



The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine

By Marja Erwin

The armed forces of the Makhnovist movement passed through four distinct phases:

1. In the *Red Guards phase*, from November 1917 to May 1918, Makhno was involved in the Red Guards in Katerynoslav Province. The German and Austro-Hungarian armies drove the Red Guards from Ukraine, and they retreated, through the Don Host, to the Volga.
2. In the *guerrilla phase*, from September 1918 to January 1919, Makhno returned to Ukraine and took part in the revolt against the Hetmanate. As the revolt grew more successful, the Austro-Hungarian and German armies sent larger forces against it; the partisan groups cooperated more closely. After the Fall of the Hetmanate, rebel forces attempted, unsuccessfully, to hold Katerynoslav, and Volunteer units landed around Berdiansk. After these crises, the rebels formed an army of 5 regiments led by Nestor Makhno, and they negotiated with the Bolsheviks for support against the Volunteers.
3. In the *Red Army phase*, from February 1919 to June 1919, the rebel forces became the 3rd Trans-Dnipr Brigade, the 1st Insurgent Rifle Division, and ultimately, part of the 7th Ukrainian Rifle Division of the Red Army. The Red Army supplied the rebel forces and the rebel forces took Berdiansk and Mariupol. After Grigoriev's mutiny, the Red Army attempted to assassinate Makhno and centralize its control over the semi-independent units.
4. In the *independent phase*, from August 1919 to August 1921, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army fought independently of the Red Army. While the Red Army evacuated Ukraine, most of the former Makhnovist troops and some regular troops split from the Red Army and joined the new Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine. As an independent force, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army would fight the Whites and, at times, the Bolsheviks.

Throughout the *Red Army phase* and the *independent phase*, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine relied on large-unit warfare, albeit without the resources and supply lines of its opponents. It was a partisan army, but not a guerrilla one. It was a volunteer army, comparable to the early Red Army.

The Red Army Phase, February 1919 through June 1919

After joining the Red Army, the rebel forces were consolidated into the 19th and 20th Ukrainian Rifle Regiments. By February 15th, they became the 3rd Trans-Dnepr Brigade of the Ukrainian Rada/Sovyet Army:

Structure of the 3rd Trans-Dnepr Rifle Brigade, February 15th, 1919:

- 7th Trans-Dnepr Rifle Regiment
- 8th Trans-Dnepr Rifle Regiment
- 9th Trans-Dnepr Rifle Regiment

In this period, the Makhnovist units were much like other semi-independent units in the Red Army. The 3rd Brigade, as well as the 7th and 8th Regiments, had anarchist commanders. The 9th Regiment had a Bolshevik commander. All units had Bolshevik political commissars. The Bolsheviks attempted to transform the Makhnovist forces into conscript forces with appointed commanders.

The Makhnovists formed additional regiments. By May 7th, Makhno had expanded the brigade to form the 1st Insurgent Rifle Division:

Structure of the 1st Insurgent Rifle Division, May 7th, 1919:

1st Brigade

- 1st Insurgent Regiment
- 2nd Mariupol Regiment
- 8th Trans-Dnepr Regiment

2nd Brigade

- 4th Kermenchik Regiment
- 5th Ignatievskiy Insurgent Regiment
- 6th Don Regiment
- 1st Sovyet Cavalry Regiment
- 1st Insurgent Cavalry Regiment

3rd Brigade

- 1st Velikomikhailovskiy Regiment
- 3rd Grigorievskiy Krivoi Rog (Kryvyy Rih) Regiment
- 7th Trans-Dnepr Regiment Berestovskiy Shock Battalion

The Bolsheviks preferred to limit the Makhnovist concentration to one brigade. Extra units could be transferred to other sectors. The Makhnovist brigade, and two other brigades, would be subordinated to the 7th Ukrainian Rifle Division. However, the Crimean Sovyet Army took one brigade; Grigoriev's revolt prompted mutinies in the other. The Makhnovist forces were the only reliable Red Army forces around Mariupol, and operated as their own division until the Bolsheviks outlawed Makhno. The retreating Makhnovist forces, under Bolshevik command, linked up with the retreating Crimean Sovyet Army near Oleksandrivsk.



