



## CREATION OF REACTIVE FORMATIONS ARTILLERY

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Soviet rocket artillery as a new type of artillery weapon appeared on the battlefields in the first days of the Great Patriotic War.

At first, only individual M-13 batteries were formed, which were sent to the most critical operational areas to test their actions in combat conditions.

The high efficiency of massive and sudden multiple launch rocket fire of the first batteries showed the need to introduce and develop this new type of weapon. During the war, battalions, regiments, brigades and field rocket artillery divisions began to be formed.

During the Great Patriotic War, Soviet artillery grew quantitatively more than fivefold, undergoing great qualitative changes during this period, associated primarily with the advent of rocket artillery.

The experience of the war showed that in all offensive operations of the Soviet Army a significant mass of rocket artillery was involved. Thus, in the offensive operations of 1943-1945. In the armies operating in the direction of the main attack, a rocket artillery group was created on average consisting of three to five regiments M-8 and M-13 and two to four brigades M-31 and M-31-12.

Already in the first weeks of the Great Patriotic War, in heavy defensive battles, rocket artillery showed the power and effectiveness of its fire. Well-prepared volleys inflicted a heavy defeat on the enemy.

Having successfully withstood the first combat test, the rocket artillery of the Soviet Army began to quickly grow in quantity and quality, and its personnel – improved their combat skills.

The combat use of field rocket artillery in the Great Patriotic War revealed the positive and negative qualities of this type of weapon.

High tactical and operational mobility of rocket artillery units and formations, the ability to create a high density of fire in a limited area in a short time, the effectiveness of fire – these are the positive qualities of rocket artillery.

The large dispersion of shells when firing, their insufficient reach, the impossibility of firing at targets located in the immediate vicinity of our troops, the large dimensions of the installations and, as a result, their great vulnerability – these are negative qualities.

Soviet field rocket artillery appeared on the battlefields in the first days of the Great Patriotic War. This was a new type of weapon. Rocket artillery, as a means of conducting massive sudden fire, first began to be widely used during the period when the Red Army was engaged in heavy defensive battles.



The first battery of rocket artillery was formed at the 1st Moscow Red Banner Artillery School. The battery included: a control platoon, three fire platoons, a combat pitinia platoon, a sighting platoon, an economic department, a fuel and lubricants department, and a sanitary unit. The battery was to have seven BM-13 combat vehicles mounted on domestic ZIS-6 vehicles. But two combat vehicles were not received from Voronezh; in addition, the battery had 44 trucks (they could transport up to 600 shells simultaneously). Captain Ivan Andreevich Flerov, who had previously been a 2nd year student at the F.E. Military Artillery Academy, was appointed commander of the battery. Dzerzhinsky.<sup>4</sup>

The rocket artillery used in the battle showed the greater effectiveness of its fire. Sudden and massive fire, high maneuverability – all this contributed to the quantitative growth of field rocket artillery and penetration into the troops.

With the beginning of the war, guards mortar units were formed, and mass production of combat vehicles and rockets was organized. The first combat vehicles were manufactured at the «Compressor» plant, which was essentially the main supplier of these vehicles. The first units of field rocket artillery were at the disposal of the Supreme Command Headquarters. Their material support and management of combat training were carried out by the Main Artillery Directorate. However, with the increase in the number of rocket artillery units, the need has emerged to form a special body to manage their combat training, support, repairs, etc. Therefore, already on September 8, 1941, a special command was created, headed by Lieutenant General of Artillery V.V. Aborenkov. To directly direct the combat activities and supply of RA units on the fronts, there were operational groups of guard's mortar units of the fronts, and in January 1942 there were such groups in all armies in which at least three separate guards mortar divisions operated.

Already at the beginning of August 1941, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief signed an order that defined the tasks solved by rocket artillery in battle:

sudden mass destruction of enemy personnel and fire weapons, both open and in field-type shelters;


destruction of enemy armored vehicles and motorized units on the march and in concentrated areas;

fighting enemy artillery.

On August 19, the 1st Guards Mortar Regiment was formed and sent to the Bryansk Front. Eight more regiments were formed in September. The experience of the combat use of guards mortar regiments in the first months of the war and especially during the defensive period of the Battle of Moscow showed that the regiments could not be used massively in one area; very often separate rocket artillery battalions operated in important directions. The situation at the front forced divisions to be sent as soon as they were ready, without waiting for the final formation of the regiment.

Of the fourteen regiments formed and sent to the front by mid-October 1941, only four operated as whole units. The remaining regiments were used divisionally in various directions of one front or another. The troops had a desire to have one division in each rifle





division of the first echelon of the army. As a result of such features of the combat use of rocket artillery, it was necessary to split regiments into divisions that operated in isolation from each other and at a considerable distance from each other from the regiment headquarters (10-30 km). This created difficulties in supplying ammunition, fuel, etc. In addition, centralized control at the regimental scale was disrupted.

In this regard, from the second half of October 1941, not regiments began to be formed, but separate guards mortar divisions.

At the beginning of 1943, breakthrough artillery formations – corps and divisions had already appeared in the Soviet Army. The creation of rocket artillery divisions dates back to this period. By the end of December 1942, three Guards mortar divisions were formed, and in January – February three more.

The brigades consisted of 4-6 M-30 divisions, and the – division first of four M-13 regiments and two M-30 brigades, and subsequently – of three M-30 brigades.

As combat experience showed, the original staff of the division suffered from a number of shortcomings. The division included units with various weapons and purposes: M-30 brigades performed only the task of destroying strongholds and resistance centers during the period of artillery preparation; M-13 regiments took part in artillery preparation and accompanied infantry and tanks to the entire depth of the operation. The unified control of the division's units was disrupted.


The division's new staffs were approved in February 1943. In addition to the brigades that were part of the divisions, the M-31 brigades were in the reserve of the Supreme High Command.

The organization and staffing of guard's mortar units and formations underwent changes throughout the Great Patriotic War. The acquired experience in combat operations and the arrival of new rocket artillery systems made adjustments not only to the combat use of rocket artillery, but also to its composition and organization.

Soviet rocket artillery, which originated at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, went through a glorious military path. It has grown into a new promising type of artillery, which has its own weapon system, organization, methods of firing and forms of combat use. In no army in the world that took part in the Second World War did rocket artillery receive such widespread development.

An analysis of the evolution of organizational forms shows that they have achieved a high degree of perfection. During the Great Patriotic War, there was a natural process of transition from the organization of small units (individual batteries, divisions) to larger units (regiments) and, finally, to formations (brigades, divisions), with a consistent improvement in controllability and efficiency.

The methods of firing rocket artillery during the war were also improved, mainly under the influence of its qualitative changes and the development of organizational forms. The main method of firing was salvo fire from the divisions. The fire was carried out in concentrated volleys of several divisions, regiments and even brigades, which



made it possible to quickly achieve the desired results. The high level of development of rocket artillery during the war led to the fact that it became an important means in the hands of front and army commanders to create fire superiority over the enemy in the main directions. At the same time, in the hands of commanders of formations and units, it was one of the effective means of performing tactical tasks.

