

Notes on the organization of the Red Army Motor Rifle-MG Battalion and Motor SMG Battalion 1942 to 1945

A www.bayonetstrength.uk PDF

1st draft uploaded March 2020

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Introduction

This piece is the next in 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 is then part 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.

Unlike the section on the [Motorised Rifle Battalion](#) I have more material to work with in terms of the Motor Rifle-MG/Motor SMG Battalion. My continued thanks to Evgenii Ignatev, who had a similar passion and interest in the subject and was able to provide details of the first two drafts of the *Shtat* tables issued, while the third popped up on the internet a while ago (though it does still present some challenges and requires a degree of reconstruction).

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 *Shtat*' 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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March 2020

Organization of the Red Army Motor Rifle-MG Battalion and the Motor Submachine Gun Battalion 1942 to 1945

At the end of 1941 the Red Army began to rebuild its armoured force, which had been effectively destroyed in the opening months of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The previous years had seen constant changes in emphasis, going from Tank Brigades as part of Tanks Corps in the late 1930s, to Tank Divisions, then back to Tank Brigades. In February 1942 a new set of *Shtat* tables were issued for a Tank Brigade, which provided the basic organizational template that would be used throughout the war.

The 1942 Tank Brigade consisted of two Tank Battalions, a Motor Rifle-MG Battalion, an Anti-tank Battery and an Anti-aircraft Battery. There were several versions of Tank Battalion, each using a different mixture of light, medium and heavy tanks. The Anti-tank Battery was armed with four 76-mm guns and the AA Battery with four 37-mm weapons. In July 1942 the Brigade was reorganized, with the heavy tanks being withdrawn from the Tank Battalions, while the Anti-aircraft Battery switched to nine 12.7-mm heavy machine guns. An Anti-tank Rifle Company, with 18 weapons, was also added.

At the end of 1943 the Tank Brigade was altered again, now having three Tank Battalions of medium tanks. The Motor Rifle-MG Battalion became a Motor SMG Battalion and absorbed the previously separate Anti-tank Battery and Anti-tank Rifle Company. The Anti-aircraft Battery remained as nine heavy machine guns.

Two, later three, Tank Brigades and a Motorised Rifle Brigade formed the nucleus of a Tank Corps (effectively a Division by Western standards). An ever increasing number of support units were added to the Tank Corps over the coming years, initially a Reconnaissance Battalion and a Rocket Launcher Battalion and going on to include various types of assault gun Battalions, heavy mortars, pioneers and heavy anti-aircraft units.

Overview

The Motor Rifle-MG Battalion was the infantry component of the new model Tank Brigade that appeared from the end of 1941. In late 1943 these Battalions were reorganized and rearmed to become Motor SMG Battalions.

Outline development, 1942 to 1945

The outline organization of the Motor Rifle-MG Battalion in 1942 was a Battalion Headquarters, two Rifle Companies, a *Desant* Company, an 82-mm Mortar Company, a Service Platoon and a Medical Detachment. In late 1943 the two Rifle Companies became SMG Companies and the Battalion absorbed the Anti-tank Rifle Company and Anti-tank Battery that had previously been Brigade units.

Each Rifle Company consisted of three Rifle Platoons, each with three Rifle Squads and an Anti-tank Rifle Squad, and a Machine Gun Platoon with a pair of M1910 heavy machine guns. The *Desant* Company had three Platoons, each of three Squads armed entirely with submachine guns. The Mortar Company had six 82-mm weapons in two Platoons of three, and the Service Platoon added Transport, Repair and Administrative Squads. In mid-1943 the anti-tank rifles were removed from the Rifle Platoons and formed into a composite Squad in each Rifle Company.

With the November 1943 reorganization the *Desant* Company added two men per Squad, and the two Rifle Companies deleted their anti-tank rifles and exchanged their bolt-action rifles for submachine guns. The newly acquired Anti-tank Rifle Company had three Platoons, each of six weapons, and the Anti-tank Battery had two Platoons, each of two 57-mm or 76-mm guns.

Overleaf is a chart that outlines the evolution of the Motor Rifle-MG Battalion and the Motor SMG Battalion throughout the war.