The Beginnings of the Independent Phase, September 1919 through December 1919

After the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine split from the Red Army, it formed new regiments and brigades. Order No. 5 outlines the earliest reorganization of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army:

Structure of the 1st Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army in the name of Batko Makhno, September 1st, 1919:

1st Brigade (Kalashnikov)
Component units unspecified

2nd Brigade (Bondarets)
Component units unspecified

3rd Brigade (Pavlovskiy)
Component units unspecified

Army Reserve
Yekaterinoslav Regiment
Machine Gun Regiment
Other units unspecified

Shortly thereafter, they reorganized the brigades into corps. Viktor and Aleksandr Belash outline the resulting organization of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army, which lasted from September 1919 into December 1919:

Structure of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine, late September 1919:

- 1st Donets Corps (Kalashnikov)
- 2nd Azov Corps (Vdovichenko)
- 3rd Yekaterinoslav Corps (Gavrilenko)
- 4th Crimean Corps (Pavlovskiy)

After the victory at Perehoniivka, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine advanced eastward in three columns. The Left and Right Columns correspond with the reinforced 1st and 2nd Corps and the Main Column includes the remainder of the 3rd and 4th Corps, as well as army assets.

Order of March of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine, September 29th, 1919:

Left Column (1st Corps)

- 13th Infantry Regiment
- [1st Infantry] Brigade Staff
- Supplies
- 1st Yekaterinoslav Infantry Regiment
- 11th Lyubetskiy Infantry Regiment
- 7th Cavalry Regiment

Main Column (3rd & 4th Corps)

- 2nd Yekaterinoslav Cavalry Regiment
- 3rd Crimean Infantry Regiment
- Garkusha's Otryad Army
- [Administrative] Staff
- Volodin's Otryad (later the basis of the 66th Crimean Regiment)
- Army Command Staff
- Artillery & Logistical Staffs
- Army Supplies
- Dermenzhin's Battalion (the motor pool)
- Chief Garrison Battalion
- Separate Formations
- 1st & 2nd Artillery (Battalions?)
- 10th Gulyay-Pole Infantry Regiment
- 8th Cavalry Regiment

Right Column (2nd Corps)

- 3rd Don Cavalry Regiment
- Pavlovskiy's Otryad
- 4th Novospassovskiy [Infantry] Regiment
- Brigade Staff (Unreadable)
- 3rd Artillery (Battalion?)
- 6th Mariupol [Infantry] Regiment
- 5th Pologi [Infantry] Regiment

(In Danilov & Shanin, unnumbered plate.)

In addition, regimental transport is listed with each regiment and, redundantly, after the 13th Infantry and 1st Yekaterinoslav Infantry Regiments. Regimental strengths are not listed.

In this period, the Makhnovist units grew distinct from the Red Army. Rebel sovyet congresses rejected any equivocation and insisted on volunteer forces with elected commanders.

A number of other forces operated in cooperation with the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine. In addition to maneuver groups formed from the regular regiments of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army, they also included local forces and allied forces. The most important allied forces included the "Middle Dnipro Group" or "Republican Forces," around the Kholodnyy Yar, and the "1st Insurgent Soviet Brigade" or "1st Ukrainian Insurgent Division" between Pavlohrad, Novomoskovsk, and Poltava.

The Battles of Katerynoslav and the Strategic Disengagement weakened the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine. It divided its corps into 6 or 7 semi-independent brigades. By February 6th, Red Army intelligence estimated the following:

Structure of the Partisan-Insurgent Ukrainian Army in the name of Batko Makhno, February 6th, 1920

1st Donets Corps (Sakhanov)

1st Brigade (Kalashnikov) (of the 1st Corps) (with 9 artillery pieces)

- 1st Yekaterinoslav Regiment
- 3rd Crimean Regiment
- 13th Insurgent Regiment
- 21st Veselo-Ternovka Regiment
- 24th Ternovka Regiment
- 28th Aleksandrovsk Regiment
- 1st Kuban Cavalry Regiment
- 2nd Yekaterinoslav Cavalry Regiment
- Garkusha's Otryad

2nd Brigade (Vdovichenko)

- 4th Novospassovskiy Regiment
- 3rd Don Cavalry Regiment
- Pavlovskiy's Otryad
- 1st Artillery Battalion

3rd Brigade (Gavrilenko) (with 5 artillery pieces)

- 10th Gulyay-Pole Regiment
- 11th Lyubitskiy Regiment
- 8th Cavalry Regiment
- 3rd Artillery Division

3rd Crimean Shock Brigade (Bondarets)

Component units unspecified

4th Brigade (Uralov) (with 8 artillery pieces)

- 26th Tauride Regiment
- 30th Berdyansk Regiment
- 42nd Nagaysk Regiment

5th Brigade (Mirelikin) (with 1 artillery piece)

- 13th Kazanka Regiment
- 16th Tauride Regiment
- 19th Melitopol Regiment

6th Brigade (Pavlovskiy) (with 2 artillery pieces)

- 62nd Dnepr Regiment
- 66th Crimean Regiment
- 7th Cavalry Regiment

(In Danilov & Shanin, No. 196)

Estimating the Strength of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine

There are few reliable figures for the strength of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine.

