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|-------|---|-------------------------|
| HKL | - | Main Line of Resistance |
| HKF | - | Battle Positions |
| Gr.W. | - | Mortar |
| MG | - | Machine Gun |
| Pak | - | AT Gun |
| IG | - | Infantry Howitzer |

Experiences with Russian Methods of Warfare and Their Utiliza-
tion in Training at the Waffen-SS Panzer Grenadier School

I. Because of the length of the war and its alternating victories and defeats, it was possible to observe the combat methods of the Russian enemy in all situations. As early as during the first winter in Russia, it was obvious that tactical leadership had to develop new methods of combat in order to be successful. The extremely wide spaces, the huge masses of men, the peculiarity of Russian tactics, and, not the least important, the changed climatic conditions all necessitated new tactical thinking. Only the soldier who enjoyed superior leadership and had superior combat ability could hope for success. This thinking implied, as a logical sequence, the most accurate observation of all Russian habits and of their reactions to German methods of warfare and, in close connection, a complete exploitation of Russian weaknesses. In order that the knowledge of the peculiar characteristics of the Russians be made available to all, it was necessary to collect all such experiences and to present them in particular to the replacement and training units and to the schools. A steady stream of combat-seasoned instructors (officers and noncommissioned officers) had to flow into these installations in order to give the replacements and recruits the benefit of a training based on the latest actual experiences. As a result, up until March 1945, the individual

superiority of our Waffen-SS infantry was repeatedly demonstrated. The final logical consequence - the full use of the experience also in the field of materiel - could not be followed because of the severe shortage of raw materials which arose in Germany as the war went on.

II. Russian Defense, German Attack

A. General

In defensive warfare the Russian soldier had an extraordinary power of resistance. His accomplishments in the construction of field fortifications were downright incredible. For such work he enlisted the aid of every available member of the civilian population, including women and children. After only a few days he had often completed a defensive system many kilometers deep. Even when he had been defeated and was retreating, his efficiency in the construction of fortifications was still to be reckoned with. Any failure to observe the rule expressed in the German "Luppenfuehrung" ["Field Service Regulations: Operations"] "Stick close to the heels of a defeated enemy" had to be paid for in blood. The pursuit could not be interrupted even at night, for otherwise the Russians would invariably begin the construction of a new line of defense.

B. Infantry Experiences

As has already been mentioned, the Russians built defensive systems as deep as 10km, and behind that had more trenches up to a depth of 30km. If they had a little time at their disposal they dug antitank ditches about 6 meters wide and 4 meters deep.

Dugouts with a thick cover of logs, earth, armor plate, or other similar materials were frequently encountered.

1. Employment of Mines

There was usually a mine belt 8 to 10 meters in front of the first trench. Terrain especially favorable for attack was heavily mined. For this purpose, the Russians preferred the wooden box mines which did not register on the usual mine detectors. Mines were laid in unexpected places deep in the battle position. Antitank mines were repeatedly encountered in terrain favorable for tanks.

If the enemy intended to retire from a previously defended sector, he made use of many tricks:

(1) Attaching demolition charges with push or pull fuzes to abandoned field kitchens or to weapons left lying in the area.

(2) In houses: attaching booby traps to doors or windows or, in the winter, to stoves; pressure-detonated charges under steps and floor.

(3) Installation of booby traps in abandoned trucks, etc.

German countermeasures: Before an attack, engineers were employed to clear the area of mines. The engineers were especially trained in removing wooden mines. In heavily mined areas it was necessary that only certain lanes be cleared. Assault teams and advanced attack elements were equipped with bangalore torpedoes for opening paths through the mine belt in front of the trench. The fact that

the Russians used mines in the above-described way was one of the reasons for the preference given by the Waffen-SS to the use of assault teams in the attack. This most frequently used type of attack will be explained later.

In order to counter Russian tricks and perfidy, one had to advance with utmost caution and use special safety measures. These cannot be standardized as different countermeasures were required for every one of the many different Russian tricks.

2. Concealment and Cover

Through training and natural talent, the Russians were masters of concealment and cover. At the beginning of the war they were able to stop attacking battalions with a few well-camouflaged snipers. The Russian soldiers were trained to disappear into the earth in every situation and to blend perfectly with their surroundings. Because of their superior knowledge of nature and their natural talent for ruses, they were constantly devising new ideas. They made use of such tricks not only in the front line, but also in the rear area in connection with troop movements. In weather favorable for air reconnaissance they conducted these movements exclusively at night, and any man caught leaving his hold or shelter during the day was severely punished. According to some reports they did not even stop short of the death penalty in such cases.

