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OPERATIONAL ART AND TACTICS

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OPERATIONAL ART AND TACTICS

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OPERATIONAL ART AND TACTICS

Contemporary and future Soviet operational art and tactics must be understood within the context of what occurred in Soviet military art during the 1970s and early 1980s. Recent Soviet articles have treated the period 1971 to 1985 as a distinct one which followed a period of the 1960s, when the Soviets argued that "a revolution in military affairs" had made theater and global war inescapably nuclear. The Soviets now believe a new period commenced in the mid-1980s, characterized in part by a technological revolution in conventional weaponry which promised to make the conventional battlefield as deadly and complex as the nuclear battlefield described in the 1960s.

During the 1960s "revolution in military affairs," Soviet military art emphasized the strategic nuclear realm and deemphasized the role of operational art and tactics. The shrunken Soviet conventional force structure served the function of exploiting nuclear exchanges and vanquishing remnants of enemy forces which had survived nuclear combat. The critical function of operational maneuver, and to a lesser extent, tactical maneuver, lost much of its former combat relevance.

In the 1970s, however, a growing conviction that war could be kept conventional prompted the Soviets to fashion strategic, operational, and tactical combat techniques which promised to make any opponent's decision to use nuclear weapons even more difficult. The movement toward a conventional option was paralleled by renewed Soviet concern for the operational level of

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war in general, and for operational art in particular.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the Soviets wrote extensively on operational and tactical maneuver themes, and by 1980 the concepts of the operational maneuver group and tactical maneuver by forward detachments were fully developed.

Simultaneously, the Soviets formulated the concept of protivoyadernyy manevr [anti-nuclear maneuver].² First expressed in defensive terms in the early 1970s, today that concept provides a cornerstone for Soviet operational and tactical techniques designed to pre-empt, preclude, or inhibit enemy resort to nuclear warfare. As articulated in 1987 by V. G. Reznichenko "the continuous conduct of battle at a high tempo creates unfavorable conditions for enemy use of weapons of mass destruction. He cannot determine targets for nuclear strikes exactly and, besides, will be forced to shift his nuclear delivery means often."³ The Soviets have tentatively decided that even greater emphasis on this type of maneuver is also a partial remedy to countering enemy use of high precision weaponry.⁴

Drawing heavily on research done on the theme "the initial period of war" or, specifically, what a nation's army must do to win rapid victory or avoid precipitous defeat, the Soviets have concluded that the principal prerequisites for victory are the surprise conduct of rapid operations by forces concentrated well forward.⁵ Hence, the Soviets tend to eschew preliminary large scale mobilization (the primary indicator of impending war) and

to argue for employment of a single strategic and operational echelon supplemented by numerous tailored operational and tactical maneuver forces. Even tactically, by 1987 Soviet writers were able to argue "there arises the problem of defining the optimal structure for the first and second echelons at the tactical level. With the enemy using high precision weapons, the role of the first echelon has to grow. It must be capable of achieving a mission without the second echelon (reserve)."⁶

Operational and tactical combat in the Soviet's view "embraces simultaneously the entire depth of the combat formation of both contending sides."⁷ As a result, combat missions are no longer described in linear fashion by the seizure of lines. Instead missions call for the securing along multiple axes deep in the enemy's defense of objectives whose seizure "undermines the tactical stability of the enemy defense."⁸ At the tactical level, specifically designated and tailored maneuver forces--usually forward detachments--perform this function, while tailored operational maneuver forces do likewise at the operational level.⁹

This offensive posture may significantly alter traditional concepts of echelonment, not only by reducing the number of ground echelons but also by supplementing the ground echelon with a vertical echelon which will add greater depth to battle. According to Reznichenko,

"One can propose that, under the influence of modern weapons and the great saturation of ground forces with aviation means, the combat formation of forces on the offensive is

destined to consist of two echelons -- a ground echelon, whose mission will be to fulfill the penetration of the enemy defense and develop the success into the depths, and an air echelon created to envelop defending forces from the air and strike blows against his rear area."¹⁰

In essence what has emerged is a Soviet concept of land-air battle juxtaposed against the US concept of AirLand battle.