After the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine split from the Red Army, the units reorganized, and smaller units combined together. The resulting regiments were probably at least as strong as comparable regiments from nearby Red Army units, including the 45th, 47th and 58th Rifle Divisions.

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (September 1919) (order of march)

- 8 infantry regiments
- 4 cavalry regiments (1 machine gun regiment, known from other sources)
- at least 3 artillery battalions

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (October 1919) (Skirda, who does not identify his source)

- 28,000 bayonets and sabres
- 200 machine guns
- 50 artillery pieces

At its peak, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army probably reached about 40,000 combat troops. Aleksandr Belash estimates more than 130,000 combat troops, but consistently overestimates both sides. The actual strength of the 1st Corps illustrates the problem, but the error may vary between corps, and almost certainly varies for the strategic reserve.

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (December 1919) (Aleksandr Belash's estimate)

- 83,000 bayonets
- 19,650 sabres
- 1,435 machine guns
- 118 artillery pieces

1st Donets Corps (December 1919)

- 15,500 bayonets
- 3,650 sabres
- 144 machine guns
- 16 artillery pieces

2nd Azov Corps (December 1919)

- 21,000 bayonets
- 385 sabres
- 176 machine guns
- 16 artillery pieces

3rd Yekaterinoslav Corps (December 1919)

- 29,000 bayonets
- 5,100 sabres
- 261 machine guns
- 34 artillery pieces

4th Crimean Corps (December 1919)

- 17,500 bayonets
- 7,500 sabres
- 154 machine guns
- 18 artillery pieces

Strategic Reserve (December 1919)

- 3,500 sabres in 1 cavalry brigade and 1 machine gun regiment
- 700 machine guns in 1 machine gun regiment
- 1 artillery battalion

The best data concerns the 1st Donets Corps in this period. The corps numbered 6,985 personnel, including 380 command personnel, 4,923 combatants, and 1,621 noncombatants. The 1st Donets Corps had 4,477 rifles, 1,015 sabres, 91 machineguns, 14 or 16 field guns, and 2 bomb-throwers on December 1st. Of these, 3,906 rifles and 877 sabres were in the infantry and new cavalry regiments, and the striking group. There were not enough horses to mount the corps' new cavalry regiment. These figures exclude the corps' old cavalry regiment, the 7th Cavalry.

1st Donets Corps (Strength Report, December 1st, 1919)

1 st Yekaterinoslav Regiment	1,570 commanders & combatants
13 th Insurgent Regiment	1,795 commanders & combatants
5 th Kuban-Trans-Dnepr [Cavalry] Regiment	359 commanders & combatants
24 th Ternovka Regiment	209 commanders & combatants
Striking Group	550 commanders & combatants
Command Company	90 commanders & combatants
2 nd Artillery Division	535 commanders & combatants Supply
Otryad of the 1 st Donets Corps	48 commanders & combatants
Corps Counterintelligence	147 commanders & combatants

The 5th Kuban-Trans-Dnepr and 24th Ternovka Regiments were new units. The Striking Group was probably an ad-hoc unit. The Ternovka Regiment refers to Ternivka near Pavlohrad not Ternivka near Perehoniivka. Note that the new regiments were substantially smaller than the old regiments.

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (December 1919) (revised guesstimate)

about 21,000 bayonets about 4,000 sabres
about 740 machine guns
about 100 artillery pieces

1st Donets Corps (strength return)

3,906 bayonets in 3 infantry regiments (about 25% of Belash's figure)
877 sabres in 1 cavalry regiment (about 25% of Belash's figure)
91 machine guns (about 65% of Belash's figure)
14 to 16 artillery pieces

2nd Azov Corps (in the same proportion)

5,000 bayonets a few hundred sabres
115 machine guns
16 artillery pieces

3rd Yekaterinoslav Corps (in the same proportion)

7,000 bayonets
1,000 sabres
170 machine guns
34 artillery pieces

4th Crimean Corps (in the same proportion)

4,000 bayonets
2,000 sabres
105 machine guns
18 artillery pieces

Strategic Reserve

probably no more than 250 machine guns in 1 machine gun regiment
probably no more than 16 artillery pieces in 1 artillery battalion

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (February 1920) (Red Army estimate)

at least 16 infantry regiments at least 5 cavalry regiments
? machine guns
at least 25 artillery pieces

Major Sources

- Belash & Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno*.
- Danilov & Shanin, *Nestor Makhno. Krestyanskoye Dvizhenie na Ukrainye: 1918-1921: Dokumenty i Materialy*. (Note that most of the original military documents are in Russian instead of Ukrainian, as is the collection.) (thus the Russian unit designations.)
- Skirda, *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack*.
- Tymoshchuk, *Anarkho-kommunisticheskie Formirovaniya N. Makhno. Sentyabr 1917 - August 1921 gg.*