

Notes on the organization of the Red Army Motorised Rifle Battalion 1942 to 1945

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Introduction

This piece marks the start of the second round of studies of various Red Army unit organizations of the Second World War.

Having begun these studies with the Rifle Battalion, there is always a dilemma when trying to apply the same criteria to other unit types. This is because no matter how specialised they may appear to be, the framework of a typical Infantry Battalion is almost always discernible in their organization, and they will in large part use the same weapons and equipment that have already been covered.

This then will be the first of an unavoidably brief 'Notes on' series, which will seek to avoid repetition of matters already detailed in the main Red Army Rifle Battalion pages, and instead focus on the differences found in specialised unit organization.

In preparing this piece I have been reminded at just how frustrating it is to research Red Army organization, particularly when it comes to motorised units. I only have one contemporary table to work with, which came courtesy of a gentleman named Evgenii Ignatev, who had a similar passion and interest in the subject.

Due to the utter dearth of information on the Motorised Rifle Battalion, this piece requires a good deal more suggestion and supposition than I am happy with. Alongside this general outline of the development of the Battalion, more complete descriptions of the versions discussed are available in PDF files that are accessible from the below linked area of the site.

[Red Army organization during the Second World War](#)

I know full well that I am not the best person to undertake this study. My reading of Russian is limited to say the least, and while it turns out I can 'speak *Shta!*' I cannot pretend to be able to understand those complementary documents, such as combat reports and training literature, that would put the organizational developments into much better context. These shortcomings aside, I hope this study proves to be of use to those interested in the subject.

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Organization of the Red Army Motorised Rifle Battalion

1942 to 1945

This has proven a monstrously difficult piece to write, primarily because I am only working from one *Shtat* table, which was issued in March 1942. At the start of that year, the Red Army had begun yet another major reorganization of its armoured and mechanised forces. In 1940, the principal Red Army mobile formation was the Tank Brigade, which existed in various forms, its organization dependent upon the types of tanks it was equipped with. In 1941 the focus changed to the larger Mechanised Corps, which was to consist of two Tank Divisions and one Motorised Division. The Motorised Rifle Regiment, equipped with its own cars and trucks, was to provide the infantry component of both these types of Division.

Many of the Red Army units that took the field in June 1941 were extinct by the end of that year. With the need to rebuild so many formations as quickly as possible attention turned back to Tank Brigades, which could be raised faster than a full Division. Two, later three, Tank Brigades would provide the nucleus of a Tank Corps (effectively a Division by Western standards), with its infantry element being provided by a new formation, the Motorised Rifle Brigade.

This consisted of three Motorised Rifle Battalions, along with a Mortar Battalion (with 12 82-mm and four 120-mm mortars), an Artillery Battalion (12 76-mm field guns) and an Anti-aircraft Battalion (12 37-mm guns). Also included were a Submachine Gun Company, an Anti-tank Rifle Company and a Reconnaissance Company. During 1943 the Mortar Battalion added two 120-mm weapons, and the Anti-aircraft Battalion was replaced by a Battery with nine 12.7-mm machine guns.

1943 saw the formation of the new Mechanised Corps, which was built around three Motorised Rifle Brigades, as described above, plus an array of support units, and often a Tank Brigade. Increasingly, Motorised Rifle Brigades in Mechanised Corps received their own armoured unit, nominally a Tank Regiment, in which case the formation was retitled as a Mechanised Brigade, though the organization of its subunits was unchanged.

The first *Shtat* for the Motorised Rifle Brigade was issued in March 1942. It was amended before the year was out and a superseding *Shtat* was apparently issued in February 1943, which was itself subject to further revisions. However, information on the organizational development of Motorised Rifle Brigades, or Mechanised Brigades, from 1943 onwards is limited to diagrams, summaries and German intelligence reports. These sources are mostly vague and often contradictory, and all of them leave a frustrating amount of detail to be surmised or simply guessed at. In the absence of the actual February 1943 *Shtat* tables making an unexpected comeback, the following is the best that I can offer.