Today, the Soviets believe that future war, with or without the use of nuclear weapons, will be war by maneuver. Their military solution to the problem of the lurking presence of nuclear and other modern weaponry is, characteristically, a dialectical synthesis of the new and the old -- of techniques developed in the 1960s and 1970s to meet nuclear realities combined with time honored methods of large scale operational and tactical maneuver developed in the Great Patriotic War. The resulting synthesis envisions Soviet forces operating in a nuclear-scared configuration employing operational and tactical maneuver in the critical initial period of war to pre-empt and overcome quickly enemy defenses, to paralyze the enemy's ability to react, and to win rapid victory within carefully defined political limits.

Through the means of focused operational and tactical maneuver, Soviet forces will attempt to pre-empt, disrupt, or crush forward enemy defenses; penetrate rapidly into the depths of the enemy's defenses along numerous axes; and, by immediately intermingling their own and the enemy's forces and by other direct actions, deprive the enemy of the ability to respond

effectively with nuclear or high precision weapons. As Soviet maneuver unfolds into the depths, consequent paralysis of enemy command and control will ultimately produce paralysis of his will to resist and, hence, his final defeat.

The Soviets have clearly articulated this view since the mid-1970s. M. M. Kir'yan, describing an army penetration operation in 1976, wrote, in a nuclear environment

formations [divisions] advance on their axes of attack from areas where they had restored their combat effectiveness and decisively move forward. In favorable conditions the offensive can be begun by forward detachments.¹¹

If nuclear weapons are not used:

The security zone [covering force area] is overcome by forces of the first echelon formations [divisions] after powerful air and artillery strikes on the most important objectives to the entire depth of the enemy defense. Forward detachments from each division destroy covering and security subunits [battalions] of the enemy and secure important objectives and areas in the forward defensive positions. Their operations are supported by artillery fire and air strikes in cooperation with operations by tactical air assault forces. Having overcome the covering force area, the forward detachments, supported by first echelon forces, penetrate the forward defensive positions from the march. If there is no possibility of creating conditions for the advance of the main force, the positions are overcome after a suitable preparation.^{12a}

To emphasize the role of tactical maneuver, a 1977 source noted:

An important role in the achievement of a high offensive tempo can be played by forward detachments, prepared and aimed at specific objectives...By their daring and enterprising operations and skillful envelopment of strong points, they can rapidly fulfill their mission.¹³

A 1982 work describing recent tactical methods noted:

Their [the forward detachments] principal mission was to capture and destroy weapons and control facilities for barriers of fire established in this [security] zone, aggressively penetrate and capture tactically important installations and positions, with the objective of creating the requisite conditions for the main forces to advance to the forward edge of the enemy's main defensive area and penetrate it.¹⁴

A 1988 article rounded out these descriptions by adding:

Modern combined arms battle is fought throughout the entire depth of the enemy combat formation, both on the side's contact live [FLOT] and in the depth, on the ground and in the air.¹⁵

Consequently, the fragmented nature of battle will result in "mutual wedging of units and subunits, which will have to operate independently for a long time."¹⁶ The net result of these views is that tactical and operational maneuver forces, committed to combat in great number and as early as possible will provide the motive force for Soviet offensive operations at the tactical and operational levels of war.

