

Russian Army Organization 1941

by Greg Moore

posted on gregpanzerblitz.com

Russian Mechanized Corps June 1941

Prior to this period, the Russians organized their tanks into Tank Brigades of various types, depending on the tanks included in them and their function. These will be covered in another document covering the Polish Campaign and the Winter War in Finland. In June of 1940, a new structure was authorized, which was the Mechanized Corps. This consisted of two tank divisions and one motorized infantry division. Each tank division consisted of two tank regiments and one motorized infantry regiment. The organization of each tank regiment consisted of one heavy tank battalion (KV-I), two medium tank battalions (T-34), and one flame tank battalion (OT-133) plus recon. It was supposed to look like this:

Tank Regiment (theory)	8 A 5	8 A 5	5 A 3	30 H 1	2 I 4
	 KV-1	 T-34	 T-26	 OT-133	 BA-10
	10 7	9 11	3 6	2 6	2 12
	x 3	x 10	x 1	x 3	x 3

Unfortunately for the Russians, by June of 1941, they had not yet built nearly enough KV-I's and T-34's to fill up the 29 mechanized corps in existence. The tank regiments were therefore filled with older tanks to make up the shortfall. T-28's were frequently substituted for KV-I's and BT tanks filled in for the missing T-34's. Only a few tank divisions had anything close to the number of modern tanks they were supposed to have.

The Motorized Infantry Division consisted of one tank regiment and two motorized infantry regiments. The tank regiment was supposed to consist of 5 battalions (about 250 tanks) of light tanks, usually BT's. In practice, T-26's were often issued instead of BT's and the divisions only had about 40% of the trucks authorized, which meant that the rifle units were usually on foot and these "motorized" divisions were little better than regular infantry divisions for mobility.

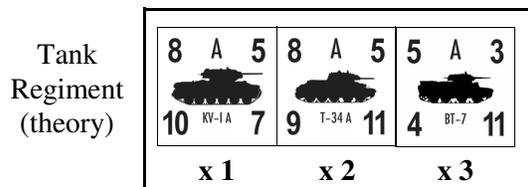
In both types of divisions, artillery was most frequently pulled by tractors of some sort, either purpose built or modified old tanks or, in many cases, agricultural tracked vehicles appropriated for that purpose.

In addition to a shortage of modern tanks, the Russians did not manufacture nearly enough spare parts for their existing tanks, preferring to concentrate on production of new tanks instead. What this meant is that by 1941, only about 27 % of all Russian tanks were considered combat worthy, with the older types, such as the T-26 and T-28 especially prone to breakdown. The numbers of tanks shown on the TO&E's is the number issued to the various divisions and not the number actually available for action. A good rule of thumb would probably be to allow only half of the number listed to be actually available. I have considered reducing the numbers down myself but there is so much variability that I will leave it to others to decide how many to allow for use. I suggest reducing by half instead of 3/4 or so because if we reduce the Russians down to 27 %, then the Germans should be reduced by at least 25% themselves as actually using tanks in a campaign is very hard on them, no matter whose tanks they are. I think for play balance, allowing the Germans to keep all theirs and deleting half the Russian tanks maintains about the right balance of vehicles available. In accounts of Russian armored units on the move in this period, they always had to abandon large numbers of vehicles because they were not functional. Spare parts usually came from cannibalizing other tanks.

These mechanized corps were in the thick of the fighting in June and July of 1941 and most were virtually destroyed, losing nearly all their tanks due to breakdown or combat loss. On July 15, most of the surviving mechanized corps were officially disbanded, with the survivors (if there were any) being used as cadres to build new units around. Most surviving motorized infantry officially became regular leg infantry (which they pretty much were anyway) and surviving tank divisions were organized into new types of tank formations.

Russian Tank Division July 1941

In July of 1941, a new type of Tank Division was formed. Because the previous divisions had proved to be too big and unwieldy, these new divisions were organized in a similar fashion but were smaller and easier to handle. Ten such divisions were formed, all in the 101 to 112 series. The new division still had two tank regiments but they were much smaller than before. They were supposed to look like this:

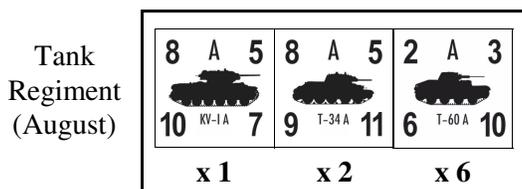


Note: T-26 was sometimes substituted for the BT tanks.

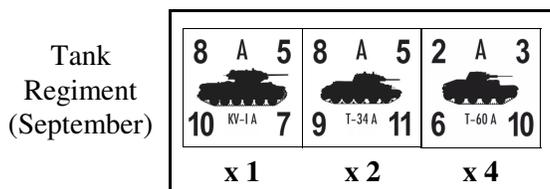
Seven out of these ten divisions had been totally destroyed by early October, the other three soldiered on for another six months to a year.

Russian Tank Brigade August 1941

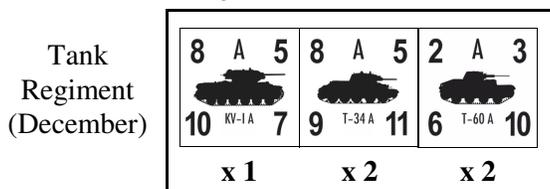
The next logical step for the hard pressed Russians was to organize their tanks into a smaller and even leaner organization. This was the Tank Brigade. Manpower requirements in the tank regiment was simplified down to little more than what was required to crew the tanks. The brigade only had one tank regiment and one infantry battalion plus supporting units. The tank regiment was supposed to look like this:



By September, the tank regiment had typically shrunk to this:



In December, a new official organization was issued, which looked like this:



As with all their “official” organizations, the Russians could not supply enough new tanks to fill them all up properly so T-26 and BT tanks continued to be commonly seen in action. These little tank brigades served as the primary Russian armored formations until the spring of 1942, with more than 50 being created altogether.