Overview

The Motorised Rifle Battalion as described herein was as found in the Motorised Rifle Brigade, and the later Mechanised Rifle Brigade, from 1942 onwards. It was not the same unit as the Motorised Rifle-Machine Gun Battalion found in the Tank Brigade of 1942 onwards, which eventually became the Motorised Submachine Gun Battalion, and which will be dealt with in a separate piece.

Outline development, 1942 to 1945

The outline organization of the Motorised Rifle Battalion from 1942 was Battalion Headquarters, three Rifle Companies, an Anti-tank Rifle Company, an 82-mm Mortar Battery, an Anti-tank Battery and a Service Company. Completing the Battalion were a Submachine Gun Platoon, a Communication Platoon and a Medical Detachment.

The Anti-tank Rifle Company had three Platoons, each of four rifles, the Anti-tank Battery had two Platoons, each of two 45-mm guns, and the Mortar Battery had two Platoons, each of three 82-mm weapons. The small Submachine Gun Platoon was a Battalion asset and had three Squads of nine men each. Each of the three Rifle Companies had three Platoons, each with four Rifle Squads, and a Machine Gun Platoon with two M1910 guns. The Service Company included a Motor Transport Platoon with almost 40 trucks, along with Repair and Administrative Platoons.

That is the last time that the overall structure of the Motorised Rifle Battalion can be stated with some certainty. After that, information is only available in summary or diagrammatic form, or from captured German documents translated into English. From these various sources, the subsequent changes to the Battalion included;

- The addition of a Machine Gun Company, with three Platoons, of three guns each, these being the standard Maxim style M1910.
- An increase in the firepower of the Anti-tank Rifle Company to 18 weapons.
- The removal of the majority of the trucks from the Motorised Rifle Battalions, these being used to form a Motor Transport Company for the use of the Brigade as a whole.
- As a result of the changes in transport, the reduction of the Service Company to a Service Platoon.

These were not the only changes to the Battalion, and those others that can be confirmed or surmised are detailed in the following pages. Overleaf is a chart that outlines the evolution of the Motorised Rifle Battalion throughout the war.

Evolution of the Red Army Motorised Rifle Battalion, 1942 to 1945

Detail	Mar-42	Dec-42 (a)	Feb-43	Jun-43 (b)
i). Personnel				
Command ranks	51	55	51	45
Political ranks	10	11	10	3
Junior command ranks	226	242	212	212
Other ranks	354	399	389	389
Total, all ranks	641	707	662	649
ii). Transport				
Passenger car	1	1	1	1
1.5-ton trucks	44	47	15	15
2.5-ton trucks	11	11	9	9
Workshop truck	1	1	1	1
Ambulance	1	1	1	1
Kitchen trailers	3	3	3	3
Motorcycle & sidecar	1	1	1	1
iii). Weapons				
Pistols	50	55	50	18
Rifles	404	450	417	244
Sniper rifles	12	12	12	12
Submachine guns	80	80	75	267
Light machine guns	36	36	36	36
Heavy machine guns	6	15	15	15
82-mm mortars	6	6	6	6
Anti-tank rifles	12	18	18	18
45-mm guns	4	4	4	4

a). Incorporating known amendments to end of 1942

b). Incorporating known amendments to mid-1943

Note - The figures for December 1942, February 1943 and June 1943 are all extrapolations.

The elements of the Battalion, 1942 to 1945

The below offers a more detailed examination of the subunits of the Battalion, at least as they were given in the original *Shtat* of March 1942.

Battalion Headquarters (1942)

The Headquarters of the Motorised Rifle Battalion was much less Spartan than its infantry equivalent, and was divided into five parts;

Command - in 1942 the Battalion was commanded by a Major, with a Captain as Deputy Commander, and also a Military Commissioner, the latter a Communist party official. Completing the command group were two officers from the specialist services of the Red Army, a Military Engineer for Technical Duties and a Quartermaster for Administrative Duties, both 3rd Grade.

Staff - the Battalion included its own Staff, largely for administrative duties, with roles that were more normally found at Regimental level. Posts included two Adjutants, the Communications officer, Chemical Warfare officer and an Engineering officer.

Party Political Apparatus - also devolved to Battalion level were further Communist Party officials, with a Secretary from the main party and another from Komsomol, the Youth wing of the Communist party.

