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SOVIET OFFICER INITIATIVE: A MYTH OR A REALITY.(U)

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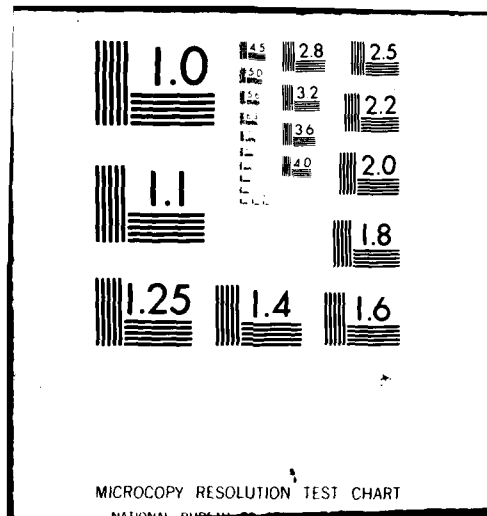
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A MYTH OR A REALITY?

MAJ/ Ronald J. Marlow
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FOREWORD

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PREFACE

An essential premise of this research is the belief that meaningful research can be done utilizing widely disseminated Soviet military writings. At the same time, realizing that much of what is printed contains propaganda, it is of utmost importance to look closely at this important method of communications for a vast armed forces complex. To reach the great number of officers in the Soviet Army, it does not appear feasible to use only limited readership publications to discuss the myriad of problems facing the Soviet military.

The author believes that the Soviets do in fact address these important problems in open press and that reading, comprehending and interpreting them will lead to a deeper understanding of the Soviet military.

SUMMARY

This paper examines Soviet concern and pronouncements on the subject of Soviet officer initiative, primarily of junior officers and commanders at platoon through division level. It is based mainly on publications of recent years and press articles written in 1978 and 1979, reflecting current Soviet concern in the realm of initiative. The analysis indicates that the subject is commented on widely by Soviet military writers, and while these authors extol the virtues of officer initiative, they restrict it for political reasons and demand that a commander use initiative only within a set of specific criteria. These criteria establish the limits for Soviet officer initiative, and provide a legitimate basis for taking initiative, Soviet style.

INTRODUCTION

Initiative, a leadership trait vigorously sought, highly prized, and much emphasized by U.S. Army officers has been viewed historically by the Soviets since the 1917 Revolution as not necessarily a characteristic to be sought after, prized, or emphasized. Rather, it is to be feared; feared for its possible consequences to the authority of a totalitarian regime. The problem inherent in this fear of initiative is steeped in the underlying mistrust, fear, and insecurity which permeates the Soviet system of government itself.

In Western analyses of Soviet military writings since the Revolution, numerous references are made to Soviet officer initiative indicating the subject's extreme importance. The topic is essential to an understanding of Soviet military leadership, and the ability of that leadership to take individual action to accomplish a mission without specific direction in time of crisis, confusion, or separation. Does the Soviet military consider independent, self-reliant leadership important, and if so, what evidence is there that this initiative is being nurtured today in garrison and in training?

While a discussion of whether the Soviet officer will perform in combat without specific directives is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to view the import which the military command system has attributed to officer initiative through its discussions in Soviet open press publications. The purpose of this paper will be to define what initiative means to the Soviet military, in particular for its officer corps, and to explore the discussion in the Soviet press of the balance between the rigid fulfillment of regulations and orders, and the tempering of such rigidity with a sprinkling of officer initiative.

BACKGROUND FOR SOVIET OFFICER INITIATIVE

At first glance initiative seems to be an anomaly in the Soviet military system, in the past as well as today. The tremendous emphasis on total allegiance to the Party and civilian command structures of the Soviet Union that pervaded early Soviet military literature after the Revolution in 1917, continues in more recent writings. The complete integration and permeation of the Communist Party apparatus into the military organization at every level down to company would appear to preclude any kind of initiative on the part of commanders or leaders. The effect of the silent partner in command on an individual officer's ability to utilize his own initiative when making decisions is by no means insignificant.