Evolution of the Red Army Motor Rifle-MG/Motor SMG Battalion, 1942 to 1945

Detail	Feb-42	Jul-42	Jun-43 (a)	Nov-43 (c)
i). Personnel				
Command ranks	30	31	28	38
Political ranks	7	7	3	3
Junior command ranks	156	156	148	130
Other ranks	209	209	212	336
Total, all ranks	402	403	391	507
ii). Transport				
Passenger car	1	1	1	1
1.5-ton trucks	22	22	22	25
2.5-ton trucks	2	2	2	5
3-ton trucks	-	-	-	4
Workshop truck	1	1	1	1
Ambulance	1	1	1	1
Kitchen trailers	2	2	2	3
Motorcycle & sidecar	2	2	1	2
iii). Weapons				
Pistols	27	28	22	7
Rifles	203	203	198	71
Submachine guns	117	117	117	344
Light machine guns	18	18	18	18
Heavy machine guns	4	4	4	4
82-mm mortars	6	6	6	6
Anti-tank rifles	6	6	6	18
57-mm or 76-mm guns	-	-	-	4

a). Incorporating known amendments to mid-1943.

b). 57-mm guns only available under November 1943 organization.

c). Part estimated.

The elements of the Battalion, 1942 to 1945

Below follows a more detailed review of each subunit of the Battalion (Companies, Platoons and Squads). For some of these a single description will suffice, while others underwent greater revision.

Battalion Headquarters (1942 to 1945)

The Headquarters of the Motor Rifle-MG Battalion initially had three sections;

Command - the command group was quite large, principal roles being the Battalion commander (Major), two Deputies (one being a Communist Party Military Commissioner, the other a Captain) and an Adjutant. Specialist branches of the Red Army provided a Quartermaster for supply and a Technician for ammunition duties.

Party Political Apparatus - this was two Communist Party officials, a Secretary from the main party and another from its Youth wing.

Headquarters Squad - this was actually the communication element of Headquarters and was equipped with four radio sets.

The RB set was used principally for communication between Battalion and Brigade Headquarters. It was a pre-war design, capable of both transmitting and receiving in either voice or Morse and could be fitted with a short aerial (1.5m or 1.8m tall) or an extended version of perhaps 6.5m, both topped with a distinctive 'star'.

The RB had two frequency ranges, 1.5 to 2.75 megacycles and 2.75 to 6.0 megacycles. It was powered by three or four dry batteries and was normally a two-man pack load. Range tends to be subjective when looking at sources, particularly as the set was produced in several versions. Maximum range might be considered as from 8 to 10 km voice and several kilometres more in continuous wave. A single RB set was carried by the Battalion, with the extended aerial mentioned specifically. Its successor was the 12-RP, with a similar range in both distance and frequency.

There were also three RBS sets. The RBS (also known as the 4-R) was a one-man radio used to link the Companies with Battalion Headquarters. It had a short range, up to perhaps 3 km voice, and could also be used as a telegraph to around twice this distance. Line of sight was needed between sets for peak performance.

Medical Detachment (1942 to 1945)

The senior medical post was initially held by a Medical Assistant, which by July 1942 became a Medical Officer (3rd Grade), renamed as a Captain (Medical Service) by 1944. Completing the detachment were a Medical Sergeant, two orderlies and a driver for the detachment's ambulance.

82-mm Mortar Company (1942 to 1945)

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 included two telephonists and a driver with 1.5-ton truck.

The Motorised Rifle Company (1942 to 1945)

The original organization was a Company Headquarters, a Machine Gun Platoon, and three Rifle Platoons, each of three Rifle Squads and an Anti-tank Rifle Squad.

Rifle Platoon Headquarters was nothing more than a Lieutenant, armed with a submachine gun. The Rifle Squads were nine men each, with a Sergeant as Squad commander and a Junior Sergeant as deputy commander, who was also the gunner for the Squad's light machine gun. Completing the Squad were an assistant gunner and six riflemen. Two of the riflemen were to carry submachine guns, and the balance, less the Junior Sergeant with the DP, all bolt action rifles. The Anti-tank Rifle Squad was just a Sergeant, gunner and assistant serving a single PTRD.

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

Company Headquarters consisted of the Commander (Senior Lieutenant), Deputy commander (Lieutenant) and a Political officer. There was also a *Starshina*, a messenger and a medical team of a Senior Sergeant and two orderlies.

Changes of 1943

By June 1943 the Company had undergone some minor alterations. First was the Army wide deletion of the Political officer and Deputy commander posts from all Company (and equivalent) level Headquarters. Secondly, the Anti-tank Rifle Squad was removed from each Rifle Platoon, with the three gunners and their assistants being formed into a single Squad under a Sergeant.