Technical Staff - this was a Military Engineer, 2nd Grade, and a Senior Clerk, who worked under the officer responsible for Technical duties on the command staff. The Technical Staff was responsible for ammunition and spare parts.

Administrative Supply - working under the Quartermaster this section oversaw supply and pay duties.

Communication Platoon (1942)

This consisted of a Radio Squad and a Telephone Squad. The Radio Squad was commanded by a Senior Sergeant and had six radio operators and a driver for its 1.5-ton truck. It was equipped with one RB and four RBS radio sets. The former was used for communication up to Brigade and the latter to link the Battalion commander with his Rifle Companies.

The Telephone Squad was a Sergeant and ten telephonists, who would appear to have had one switchboard, 12 telephones and 16-km of cable.

Medical Detachment (1942)

This was made up of the Battalion Doctor, a Medical Assistant (the description of the latter seemingly translates as military paramedic), a Medical Sergeant, two orderlies and a driver for the detachment's single ambulance.

Submachine Gun Platoon (1942)

The Motorised Rifle Brigade included a full Submachine Gun Company, and in addition to this a Submachine Gun Platoon in each Motorised Rifle Battalion.

In the 1942 *Shtat* the Platoon was commanded by a Lieutenant, with a *Starshina* as the Platoon NCO and a messenger completing Headquarters. There were then three Squads, each of nine men. The interesting aspect is that all the men in the Squads were NCOs, the commander being a Senior Sergeant, his Deputy a Sergeant, and the seven other men all Junior Sergeants. All 30 men in the Platoon were armed with submachine guns.

Anti-tank Rifle Company (1942)

Under the 1942 *Shtat*, the Company was quite small. Company Headquarters was four strong, with a Senior Lieutenant, a Lieutenant and a Political officer providing the command staff, plus a *Starshina* as senior NCO.

There were three Platoons, each with a Lieutenant and Senior Sergeant at its Headquarters, overseeing two Squads. Each Squad consisted of a Sergeant and two teams, each with a gunner and assistant serving a single anti-tank rifle. The senior gunner in each Squad was a Junior Sergeant and the other a Lance-corporal.

Anti-tank Battery (1942)

The Battery had a minimal Headquarters and two firing Platoons, with two 45-mm guns per Platoon, towed by 2.5-ton trucks.

82-mm Mortar Battery (1942)

Similarly straightforward was the 82-mm Mortar Battery. The Company had two Platoons, each with three 82-mm mortars and two 1.5-ton trucks for carriage of personnel, weapons and ammunition. Company Headquarters was bolstered by a small communications element of two telephonists and a driver with 1.5-ton truck.

The Motorised Rifle Company (1942)

The outline organization was a Company Headquarters, a Machine Gun Platoon, and three Rifle Platoons, each of four Rifle Squads.

Rifle Platoon Headquarters was simply a Lieutenant, with a submachine gun, and a sniper/observer, armed with a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight. The Rifle Squads were eight strong, made up of a Sergeant (commander), Junior Sergeant (deputy commander), light machine gunner (also a Junior Sergeant), assistant gunner and four riflemen. One of the latter was armed with a submachine gun and the balance, excepting the gunner with the Squad's single DP light machine gun, were all to carry the SVT semi-automatic rifle.

The Machine Gun Platoon had an officer commanding two Squads, each of a Sergeant, a gunner (Junior Sergeant) and three gun numbers, serving an M1910 machine gun, for two in the Platoon.

Company Headquarters was large by Soviet standards. In 1942 it had the usual staff of Commander (Senior Lieutenant), Deputy (Lieutenant) and a Political officer. There was also a Command Squad, of the *Starshina*, an Administrative Service Sergeant, a messenger, a sniper/observer, and unusually a Sergeant Armourer from the Technical Service. Completing the Squad was a medical detachment of a Senior Sergeant and two orderlies.

The Service Company (1942)

This consisted of a Motor Transport Platoon, a Repair Platoon and an Administrative Platoon. The former was provided with one car and 31 trucks for the transport of personnel and weapons, and another six trucks for ammunition, fuel and equipment. It was responsible for lifting the majority of the Battalion, with only the Mortar and Anti-tank Batteries having sufficient vehicles to carry their own personnel.

