

“We had several requests to produce HIMARS mock-ups”: an interview with Metinvest’s COO Oleksandr Myronenko for Radio NV about the Group’s production for defence needs and assistance to Ukraine’s armed forces

In an interview with Radio NV, Oleksandr Myronenko, Chief Operations Officer of Metinvest Group, spoke about the production of “fake weapons” to fool the occupiers, the huge demand for mine trawls and cooperation with the military.



— **This is a highly unusual product. At what point did you start working on military equipment decoys? How were you approached about this?**

— This production has been going on for more than a year. And we were approached by the military, as is usually the case. They came with their needs and asked whether it was possible to make such items, mock-ups, which would help us to deceive the enemy or create fake positions.

Of course, we first looked at the drawings of these mock-ups. And we set to work. The first pieces were not that good, but then, together with the military, we honed each design and each copy of the decoy weaponry. And now they look very similar to the originals and work extremely well, according to feedback from the military. This is a project that we are implementing together with our military. Indeed, this is very important work.

— **And how do you measure the success of a mock-up? Does it have to be very similar to certain weapons or certain types of military vehicles? What are the parameters?**

— The parameters are simple. The main one is authenticity, so that an item cannot be distinguished from the original when spotted by a drone or other means of reconnaissance.

And the key metric: when a mock-up is hit, this means that it is performing its function extremely well. The enemy is wasting expensive ammunition to hit something made of wood and plastic, rather than the real weapons hitting them in response.

— **What types of equipment are we are talking about?**

— Currently, our main products are Soviet-era D-20 and D-30 howitzers and American-made M777 howitzers, as well as several types of radar stations and electronic warfare equipment.

We had several requests to produce HIMARS mock-ups. We made several copies and they are also working now.

— **So when asked whether the production of HIMARS has been launched in Ukraine, we can say “yes” (laughs — ed).**

— Certainly. They even move and change positions. And they look like real vehicles performing their function.

— **How did you set up the team? This is not a mundane task, and it probably requires “flexible” people with certain professional characteristics.**

— When it comes to the team, it was very easy, because we have many specialists with experience of working with metallurgical and other equipment. So it was easy to do. All our people are patriotic. And any request that we receive from the military (this applies not only to decoys, but also to other items) is fulfilled by our employees

with great inspiration and pleasure.

That's why we mostly ask what the military needs, for drawings showing how to do it, and about the materials in question. After that, our people carry out the task with great pleasure. And all of this is given to our army for free.

— Perhaps the military shared footage of the Russians destroying such mock-ups. What did you see? What made the biggest impression or made you smile?

— From what I saw, the howitzers already mentioned were hit. And an airstrike was carried out with a very expensive missile, worth about one and a half million dollars, on a fake electronic warfare station not far from our positions.

We receive these videos directly from the people to whom we give these mock-ups. They gratefully send us such videos after a mock-up has been hit, or even sometimes give us some souvenirs.

— What kind of souvenirs? Part of a missile? Some fragment?

— They cannot hand over part of a missile, because they are taken away for examination, but they give us some small items for our victory museum.

— Apparently, our enemy may be producing similar items. Such decoys have been used for a long time and in many wars. What do we know about what the enemy might be doing?

— I don't know much about the production of such items by the enemy, but I'm sure they also use such mock-ups. How successful are they in using them? It's hard to say, as I don't have information about how often our people hit such decoy targets.

I do hope that we are working more against the real weapons and manpower attacking our positions.

— And how do orders arrive? Does the general staff send, say, a letter: we need 20 HIMARS and five M777 howitzers in December or February? How does it work?

— We work more directly with brigades on the front line. And we already have great experience in liaising with the commander of each brigade.

They turn to us directly and say, "we need this and that for these areas". And, based on our production capabilities, we fulfil these orders and send them to virtually all areas, from the Kherson region to Bakhmut.

Mock-ups and a lot of other items.

— The specifics of such production mean that it must be clandestine. How do you ensure the security of this production so that a Russian, not even an agent, but a sympathiser, does not disclose the location in exchange for something?

— First, this production is outside our enterprises. Second, the people who work on this are time-tested and extremely patriotic. That's why we trust them completely. There can be no leakage of information from them. Third, we do not reveal where and to whom we transfer certain mock-ups, or in which areas they are used. Nor do we reveal where and at what locations this production is.

We try to maintain maximum secrecy to avoid giving the enemy any information about such facilities.

— Metinvest has started producing mine trawls, and there is also the Steel Front initiative. Tell us more about this, please.

— Rinat Akhmetov's Steel Front project actually began the day after the start of the Russian full-scale invasion. And this project was created to finance and help all our soldiers defending the country. As part of this project, we donate products that we make ourselves within the Group. These include shelters, interceptors of Lancet drones, mine trawls and decoys, as well as many other items.

There is also a commercial share, so to speak: that is, what Rinat Akhmetov's businesses buy and hand directly to troops. This includes drones, cars, sights and many other items purchased in large quantities.

The project functions depending on needs that arise at certain times and stages of the war. At first, these were for fortifications and bulletproof vests, and then shelters, followed by drones and many other items.

— We understand there is huge demand for mine trawls. How many are needed, maybe at least an approximate number? And how many can we produce now?

— This product can be damaged because it interacts directly with land mines. The demand for it is extremely high. It can be measured in tens or hundreds of units.

The one that we are currently producing is the KMT-7 trawl, which is mounted on tanks. We have developed a version of it based on Soviet drawings. And it can be mounted on Soviet-era tanks and break through mine barriers during certain assault manoeuvres.

Our current capacity is five trawls a month. Aside from this, there are also the rollers on these trawls that are damaged much more often. That's why we make more of them.

A trawl can be collected and repaired, a trawl frame can be installed and new rollers can be fitted to it. And then it

can be used again. So when it comes to the frames and body of these trawls, it is five units. As for rollers for trawls, it is around 20 sets a month.

— **The issue of Mariupol is an extremely painful topic for all Ukrainians. We all remember the tragedy that resulted from Russia's temporary occupation of this Ukrainian city. Two steelworks, Ilyich Steel and, of course, Azovstal, were key enterprises in Mariupol. What is happening to these enterprises under Russian occupation?**

— As far as I know, Azovstal was heavily damaged in the assaults that took place there, from the heroic defence of those who stayed at the plant until the last moment. As for Ilyich Steel, I don't have any exact information about the damage that it sustained.

We will be able to speak about their condition only when we return to our Mariupol and these enterprises and inspect them. Then it will be possible to say in what state they are and how to restore them. But for now, I would rather not spread rumours or unverified information.

— **Russian propaganda media reported that one of the clans subordinate to Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya's dictator, had allegedly been given control of both Ilyich Steel and Azovstal. What does this mean?**

— In my opinion, this does not mean management, but robbery, since any restoration or anything like that is out of the question. In my view, they are not capable of restoring these production sites. As such, there is a major risk that they may be looted heavily.

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