According to a recent Soviet account, the Red Army owes its existence to Lenin and to the Communist Party which trained, educated, and appointed its command personnel:

Together with political officers and Party organizations, the Soviet commanders train their subordinates in the spirit of patriotism and proletarian internationalism, in the spirit of impeccable fulfillment of military duties and infinite loyalty to the Communist Party.¹

Later, the same author indicated the tremendous impact of the Party on the modern Soviet Armed Forces:

Thanks to the Communist Party's care, the Soviet Armed Forces are provided with precisely such commanders - infinitely loyal to the people ... The Party will work indefatigably to train Army and Navy officers and political and technical personnel who are fully devoted to the Communist cause and recruited from among the finest representatives of the Soviet people ... One of the Communist Party's most important demands on Soviet officers is that they enforce discipline, field regulations and organization. It has been found in practice that the more complicated the weapons, the stronger the discipline must be, the more strictly orders and instructions must be fulfilled ... Lenin's instruction that military discipline should be raised to the utmost has become a law for the Soviet Armed Forces even in times of peace.²

The emphasis on subservience to Party control in all areas of military life further strengthens the premise that an officer would have a difficult time asserting his own initiative. Marshal Sokolovskiy wrote in the mid-sixties that:

The most important principles of the work of the political agencies and Party organizations of the Armed Forces are the daily and steadfast assurance of the undivided authority of the Communist Party in all aspects of life and the activity of the Armed Forces; the assurance of unity in troop training and political education, its continuity and purposefulness; the combination of collective leadership and high personal responsibility of leaders to the Party for the entrusted sector of work; the intimate relationship between Party and political agencies and the broad masses of Communists and nonparty members.³

Supporting this earlier account of subservience to the Party is a recent article which discussed the "one man rule" (Yedinonachaliye) relationship between a regimental commander and his political officer. The commander had recently assumed command of the unit. He had failed to call in the political officer for consultation, visited the unit's outposts without asking the political officer to accompany him, and prepared a written reprimand on an officer in one of the battalions. The political officer attended a meeting of the political cadre of the division,; a meeting the regimental commander was aware of, but to which he was not invited. When the political officer called on the regimental commander, the commander greeted him "fearfully", and immediately announced he had withdrawn the reprimand. The political officer had said nothing, yet, his power had been felt by the commander and he had relented to the Party's authority.⁴

The new service regulations mention "yedinonachalie" as being associated with the commander's great responsibility to his people, the Party, and the Soviet state. The Interior Service Regulations point out that "... it is the duty of every commander and superior to implement the policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government, to act as organizer and leader in the instruction and education of their subordinates, constantly to improve the methods of the unit, ship, and subunit control, persistently to work to improve his organizational abilities and instructional skills, to study and introduce in practice all the new progressive developments."⁵

The Soviet military considers sole responsibility and collectivism as key troop control principles. The Soviet concept of sole responsibility is intermeshed with the premise of responsibility resting with one commander, commonly called one-man command. The commander exercises his power in concert with the guidance of the CPSU fully cognizant of his responsibility for decisions, control of troops and his accomplishment of the mission.⁶ The focal characteristic and primary foundation of one-man command, a concept tailored to achieve a high state of combat readiness, centralized troop control, unity of will and strength, as well as the infusion of personal discipline and responsibility of each soldier for his assigned duty, hinges on the fact that it is totally subservient to the interests of carrying out the Party's policies in the army. It follows then that the one-man command concept emerged as a result of the necessity to ensure the unity of will and activities of the soldier.⁷

Closely associated with the single commander concept is the principle of collective leadership. Here, in the Soviet military view, the solution of complex problems and crucial questions rests not in the action of one leader, but in the activities of a group of responsible individuals. The Soviets espouse the Marxist-Leninist concept of collective leadership in which there can be more than one authoritative person in a unit, the commander and the political officer. Placing the political officer above, or equal to, the commander's authority appears to lessen or negate any chance for a display of initiative for fear of an unfavourable report by the political officer. The omnipresent political infrastructure ensures morale, welfare, ideological training as well as a check on the commander's actions. The role played by the political officer at regimental level is significant. He has the final approval on the selection, assignment, and efficiency report of officers subordinate to the regiment.⁸

Western sources tend to picture the Soviet officer as one who has little room for individual action and initiative, whose instinctive reaction is shifted in a given situation, and who moves about his daily duties as would a programmed

automaton. C.N. Donnelly described the root of the Soviet command and control problem as:

... the Russian's tendency to sit and do nothing until an order is given. Making preparations in anticipation of an order so as to speed up its implementation is just not generally done ... The problem of initiative is a thorny one; but a traditional lack of it in Soviet life at any level other than the very top certainly increases adherence to stereotype and to rules, and increases dependence on contact with a senior commander.⁹

This hardly describes the Soviet officer who is characterized daily in the Soviet press. An examination of the picture as painted by Soviet authors of numerous articles is necessary in order to gain a more balanced image of the modern Soviet officer who has the capability of displaying initiative, initiative Soviet style.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION IN THE SOVIET PRESS

The broad discussion in the current Soviet press over the need for, desirability of, and acceptable degree of individual officer initiative revolves around a number of areas. The following are primary topic headings found in the Soviet military discussion of officer initiative: definition of initiative; the demand for strict fulfillment of regulations; the influence of the Communist Party; initiative as a quality of a Soviet officer; risk-taking demanded; examples of taking initiative; and fear and resentment of those taking initiative. These are subjects which demand exploration for an insight into the essence of officer initiative as myth or reality.

