

Newsweek: Metinvest Produces Some 600 Steel “Hideouts” and Command Posts for the Front

A group of Ukrainian soldiers were sheltering in a metal barrel several meters underground, when one of Russia’s lethal, highly destructive 250-kilogram guided bombs landed nearby.



The six fighters spent days in the metal structure meters underground far below heaps of earth and soil, recalled Oleksandr Myronenko, chief operating officer for Ukrainian mining and steel holding Metinvest Group. It may have been days before they were rescued, he told Newsweek, a leading US magazine, but the protective steel shield saved their lives.

Now, staring down slow but steady Russian advances in the east and near-constant aerial bombardment, the Group and Ukraine’s military are working on setting up steel command posts dug deep into the ground. They are designed to protect soldiers close to the front line as well as commanders meeting miles away from the fierce clashes.

A single barrel, which takes around a week to make, is termed a “hideout,” while six of the barrels can be fused together in a more complex design to make up a steel command post.

Around 600 barrels have been churned out so far, making for around 480 “hideouts,” said Myronenko. The other 120 barrels have gone toward making a total of 20 steel command posts, Myronenko said. Of these, around 14 are up and running, with the rest delivered to the brigades preparing to use them.



An unnamed member of the Kara-Dag brigade, part of Ukraine's National Guard. The brigade have received new steel command centers, designed to be installed underground and protect fighters from aerial attacks.

Another four command posts are heading for the National Guard once they are finished off, Myronenko said. Another will be delivered to the famed Kraken unit, which is part of Ukraine's GUR military intelligence agency.

The "hideouts" are intended to give at least minimal comfort conditions to troops very close to the front lines. The 20 command posts can house troop commanders, store weapons or host sleeping quarters for the military.

The barrels have been used to build up fortifications along Ukraine's defensive lines close to Pokrovsk, the essential Ukrainian logistics hub in the embattled eastern Donetsk region. Moscow has been inching toward this region since capturing the former Ukrainian stronghold of Avdiivka in February. Over the past year, more "hideouts" have been installed close to Pokrovsk.

Russia has claimed to have taken control of a handful of villages not far from Pokrovsk in recent weeks. Moscow has also made gains toward the city of Kupiansk, in the northeastern Kharkiv region, and managed to peel back some of the control Ukraine has maintained in the southern Russian Kursk region since early August.

On Saturday, Ukraine's commander in chief, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Ukraine was "holding back one of the most powerful Russian offensives" since February 2022. With North Korean troops likely to join the fray in the coming days, according to the US, reducing prospects for a reprieve from aerial bombardment, Ukraine has its work cut out for its fighters heading for another winter season.

Metinvest publicly said back in January that it had started producing the steel underground command posts. The project falls under Ukrainian billionaire Rinat Akhmetov's Steel Front initiative, known for designing steel shields for Ukrainian-operated Abrams tanks and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles donated by the US, and other Western-made tanks on the battlefield.

The barrels have also been delivered to the neighboring Luhansk region and throughout Kherson, in Ukraine's south. They are "basically scattered along the front line," Myronenko said.

No Protection Above Ground

With the cover of darkness, the Ukrainian installers dig pits into the earth, add layers of timber cladding and shoring up the hole up to five meters underground. They then pile vegetation and shrubs on top of the site to blend the command center into the landscape.

"No command post that is located above ground is efficient," Myronenko said. "It simply doesn't provide the proper protection if it's above ground."

Unless given away by nearby residents and saboteur groups, or by lapses in due diligence from the military, it's very difficult for Russia to detect the underground steel structures, Myronenko said.

"They can be detected like any other command post if there is a constantly some concentration of people or concentration of vehicles nearby," Myronenko said.

It is most vulnerable to Russian forces when being built, he said.

The underground command posts are vulnerable to a direct hit with one of Russia's Iskander short-range ballistic missile, but the Shahed cannot typically reach those protected underground.

Standard-designed barrels can be tweaked to a brigade's needs, Myronenko said. Some units request larger barrels, and others, for example first person-view (FPV) drone units, need to have space for a workstation to operate drones.

The barrels are not delivered with electronic warfare equipment as standard, and some units request empty, unfurnished barrels, Myronenko said.

"Some units, they have their own and they install them outside of the barrels to suppress the radio signals to protect themselves from drone strikes," Myronenko said. "Sometimes the military, they approach us to procure electronic warfare systems for them. But this is done on a case-by-case basis," he added.

"There is no cookie cutter approach, no universal recipe, when it comes to electronic warfare systems," he said.

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