The Repair Platoon was divided into Vehicle and Weapons Sections and included a workshop truck. The Administrative Platoon was primarily concerned with messing duties and had three kitchen trailers.

The first changes, late 1942

Before the end of 1942 there were two confirmed changes made to the Motorised Rifle Battalion. Principal of these was the addition of a Machine Gun Company, with three Platoons, each with three M1910 guns. Second was an increase in the firepower of the Anti-tank Rifle Company, up from 12 weapons to 18. Overall, Battalion strength grew from 641 to 707 all ranks.

There are competing outlines of how the Anti-tank Rifle Company was amended to accommodate the six extra weapons. One of these gives each Platoon a third Squad of five men and two rifles, and deletes the Platoon NCO, for 15 men per Platoon. Another has the Company reconfigured into two Platoons, each of an officer and three Squads, each Squad seven strong and with three anti-tank rifles. Personally, I reckon the latter was the format most likely to have been used.

1943 - New tables, new questions

In February 1943 a new series of organization tables were issued for the Motorised Rifle Brigade, among them one for the Motorised Rifle Battalion, apparently under the reference number 010/421. If a copy of this table remains in existence then it is very well hidden as no one appears to have been able to reference it directly since the end of the war in Europe. Given its (eternal) absence below is my attempted reconstruction of it.

Battalion Headquarters (1943 to 1945)

The strength of Headquarters remained at 19 all ranks and there is no detail available as to whether there were any changes in ranks or duties.

Communication Platoon (1943 to 1945)

This increased from 20 to 22 men, though what the roles of the additions might be is a matter of pure conjecture. My suggestion would be that the Communication Platoon received some of the vehicles from the disbanded Motor Transport Platoon, the latter having earmarked at least one 1.5-ton truck for signal equipment.

Submachine Gun Platoon (1943 to 1945)

The Platoon looks to have retained its authorised strength of 30 men. Available summaries giving the rank split of the Battalion indicate a definite reduction in the number of NCOs during 1943, and developments in other units show that the inflated rank structure in SMG Squads and Platoons was being altered around this time.

My suggestion would be that each NCO in the SMG Platoon was reduced by one step in rank. That would make the Platoon NCO a Senior Sergeant, the Squad commanders Sergeants and assistant commanders Junior Sergeants, leaving the balance of the Squad as Lance-corporals. This would be in line with the rank structure used in other motorised and armoured type units.

Anti-tank Rifle Company (1943 to 1945)

Several diagrammatic outlines of the Company from 1943 show it with two Platoons, each of 22 men, which would allow for a Platoon commander and three Squads, each of seven men and serving three anti-tank rifles.

Machine Gun Company (1943 to 1945)

Similar schemes show this with three Platoons, each of three Squads. It does appear that each Platoon had a 1.5-ton truck to carry weapons and ammunition.

Anti-tank Battery (1943 to 1945)

The Anti-tank Battery looks to have retained the 45-mm gun throughout, though it is possible that some units were selected to receive the newer 57-mm piece.

82-mm Mortar Battery (1943 to 1945)

This was largely unaltered, retaining its 1.5-ton trucks for transporting its mortars and ammunition. Company Headquarters is though shown as being reduced by two men in some sources, which may indicate the removal of its 1.5-ton truck and driver.

Medical Detachment (1943 to 1945)

This looks to have remained unaltered.

The Service Company

The key difference between the March 1942 Motorised Rifle Battalion and the superseding organization of February 1943 was the deletion of the Motor Transport Platoon. The vehicles and drivers were removed to create a new Transport Company, which was used to move personnel and equipment across the Brigade as a whole. This left just the Repair and Administrative elements with the Battalion, which together formed the new Service Platoon.

Any attempted description of what the Service Platoon contained is pretty much a guessing game with no answer. My suggestion is that the specialist personnel of the Repair and Administrative Squads were unchanged, with the commander of the former Repair Platoon becoming the commander of the Service Platoon. The Administrative Squad was reduced in strength, while the weapons portion of the Repair Squad looks to have been increased. Overall I suspect the Administrative Squad lost its three 1.5-ton trucks, while the Repair Squad took on the two ammunition trucks from the disbanded Motor Transport Platoon. The Battalion appears to have retained its single passenger car, which may have been added to the Service Platoon Headquarters. Finally, I would surmise that the Administrative Squad was commanded by a *Starshina* rather than an officer.

