

13th Guards Rifle Division



From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Active | 1929 - 1988 |
| Country | Soviet Union |
| Branch | Red Army |
| Type | Infantry |
| Role | Red Guards |
| Part of | 32nd Guards Rifle Corps , 5th Guards Tank Army , 1st Ukrainian Front , and Southern Group of Forces |
| Engagements | Soviet invasion of Poland Winter War Battle of Kharkov Battle of Stalingrad Battle of Kursk Operation Bagration Battle of Berlin Battle of Halbe |
| Decorations | Red Guards |
| Disbanded | 1988 |

Commanders

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Notable commanders | Major General Filipp Alyabushev 1941 (87th Rifle Division) Lieutenant General Alexander Rodimtsev 1941-1943 (both the 87th Rifle Division and the 13th Guards Rifle Division) Major General Gleb Baklanov 1943-44 (13th Guards Rifle Division) Major General Vladimir Komarov 1944-45 (87th Rifle Division) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The **13th Guards Rifle Division** was a [Soviet Union Red Army infantry division](#) that served with distinction in [World War II](#).

Formation

The [87th Rifle Division](#) was formed in 1929. The 13th Guards Rifle Division itself was formed on 19 January 1942, when the 87th Rifle Division was awarded [Guards](#) status and re-designated as the 13th Guards Rifle Division.

Early service

The 87th Rifle Division had seen action fighting against the [Poles](#) 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 the division was transferred to the Finnish Front, it escaped the fate of many Red Army units during the conflict with Finland. After the war, the unit was transferred to [Ukraine](#) in early 1940.

World War II

Operation Barbarossa

On 22 June 1941, the [German Wehrmacht](#) unleashed a [furious offensive](#) against the surprised Soviet Union. During the opening hours of the German offensive, the 87th Rifle Division, then a part of the [5th Army](#), engaged in heavy combat with the Germans. At least a portion of the division was encircled during the opening day of the war. Their involvement in heavy fighting seems to have continued as their recently appointed commander, [Major General Filipp Alyabushev](#), was killed in action only three days after the start of the war.

Three months later, in the fighting that ended with the encirclement of [Kiev](#) (now known as the [Battle of Kiev](#)), the 87th Rifle Division was still a portion of the 5th Army. Although the entire unit was encircled, along with hundreds of thousands of other [Red Army](#) soldiers, much of the 5th Army were able to fight their way out of the encirclement after a [counter-attack](#) by [Belov's 20th Cavalry Corps](#) broke through the German ring around Kiev. Incidentally, the Belov that commanded the Corps that bought hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers their lives is unknown, but the possibilities are as follows: [Alexander Belov](#), [Alexei Belov](#), [Grigori Belov](#), [Ivan Belov](#), [Nikolai Belov](#), [Pavel Belov](#), [Vladimir Belov](#), and [Yetvikhiiy Belov](#), as all of these men were Red Army officers who participated in the Battle of Kiev). Amongst the survivors of the encirclement of Kiev was [Colonel Alexander Rodimtsev](#), the commander of the [5th Army Brigade](#) and the [3rd Airborne Corps](#). On 6 November, the 87th Rifle Division was re-formed around the survivors of the 3rd Airborne corps and placed under the command of Col. Rodimtsev.

On 19 January 1942, the 87th Rifle was officially awarded Red Guards status and was re-designated as the 13th Guards.

Battle of Kharkov

In May 1942, the 13th Division was involved in the Soviet counter-offensive at Kharkov, where they fought on its northern axis, thus escaping the encirclement and destruction of a substantial portion of the Soviet forces engaged, followed by the Russian defeat. During this offensive, the division suffered more than fifty-percent casualties, most of which were sustained in the repelling of fierce German counter-attacks. It was during one of these attacks that an [Artillery Captain](#) of the 13th earned the first [Order of the Great Patriotic War](#) 1st Class to be awarded. Following his unit's success during this offensive, Colonel Rodimtsev was subsequently promoted to Major General.

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

The Battle of Stalingrad

First blows

On 13 September of that year, German [infantry](#) divisions made their first advance into [Stalingrad](#), marking the opening salvos of the [Battle of Stalingrad](#), one of the most costly and largest struggles of the war. By the end of the day the German [71st Infantry Division](#) had reached the city center, north of the [Tsaritsa Gorge](#). A [Stavka](#) (Soviet Supreme General Staff) directive ordered the 13th Guards Division (in the midst of its refit, resupply, and reinforcement) to the [Volga River](#) and Stalingrad as reinforcements for the men fighting the Germans on the other bank of the river. After receiving approximately 10,000 men as reinforcements the 13th Guards were rushed to the front and arrived piecemeal, its men exhausted from a grueling forced march across large tracts of territory. Due to being in the midst of re-fit and resupply, one thousand of the division's men were unarmed, and nearly all of the rest were short of ammunition.^{[[citation needed](#)]} After being briefed by [Lieutenant General Vasily Chuikov](#), the commander of the [62nd Army](#) (which consists of all of the troops fighting within and around Stalingrad), on his assignment, Rodimtsev famously and determinedly declared,

"I am a Communist! I have no intention of abandoning the city [Stalingrad]!"