INITIATIVE DEFINED

Any discussion of Soviet officer initiative is groundless without a definition of that quality in Soviet terms. The Soviet Dictionary of Basic Military Terms presents a lengthy and important concept of officer initiative:

Initiative of a commander (commanding officer) (1) a creative, informal solution by a subordinate commander (commanding officer) during an operation (or battle), which is part of a mission assigned to him, and the readiness to take a calculated risk in connection with such a solution. The initiative of a commanding officer (commander) consists in striving to find the best method of fulfilling an assigned mission, in utilizing favorable opportunities, and in taking the most expedient measures promptly, without awaiting orders from one's immediate superior. (2) The ability to impose one's will on the enemy in the course of an operation (or battle).¹⁰

As the early seventies began, Lieutenant General Bilaonov indicated in an article his understanding of initiative as the desire of officers:

... on the basis of a thorough knowledge of regulations, to seek the most expedient and efficient methods and means to resolve assigned tasks or problems which arise. The rich

experience of the past war period convincingly prove that creativity is embodied in those who are theoretically well versed and who possess good practical skills.¹¹

Confirming the earlier definitions, Lieutenant General Gorbunov wrote in the late 1970's:

In practice the term initiative is frequently used in two meanings. In the broad sense, initiative (strategic operational and tactical initiative) means active offensive operations of forces with a view to impose one's will on the enemy. In the narrow sense, initiative stands for independent actions of servicemen designated to accomplish their combat or training missions ... It consists in making creative use of the conditions that have taken shape, vigorous action, readiness to assume responsibility for a decision adopted independently.¹²

The groundwork for Gorbunov's interpretation was paved by Major General of aviation, V. Serebryannikov:

Strictly speaking, initiative is an attempt by the individual ... to find and implement the very best method of performing a task ... Initiative consists in taking creative advantage of current conditions and vigorous action, while at the same time including a readiness to assume responsibility for such action. Initiative does not conflict with but actually supplements performance according to regulations.¹³

An analysis of the four definitions indicates a thread of continuity present in both earlier and later editions, and, possibly, a composite definition: A creative, informal independent solution reached by taking a calculated risk; utilizing the best possible method for performing a task; based on a thorough knowledge of regulations, and a willingness to assume responsibility.

A freshness appears in the later definitions with the attempt to balance off the regulations for adherence to Soviet military regulations against the creative initiative taken without specific instructions. The dilemma between blind obedience to regulations and a newly sought initiative for the individual officer is the central theme of the discussion, around which all the other topics mentioned earlier revolve. The discussion does point up the renewed interest in producing an officer who knows and follows regulations, but, at the same time, possesses an added dimension, the ability to think and act for himself when specific guidance is lacking.

STRICT FULFILLMENT OF REGULATIONS

The premise that regulations and rules are the heart of Soviet military discipline in the Armed Forces stems from the belief that a "... firm knowledge of regulations and a deep comprehension of their concepts is the guarantee that in any situation each officer ... will be able to quickly evaluate the situation and make the correct decision...."¹⁴ According to Colonel Simchenkov,

It is "... a knowledge of regulations which is the firm

basis on which organization and efficiency is instilled in an officer's work and which help polish the ability ... to react more rapidly to all situation changes ..."15 and "... to think and act imaginatively and with initiative on the battlefield."16

It appears that the concept of initiative partly derives from a knowledge of regulations. A Soviet officer with a desire to display independent initiative must contend with the tremendous pressure placed on officers to fulfill the essence of regulations and orders without deviation. From their earliest schooling, Soviet officers are brought up "... in a spirit of strict fulfillment of all requirements established by Soviet laws and regulations ..."17 and, therefore, "... any disruptions or switching of planned activities without valid reasons are inadmissible."18 The stereotype of the Soviet officer or serviceman uttering an unquestioning "yes, sir" to an order is given credence in the Soviet Officer's Handbook.19

The seriousness with which all of this is taken is pointed out in two accounts. In the first, a battalion commander relates the story of one of his young commanders whose subunit had failed an inspection. He judged the failure by stating that it:

... is impossible to say that he has chosen the road of liberalism and connivance, but at times he has lacked the persistence and the officer's firmness to bring about the timely and precise fulfillment of all orders and commands which he has issued. This has led to carelessness ... and to cases of deviation from that procedure laid down by regulations.20

