



# Russia Integrates Tank Battalions into the Airborne Troops

**OE Watch Commentary:** In Soviet times, the Russian Airborne (VDV) was envisioned as an exploitation force that would jump in behind enemy lines to seize key points. In order to fulfill this mission, almost the entire division or brigade would be on jump status and regularly practice airborne insertion techniques. Since the VDV was not intended to fight against heavy conventional forces and given the aforementioned mission requirements, the Russian VDV only used light armored vehicles that were capable of being transported and/or parachute dropped by the Il-76 cargo plane. Due to this situation, the Airborne possessed no main battle tanks, and instead used light tanks such as the PT-76 (now retired) and the Sprut-SD. Although main battle tanks were never part of the VDV's MTO&E in Soviet times, they were routinely operationally controlled by VDV units when necessary. The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses how the Russian VDV is integrating tanks into its ranks.



Russian Airborne Troops.

Source: <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Airborne-troops-day-2010/i-LWQHtCd>, CC BY 4.0

In 2015, the VDV decided to add organic tank battalions to VDV regiments and brigades. This development was due to a change in how the General Staff believed the VDV would be utilized. Large-scale rear insertions against peer-level adversaries are now extremely difficult given the proliferation of modern air defense systems. Russian VDV units are no longer focused on this one mission. Instead they are now focused on specific missions regarding the areas where they are located, for example the 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division in Novorossiysk has been designated a 'mountain division.' (This designation has required slight MTO&E and training changes.) In addition, the role of the VDV as a rapid reaction force has also impacted MTO&E requirements. Since the General Staff envisages the VDV as part of the initial rapid reaction element that would fend off any NATO incursion, an armor capability is seen as essential for this mission. Although the VDV is adding a non-airmobile friendly piece of equipment to its ranks, the deployability of the VDV will in reality change very little. The Russian VDV, as the conventional force, primarily relies upon rail for the mass movement of units and most combat vehicles. Regimental-level drops can be conducted, but with a great straining of resources, so the addition of tanks units will have negligible impact on a force which is already relying on rail for the mass movement of brigades and divisions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

*“The airborne assault forces are growing their tank muscle.”*

**Source:** Vladimir Sosnitskiy, “Десантные тельняшки танкистам впору (Tank Troops in the Striped T-Shirts of the Airborne Troops),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 25 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/desantnye-telnyashki-tankistam-vporu/>

Rayevskiy training ground, Krasnodarskiy Kray -- The armor in Airborne Troops units just got much tougher and more reliable...The dynamics of a company-level tactical exercise at a recently formed tank battalion of the 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division largely mirrored real warfare. The first two companies of this subunit, which are manned by contract soldiers, have already undergone a similar appraisal of their combat proficiency. Now is the turn of the third company, in which most of the crews are conscripts. They only recently arrived from training subunits in Kovrov, Chelyabinsk, and Sertolovo. They chose to serve in the Airborne Troops of their own volition. Many say it was something they did not dare dream of, but it turns out that the airborne assault forces “are growing their tank muscle.” The young tank troops have already been issued their blue-and-white striped T-shirts, of which they are particularly proud. True, the commander of the conscript company says that this badge of distinction is, so to speak, a down payment and they will have to sweat to earn it. Indeed they will: Even before this exercise the mechanic-drivers were tested for their driving skills and tank commanders and gunners examined in the theory of shooting and the nuts and bolts of tank weaponry.

Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Khokhlov starts counting down the seconds on his electronic stopwatch as the company obeys the order to assemble, and then he dispassionately notes the crews' agility at the fighting vehicle depot and as the subunit heads to the training ground, how they obey commands while on the march, take on ammunition at the staging area, and transition from travel to combat mode. “As the practice of the first months shows, instructing the soldiers in the separate procedures and individual drills turned out much simpler than getting them to act cohesively as part of a crew, platoon, or company,” Lt Col Khokhlov admits. “And this is where we rely on the experience and abilities of the tank commanders, who are contract soldiers. It is they who have to forge the individual soldiers' characters and skills into a team spirit. The youthful energy of the platoon commanders comes into play as well -- they are all recent graduates of the Kazan' and Omsk tank schools.”

The formation's staff officers play an active role in the division's new battalion, which is helping it to rapidly find its feet. The guards division's deputy commander, Colonel Andrey Kondrashkin, keeps a close eye on the tank officers' tactical training, maintaining their focus on ways of jointly operating with airborne assault subunits and on careful study of Airborne Troops subunits' tactics in battle. The guards formation's training chief, Major Yevgeniy Solovyev, and the officers in his section help the battalion staff to use the exact format preferred in the division for organizing exercises. And the armor and tank service specialists take care so that the battalion's “iron” does not encounter any operating issues...

By the way, in the preceding exercise for the professional companies their commander decided to lengthen the range of fire from the T-72B3 tank's 125-mm gun and shorten the target display time. The rate of fire accelerated. Obviously, this required more intensive and better coordinated work by the crews. But it is fair to demand that of professionals. The airborne assault tank troops speak very highly of their T-72B3 machine, believing that its simplicity of operation, survivability, all-terrain capabilities, weaponry, and a recent upgrade make it the best tank in the world. The company-level tactical exercise stage for the newly formed airborne assault tank battalion has shown that these are promising innovations and that the subunit itself is on the right track in its evolution.