Immediately, Chuikov decided to send this poorly-armed^{[[citation needed](#)]} yet determined unit straight into the midst of the battle. Because of the recent influx of new recruits, the division was now largely inexperienced and untrained, and lacked both maps and knowledge of Stalingrad's rubble-strewn streets, which would prove enormously difficult to overcome in the struggle ahead. However, Major General Rodimtsev thanks to his experience fighting in the [Spanish Civil War](#) was well versed in [urban warfare](#). At 17.00, 14 September, the forward elements of the 13th Guards swiftly crossed the river to reinforce a line that was being held by a mere 15 tanks and few hastily assembled combat groups. It is estimated that more than half of the first wave perished during the river crossing, more than 3,000 being killed in just the first 24 hours of brutal [hand-to-hand combat](#). 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 one of Rodimtsev's junior officers, [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 less than fifty men and moved them over to the railroad station. Here, the small but determined force prepared itself for the German attack.

Soon after digging in, a substantial force of German infantrymen arrived to seize control of the station. The Russians proceeded to repeatedly frustrate the Germans in an epic room-by-room struggle for control of the depot for 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.

Exchanging gunfire down hallways, hurling grenades back and forth between rooms, Dragan's men inflicted significant casualties on the Germans. 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 13th Guards.

Battle at the Mamaev Kurgan Park

The Battle at the [Mamaev Kurgan Park](#) began approximately three weeks after the brutal fighting between the German and Russian infantrymen had begun in the outskirts of Stalingrad, on 15 September. This portion of the Battle of Stalingrad consisted of the 13th Rifles combating several Wehrmacht divisions for control of the park's central hilltop summit, which changed hands multiple times during this fierce fighting. Meanwhile, other contingents of the 13th Rifles fought in different sectors of Stalingrad. The division was in the midst of the combat 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 officer of the platoon which defended the building). Most accounts state that of the 10,000 men of the 13th Rifles that crossed the Volga into the Battle of Stalingrad, only between 280 and 320 of them survived the struggle. This profligacy with life seems incredible to Western eyes, but was not unremarkable during the conflict on the Eastern front.

Battle of Kursk

Following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad and the destruction of the [German 6th Army](#), the 13th Guards are again pulled from the lines for re-fit and re-supply. Alongside the [5th Guards Tank Army](#) as a portion of the [Voronezh Front](#), the 13th Rifles were held in reserve south of [Kursk](#), in order to counter the forthcoming German offensive there - [Operation Citadel](#). The original intention was for these two formations to [counter-attack](#) the Germans after the German assault had been ground down by the front line Soviet units, but both formations were committed to prevent a possible breakthrough. After several days of continuous fierce

fighting (including the tank [battle at Prokhorovka](#), in which the 13th Rifles' small number of armored units participated in), they successfully ground the elite [Waffen-SS](#) formations to a standstill. Meanwhile the rifle battalions on the 13th held the line around Oboyan, repelling attacks from trenches. Relatively few casualties were sustained because the Germans were focussing their attention on Prokhorovka by the time they had moved up from the reserve area in the rear.

Liberation of Ukraine

Shortly thereafter, the 13th Rifles 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 23 September 1943. This is indicated by the designation of "13th Guards Rifle Division, Poltava" (given in September 1943), which shows that the division was cited for their actions in seizing Poltava. 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.

Additionally the division fought in Kremenchug, Krivoi Rog, Kiev, Uman-Botowni, and Lvov-Sandomir.^[1]

Advance into Germany

During the Red Army's final drive into Germany, starting with [Operation Bagration](#) beginning on 22 June 1944, the 13th Rifles Division was a portion of the [32nd Guards Rifle Corps](#), which was a portion of the [5th Guards Tank Army](#), which itself was a portion of the [1st Ukrainian Front](#). This force drove the Germans back through northern Ukraine and central Poland in to the northern regions of Germany itself. By the end of January 1945, the 1st Ukrainian Front, including the 13th Rifles, had reached the southern outskirts. Here, they participated in the [Battle of Berlin](#) and the [Battle of the Elbe](#), where they distinguished themselves yet again while combating the Germans for both of their objectives: Berlin itself and the [Teltov Canal](#). The capture of the latter objective gave the Red Army a river crossing of the [Elbe River](#), allowing the Russians to assault the heart of the [Third Reich](#).

Later service

After the end of the war the division became a part of the [Southern Group of Forces](#), being reorganised as 13th Guards Mechanised Division. It was withdrawn from Vienna, Austria, in 1955 and subsequently restructured as a tank division.^[1] Thus 13th Guards Tank Division formed part of the Southern Group of Forces for many years before finally being withdrawn and disbanded at the end of the 1980s. American military sources reported its final deactivation site in 1989 as the [Odessa Military District](#).

The division's final honorifics in 1988 included 'Poltava', Transylvania Order of Lenin, Twice Red Banner, Suvorov and Kutuzov.

Subordinate units during World War II

- 42nd Guards Rifle Regiment
- 39th Guards Rifle Regiment
- 34th Guards Rifle Regiment
- 32nd Guards Artillery Regiment
- 4th Guards Anti-Tank Battalion
- 8th Guards Sapper Battalion
- 14th Reconnaissance Company
- 139th Signal Battalion
- 12th Chemical Warfare Company
- 11th Transportation Company
- 17th Field Bakery
- 15th Medical Battalion
- 2nd Veterinary Hospital