The second article discusses the fate of a platoon commander after his men failed in their proficiency tests. The author pointedly states:

Gross violations of regulations ... were committed in the subunit commanded by Captain I. Markov ..., "who was " ... brought to strict account by the Party for all of these violations. He was recommended for discharge into the reserve ... It was a harsh but necessary measure ... No one is permitted to deviate from the standards of military life.21

Indicative of the diversion of opinion over the need for strict adherence to regulations and orders versus tempering those regulations and orders with initiative, is the comment that utilization

... of the means of combat and their control are naturally rigidly centralized, and the structure of military service itself is regimented to the maximum degree by regulations and orders. This does not rule out, however, but actually calls for activeness and initiative by military personnel in the performance of their duties ... such initiative is not in conflict with regulations or orders, but helps ... to perform better and to improve combat readiness.22

PARTY'S INFLUENCE

A considerable role in indoctrinating officers is played by the Communist Party whose network of political officers transcends all levels of the military. An officer's development begins from the moment he assumes a position and directly depends on the influence of his commander, political officers, and Party and Komsomol organizations. The Internal Service Regulations (Ch. 2, Art. 47 and 48) also say a commander bears personal responsibility before the Party and the Soviet State (in that order) for his actions.²³

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) maintains that unity of command is the most important factor in the organizational development of the armed forces. The Party organs in every military unit down to company level are the strengthening force, the backbone, and, "... cementing force which molds together the ranks of troops and makes them monolithic and indestructible."²⁴ It is the Party committees which are constantly teaching young officers, placing a great deal of effort into individual work with officer Party and non-Party members, ensuring that they strictly observe regulations.²⁵ Party political work is based on the premise that regulations comprise the law governing every aspect of military life, is focused on the establishment of firm regulation order, and, is accomplished by commanders and Party political organs, who are expected "... to develop respect for regulations and an awareness of the need for firm military discipline ..."²⁶

All of this rhetoric implies that the Soviet officer is scrutinized constantly by a Party organization which is fundamentally determined to improve the moral, political and psychological training of officers. This is done with one goal in mind, to improve on the production of an officer who unquestioningly accepts the precepts of the Party, the regulations of the Armed Forces, and the orders of his commander. An officer who will obey the orders of his superiors without deviation is the desired product.

This concept of a totally programmed officer is not necessarily congruous with the ideas presented by several current military writers. Their attempt, though, to relate that the Party does in fact desire initiative on the officer's part is less than convincing. One author maintained that the Party has invariably pointed to the need to rely on the "... daring initiative and resourcefulness inherent in our people."²⁷ Another states matter of factly that the "... active and purposeful Party and political work contributed ... to the successes in combat training and the rise in the creative energy and initiative of ... officers."²⁸ The last holds firmly to the conviction that it "... is the duty of commanders, political organs, Party and Komsomol organizations to develop politically aware, ideologically stable fighting men who are active and demonstrate initiative."²⁹

The totality of the Party's influence over every part of the military life of a Soviet officer inevitably makes it more difficult for him to break out of the mold used to shape his behavior. There seems to be little chance that the Party will relent in its tireless efforts to control every facet of his life, and to make his every action predictable. This pressure will more than likely preclude the officer's selection of an independent course of action, knowing full well the risks involved and the responsibility which must be assumed, unless the circumstances are such that he has no other choice.

INITIATIVE AS A QUALITY OF AN OFFICER

Contemporary Soviet press articles do not leave the situation entirely in favor of the Party and its control without regarding the importance of initiative as a quality of a Soviet officer and a trait to be nurtured and prized, sought and attained.

In the early formation of young commanders, a display of initiative is expected without waiting for a senior's guidance.³⁰ Because modern warfare is characterized by frequent and immediate change, a commander must be capable of "... intellectual flexibility, independence and resolve ...," as well as possess "... the necessary freedom of choice of methods for fulfilling the mission assigned."³¹ Each officer is expected to possess a creative imagination, which according to one source is "... an essential condition in the Armed Forces ..., a guarantee of initiative, and bold and confident action on the battlefield."³²

The ability of a commander to think quickly to exert influence in a given situation demands "... initiative and boldness - those are the inseparable traditional qualities of the Soviet officer."³³ When that same commander trains his staff officers he is charged with the task of creating for his subordinates the "... necessary conditions for independent work...,"³⁴ in order that they might possess "... insight, methods expertise and imaginative initiative."³⁵

All of these words ring hollow unless a young officer is given the opportunity to develop and exercise this quality. It must become a practice which is uninhibited by fear of error and retaliation. Evidence for maturation of this particular quality is severely lacking.

