

Red Army and Soviet Militia Rifle Units Mobilised from 22nd June to 31st December 1941

Rifle Divisions Mobilised From 22nd June to 31st December 1941

Utilising the methodology and detailed structure described above, we can now focus on the individual combat unit types that the Soviets mobilised in the second half of 1941.

The most important Soviet combat unit type mobilised in 1941 was by far the rifle division. Rifle divisions represented the backbone of the Red Army's defensive capability at the beginning of the Soviet-German war. With the failure of the mechanised corps becoming obvious to all by July 1941, the pre-war rifle divisions and newly mobilised rifle divisions also became the primary offensive divisional sized units in the Red Army. Due to the enormous number mobilised and the difficulty forming effective tank corps, the new rifle divisions remained the principal defensive and offensive combat units in the Red Army from August-September 1941 until mid 1942.

The rifle division's 1941 MD and MND matrices have already been examined in some detail (used as the examples above). Table **Sov RD mobilisation** shows the Red Army rifle divisions Mobilised and Deployed (MD), and Mobilised and Not Deployed (MND), from 22nd June to 31st December 1941. In addition table **Resource usage Mob Sov RDs** shows the average resources used by the 'actual average full strength' rifle division with a specific TOE, and the total reserve resources used by mobilised units which used this TOE. The two types of Red Army rifle divisions mobilised in the second half of 1941 were based on a July 1941 TOE (29th July *Shtat*) and a December 1941 TOE (6th December *Shtat*). In addition a third type of rifle division was formed and designated 'militia rifle divisions' which are treated as a separate combat unit type in the Soviet FILARM model. The large majority of militia rifle divisions were redesignated as regular Red Army rifle divisions in 1941, and these represent a large proportion of the MND rifle divisions shown in table **Sov RD mobilisation**. One of the most important things for the reader to remember at this point is that all the newly mobilised rifle divisions were much weaker than the pre-war rifle divisions. This was true in all respects, and was especially true in the critical areas of LMGs, medium to heavy artillery, AT guns, tractors, all forms of motorised transport, and signal equipment.¹

The massive Soviet mobilisation effort and the reduction in overall strength per division meant the Soviets were able to achieve the following remarkable figures.

- Between July and the end of December 1941, 182 rifle divisions (which were initially formed as regular Red Army rifle divisions) were Mobilised and Deployed (MD). They were all mobilised and allocated (or assigned) to an army or front HQ in the west USSR. These 182 MD rifle divisions used the equivalent of 161 divisions worth of reserve resources.
- Between July and the end of December 1941, 96 regular Red Army rifle divisions were Mobilised and Not Deployed (MND). These 96 MND rifle divisions used the equivalent of 27.66 divisions worth of reserve resources. (Note a unit which is created by a simple name change from an old unit without the addition of any new subunits from reserves is considered a MND unit).
- Between July and the end of December 1941, the Soviets mobilised 278 regular Red Army rifle divisions. These 278 mobilised rifle divisions used the equivalent of 188.66 divisions worth of reserve resources.

¹ Refer Part IV 3 – 'The Tables of Organisation and Equipment (TOE) for Soviet Land Combat Units from 22nd June to 31st December 1941', for descriptions of Soviet TOEs in 1941. Part IV 3 1) b. - 'Red Army Rifle Units - Rifle Divisions, 29th July 1941' details the reduction in authorised personnel and weapon types from pre-war rifle units.

- Of these 278 newly mobilised rifle divisions, 242 utilised the July TOE (using the equivalent of 173.66 divisions worth of reserve resources) and 36 utilised the December TOE (using the equivalent of 15 divisions worth of reserve resources).

All the above figures do not include the 46 militia rifle divisions mobilised in 1941 of which 43 were Mobilised and Deployed (MD). 31 of these militia rifle divisions were redesignated as regular Red Army rifle divisions during 1941 and are considered in the next section. These formed many of the MND rifle divisions shown in table **Sov RD mobilisation** and so they still found their way onto the battlefield against Axis forces during 1941. If militia rifle divisions are included then 225 Soviet rifle divisions of all types were Mobilised and Deployed (MD) in the second half of 1941.