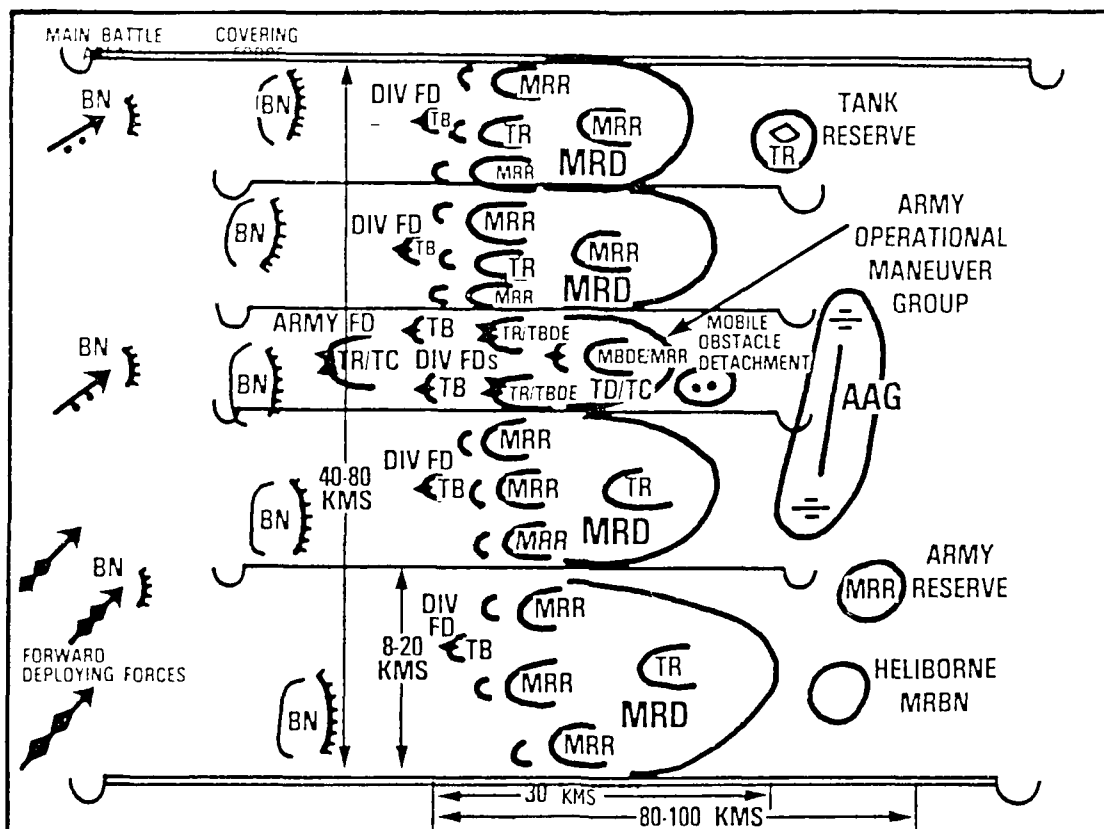
These concepts were developed in the 1970s and early 1980s when tactical nuclear weapons posed the greatest potential threat on the battlefield. In the mid-1980s the Soviets have recognized the growing threat of high precision weaponry and other high technological weapons systems. Their initial response has been to accentuate those trends of the 1970s by stressing heavier single echelons, more rapid tactical and operational maneuver, and greater tactical flexibility by small units. One author has noted that, although basic offensive principles still apply, greater premium would have to be placed on the importance of surprise actions, maneuver of subunits and fires, sharp and

continuous cooperation, skill in concealing from the enemy one's intentions, and firm continuous command and control.¹⁷ Another has added the "the revived capabilities of the battalion, and the increased significance of independent operations of subunits, naturally places great demands on the commander."¹⁸ These and similar assertions indicate an increased Soviet concern for tailoring more carefully at the battalion and regimental level and a concomitant concern for more initiative and flexibility on the part of their commanders at these levels.

It is clear the Soviets feel that the pace of technological change is about to quicken with possible unforeseen consequences. A political corollary for dealing with this uncertainty is to display a defensive posture to slow the pace of change and gain time and resources to foster R&D necessary to deal with it. In this sense, a high-profile defensive stance would accord with the traditional Soviet understanding that in military art the defense is a temporary state which facilitates future resumption of the offensive. The litmus test of Soviet defensive sincerity is whether a similar defensive orientation appears at the operational and tactical levels. As yet it has not.

The exact nature of modern Soviet offensive operations is determined by the strength and depth of the enemy defense. When attacking an unprepared defense (only a deployed enemy covering force), army, divisional, and regimental forward detachments initiate the assault, penetrate the covering force area, and preempt enemy occupation of their main defensive belt (Figure 1).¹⁹

ARMY OPERATIONAL FORMATION - 1987 AGAINST AN UNPREPARED DEFENSE



IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE-150 KMS
SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE-350 KMS

← DIVISIONAL
FORWARD
DETACHMENTS
(TB)

⤵ REGIMENTAL
FORWARD
DETACHMENTS
(MRBN+)

