

Battle of Orël, 10-27 October 1919

Red Order of Battle

My primary source of the units involved in the Battle of Orel is I. I. Sukhov's article in Сержант (Seargent) Magazine #5. Note that the Soviets referred to this battle as the Orël-Kromy Operation.

Southern Front

Commander: V. N. Egor'ev (up to 11 October), A. I. Egorov (from 11 October)
Chief of Staff – N. V. Pnevsky (up to 17 October), N. N. Petin (from 21 October)
RMS members: I. V. Stalin, M. K. Vladimirov, L. P. Serebryakov, M. M. Lashevich;

13th Army

Commander: A. I. Gekker
Chief of Staff: A. M. Zayonchkovskiy
RMS members: I. V. Kosior, G. L. Pyatakov, A. P. Rozengol'ts
17,907 bayonets, 1,755 sabres, 318 MGs, 86 guns

3rd Rifle Division

Commander: V. K. Gondel', A. D. Kozitskiy (from 24 October)
19th-27th Rifle Regiments, in 7th-9th Rifle Brigades
2,801 bayonets, 275 sabres, 49 MGs, 21 guns (1 October 1919)

9th Rifle Division

Commander: A. D. Kozitskiy, P. A. Solodukhin (from 17 October)
73rd-81st Rifle Regiments, in the 25th-27th Rifle Brigades
3,822 bayonets, 164 sabres, 34 MGs, 11 guns (6 October 1919)

42nd Rifle Division

Commander: I. H. Pauka
370th-378th Rifle Regiments, in the 124th to 126th Rifle Brigades
5,629 bayonets, 235 sabres, 152 MGs, 27 guns (7 October 1919)

55th Rifle Division

Commander: M. K. Yuzvyuk
Chief of Staff: A. V. Stankevich
RMS members: Ya. I. Alksnis, B. Kuzmin
496th-505th Rifle Regiments, in the 164rd to 165th Rifle Brigades
2,781 bayonets, 157 sabres, 13 MGs, 5 guns (17 October 1919)

*Formed in a hurry on 30 September 1919 from miscellaneous units of the Orël Fortified Area.
Disbanded on 15 October 1919, after taking severe losses, to reinforce the 9th Rifle Division*

Composite Rifle Brigade

Commander: M.S. Sveshnikov
2,874 bayonets, 415 sabres, 63 MGs, 19 guns (1 October 1919)

Formed from units of the Kursk Fortified Area. It took severe losses early in the battle and was broken up, to reinforce the 9th Rifle Division.

Estonian Rifle Division

Commander: Ya. K. Pal'vadre

Chief of Staff – A. Pyl'd (Põld)

RMS members: A. Peymets, Ya. Tamm, E. Pits

Four Estonian Regiments in two brigades

1st "Vsevobuch" Regiment (former Putilov Workers) & 86th Rifle Regiment in 3rd Brigade

7,191 men: 3,346 bayonets, 114 sabres, 68 HMGs, 12 LMGs, 11 guns (in three batteries)

Was reformed 1 March 1919, originally as the Composite Division, from the Estonian brigade and two Russian regiments. The Estonian integral cavalry regiment had been sent to the NW Front when the infantry became a brigade. The quality of the Estonians was high, similar to the Latvians, and they fought well during the battle.

13th Independent Cavalry Brigade

509 Sabres, 7 MGs, 3 guns

12th Armoured Car Detachment

Probably about 4 cars

Armoured Trains

At least 5 trains.

The 13th Army had 13 operational trains in May 1919, but had lost most of these in their retreat. Some reinforcements arrived from reserve in October however.

14th Army

Commander: I. P. Uborevich

Chief of Staff: S. G. Shvarelidze-Bezhanov;

RMS members: N. F. Preobrazhenskiy, G. K. Ordzhonikidze

15,287 bayonets, 2,730 sabres, 462 MGs, 100 guns

7th Rifle Division

Commander: A. G. Golikov

55th-63rd Rifle Regiments, in the 19th to 21st Rifle Brigades

1,449 bayonets, 106 sabres, 55 MGs, 9 guns (16 October 1919)

Formed in Yaroslavl on 11 September 1918

This unit was to take very heavy casualties.

