Soviet Unit Impression

Soviet forces will be portraying troops of the 9th Rifle Battalion, 39th Guards Rifle Regiment, 13th Guards Rifle Division Poltava, 32nd Guards Rifle Corps, 5th Guards Tank Army, 1st Ukrainian Front.

Unit History

The division was formed as the 87th Rifle Division in 1929.

The 87th Rifle Division saw action in the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. Later that year, the division was sent northwards to Finland to serve as reinforcements in the Winter War. As they were a late arrival on the Finnish Front, they escaped the fate of many Red Army units during the conflict. After the Winter War, the unit was transferred to Ukraine in early 1940.

German Invasion

The German Army invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The 87th Rifle Division, then a part of the
5th Army, was almost immediately engaged with a portion of the division being encircled on the very first day of the war. Just three days later, their recently appointed commander, Major General Filipp Alyabushchev, was killed in action.

Encirclement

Three months later, the 87th Rifle Division which, along with the rest of the 5th Army, was encircled at Kiev. Thanks to a counter-attack by Belov's 20th Cavalry Corps, many of the 5th Army survivors were able to fight their way out of the encirclement. On November 6, the 87th Rifle Division was re-formed around the survivors of the 3rd Airborne corps and placed under the command of Col. Rodimtsev.

Two months later, on January 19, 1942, the 87th Rifle Division was officially awarded Guards status and was re-designated as the 13th Guards.

Kharkov

In May 1942, the 13th Division was involved in the Soviet counter-offensive at Kharkov, where they fought on the northern axis. Due to their position on the line, they escaped the encirclement and destruction of a substantial portion of the Soviet forces engaged. Still, the division suffered more than fifty-percent casualties, most of which were sustained in the repelling of fierce German counter-attacks.

After the Kharkov operation, the 13th Guards were pulled from the line to be refitted, resupplied, and reinforced.

Stalingrad

Rushing to Battle

On September 13, 1942, German infantry divisions made their first advance into Stalingrad. By the end of the day, the German 71st Infantry Division had reached the city center. Soviet Supreme General Staff ordered the 13th Guards Division (in the midst of refitting) to the Volga River and Stalingrad.

After receiving approximately 10,000 men as reinforcements, the 13th Guards were rushed to the front in a grueling series of forced marches that caused them to arrive piecemeal.

Because of the recent influx of new recruits, the division was largely inexperienced and lacked both maps and knowledge of the city. In spite of this, at 17.00, September 14, the forward elements of the 13th Guards crossed the Volga and went directly into action.

According to Albert Burkovsky, who crossed the Volga at age 14 with the 13th Guards, “The soldiers were fully equipped. Each had a greatcoat, two grenades, gas mask, ammunition, and an avtomat (Ppsh-41). Many drowned before they could fight. They were under terrible fire. Bombing, shelling, machine gun fire - it was a real cacophony. It was awful.”

It is estimated that more than half of the first wave perished during the river crossing with more than 3,000 being killed in just the first 24 hours. Ultimately, after extremely heavy losses on both sides, the
German advance was repelled. Rodimtsev's soldiers recaptured the Mill and secured the central river crossing for other regiments of the 13th Guards.

**The Railroad Station**

The following morning, Lieutenant Anton Kuzmich Dragan was personally ordered by Chuikov to hold a key railroad station in downtown Stalingrad against an impending German assault. Dragan proceeded to gather a platoon of around fifty men and moved them to the railroad station.

Soon after digging in, a substantial force of German infantrymen attacked. The Russians repeatedly frustrated the Germans in an epic room-by-room struggle for control of the depot that lasted nearly three weeks. Breaking through walls, crawling over rafters, and burrowing under the floorboards, the Russians would yield but a portion of the structure to the Germans, only to emerge elsewhere and start the struggle all over again.

In spite of this heroic resistance, Dragan's platoon was eventually reduced to a handful of men. After running out of ammunition, and with their rations gone, one of the Soviet Guardsmen took out his bayonet and carved on a wall,

> “Rodimtsev's Guardsmen fought and died for their country here.”