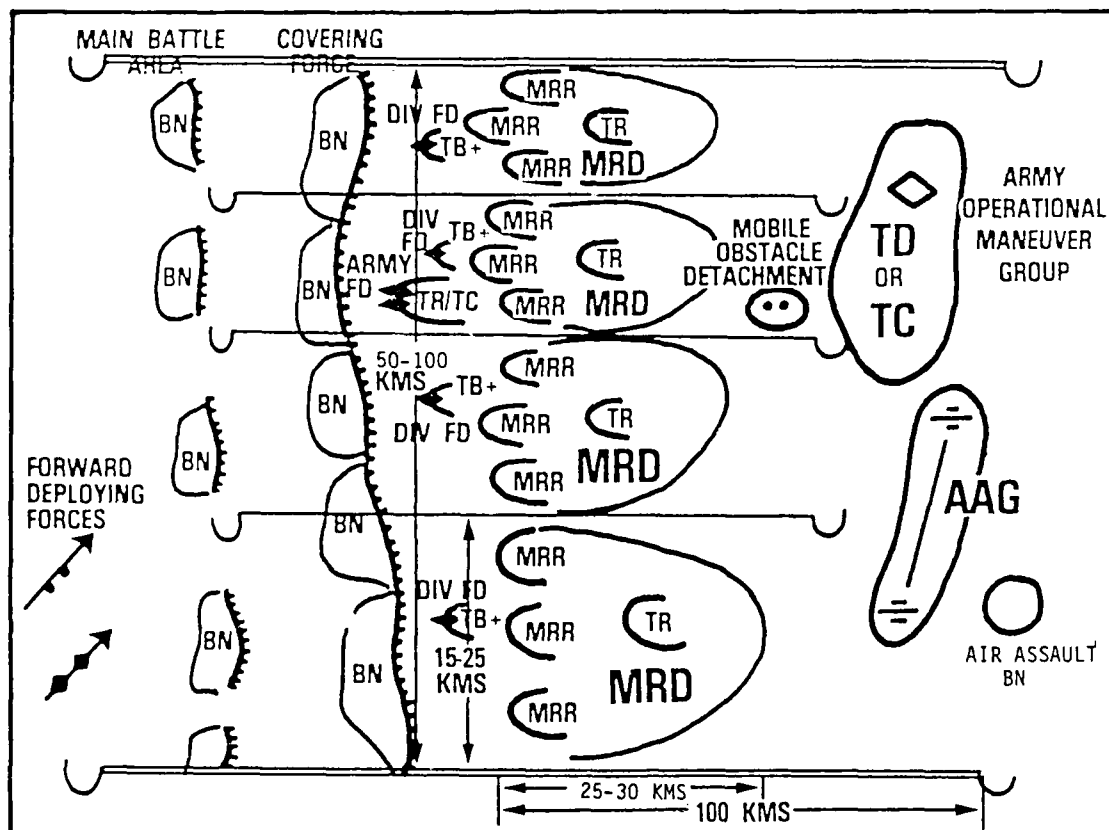
Figure 1

Against a partially prepared defense (in place covering force and partially occupied main defense area), army and divisional forward detachments, supported by heavy fires, overcome the security zone and penetrate into the main defense area to forestall establishment of a firm, continuous defense and facilitate the commitment of main force formations and operational maneuver groups (figure 2).

In an offensive against a prepared defenses (fully occupied defenses), main force formations effect the penetration of both the covering force zone and the main defense area, supported by a full artillery offensive and air strikes (figure 3). In some instances, divisional forward detachments are used to overcome the security zone or to initiate subsequent attacks on specific objectives in the main battle area. Army and division forward detachments, designated in advance, generally remain in second echelon until the penetration operation nears completion. Then they commit to combat to initiate tactical maneuver, to begin exploitation into the operational depths, and to condition the way for subsequent commitment of army and front operational maneuver groups.²⁰

During the exploitation, forward detachments and operational maneuver groups provide a means for maintaining the forward momentum of the entire force. They insure continued fragmentation of enemy forces, pre-empt or overcome intermediate enemy defenses, and destroy the equilibrium of redeploying enemy reserves. All the while, forward detachments provide the

ARMY OPERATIONAL FORMATION — 1987 AGAINST A PARTIALLY PREPARED DEFENSE



IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE-120 KMS
SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE-300 KMS

