



Artillery Training in Preparation for Tsentr 2019

OE Watch Commentary: The Totskoye training center has a long and remarkable history. On 14 September 1954, the Soviets dropped a 40 kiloton RDS-4 atomic bomb there as part of a training exercise involving 45,000 troops and massive amounts of aircraft and equipment. In September 1994, 250 Russian and 250 American soldiers participated in “Peacekeeper ‘94”-the first joint Russian-US training exercise held in Russia. Now, the Totskoye training center is home to preparations for what will become another front page headline: Exercise *Tsentr* will be held in September 2019. The accompanying passage from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses preparation exercises for *Tsentr* 2019, which will be held in the Central Military District. The Central Military District occupies the center of Russia [Volga, Ural and Siberian regions] and borders the Arctic Ocean to the North and Kazakhstan and Mongolia to the South.



Central Military District Headquarters.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Military_District_headquarters,_Yekaterinburg.jpg, CC BY 4.0

Although the preparation exercise simulated the launches of Iskander ballistic and cruise missiles, there was no scrimping on ammunition expenditure. A six-gun-battery of 152mm howitzers may fire a 300 meter standing barrage (50 meters per gun). The standing barrage is planned to insert a wall of artillery fire to stop the advancing enemy in his tracks. The standing barrage is continually fired to deny the enemy further advance. This exercise fired a 2,400 meter standing barrage. That is a 1.49 mile wall of continuously exploding rounds and shrapnel! It takes eight batteries of 152mm artillery to fire that standing barrage. 18 batteries were available, so the barrage was sustained by switching batteries to keep the barrels cool enough. The “Fire Vise” is another ammunition-intensive planned fire event that uses multiple battalions to fire simultaneous moving barrages designed to force the enemy inward to a concentration area where they can be finished by area fire. The concept was developed in Afghanistan and refined in Chechnya.

Also discussed in the article was the use of various mortars and gun/mortars, as well as antitank systems, during the exercise. This exercise completed the winter training period. Contract soldiers are placed in those positions requiring the most training and they will still be trained and available in September for Exercise *Tsentr*. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“As the conclusion of a month-long training encampment, artillery subunits of an artillery brigade, a multiple rocket launcher brigade and motorized rifle brigade artillery conducted a live-fire tactical exercise which included simulated missile launches by a missile brigade.”

Source: “Missile Troops and Artillerymen of Central Military District’s 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army Have Successfully Mastered New Tactical Devices To Combat Illegal Armed Elements,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17 April 2019. <http://redstar.ru>

This was conducted at the Totskoye combined-arms training range under the direction of Guards Colonel Vasiliy Solovyev, Acting Chief of Staff of the Central Military District’s 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army, and Guards Col. Andrey Shabanov, Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery of the combined formation. Under the command of these combined-arms officers, the missile troops and artillerymen accomplished missions involved in the command and control of missile strikes and artillery fire, and rehearsed different ways of eliminating illegal armed elements.

In the exercise, missile brigade battalions, armed with Iskander-M missile systems, delivered individual and group missile strikes against particularly important and hardened targets. ... Guards Lieutenant Colonel Ruslan Bakirov, Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of the 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army’s Missile Troops and Artillery, and the men under Col. Andrey Surkov conducted nine simulated strikes using conventionally armed cruise and ballistic missiles, and -- according to objective monitoring data -- successfully “destroyed” four command and control posts, two communications centers, and two bridges and a dam. These “strikes” thwarted an approach by the operational reserve of the hypothetical illegal armed force.

Over 2,000 men and some 500 systems were assigned to the final evaluation exercise of the winter period of instruction for artillerymen and missile troops. Battalions and batteries of cannon and rocket artillery performed a variety of fire missions on the range’s tactical area between the Lysaya and Kalanchovaya mountains. For the first time a wall of fixed barrage fire extending for some 2,400 meters erupted from the bursts of howitzer shells. On the order of Guards Col. Andrey Shabanov, Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery of the combined formation, this fire mission was conducted in a well-coordinated manner by three battalions of 2S19 Msta-S 152-mm self-propelled guns, two battalions of the Separate Guards Artillery Brigade under Guards Col. Sergey Yurchenko and a battalion of D-30 122-mm towed howitzers. In this way the artillerymen prevented subunits of the hypothetical illegal armed forces from breaking out of their blockaded area.

For the first time at the Totskiy range, the Samara army’s “gods of war” also employed the “fire vise” against the hypothetical militants. Using several three- line moving barrages, heavy and medium howitzer battalions forced the notional adversary back into a 64 hectare [158 acre] artillery concentration area. There, they delivered overlapping volleys of rocket-propelled high explosive powerful warheads, each containing 1,000 preformed fragments. Two MLRS rocket artillery battalions from the artillery of two guards motorized infantry brigades undertook this mission. Guards LTC Rustam Fakhрутdinov commanded the battalion of Grad 122-mm multiple-launch rocket systems and Guards Major Eduard Usov commanded his battalion, which was recently rearmed with the Tornado-G systems.

According to Guards Lt. Col. Bakirov, the best results were posted by the rocket artillery battalions of Guards Lt. Col. Fakhрутdinov and Guards Maj. Usov. He also singled out the self-propelled howitzer battalion under Guards Captain Aleksey Obutkin from the Guards Artillery Brigade. His men are specialists in counterbattery fire and successfully completed seven fire missions to suppress artillery batteries and mortar platoons belonging to the hypothetical illegal armed elements....