At the end of 1943 more significant changes were made. The Anti-tank Rifle Squad was removed from each Rifle Company, and the two Rifle Companies became Submachine Gun Companies. Every man previously armed with a rifle or a pistol exchanged this for a submachine gun, either the PPSH41 or the later PPS-43. This change also resulted in the six riflemen in each Squad being bumped up a rank to Lance-corporal, though not the deputy light machine gunner.

The Tank *Desant* Company (1942 to 1945)

Perhaps one of the most enduring visual images of the Red Army at war was that of a group of infantrymen riding into action on the hull of a T-34 medium tank. Often known as 'tank riders' in the West, these were termed танко десантная (tanko desantnaya), which roughly translates as 'tank assault'. Десантная is generally

anglicised as *Desant*, to mean 'descend'. *Desant* does appear to refer to the act of landing, and can be applied as readily to troops arriving by parachute and landing craft as by jumping down from the rear deck and sides of a tank.

From the outset the Company was armed with submachine guns and had no light or heavy machine guns allocated to it. The Squad was eight strong and reflected the unusual rank structure of submachine gun elements in mobile units. It was commanded by a Sergeant and the other seven men were all Junior Sergeants. Along with the Platoon commander, a Lieutenant, every member of the Platoon was armed with a submachine gun.

Under the November 1943 *Shtat* the *Desant* Company was increased to ten men at full strength. The inflated ranks were also addressed, the Squad now having a Sergeant and nine Lance-corporals.

The Service Platoon (1942 to 1945)

This was made up of two Motor Transport Squads, a Weapon and Machine Repair Squad and an Administrative Squad.

Under the 1942 organization the majority of the Battalion's vehicles were in the Service Platoon. The two Transport Squads had between them 16 1.5-ton trucks, one Jeep and two motorcycles with sidecars. 14 of the trucks were for personnel and the other two for ammunition and fuel respectively. There is no indication as to how the troops were to be carried across these vehicles; two Transport Squads would suggest one per Rifle Company, with perhaps one truck for the Machine Gun Platoon and two for each Rifle Platoon, leaving Company HQ to be dispersed across the vehicles. What is certain is that this was not tactical transport, as found in British, US or German motorised infantry units. The absence of any organic vehicles for the Battalion Headquarters Staff is unusual and means seats would have to be found for them as well

The Repair Squad included two armourers and a mechanic with a workshop truck while the Administrative Squad had two kitchen trucks with trailers.

Under the November 1943 *Shtat* it seems that vehicles were increased with the addition of trucks from the newly added Anti-tank Rifle Company and Anti-tank Battery, though the details require some reconstruction.

The 1943 reorganization

As well as the changes already described, the revised *Shtat* of November 1943 added two subunits to the newly retitled Motor SMG Battalion, which were already part of the Tank Brigade organization. These were not then new troops and their absorption into the Battalion may have been as much about simplifying administration as increasing its combat power.

Anti-tank Rifle Company (1944 to 1945)

The previously separate Anti-tank Rifle Company had three Platoons, each with a Lieutenant and Senior Sergeant in its Headquarters, and three 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. There was a Transport Squad with four drivers, each with a 1.5-ton truck. Overall the Company deployed 18 anti-tank rifles.

With only an amended version of the November 1943 *Shtat* to work from (in which the Anti-tank Rifle Company has been deleted), the changes made to the Company when it joined the Motor SMG Battalion have to be surmised. Several sources show the Company as 53 all ranks, with a two man Headquarters, presumably the Commander and *Starshina*, and three Platoons each of 17 men, as described above. It seems likely that the Company's Transport Squad was merged into the Service Platoon, and my best guess is that three 1.5-ton trucks were added as a result.

Anti-tank Battery (1944 to 1945)

The newly organized Tank Brigades of early 1942 had included a Battery equipped with four 76-mm guns. These were identified on the *Shtat* as the YCB, which translates to SPM in English, and referred to the F-22 field gun. This was a pre-war design and had been built to a brief that sought an artillery piece that could be used as both a field gun and an anti-aircraft weapon. Needless to say, the concept of one gun meeting two such very different requirements proved unattainable, the F-22 was though put into production as the new M1936 Divisional field gun.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Red Army quickly found itself disadvantaged in terms of anti-tank guns. As had proven the case elsewhere, in the absence of an effective, purpose built anti-tank gun, the next best thing was often a repurposed field gun or anti-aircraft piece. By 1941 a revised model of the F-22, the M1939, had reached units, and both could be found in the anti-tank role.