Figure 2

ARMY OPERATIONAL FORMATION — 1987 AGAINST A FULLY PREPARED DEFENSE

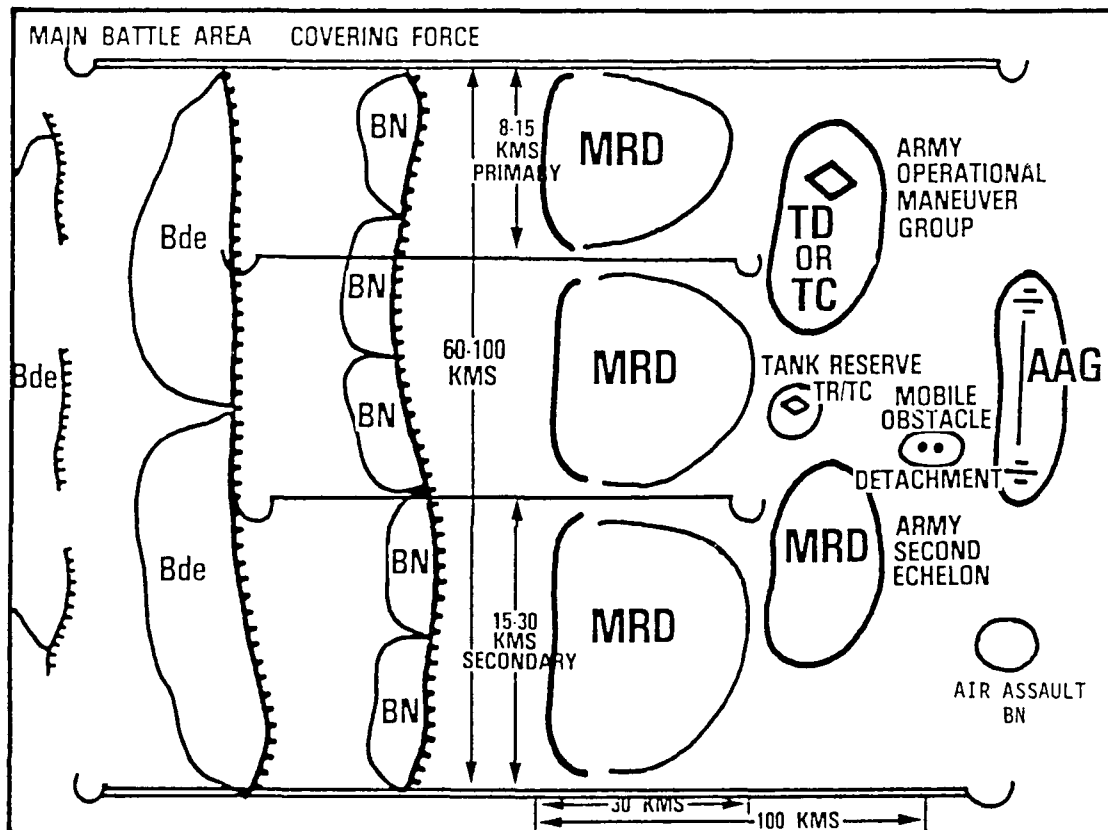


Figure 3

essential linkage between operational maneuver forces and main forces, and lend cohesiveness to the entire offensive (figure 4). Throughout the offensive, tactical air assaults ranging from company to brigade strength cooperate with maneuver forces. Air assault forces with their vertical fire support means (helicopters) constitute an air echelon, which supplements existing ground echelons.²¹ The Soviets strongly believe requisite offensive success can be achieved only against an unprepared or partially prepared defense.

This offensive scheme posits certain distinct requirements, among which are:

- the achievement of a degree of surprise to create necessary force superiorities and gain initial advantage. This involves deception regarding attack intentions, location, and scale.
- avoidance of major attack indicators. This requires renunciation of large scale mobilization, extensive pre-war theater preparations, and use of selective mobilization techniques.
- reliance on shallow strategic and operational echelonment to offset lack of mobilization, to reap maximum surprise, and to establish high initial offensive momentum.
- early commitment of tactical and operational maneuver forces to achieve rapid penetration, to enmesh forces quickly, and to avoid enemy nuclear response.

Future developments will determine to what degree the Soviets are wedded to these offensive concepts and how sincere they are regarding the newly proclaimed "defensiveness" of their military doctrine.

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ENDNOTES

1. In a recent review of a book by A. Babakov on the Soviet armed forces in the post-war years, A. Reznichenko challenges Babakov's description of post-war periods of military development. Babakov postulated that the distinct periods were 1945-1953, 1954-1961, 1962-1972, and 1973-1986. Reznichenko argues for the subdivision of 1945-1960, 1962-1970, and 1971-1985. His argument clearly delineates the period of the revolution in military affairs (1961-1970) and the period when the Soviets adopted a dual option (1971-1985). He strongly implies that a new period has begun in the mid-1980s characterized by the rapid changing pace of conventional technology and the emergence of high-precision weaponry as the first noticeable facet of that change. The growing importance of the new weaponry will probably accentuate techniques the Soviets developed in the 1970s to deal with the menacing presence of nuclear weapons. Specifically, the Soviets will further develop operational and tactical maneuver techniques aimed at preempting or neutralizing effective enemy use of any weapons of mass destruction, nuclear or conventional. See V. Reznichenko, "Sovetskiye voorushennyey sily v poslevoenny period" [The Soviet armed forces in the post-war period], Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil [Communists of the armed forces], No. 1 (January 1988), 86-88.

