployed outside the UK without specific permission from the Canadian government. Similarly there are influential factions in Australia and South Africa strongly opposed to the sending of any troops to Europe (or indeed to participation in the war at all)

4) Vitally, the British government has to remember the essential strategic objective of maintaining the **goodwill of America**. Many Americans (for example the ambassador to the Court of St. James) do not see the necessity for this war, and have a certain sympathy for Germany. Many more think of this as an essentially European war which has nothing to do with the States, and which America must stay out of. The British government realises the absolute necessity of maintaining the goodwill (and hopefully covert support) of the American administration.

5) The British Army consists of a highly mechanised and efficient regular Field Force. This is the main striking power of the Army, and **should not be squandered needlessly**. Given time, the new territorial divisions can be brought up to strength, and will in due course come to equal the fighting efficiency of the Regulars. What ever operations are decided upon, it is essential that the Field Force remain as far as possible intact and that it operate as a single cohesive force throughout.

6) Remember, the government has a fairly **slim majority!** You will have to carry not only your party but also the House of Commons with you. The last thing that you need at the

moment is to lose a vote of confidence in the House, which need not be solely over the conduct of the war. There are certain pressing domestic matters deserving of government attention, such as compulsory evacuation of civilians, the Moseleys, the strike in the Clydeside shipyards, and the new pay demand from the Kent coal fields. These are all items that take as much time for an average Cabinet Minister as the military affairs of war.

ARMY

It should be noted that whilst the British Army is the most advanced in terms of motorisation it was still not fully mechanised. Even in Regular Divisions there is not enough transport to lift the Division in one go, and in Territorial Divisions the situation is not as good because of a lack of vehicles. However it is not envisaged that a division would require to be lifted all at once.

Most Territorial Divisions do not yet have their full allotment of artillery of any type as they are still being equipped and trained. On the Anti-Tank gun front many units are equipped with the French 25mm gun in lieu of the 2 pdr as production cannot yet match demand. The Anti-Aircraft weapons in use include very few 3.7" guns and a handful of the new 40mm for the LAA units; most being equipped with the older 2 pdr guns and are awaiting re-equipment.

In general it is vitally important to any expeditionary force that the British Line Of Communication to Channel Ports is protected. To avoid German air interdiction supply shipping should be routed well to the West.

Overseas there are always threats to the Empire and Commonwealth. In particular there is a risk, should Italy enter the war, of an invasion of Libya. This might be further complicated by Arab disaffection in the middle east.

Finally, decisions have to be made as to the strength, composition and location of a strategic reserve to deal with increased tension throughout the world.

Army Units

The original pre-war plan was to raise 13 Territorial Divisions. This was revised just before the outbreak of war to an initial total of 26 TA Divisions. As a result of this expansion a severe strain has been imposed on the training organisation. Regular units have therefore been milked of officers and NCOs to stiffen the new divisions forming.

Full mobilisation started at the end of August 1939, and the current plan is to form a total of 32 divisions in the first year, rising to a total of 55 divisions by September 1941.

The availability dates below can be advanced, but this has a marked consequential reduction in unit quality - units brought in early lack training and substantial parts of their equipment allocation.

Anti-Aircraft Command. Territorial Army:

5 x AA Divisions for Home Defence.

28xAA-defended ports, providing light protection.

Commonwealth Forces:

Unit

Available

1st Can Div

Jan 40

EGYPT:

Armoured division (forming)
11th Indian Division
3 x British infantry brigades
Supporting Artillery and Engineers etc.

PALESTINE:

7th and 8th Infantry Divisions
3 x British infantry brigades

OTHER GARRISONS:

Malta, Gibraltar, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and British Somaliland all have small garrisons, mainly composed of African Troops.

In Sudan : 2 Battalions of British infantry.

AFRICA:

Local defence forces are forming 5 infantry battalions of the King's African Rifles and the Royal West African Frontier Force. These are not regarded as suitable for deployment overseas.

INDIA:

Local forces are being organised, but are a long way from providing additional forces for use outside the region. The only force that might be available is one Divisional HQ and an infantry brigade group.

