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Russia to overhaul its most famous army divisions

24/11/2008 MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti military commentator Ilya Kramnik) - The Russian Defense Ministry is moving to disband the Moscow Military District's 2nd Guards Tamanskaya Motorized Rifle Division and 4th Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division, and to convert them into four brigades.

Both divisions now have 12,000 to 14,000 officers and men. The four brigades will have 50% more personnel, or between 18,000 and 20,000 officers and men. This makes up for 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers per brigade.

Other army divisions will also be converted into brigades.

Unfortunately, brigade level tables of organization, as well as the organization of their battalions, companies and platoons, are not yet known. Moreover, it is unclear whether the new brigades will have infantry-heavy or tank-heavy battalions with light infantry regiment status, as some analysts predict.

No plans for dividing divisional artillery and air defense units, for subordinating the brigades to tactical commands and for facilitating their cooperation with military district commanders have been published to date.

In this situation, it would be imprudent to make any conjectures. This raises the issue of the military reform's openness. However, minimal publicity is essential.

This is particularly true of plans to overhaul the Tamanskaya and Kantemirovskaya divisions, which have a long and glorious history.

The 2nd Guards Motorized Rifle Tamanskaya Order of the October Revolution, Order of the Red Banner and Order of Suvorov Division named after Kalinin was established in the summer of 1940 as the 127th Rifle Division in Kharkov, Ukraine.

When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the division fought enemy forces in the first few months of the Great Patriotic War, and was renamed as the 2nd Guards Rifle Division in September 1941 together with several other Red Army units.

The division subsequently took part in many large-scale military operations, was renamed as the Tamanskaya Division for its heroic exploits during the Novorossiisk-Taman operation and finished the war on April 17, 1945 on the Samland Peninsula in East Prussia.

After the war, the division was converted into a motorized rifle division and deployed in the Moscow Region's Naro-Fominsk District.

Its elements always took part in military parades on Red Square, helped to overthrow Lavrenty Beria, former chief of the dreaded Soviet secret police, in the summer of 1953 and were also involved in the abortive

August 1991 coup against the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the October 1993 clashes between President Boris Yeltsin's supporters and the Russian parliament.

The 4th Guards Kantemirovskaya Order of Lenin and Order of the Red Banner Tank Division named after Yury Andropov, which is also deployed in the Naro-Fominsk District, has an equally distinguished history.

Formerly called the 17th Tank Corps, it was established in the spring of 1942 and renamed as the 4th Guards Tank Corps in 1943 for its exploits during the battle of the Don River.

The corps fought in many other strategic operations and finished the war on May 9, 1945 on the outskirts of Prague.

The Soviet tank force was overhauled in the fall of 1945; and the corps was renamed as the 4th Guards Tank Division. Just like the Tamanskaya Division, the Kantemirovskaya Division participated in Red Square parades. On September 8, 1946, when the U.S.S.R. celebrated Tanker Day, the entire division marched through Red Square.

In 1991 and 1993, the division's elements were also deployed in Moscow. Its officers and men fought in both Chechen campaigns, and took part in various peacekeeping operations.

The Tamanskaya and Kantemirovskaya divisions have a proud place in the Russian army's history. Their glorious traditions are the pillar of any great nation's army.

The high command of the Russian armed forces has said the newly established brigades would retain their honorary names and banners.

Hopefully, their banners and other regalia will not end up in museum collections.

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