RISK TAKING DEMANDED

Having established that the Soviet officer possesses the quality of initiative, Soviet military chroniclers immediately pronounce that there is a certain element of risk involved in displaying that initiative.

One author is convinced that independence and initiative comprise the major parts of a commander's organizational and decision-making skills. Yet, at the same time, he alludes to the reality of the situation where initiative is praised if the results of the solution are successful. However, when there is failure, a reprimand is sure to follow. Junior officers who queried if it would be wiser to do only what is demanded or ordered, because displayed initiative is often misinterpreted, were given the reply:

I would like to remind such comrades that the person who deserves a reproach is not the one who in striving for the best possible fulfillment of the assigned task does not reach his goal, but that person who, fearing responsibility, does not use all his power and resources to achieve success and acts without initiative.³⁶

In an editorial in Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star), a reference was made to the interests of present day combat readiness which demands actions which differ from those in the past. An officer must take upon himself difficult responsibilities in order to employ innovation, for "... success is far from being

guaranteed immediately, and the introduction of something new not infrequently involves a certain risk."³⁷ In tactical exercises and training problems, one author maintained, the Soviet officer-commander must be deliberately placed in difficult situations in order to cultivate and be required to display "...³⁸ courage, willpower, resourcefulness and the capability of taking a risk...."

Another author felt that initiative had to be expanded and praised at every opportunity. When an officer was found to be doing nothing on his own without guidance from a senior officer, his commander programed a systematic effort to develop initiative in the officer. On one occasion the commander left on temporary duty leaving the junior officer to his own devices.³⁹ This forced the junior officer to take risks and assume the responsibility for his decisions.

In each of these instances, reading between the lines, the author was alluding to an acceptable degree of initiative which demanded that an officer be ready to demonstrate his initiative by taking the risk and assuming the responsibility for the decision he makes. This presupposed that he would be acting independently and would be allowed to practice this kind of activity as he progressed as an officer. Not mentioned by the articles above, but brought out by another, is what constitutes demonstrated initiative. It seems to take several forms, from an individual officer's willingness and ability to take on the most difficult task, to his capability to plan and perform tasks independently,⁴⁰ to making a decision based on on-the-ground experience without specific guidance to do otherwise.⁴¹

TAKING THE INITIATIVE - EXAMPLES

Perhaps the longest series of articles discussing the topic of a commander's initiative in the decision-making process came as a result of an article published early in 1978 by a battalion commander. Superficially, the article was simply another presentation of the intricate method a commander uses to prepare himself for making a decision, a subject found frequently in Soviet journals. It had all the earmarks of the preferred method for accomplishing a mission. Detailed examination reveals that the author recommended a stilted and minutely detailed step-by-step procedure for planning an operation. It left little room for officer initiative. Reference was made to a company commander's actions after conducting his reconnaissance and having issued his verbal order: "The commander is also obliged to give his subordinates instructions on every aspect of support and security of combat operations and also to define the basic tasks ..."⁴²

It was this emphasis on detailed and unalterable orders which prompted several writers in the succeeding months to once again address the subject of officer initiative. One spoke of initiative through the example of an officer who changed his instructions in order to decrease the time for an artillery preparation by three minutes in his sector. His reasoning was it would allow his unit to move into a forest and with a flanking attack crush the enemy's antitank defenses. The idea was a successful gamble. The author felt "... that this was a creative commander's decision. It included a tactfully efficient idea and the factor of surprise ...," and manifested "... creativity and initiative in combat."⁴³

Treading on familiar ground, another author recalled that a commander must have the ability to foresee problems, react quickly to changes in the situation,

and be flexible enough to make appropriate corrections to the initial orders. He cited the example of a battalion commander who had ordered one of his companies to make a frontal engagement. After realizing the enemy situation in relation to that of his subunit's, he changed the mission of that unit before consulting with his superior.⁴⁴

A lieutenant affirmed that as a junior commander he was expected to accomplish a task or mission without specific orders from the company commander. He stated that:

... the company commander will assign a general mission, but he is in no position to consider and provide for all the details and fine points ... thus any platoon commander is obligated to prepare himself and subordinates for combat ... outline his measures for organizing it ... and not only outline them for himself, but also report through channels about decisions made on his own.⁴⁵