When one considers that the entire Red Army had 198 rifle and mountain rifle divisions only six months before, this was a very remarkable achievement. It had taken many years to build, train and arm the huge pre-war Red Army. It must be borne in mind however that the 198 pre-war divisions had considerably more overall combat power than the 225 new MD rifle divisions. On average it took only a month to Mobilise and Deploy (MD) most new divisions. This included mobilising huge numbers of personnel from civilian duties, transporting them to an assembly training areas, arming them, getting them into some sort of organised force and assigning them as 'combat ready' into the front line. Any additional training they received was rudimentary at best and shortage of trained officers naturally became a severe problem.

To get more officers into the Red Army as soon as possible the officer corps was massively expanded. In 1941 at least 75% of all reserve officers were called up to active duty. On 16th July 1941 officer training courses were all drastically shortened and by the end of 1941 the number of officer training schools was expanded from 138 to 164. In October 1941 junior lieutenant courses were started in each army and special local courses were started to train selected NCOs and enlisted men as lieutenants. By the end of 1941, 90 940 officers were irrecoverably lost and the Red Army had 'trained' 192 000 new ones.² All this enabled new rifle divisions to still have a TOE of over 10 700 men and most divisions had numbers approaching this figure with at least a basic officer system in control. In many cases new rifle divisions were being Mobilised and Deployed (MD) in just one to two weeks! This was generally truer for the divisions formed in July-August 1941 when the pool of trained reservists was at its height and while the NKVD was able to provide large numbers of trained personnel. The story with cavalry divisions, rifle brigades and many other combat unit types is almost equally impressive, the details of which will be covered in the relevant sections relating to these combat unit types mobilised in 1941.

When considering the 278 regular rifle divisions mobilised in the second half of 1941, it is instructive to briefly examine their primary sources of personnel and equipment. These can be broken down as follows.

- 25 divisions were formed primarily from existing mechanised, tank or mountain divisions.
- 4 divisions were formed primarily from existing airborne, rifle and naval brigades, and cavalry divisions.

² C.C. Sharp, "Red Tide", Soviet Rifle Divisions Formed From June to December 1941: Soviet Order of Battle WWII, Volume IX, George F. Nafziger, West Chester, OH, 1996, p. 1. Note the limited training of new Red Army officers in 1941 meant that they received most of their training 'on the job' at the hands of the German Army. Obviously this proved very expensive for all the Soviet units concerned. It is interesting that the stringent training requirements for German Army soldiers to qualify as even junior officers changed relatively little throughout WWII. Naturally this contributed to a shortage of German officers. German policy also often resulted in junior ranks commanding relatively large formations because the Germans didn't believe in 'battlefield commissions'. Despite the experience of commanding a large or complex formation in combat, German officers were still usually expected to receive the appropriate qualifying training in officer training schools. The overall result was that the German Army's small unit leaders (junior officers and NCOs) were probably never equaled at the tactical level during WWII.

- 18 divisions used a large proportion of NKVD personnel or were formed by the NKVD.
- 32 divisions used a large proportion of militia personnel or were formed by converting militia units to Red Army units.
- 189 divisions were formed from reservists, including reservists from ethnic or nationalist groups in the USSR.
- 10 divisions were Guards rifle divisions formed wholly from existing Red Army rifle divisions by redesignating them.

The above does serve to illustrate how massive and varied the Soviet mobilisation effort was. However it also serves to underline the point that taking the figure of 278 newly mobilised rifle divisions on face value (as 278 full new divisions) results in a severe over estimation of the true combat power of these divisions. In some accounts of Operation Barbarossa, similar figures are quoted to provide evidence that the Germans could never have overcome such a massive Soviet mobilisation success as well as simultaneously defeat the massive pre-war Red Army. The fact that these 278 mobilised rifle divisions used the equivalent of 188.66 divisions worth of reserve resources (excluding the reserves that went into new militia rifle divisions), provides a more accurate indication of their true overall combat power.³