They used every available means and power for digging entrenchments. Even civilians were drafted for digging in the front line

at night. We were frequently able to observe that they continued digging with the same fanaticism even when they planned to attack in the immediate future.

German countermeasures: Increased importance was placed on camouflage and terrain observation training. It proved useful, first of all, to present a basic training demonstration which would clearly show all of the possibilities involved. It was necessary to prove that camouflage could be practiced with the simplest, constantly available materials and to emphasize its extraordinary significance. The presentation of such a training demonstration will be described in another paper.

After the awakening of the basic conception and understanding of camouflage, it was necessary to give every soldier further training under simulated combat conditions, so that a check could be made on his ability to put the correct principles into practice. Every slackness in camouflage discipline had to be energetically counteracted, and training had to reach maximum thoroughness through constant practice.

The supreme motto for camouflage and entrenchment-digging was: "Sweat saves blood!" Terrain observation was intimately related to camouflage. Through continuous practice the trainee had to learn to spot any unnatural feature in terrain and to recognize any change in familiar terrain immediately.

3. Russian Defensive Tactics

The Russians defended every meter of their soil with unbelievable tenacity. In a minimum length of time they constructed field fortifications which enabled them to hold their ground with tooth and nail. Although their mobility increased during the course of the war, it was never a decisive attribute. Their strength lay in their stubborn uncompromising defense down to their last breath.

1941-42: At the beginning of the war the Russians knew only the long linear type of defense which they strengthened through the employment of an incomparably large number of entrenchment diggers. The artillery produced only occasional fire concentrations. As a matter of fact, it did demonstrate more mobility than did the infantry, and it employed many roving guns and roving batteries which, because they fired only a short time from any one position, often became very troublesome. The artillery was not effective against a rolling attack because it required too much time to concentrate fire on the target.

1943: This year, while producing no new infantry tactics, showed new methods in the employment of tanks and antitank defenses. Deep in the battle position heavy machine guns and dug-in tanks were encountered, which, because of good armor and the small target area presented, were particularly menacing.

Sectors favorable for tank operations almost always contained AT-gun concentrations which were developed to extraordinary strength. With HE, these guns were also used against infantry targets.

Although practically every town was strongly occupied, reconnaissance showed them to be empty, for no one was allowed to leave his shelter even for fetching food and water except under cover of darkness.

Tank counterthrusts were executed by small formations of tanks, unaccompanied by infantry. They were in most cases at the complete mercy of the German antitank forces. Infantry counterthrusts were infrequent and when employed were launched too late. Otherwise, there were no significant changes in defense methods throughout the war.

The Stalin Organs [multiple-tube rocket launchers], which were employed more and more frequently, had considerable demoralizing, but little actual effect.

The most effective weapons at all times were the medium and heavy mortars, especially after many of the heavy ones were organized into mortar battalions in 1944.

The air force deserves no attention for it was knocked out in the first weeks of the war and was later restricted to the use of obsolete individual planes which flew over the front-line area at night and dropped single bombs.

If the Russians had no intention to go over to the attack, their fire and reconnaissance activity during the day was very meager, while at night small arms fire was increased. If a Russian attack was in the offing, adjustment fire by their weapons on specified points was felt, and increased reconnaissance activity was noticeable.

In most cases it was possible to determine their subsequent point of main effort by the accurate recording of this activity.

While on the defense, the Russians conducted extensive propaganda activity through the use of leaflets and loudspeakers. Local German commanders were particularly subject to attack. During the last years they repeatedly attempted to send back prisoners of war who, after being subjected to severe pressure, were given the mission of undermining morale.

German countermeasures: Russian defensive tactics and numerical superiority forced German attack procedures into new channels. As a result of the tenacious resistance, the extensive use of mines, and the wide unit sectors caused by the vastness of the spaces, attack on a broad front no longer met with the desired results. The previously customary method of attacking in a wide-angle wedge had to give way to that of the sharp wedge. Through the use of an assault-team type of attack, gains could be made with the least number of losses.