The foundation for present-day writers whose accounts conflict with LTC Anisimov's thesis was prepared by an earlier article stressing the need for commanders to train their officers to utilize their initiative. When confronted with criticism of a young officer who had been accused of lacking initiative, the author immediately wondered if the officer's superiors had placed emphasis on developing this quality, or if they had afforded him the opportunity to make independent decisions. Senior officers are chided for excessive supervision in the sense of subjecting their subordinates to extremely detailed instructions on how to perform a duty and never considering a new approach or different decision other than their own. The author explained: "This stifles initiative, does not give it a chance to unfold and an individual begins to doubt his own abilities to make independent decisions and implement them."⁴⁶ His best example of what officer initiative should be is his account of a lieutenant assigned to deliver ammunition to a specific unit's rear area. Upon arrival and finding the rear destroyed, the officer decided on his own that instead of returning to his own unit to report the events, he would move forward and deliver the ammunition to the firing positions directly. In the process one of his trucks was destroyed. The author allowed that the lieutenant's action deviated from the order given, and that besides losing considerable time for his own unit he had lost a vehicle. However, the officer had utilized his initiative and was, therefore, correctly justified.⁴⁷

A more recent response came from Colonel Sotnikov in his article describing a water crossing. He retold the story of a young lieutenant who had been given an order containing a specific route along which to ferry troops and equipment. While making his first return trip, the officer noticed that there was a more efficient route, one that would decrease the crossing time and reduce the loss of men and supplies. On his next trek he changed his route, making the decision on his own. The author praised the initiative and decisiveness shown by the young officer, never mentioning the fact that it was a significant change to a very specific order.⁴⁸

FEAR AND RESENTMENT

Not all military commanders emphasize the need for initiative in their officers. Even in the military journal and press articles, which form the basis of this study, fear, criticism and resentment by commanders of officers who do exhibit a tendency to deviate from the norm were apparent.

A young officer who was publicly embarrassed by his commander and wrote his position in a letter to the political section suffered the consequences of taking initiative on his own. The battalion commander, upon learning of the letter, tried to get rid of the lieutenant, never checking on the validity of the allegations. The officer's efficiency ratings began falling immediately, although, up to that time he had been considered an exceptional officer. (The Party would later overturn these ratings). This story was related by an officer who condemned the actions of the superior officers and supported the individual's obligation to speak out fearlessly against shortcomings. The author criticized the commander's philosophy that allowing one letter would invite others and that it was detrimental to a unit in which the expression of criticism and self-criticism is forbidden.⁴⁹

That there can be "no talk of initiative or independent action until the orders are received",⁵⁰ is a problem identified by one author. It is during the decision-making process, he contends, that officers can make suggestions which help the senior commander and encourage the subordinates' independence and their reliance on initiative. The commander who held his subordinates back, "... restricted their initiative and preferred to do everything himself. He forgot the rule that even the most able commander fails to succeed if his subordinates execute his orders mechanically, without displaying initiative and independence. If the senior commander encourages initiative and independence, the atmosphere in the collective is creative."⁵¹

In the Soviet military press today, commanders are being chided for holding back, resisting initiative in their subordinates, and resenting those who display it. The trend appears to be the desire for an officer corps somewhat relaxed in its feelings toward initiative-taking, but, at the same time, mindful of its confidence in the historical heritage of a strict and unyielding discipline system for success in combat.

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet military is aware of the advantage of an officer discipline system in which the officer is entrusted with a certain degree of responsibility and expected to display initiative as he progresses in the service. This discipline would be conscientious and voluntary, founded on the knowledge and understanding of Party principles and military regulations, and dedicated to communism and hatred of the class enemy.

Simultaneously, the military senses the dangers present in such a system: the total control and response of their officers to orders would be threatened; the military system, its rules and regulations, and indirectly, those of the Party, would be open to criticism and challenge; the need to persuade would replace the often easier path of coercion, ridicule and demotion; and the barometer for measuring moral-political training, strict and absolute discipline, would be ineffective in a climate of independent, individual initiative.

Although the Soviet commander is ultimately responsible for the political-military training in his unit, it is the Party organizations which ensure the accomplishment of political indoctrination of officers. The concept of initiative is suppressed by the Party. Party emphasis is on strict and unswerving discipline and obedience to military regulations, expected of all officers.⁵² The watch-dog mission of the political organs does nothing to

facilitate the growth of an officer's ability to act on his own, producing solutions reached by independent thinking. Rather, the Party focuses its attention on the ideological conditioning, and on the shaping of the officer in the image and likeness of Lenin and the other fathers of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to overestimate the Party committee's influence on the development of young officers. The narcotic used is discipline. The exceptional officer, though, remains willing to take the risk and experiment with initiative, but does so only under particular circumstances.