Under cover of darkness, Dragan and the five remaining soldiers under his command eventually slipped out of the building, made their way through the German lines, and were reunited with the remainder of the division.

**Heavy Fighting**

In the weeks that followed, divisional units fought in different sectors of Stalingrad. The division saw action throughout the city in the remains of the bombed-out buildings and factories, on the slopes of the Mamaev Kurgan hills, in the Red October Tractor Plant, and in the key strategic building known as "Pavlov's House" (Yakov Pavlov was the commanding NCO of the platoon which defended the building).

Most accounts state that of the 13th Guards that crossed the Volga into the Battle of Stalingrad, only between 280 and 320 of them survived the struggle.

**Battle of Kursk**

Following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the 13th Guards was again pulled from the lines for re-fit and re-supply. Held in reserve south of Kursk, the rifle battalions of the 13th held the line around Oboyan, repelling attacks from trenches. Relatively few casualties were sustained.

**Liberation of Ukraine**

Shortly thereafter, the 13th Guards advanced south-westwards, where they participated in the Red Army's assault to liberate Ukraine from German control. The division took part in the Kirovograd Operation in which they gained control of the town of Poltava. After extremely fierce fighting, it was
liberated on September 23, 1943. Soon afterwards, the 13th Guards Rifle Division was given honorary title “Poltava” as a tribute to their bravery.

After Poltava the 13th Rifles took part in a false crossing of the Dnieper River to confuse the Germans and allow for crossings further north and south. Elements of the division crossed the river on floats and rafts to reach the island of Peschanny. They sustained heavy losses in this operation when they were pinned down by enemy fire on the island, which is located in the middle of the river. German infantry had occupied the west side of the island and had to be dislodged in hand-to-hand combat.

**Mindset, Morale, and Supply**

It is important to note that by October 1943, the 13th Guards would have essentially been in its’ fourth formation. After the encirclement at Kiev and battles at Kharkov and Stalingrad, most of the men and women marching to the Dnieper would have only been in the division since the Spring of 1943. Remember less than 320 of those who crossed the Volga marched out of Stalingrad.

Still, this would have been largely a veteran unit. The latest replacements would have seen action at Kursk and heavy fighting at Poltava.

Here is a quote from *Red Road from Stalingrad* by Mansur Abdulin of the 66th Guards Rifle Division describing his personal equipment: “On the night of 5 October 1943, near the Village Vlasovka, we began crossing the Dnieper, our objective being the ‘neutral’ island Pescanny. On my feet I’m wearing close-fitting canvas boots. When wet they become especially tight. I also have my SMG, two cartridge drums, two grenades, and a TT pistol. My knapsack will serve as a float. I filled it with fresh, dry straw, carefully sewed it up and greased it with a piece of American fat.”

The quote is particularly telling in that it clearly mentions “American fat.” This shows Lend-Lease goods were a factor during this campaign.

**Impression Guidelines**

**General Rules**

1. The goal is simple - to look like typical Red Army soldiers on the Dnieper campaign in October of 1943. Please keep that in mind when putting together your impression.
2. Take a “Less is more” approach. The Red Army was travelling pretty light at this point in the war.
3. The Command Staff will be inspecting all attendees. If the Commander suggests you remove or switch something, don’t get upset. (See Rule #1)
4. Loaner gear is available so if you need something, contact the Commander. We are happy to help.

**Uniform**

1. **Headgear**
   Preferred - Pilotka with wartime-style cap star. Cap may be wool, cotton, or wool/cotton blend. Cap star
can be large or small, painted or enameled.  
Not allowed - Repro or postwar “Staybright” type stars.

II. Gynmastiorka (Tunic)
Preferred – Obr35 pattern converted to 1943 regulations or Obr43 pattern without pockets.
Accepted – Obr43 pattern with pockets.