The Red Army had begun work on a new, dedicated anti-tank gun in 1940, the ZiS-2, which fired a 57-mm round. Production started a few weeks before the invasion of June 1941, and was then halted at the end of that year. From then on factories started to turn out the ZiS-3 M1942, a 76-mm gun that would go on to replace the M1936 and M1939 guns serving in Divisional Artillery Regiments.

During 1943 the German Army began to replace the generation of tanks that had served so effectively during the campaigns of the previous years. By mid-1943 Soviet attention returned to the 57-mm ZiS-2 as they began to encounter these newer German tanks, the Tiger and later Panther, and the overhauled Panzer IV.

The 1942 *Shtat* referred to the 76-mm gun for the separate Anti-tank Battery of the Tank Brigade, more specifically stating the YCB (SPM). Under the November 1943

table the 57-mm gun was detailed as an alternative to the 76-mm YCB, though the summaries I have seen all refer to 76-mm guns rather than 57-mm models.

As a standalone unit the Battery consisted of a Headquarters Platoon, two Gun Platoons and a small Service Squad. Headquarters Platoon included a Scout Squad with five men and a Communication Squad with an RBS radio, a telephone team and a 1.5-ton truck. Each Gun Platoon was commanded by a Lieutenant, with two Squads, each of seven men with a 76-mm gun towed by a 3-ton truck.

When the Battery became part of the Motor SMG Battalion the Service Squad was deleted and Headquarters Platoon lost one scout and one signaller, but otherwise remained the same.

Overleaf is a summary of the changes in both Rifle Platoon and SMG Platoon organization.

Motor Rifle Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/347 - February 1942

Personnel	No.	Rifle	SMG	LMG	Atk-R
Platoon Headquarters					
Commander (Lieutenant)	1	-	1	-	-
Total, Headquarters	1	-	1	-	-
Anti-tank Rifle Squad					
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1	-	-	-
Gunner (Junior Sergeant)	1	-	-	-	1
Gun number	1	1	-	-	-
Total, Squad	3	2	-	-	1
Three Rifle Squads, each					
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1	-	-	-
Machine gunner (Junior Sergeant)	1	-	-	1	-
Machine gunner	1	1	-	-	-
Rifleman	6	4	2	-	-
Total, Squad	9	6	2	1	-
Total, Platoon	31	20	7	3	1

Motor Rifle Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/273 - July 1942

(amended to June 1943)

Personnel	No.	Rifle	SMG	LMG
Platoon Headquarters				
Commander (Lieutenant)	1	-	1	-
Total, Headquarters	1	-	1	-
Three Rifle Squads, each				
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1	-	-
Machine gunner (Junior Sergeant)	1	-	-	1
Machine gunner	1	1	-	-
Rifleman	6	4	2	-
Total, Squad	9	6	2	1
Total, Platoon	28	18	7	3

Motor SMG Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/502 - November 1943

Personnel	No.	SMG	LMG
Platoon Headquarters			
Commander (Lieutenant)	1	1	-
Total, Headquarters	1	1	-
Three Rifle Squads, each			
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1	-
Machine gunner (Junior Sergeant)	1	-	1
Machine gunner	1	1	-
Rifleman (Lance-corporal)	6	6	-
Total, Squad	9	8	1
Total, Platoon	28	25	3

Desant SMG Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/347 - February 1942;**Desant SMG Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/273 - July 1942**

Personnel	No.	SMG
Platoon Headquarters		
Commander (Lieutenant)	1	1
Total, Headquarters	1	1
Three Rifle Squads, each		
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1
Submachine gunner (Junior Sergeant)	7	7
Total, Squad	8	8
Total, Platoon	25	25

Desant SMG Platoon, under *Shtat* reference 010/502 - November 1943

Personnel	No.	SMG
Platoon Headquarters		
Commander (Lieutenant)	1	1
Total, Headquarters	1	1
Three Rifle Squads, each		
Squad commander (Sergeant)	1	1
Submachine gunner (Lance-corporal)	9	9
Total, Squad	10	10
Total, Platoon	31	31

Sources used and Acknowledgements

Shtat Tables

Motor Rifle-Machine Gun Battalion of a Tank Brigade

010/347 dated 15th February 1942

010/273 dated 31st July 1942

Motor Submachine Gun Battalion of a Tank Brigade

010/502 dated ? November 1943

Other sources

Red Army Handbook (by Zaloga and Ness), since reissued as the *Red Army Companion*.

From the www.pamyat-naroda.ru website;

<https://pamyat-naroda.ru/documents/>

Still searching for...

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