In addition the reader should always bear in mind that the 'actual average full strength' rifle division was below its TOE. This was particularly true for MMGs, 45mm AT guns, AT rifles, 76mm AA guns, 37mm AA guns, 12.7mm AAMGs, trucks and horse teams: all weapon systems and equipment in short supply in the USSR in 1941.⁴ Applying the size equation to the 'actual average full strength' rifle divisions shown in table **Resource usage Mob Sov RDS** we find that the actual strength of a typical new July 41 rifle division was 72% of the Minimum Divisional Size (MDS) value compared to 82% for a division at full strength.⁵ The December 41 rifle divisions were stronger: a typical new December 41 rifle division's actual strength was 84% of the MDS value compared to 93% for a division at full strength. In other words given the low authorisation levels (reduced TOEs) and given the equipment shortages, the rifle divisions mobilised after June 1941 cannot truly be called 'divisional sized' or 'division equivalent' combat units. This statement is based on comparison to contemporary divisional sized units around the world in 1941 and WWII in general.

The small size of these divisions means that the true combat power of the average newly mobilised rifle division during 1941 was between 45-55% of a contemporary German first line infantry division. This is even before we consider factors for Relative Overall Combat Proficiency (ROCP), which includes quality of training, available trained officers, Supply Distribution Efficiency (SDE), signals efficiency, etc.⁶ In short, a very sophisticated military simulation of Operation Barbarossa, fully utilising the Soviet and German FILARM models, is really the only

³ Refer Part IV 10 – 'A Review of the Numbers and Strengths of Soviet Land Combat Units Mobilised from June to December 1941'. Includes a detailed analysis of the actual size of the overall Soviet forces mobilised in 1941, measured in terms of MDS values and the reserves used.

⁴ 18 000 Soviet AT rifles were produced before June 1941 and they were authorised in the TOE of the July 1941 rifle division. However they were only issued late in 1941 because ammunition for them was not in production until late in 1941. Note the December TOE rifle divisions had a full complement of AT rifles while earlier divisions received theirs in November-December 1941 (as replacements in the Soviet FILARM model).

⁵ Refer to Part I 10. 2) – 'Military Simulations, and The General Structure of the Integrated Land and Air Resource Model - A 'Divisional Sized' or 'Division Equivalent' Combat Unit in WWII - Measuring Whether a Combat Unit can Reasonably be Called a Divisional Sized Combat Unit' for details on the equation used for calculating division size. The Minimum Divisional Size (MDS) value is essentially the minimum sized combat unit that can be reasonably called 'Divisional Sized' or 'Division Equivalent' in 1941.

⁶ Refer to Part III - 'Relative Overall Combat Proficiency (ROCP): the ROCP of Soviet and Axis Forces from 1941-1945', for calculations relating to the various belligerent's ROCPs in 1941.

practical way to accurately assess if the Wehrmacht could have defeated the huge pre-war Red Army as well as the immense Soviet mobilisation programme in 1941.

Finally the NKVD deserves a special mention here for its contribution in supplying personnel for the new divisions. In 1941 the NKVD was a large and complex organisation which contributed significant forces to defending the Soviet state. These included border guards (some with their own aircraft and patrol boats), internal guard forces (security forces), corrective labour camps (the GULAGS) and espionage units. Probably the most significant contribution made by the NKVD to directly defend the USSR was in its supply of trained men to the Red Army. Pre-war NKVD personnel were drafted for three years instead of two for the Red Army. Thus in June 1941 most NKVD personnel were slightly better trained than the average Red Army reserve personnel. Early in the war around 114 000 border guards and internal troops formed the cadre for new Red Army divisions, or were formed into NKVD divisions and almost immediately redesignated as Red Army divisions.⁷ These NKVD personnel were largely responsible for the new rifle divisions Mobilised and Deployed (MD) as early as July 1941.

⁷ C.C. Sharp, "Red Death", Soviet Mountain, Naval, NKVD and Allied Divisions and Brigades 1941 to 1945: Soviet Order of Battle in WWII, Volume VII, George F. Nafziger, West Chester, OH, 1995, p. 55.