MALAYA

1 x British infantry bde
1 x Indian infantry bde

HONG KONG:

1 x British infantry bde
1 x Indian infantry bde

SHANGHAI:

1 x British infantry bde

ROYAL NAVY

BATTLESHIPS: (18)
BATTLE CRUISERS: (3)
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS: (12)
HEAVY CRUISERS: (34)
LIGHT CRUISERS: (42)
AA CRUISERS: (6)

ROYAL AIR FORCE

FIGHTER COMMAND: 4 fighter wings Based in SE England
1 Fighter wing based in the Midlands
1 Fighter wing based in North
BOMBER COMMAND: 1 Light Bomber wing based in Southern England

1 Light Bomber wing based in East Anglia
1 Bomber wing based in Yorkshire
1 Bomber wing based in Lincolnshire

COASTAL COMMAND : 2 Recce / Bomber Wings

Operation Radius (Km)

	Km
Fighter Wing	160
Light Bomber Wing	800
Bomber Wing	1200
Recce Wing	1600

THE BRITISH PLAN

1. BEF ORBAT - BEGINNING OF MAY 1940

10 divisions formed into 5 corps as below. BEF comprises 5 Regular Infantry Divisions, 4 Territorial Divisions and the 1st Armoured Division. Deployment to France of 1st Armoured Division brought forward to beginning of May by incorporating 1st Army Tank Brigade into it, and delaying formation of 52nd Lowland Division. The first four corps comprise one regular and one territorial division.

I Corps	1st Division & 48th South Midlands
II Corps	2nd Division & 49th West Riding
III Corps	3rd Division & 50th Tyne & Tees
IV Corps	4th Division & 51st Highland
V Corps	1st Division & 1st Armoured Division

Army Units: 1st & 2nd Lt Armd Recce Bde

RAF Support

2 Fighter Wings deployed to France.

Fighter Wings are to provide CAP for the BEF advance into Belgium.

2 Light Bomber Wings based in SE England and / or East Anglia.

The Light Bombers have not been moved to France because their 800 km radius is sufficient to allow them to remain in England.

Light Bomber Wings are to recce in front of BEF to report the German invasion and where Belgian forces are holding out.

2. START LOCATIONS

Before German attack.

I Corps	Dunquerque
II Corps	Cassel
III Corps	Menen - French side of border obviously
IV Corps	Lille
V Corps	Armentieres (in reserve)

ARMY BOUNDARY - Southern Flank : From Sedin Forest (square G08) then south of main Lille to Halle road, then east to Wavre, inclusive.

1st Lt Armd Recce Bde Cassel

2nd Lt Armd Recce Bde Menen

Fighter Wing airfields : Lille and Meteren (square F10).

3. BEF MISSION

3.1 BEF will remain behind the Franco-Belgian border until the Germans invade Belgium.

3.2 Upon German invasion of Belgium, the BEF will advance to hold the line from Antwerp through Brussels to Halle in cooperation with the Belgian Army.

3.3 Corps Line of Advance as Below

I Corps From Dunquerque along coast road to Oostende, then Brugge, Zelzate, ANTWERP
II Corps From Cassel, to Poperinge, Ypres, then secondary roads to Roseelare & Deinze, then Gent, St Niklaas, MECHELEN
III Corps From near Menen to Courtrail, Renaix, Ninove, BRUSSELS
IV Corps From Lille to Ath then to HALLE.
V Corps From Armentieres to Gent then AALST (in reserve).

1st Lt Armd Recce Bde From Cassel to forward of Mechelen. Advance in front of II Corps.

2nd Lt Armd Recce Bde From Menen to forward of Brussels. Advance in front of III Corps.

3.4 Intermediate Stop Line

Required if Germans advance across intended BEF Line before we reach Antwerp, Brussels and Halle.

I Corps ZELZATE
II Corps GENT
III Corps OUDENAARDE
IV Corps TOURNAI
V Corps COURTRAIL (in reserve)

4. REINFORCEMENTS

May 1940 : 42nd East Lancs and 44th Home Counties Divisions

June 1940 : 15th Scottish

To be deployed to BEF. Initially under BEF HQ. Probably to be added as 3rd division to existing corps, but could be formed into 6th Corps.