41st Rifle Division

Commander: M. V. Molkachanov, R. P. Eydeman (from 12 October)

361st-369th Rifle Regiments

5,520 bayonets, 690 sabres, 122 MGs, 52 guns (10 October 1919)

Formed 19 July 1919 from the Sumy Army Group

If this division followed the usual pattern, it would have only the 121st to 123rd Rifle Brigades. However it seems to have had four brigades. Presumably the fourth was not numbered in sequence, but added as a result of a merger of another unit. It was likely only temporary.



46th Rifle Division

Commander: A. N. Lengovskiy

RMS member: L. Z. Mekhlis

406th-414th Rifle Regiments, in the 136th to 138th Rifle Brigades

7,015 bayonets, 245 sabres, 224 MGs, 23 guns (1 October 1919)

Formed 16 June 1919 from the 2nd Ukrainian Rifle Division

It appears this division took little part in the battle.

57th Rifle Division

Commander: F. A. Kuznetsov.

505th-513th Rifle Regiments, in the 169th to 171st Rifle Brigades

1,303 bayonets, 200 sabres, 40 MGs , 12 guns(8 October 1919)

Formed 25 July 1919 from the Poltava Army Group

It seems this division only took a peripheral part in the Orel-Kromy Operation.

Sablin Group

Commander: Yu. V. Sablin

The composition of this group is unknown. It appears it took no active part in the battle.

Cavalry Division of the 14th Army

Commander: N.K. Shchelokov

Chervonno Cossack Brigade

11th and 12th [14th?] Independent Cavalry Brigades

Although formally grouped together, it seems these units fought separately at this time. The Chervonno Cossacks were attached to the Shock Group, and took an active part in the battle. It is not clear that the other two brigades took any part at all.

5th Armoured Car Detachment

probably about 4 cars

22nd Armoured Car Detachment

probably about 4 cars

Armoured Trains

The 14th Army had lost most of their trains in the retreat.



Strike Group

Subordinated to the 13th Army, from 14 October the 14th Army

Commander: A. A. Martusevich

Latvian Rifle Division

Commander: A. A. Martusevich, F. K. Kalnin'sh [Kalnins] (from 20 October)

Chief-of-Staff: K.J. Shvede

RMS member: K. Dozitis

1st-9th Latvian Rifle Regiments, three brigades, each regiment about 700 bayonets, 12 MGs

Cavalry Regiment – four squadrons, 618 sabres, 2 HMG, 8 LMG "Lewis"

Three Light Artillery *Divizioni* – 1st-9th light batteries (3 *divizioni*), each 4 × 76.2mm guns and 2 HMG

Howitzer *Divizion* – 3 × 122mm howitzers, 2 × heavy guns.

While not the same elite force as early in the war, the Latvians were the best forces in the Red Army at this battle, both experienced and motivated. They were to bear the brunt of the fighting at Orël. Their main fault was that they were quite slow moving, due to excessive caution.

Independent Chervonno-Cossack Brigade

Commander V. M. Primakov

1st and 2nd Regiments

1,200 sabres, 24 HMG, two light batteries (each 4 guns) and one mountain (with 2 guns) horse battery

This brigade appears to have been part of the newly formed "Cavalry Division of the 14th Army" at this time, but fought separately from the other two brigades (in 14th Army) at Orel-Kromy. It would later be named the 8th Red Cossack Cavalry Division. The brigade had been raised in the Ukraine, and the "Cossack" of the title refers to this, not any reference to the usual Cossack Hosts. It was an experienced and well-equipped unit, and was very much the spear of the Red attacks. ("Chervonno" is the colour red, but a different word from that used for Red Army, "krasny".)

Independent Rifle Brigade

Commander: P. A. Pavlov.

Plastun Regiment – 532 bayonets, 16 MGs

Kiev Regiment – 700 bayonets, 15 MGs

Composite Regiment – 450 bayonets, 15 MGs

Two light batteries – 6 guns

Cavalry *divizion* – about 120 sabres

Despite being part of the elite Strike Group, this was a recently raised unit, full of deserters and lacking qualified commanders. It did not perform well and took heavy losses.

8th Armoured Car Detachment

probably about 4 cars

21st Armoured Car Detachment

probably about 4 cars