Soviet open press articles hint at the struggle of military officers to balance the strict moral-political teachings of the Party on the one side and their desire to act independently and display a creativeness in their work on the other. The fact that the Soviet leadership permits such discussion may derive from its realization that a certain percentage of officers want to play a more active part in the decision-making process, desire to act independently when guidance is lacking or sketchy, and long to be assured that punishment will not be the result of a deviation from orders. Or, the leadership may truly believe in the merits of initiative, but finds itself locked into a system which cannot permit it without risking collapse. Therefore, discussion serves as a safety valve for releasing pressure. Regardless, it is in some respects like a carrot, dangling, enticing, and so close, yet, never quite attainable without the right formula for action.

Essential and key to this entire discussion of initiative is just what it means to the Soviet military leadership. In the analysis made by this author, it is believed that the precedent for current thinking by the Soviet military on the subject of officer initiative was established in June 1943, on the Central Front. General K.K. Rokossovskiy, Commander of the Central Front, learned of an attack about to be launched by the Germans. The attack was on a scale large enough to cut off Rokossovskiy's forces. The General, unable to reach the supreme commander [it is assumed here that Stalin is referenced], made an independent decision to launch a massive artillery strike on the concentrated German forces. The Germans were caught by surprise and suffered sufficient losses to preclude an attack.⁵³

What must be understood is that the important elements here have nothing to do with being successful or unsuccessful. The basic ingredients for officer initiative today are those that were present in June 1943. The combat situation for General Rokossovskiy changed rapidly, without warning. His units were in the main path of the impending attack and, therefore, would have been directly affected by that attack. The General had no time to confer and receive guidance from his superior, and, finally, he had to act. There was no choice but to act: it was expected of him.

So it is with the concept of officer initiative in the present day Soviet military establishment. The same criteria are there, and when they are met, initiative has to be taken. The first criteria is the situation. The situation must be such that there has been significant, uncontrolled, and rapid change. An example is the sudden overtaking of orders by events, when to follow those orders any longer would have disastrous or negative results for a unit. (The degree of criticality of the situation sets this concept apart from U.S. style. The Soviets view only the gravest of situations as justification for personal action contrary to the set plan. The officer is not able to practice in peacetime what will be demanded of him in wartime, namely, independent action and initiative). The second criteria is place. The decision maker must be in a place where he and his unit are, or will be, directly affected in a negative manner by the change in the situation. And

the third is that there can be no time available to seek and receive guidance or an adjustment to orders from the next higher authority. It is because of this absence of time that the decision maker is required to act, and act immediately without regard to the consequences of a possible failure. Fate, then, has the final word.

These are the elements which the present Soviet military leadership consider essential and accept as the justification for an officer to make an independent decision, thereby displaying Soviet style initiative. Of course, in the final analysis it must be realized that the Soviets are masters at blending theory and practice. Theory requires an officer to conscientiously and voluntarily obey, simultaneously being told to contribute to the decision-making process, utilizing the capability and duty to take the risk, assume the responsibility, and make his own decision, independently, and without hesitation. Practice requires that an officer unquestioningly obey, never discussing whether he has the right to question, or speak his mind, or whether he has acted justifiably. He has but one law - the commander's order - and that must be obeyed, "unless ..." It is under these "unless" conditions that a Soviet officer's initiative is a reality. The tragedy is that he is not able to practice or nurture it on a day to day basis. A skill left idle will be rusty at best when called upon to perform.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ I. Babenko, Soviet Officers (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p.18.
- ² Ibid., pp.21-22.
- ³ V.D. Sokolovskiy, Voyennaya Strategiya (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1968), p.423.
- ⁴ Colonel Berezhnov, "Kontakt", Krasnaya Zvezda, 18 January 1980, p.2.
- ⁵ Sbornik zakonov SSSR i ukazov presidiuma verkhovnogo soveta SSSR, 1938-1975 (Moskva: Izvestiya soviet Deputatov trudyashchikhsya SSSR, 1976), Vol. 4, p.376.
- ⁶ Colonel General N.A. Lomov, ed., Scientific-Technical Progress and the Revolution in Military Affairs (Moscow: translated and published by the U.S. Air Force, Soviet Military Thought Series, 1973), pp.168-169.
- ⁷ Joseph D. Douglass, Jr., The Soviet Theater Nuclear Offensive (published by the U.S. Air Force, 1976), p.87.
- ⁸ Sbornik zakonov SSSR, p.385.
- ⁹ C.N. Donnelly, "Tactical Problems Facing the Soviet Army: Recent Debates in the Soviet Military Press", International Defense Review, No. 9, 1978, p.1410.
- ¹⁰ Slovar' osnovnykh voyennykh terminov (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1965), pp.97-98.
- ¹¹ Lieutenant General P. Bilaonov, "Znaniye ustavov razvivayet initsiativu", Tyl i snabzheniye sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil (May 1971), p.21.
- ¹² Lieutenant General V. Gorbunov, "Initiative and Creative Approach in Warfare", Soviet Military Review (October 1979), p.12.
- ¹³ Major General V. Serebryannikov, "Initsiativa sovetskogo Voyna: Sotsial'-nyye grani voyennogo stroitel'stva", Krasnaya Zvezda, 22 March 1979, p.2.
- ¹⁴ Bilaonov (May 1971), p.20.
- ¹⁵ Colonel P. Simchenkov, "Komandir i shtab", Voyenny Vestnik, No. 7 (1979), p.32.
- ¹⁶ Lieutenant General A. Matveyenko, "Komandir batal'ona", Voyenny Vestnik, No. 3 (1979), p.46.
- ¹⁷ Lieutenant General V.I. Lyashko, "V dukhe neuklonnogo vpolneniya ustavov", Voyenny Vestnik, No. 5 (1979), p.52.
- ¹⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Latushkin, "Organizatorskiye sposobnosti-obyazatel'noye kachestvo komandira", Voyenny Vestnik, No. 2 (1978), p.108.
- ¹⁹ Major General S.N. Kozlov, ed., Spravochnik ofitsera (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1971), p.158.