Russian Infantry Division June 1941

A new organization for the Russian infantry division had been officially called for in April of 1941. This organization was a little smaller than the previous division. It consisted of 3 infantry regiments, a recon battalion, an artillery regiment, an anti-aircraft battalion, an anti-tank battalion and a pioneer battalion. Most transport was horse drawn though some attempt had been made to motorize the artillery. Some divisions had a few tanks attached, usually T-26's. One of the weaknesses of the division was the almost total lack of radios even among recon and artillery units. German accounts of action in the first summer make almost no mention of Russian artillery fire except from prepared positions. The supply columns usually directly attached to the artillery were also missing from these new formations. The Russians were simply not able to coordinate artillery support when on the move. Also a lack of experienced officers due to the purges of the 1930's also hampered the ability of these divisions to perform well. An infantry division usually received less than half of the motorized vehicles authorized and were expected to requisition what they needed from civilian stock, a system which did not work very well. Many of these divisions were chewed up by the Wehrmacht in the summer of 1941.

Russian Infantry Division August 1941

The huge losses suffered in the early part of the campaign forced the Russians to create a new reduced strength organization for their infantry divisions. This was officially released in late July and further modified in August. Manpower was reduced 25% overall. Heavy weapons in the rifle regiments were reduced in number or eliminated altogether. The artillery regiment was also substantially reduced with the number of gun tubes falling from 60 to 24. Selected divisions still received a battalion of tanks comprising about 30 tanks in all, usually T-26's.

Russian Infantry Division December 1941

The December Infantry Division TO&E was mostly a standardization of some changes that had been made to the August organization. All the new officers required by the huge losses of the summer were inexperienced and unable to properly coordinate the heavy weapons attached to the infantry companies so most of the weapons were consolidated into separate units. A rocket-launcher battalion was added to the structure although very few divisions actually received any. The AT guns were supposed to be upgraded to the new 57mm gun but, again, few divisions actually received them. The 76mm AA guns were finally eliminated as they had proved unwieldy in action. Division transport levels sank even lower as vehicles became impossible to supply.

Russian Cavalry Division June 1941

In June of 1941, the Russians had 13 Cavalry divisions, with four of them being a smaller version called a "Mountain Cavalry Division". Russian cavalry divisions were a mix of mounted units and light tanks and had been very useful in the early campaigns such as the Polish Campaign, where five cavalry corps were used.

Russian Cavalry Division July 1941

The initial German onslaught severely reduced Russian mechanized forces. In order to provide some mobile troops until these could be rebuilt, the Russian cavalry branch underwent a massive expansion in July. In order to provide a large number of these units, a new organization was introduced which stripped virtually all non-combat support away for the division which was not immediately needed. The overall division was substantially reduced in size with almost all the units in the division either reduced or eliminated. Between July and December, no less than about 70 of these new smaller cavalry divisions were created. Cavalry units proved to be a useful type of unit to the Russians with their vast tracts of rough terrain with poor to nonexistent roads. While other armies reduced or eliminated their cavalry divisions after the early part of the war, the Russians continued to use large numbers of them until the end, finding them to be a useful partner to the mechanized forces.

1941 Russian Supplemental Units

 **45mm AT gun** This is the early war version of this gun. This piece served until 1942, when it was replaced by the higher velocity 45mm gun with special ammunition that is included in the original game for the the later war period. This early war version is also the only 45mm gun that the Russians ever mounted on a vehicle.

 **76.2 mm anti-aircraft gun** These things were issued to infantry divisions alongside the much better 37mm AA gun. They were unwieldy and not well thought of for field use so were discontinued at the end of 1941 with a few still around through 1942. Represents 6 guns.

 **SMG Company** This unit represents an early version of the SMG unit. It is a lighter on manpower than the later unit and would not be as experienced. This unit should probably be used to represent such a company at least through the first half of 1942.

 **Cavalry Squadron** Represents about 140 mounted troops armed mainly with rifles and pistols but includes 8 light machine guns and a few 50mm mortars. This piece represents early war cavalry units before all the SMG's and other heavy weapons were added. A very large number of these units were raised in late 1941 to help compensate for the great loss of mechanized units in the initial attack and leadership and morale would be shaky.

 **T-27 Tankette** Several thousand of these were built in the early 30's. They were considered obsolete by 1941 but the hard pressed Russians still found uses for them. They were sometimes seen in cavalry divisions early on and sometimes issued out as replacements in the tank units when there was nothing else available. Their main use in WWII however was as prime movers for light artillery, particularly the 45mm AT gun. This piece is rated as a transport unit for that reason. The piece should only be allowed to transport light guns.

 **BA-20 Armored Car** This is a very common early war armored car with several thousand built in the late 30's. Primary armament is a MG in a small turret on top. Over 1300 of these were present when the Germans invaded.

 **BA-10 Armored Car** The Russians used light and heavy armored cars in 1941. This is the heavy one commonly used. 1400 were built from 1938 until 1942. This gun is the 45mm AT gun. I have reduced the attack by one because it's an armored car and the turret is hand cranked. Note: the BA-10 previously published has a MG for a main weapon but I think that is wrong and this is the correct piece. This is the most common Russian armored car in service in 1941 with over 2600 present in June.