2. Among the many articles see F. Sverdlov, "K voprosu o manevre v boyu" [Concerning the question of maneuver in combat], Voenny Vestnik, No. 8 (August 1972), 31; V. Savkin, "Manevr v boyu" [Maneuver in battle], Voenny Vestnik, No. 4 (April 1972), 23. Hereafter cited as VV.

3. V. G. Reznichenko, Taktika [Tactics], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987), 72.

4. For example see I. Vorob'yev, "Novoye oruzhiye i printsipy taktiki" [New weapons and tactical principles], Sovetskoy voennoye obozreniye [Soviet military review], No. 2 (February 1987), 18.

5. Extensive Soviet analysis of this theme of initial war has produced many studies, including S. P. Ivanov, Nachal'nyy period voyny [The initial period of war], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1974); M. Cherednichenko, "O nachal'nom periode Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Concerning the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, No. 4 (April 1961), 28-35 (hereafter cited as VIZh); P. Korkodinov, "Fakti i mysli o nachal'nom periode Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Facts and ideas about the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], VIZh, No. 10 (October 1965), 26-34; V. Baskakov, "Ob osobennostyakh

nachal'nogo periode voyny" [Concerning the peculiarities of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 2 (February 1966), 29-34; A. Grechko, "25 let tomu nazad" [25 years ago], VIZh, No. 6 (June 1966), 3-15, I. Bagramian, "Kharakter i osobennosti nachal'nogo perioda voyny" [The nature and peculiarities of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 10 (October 1981), 20-27; V. Matsulenko, "Nekotoryye vyvody iz opyta nachal'nogo perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny" [Some conclusions from the experience of the initial period of the Great Patriotic War], VIZh, No. 3 (March 1984), 35-42; A. I. Yevseyev, "O nekotorykh tendentsiyakh v izmenenii soderzhaniya i kharaktera nachal'nogo perioda voyny" [Concerning some tendencies in the changing form and nature of the initial period of war], VIZh, No. 11 (November 1985), 11-20.

6. Yu. Molostov, A. Novikov, "High precision weapons against tanks," Soviet Military Review, No. 1 (January 1988), 13.

7. Reznichenko, 200.

8. Ibid.

9. David M. Glantz, Soviet Conduct of Tactical Maneuver: The Role of the Forward Detachment (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1988).

10. Reznichenko, 206.

11. M. M. Kir'yan, "Armeyskaya nastupatel'naya operatsiya" [Army offensive operation], Sovetskaya voennaya entsiklopediya [Soviet Military Encyclopedia] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976), 1:243.

12. Ibid.

13. P. Simchenko, "Manevr--klyuch k pobede" [Maneuver--key to victory], VV, No. 4 (April 1977), 70. Other articles include G. Lobachev, "Vysokiy temp nastupleniya--nepremennoye usloviye pobedy" [High offensive tempo--an indispensable condition for victory], VV, No. 2 (February 1977).

14. N. Kireyev, "Primeneniye tankovykh podrazdeleniy i chastey pri proryve oborony protivnika" [The use of tank subunits and units during the penetration of an enemy defense], VIZh, No. 2 (February 1982), 39.

15. Molostov, Novikov, 13.

16. Ibid.

17. M. M. Kir'yan, Vnezapnost' v nastupatel'nykh operatsiyakh Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny [Surprise in offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War], (Moscow: "Nauka", 1986).

18. D. A. Dragunsky, Motostrelkovyy (tankovyy) batal'on v boyu [The motorized rifle (tank) battalion in battle] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), 9.

19. Kir'yan, "Armeyskaya", 243; F. D. Sverdlov, Peredovyye otryady v boyu [Forward detachments in combat] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), 117-140.

20. Sverdlov, 117-140.

21. Reznichenko, 206, in his 1987 edition of Taktika, differentiates between ground and air echelons, stating:

While analyzing the future development of offensive combat tactics, one can propose that, under the influence of modern weapons and the greater saturation of ground forces with aviation means, the combat formation of forces on the offensive is destined to consist of two echelons--a ground echelon, whose mission will be to fulfill the penetration of the enemy defense and develop the success into the depths, and an air echelon created to envelop defending forces from the air and strike blows against his rear area.