- ²⁰ Lieutenant I. Pilipchuk, "Trebovatelnost' komandira", Krasnaya Zvezda, 3 August 1978, p.2.
- ²¹ "Znat' i vpolnyat' trebovaniya ustavov", Krasnaya Zvezda, 15 March 1979, p.1.
- ²² Serebryannikov, p.2.
- ²³ Major V. Vecherskiy, "Partiynaya organizatsiya i molodyye ofitseri", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 11 (1978), p.77.
- ²⁴ Lieutenant General K. Maksimov, "Sila partiynogo vliyaniya", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 8 (1978), p.15.
- ²⁵ Ibid., and, Colonel I. Korniyenko, "Poborniki ustavnogo poryadka", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 3 (1977), pp.69-70.
- ²⁶ "Znat' i vpolnyat' trebovaniya ustavov", p.1.
- ²⁷ Gorbunov, p.12.
- ²⁸ Lieutenant General A. Semirenko, "Psikhologicheskaya podgotovka ofitsera", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 1 (1979), p.54.
- ²⁹ Serebryannikov, p.3.
- ³⁰ Colonel I. Strel'nikov, "Nasha obshchaya zabota", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 3 (1979), p.69.
- ³¹ Gorbunov, p. 14.
- ³² Kozlov, p.74.
- ³³ Colonel General V. Merimskiy, "Takticheskoye myshleniye komandira", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 10 (1978), p.29.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Simchenkov, p.30.
- ³⁶ Colonel V. Chistyakov, "Initsiativa v boyu", Krasnaya Zvezda, 21 September 1978, p.2.
- ³⁷ "Otvetstvennost' personal'naya delovitost' tvorcheskiy podkhod", Krasnaya Zvezda, 4 January 1979, p.2.
- ³⁸ Latushkin, p.107.
- ³⁹ Bilaonov, pp.21-22.
- ⁴⁰ Serebryannikov, p.3.
- ⁴¹ Colonel Sotnikov, "Initsiativa i reshitelnost' zalog uspekha", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 10 (1979), p.81.
- ⁴² Lieutenant Colonel Anisimov, "Komandir - organizator boya", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 1 (1978), p.47.

- ⁴³Colonel K. Titakov, "V osnove uspekha-tvorchestvo", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 10 (1978), p.36.
- ⁴⁴Lieutenant Colonel V. Nesterenko, "Slazhennost' v raboro komamdira i shtaba", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 11 (1978), p.49.
- ⁴⁵Lieutenant Masharov, "Nuzhny initsiativa, samostoyatel'nost' ", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 12 (1978), p.67.
- ⁴⁶Bilaonov, p.21.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p.24.
- ⁴⁸Sotnikov, p.81.
- ⁴⁹Major V. Semenov, "Prizledovat' prichiny", Krasnaya Zvezda, 24 May 1979, p.2.
- ⁵⁰Babenko, p.74.
- ⁵¹Ibid.
- ⁵²Lieutenant General B. Utkin, "Budushchim ofitseram - prochnyye navyki partiyno - politicheskoy raboty", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 3 (1979), pp.52-53.
- ⁵³M.P. Skirido, Narod, armiya, polkovodets (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1970), p.197.

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