The Motorised Rifle Company (1943 to 1945)

The overall format of the Company was not changed under the February 1943 reorganization, remaining as a Headquarters, a Machine Gun Platoon and three Rifle Platoons. Likewise the Rifle Platoons still consisted of a minimal Headquarters and four Rifle Squads. Schematic outlines of the Company show an increase of one man in the Machine Gun Platoon.

My suggestion is that this reflects the allocation of a 1.5-ton truck to the Platoon to carry its pair of M1910 two-wheeled heavy machine guns. Under the 1943 organization the only vehicles remaining with the Motorised Rifle Battalion look to have been those that were carrying or towing support weapons, or hauling equipment or stores. The M1910 was not a weapon that could be towed very on its wheeled carriage, and even in the Rifle Regiment proper it was transported by a horse and cart. With the loss of the Battalion transport pool I think that it was necessary to add transport to the Company Machine Gun Platoons, which may have been done by simply reallocating the three 1.5-ton trucks deleted from the Administrative Squad, so resulting in no overall increase of vehicles.

There are several sources that show the strength of the Battalion as 662 all ranks, but offer no breakdown by rank. Starting at 707 all ranks and deleting the Service Company Headquarters and the Motor Transport Platoon leaves 658 men; after incorporating the minor increases in several subunits and decreases to others this figure can be nudged up to 662 men without embellishment.

Subsequent developments

In May 1943 the Red Army deleted the posts of Deputy commander and Political Officer from all Company, Battery and Squadron level Headquarters. In the Motorised Rifle Battalion this accounted for 13 officers and takes the Battalion down to 649 all ranks, which figure is supported by multiple sources.

Another development of mid-1943 was the increase in issue of submachine guns throughout all infantry units. In the Motorised Rifle Company one Platoon exchanged its rifles almost entirely for submachine guns, but each Squad retained its DP light machine gun and Platoon Headquarters still included a rifle armed sniper.

Where summaries for the Battalion include weapons, they all indicate that submachine gun usage was far greater than can be accounted for by the above change alone. My final suggestion is that submachine guns were issued to almost all NCOs and junior officers (Lieutenants and Junior Lieutenants), at least from 1943 onwards. See the reconstructed *Shtat* information for full details.

Sources used and Acknowledgements

***Shtat* Table**

Motorised Rifle Battalion of a Motorised Rifle Brigade

010/371 dated 31st March 1942

Other sources

Red Army Handbook (by Zaloga and Ness), since reissued as the *Red Army Companion*. In the 1998 edition, Tables 2.9 (page 76), 2.17 (page 85) and 2.18 (page 86) and also the text on pages 75-76 refer. The information in table 2.18 can also be found on an old Nafziger Collection document at the below link.

<https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/carl/nafziger/944RBXA.pdf>

From the www.pamyat-naroda.ru website;

<https://pamyat-naroda.ru/documents/view/?id=262126212>

Report on the strength and combat strength of the 46th Mechanized Brigade as of October 24, 1942 - this includes a breakdown of the Battalion by rank.

<https://pamyat-naroda.ru/documents/view/?id=451530405>

Organization scheme of a motorized rifle brigade (May 28th 1943) - this is a wire diagram of the Brigade that I think shows the February 1943 figures for personnel.

<https://pamyat-naroda.ru/documents/view/?id=132354526>

Staffing of the brigades in 1st Guards Mechanised Corps (July 8th 1943) - this shows authorised strengths for the various parts of the Mechanised Brigade, incorporating I think the officer reductions of May 1943.

From the internet discussion form, www.axishistory.com

<https://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=196669>

<https://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=196779>

<https://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=196789>

A special thanks to 'Nakhodchanin' for their input into the above forum threads.

Still searching for...

I am, as mentioned, still hoping to find any of the actual *Shtat* tables for the February 1943 model of the Motorised Rifle Brigade, and would appreciate any guidance or directions as to where they may be located in Russian archives.