IV. Sharovari (Breeches)
Preferred - Obr35 or Obr43 pattern.

V. Footwear
Sapogi (high boots) or botinki (low boots) with proper puttees. Soviet and Lend-Lease styles are acceptable.

VI. Undergarments
Preferred – Soviet-issue underwear
Acceptable – Lend-Lease underwear or “tank top” without tags or printing.
Not allowed – Modern tshirts and underwear

VII. Medals
All attendees will have a proper Guards badge. Older men are authorized to wear the Defense of Stalingrad Medal in limited numbers. Defense of the Caucasus are not authorized.

Equipment

I. Kaska (Helmet) – Every soldier will have a helmet. “Everywhere around in the sand I see soldiers...I see only their raised heads, like water melons in a garden.”

Preferred – standard wartime style SSh-40

Accepted – SSh-39.
Not allowed – “Converted” Czech or other postwar Communist.

II. Remyen (Belt)
Preferred – Leather belt. US-made “Garrison” belts would be appropriate.
Accepted – Canvas/leather belt

III. Ammunition Pouch – Please wear one pouch on your right side.
Discouraged – “Tsarist” type ammunition pouches.
Not allowed – Kirza rifle pouches or postwar Polish submachine gun pouches with nylon belt loops.
IV. Lopata (Shovel) – Shovel should have appropriate carrier.
Preferred – Soviet-style riveted or stamped shovels are accepted.
Accepted – German shovels
Not allowed – Chinese or “Spetsnaz” shovels.

V. Flyaga (Canteen) – Canteen should have appropriate carrier.
Preferred – Wartime style with small threads, glass canteens, or postwar (large threads) that have been repainted or stripped to bare aluminum.
Accepted – Prewar canteen (cork stopper) or German canteens in Soviet carriers.
Reluctantly accepted – Unmodified postwar canteens.

VI. Plasch-Palatka (Rain Cape)
Preferred – Wartime style with leather or handsewn grommets.
Accepted – “Defarbed” postwar type with handsewn grommets.
Not allowed – Postwar style with brass grommets.

VII. Myeshok (Knapsack)
Preferred – Soviet-made wartime style.
Accepted – Reproduction wartime style.
Not allowed – Postwar style with pockets.

VIII. Soomka Protivogaznaya (Gas Mask Bag) – Optional. Limited numbers.
Preferred – Leningrad pattern or other wartime styles.
Accepted – Correctly converted postwar Soviet.

IX. Knives – Knives are optional. Side knives in limited numbers will be allowed.
Preferred – Pocket knife.
Accepted – SVT-40 bayonet or original K-98 “trophy” bayonet. NR-40 “Scout” Knife may be worn by scouts, snipers, sappers, and as approved by the Commander.
Not allowed – Repro K-98 bayonets, trophy daggers, or rubber knives.

X. Grenade Pouch – Optional. Very limited numbers.
Preferred – Nothing.
Accepted – Three cell pouch for F-1 or RG-42 grenades.
Not allowed – RG-33 pouches, shovel pouches, etc...

XI. Koteluk (Mess kit)
Preferred – pot type.
Accepted – Two-piece style. Should be repainted or stripped to bare aluminum.
Reluctantly accepted – Unmodified postwar canteens.

XII. Medical Equipment
All medical equipment will be approved by the Senior Sanitar prior to being fielded.
Cold Weather Gear (If needed)

I. Headgear
Preferred – Ushanka with appropriate chapka-size star.
Not allowed – Budionovka, Czech ushanka, balaclava, or German toques.

II. Coat
Preferred – Shinel (overcoat) with correct wartime insignia or telogrieka (padded coat). When not in use, shinel should be rolled.

III. Gloves/mittens
Preferred – Soviet canvas/felt gloves or knit gloves.
Accepted – German or other nationalities trigger finger mittens.
Not allowed – Shearling or modern gloves.

IV. Trousers
Accepted – Padded trousers are accepted but not required.