This fact implied changes in training and armament. More emphasis had to be placed on the main effort. The formation of the main effort by the use of strong firepower and reserves had been a common practice before. The frugal employment of men was new. It followed that firepower had to be increased. The fire potential of the infantry heavy weapons units was increased through additional medium and heavy mortars, infantry howitzers, and AT guns. The

light mortar, because of its limited range, fell into disuse.

The squad (10 men) was given an additional machine gun with a tremendous cyclic rate and a rifle-grenade launcher which, as the smallest high-angle weapon, was used to reach concealed targets immediately before and after a breach had been made.

Leading attack elements could, under covering fire from the artillery and heavy weapons, advance close to the enemy without themselves having engaged in the fire fight. They were prepared to assault in full force and with maximum use of ammunition. In an attack on a fortified line it was more expedient to allow for losses from our own artillery than to allow a rekindling of enemy resistance by strict observance of safety regulations and thereby to suffer heavier losses.

Since penetration of the enemy positions did not put an end to all resistance, close-combat training was undertaken. In this training the soldier was made thoroughly familiar with every possible situation he might encounter and had to develop lightning-quick, fearless reaction with any weapon at his disposal. The necessary courses* for close-combat training were laid out with simple equipment and demanded slash, thrust, and fire in rapid succession.

After a successful penetration, an immediate continuation of the attack or a rolling-up of the Russian line was necessary.

It was always important to disregard darkness or bad weather if
*Editor's note: The word "course" is used here in the same sense as in "obstacle course."

a successful attack was to be immediately expanded.

In an attack with a limited objective it was necessary to make the promptest preparation for defense. Heavy weapons and artillery had to keep in constant touch with the front line. Changes of position had to be effected by echelon with the utmost speed. The AT guns accompanied the attacking troops, and some of them had to be ready for action at all times. Only under these conditions could an attack achieve success and be continued. If the attack was led by tanks, it was imperative that contact with the tanks be maintained. Transport equipment had to be assembled beforehand in order to be ready for the moment when the tempo mounted. It proved advisable to place the armored infantry together with the tanks in a task force under unified command. A full recognition and employment of fire and movement was the cardinal principle both on the battle-field and in training. The cardinal maxim had to be: "No fire without movement and no movement without fire!"

Superior mental agility plus the improved training produced successes time after time against the numerically superior foe.

III. Russian Attack, German Defense

A. General

The first experiences based on Russian attack methods could be collected in the winter of 1941-42, and further experiences after the fall of 1943. These methods took two forms:

1. mass attack,
2. infiltration.

Mass attack was a result of the Russian numerical superiority. It was designed to roll over the German lines and crush them. It was carried out with heavy concentrations of men formed into as many as seven waves. This method could be opposed only by the superior bravery of the German soldier and the flexibility of the German battle command. The impossible was accomplished, and the German soldier, despite overwhelming enemy forces and in the presence of icy cold to which he was not accustomed, remained victorious.

The second method of attack was developed because of the tremendous size of the area and because of the failure of mass attack. Gaps in the front were exploited for the purpose of dispatching forces back of the German lines (forested areas) where they harassed rear services, inflicted losses, and disrupted supply.

B. Infantry Experiences

First experiences under the terrible, unwonted cold produced the following picture:

At the advent of frost the German front was partly still in movement and not yet prepared for defense. The hard-frozen ground and the heavy snowfalls prevented a systematic construction of defense positions. Under cover of the snowstorms and of the dusk-like weather, the first Russian waves, clad in white camouflage coats, approached unseen close to the German positions. Wave upon wave, spurred on by political commissars, surged against the German lines. Systematic attack preparation by fire concentrations from heavy weapons and artillery or by concentrated commitment of tanks

was unknown to the Russians in the first years of the war.

When the Russian attacks, suffering tremendous losses, were repeatedly doomed to failure, a transition to infiltration tactics was made. This method made use chiefly of swift, mobile forces. If the terrain permitted, preference was given to the use of tanks. In winter, detachments of ski troops were favored.

German countermeasures: The Russian mass attack could be opposed only by an elastic defense in depth and by a well laid out position. The task at higher levels was to provide strong strategic reserves and at lower levels to build up mobile, powerful combat reserves. Everything depended on quick, determined action. The Russians could not be allowed to gain time for expanding their initial successes, for going over to a continued attack, or for defending the ground they had won.

Winter warfare necessitated new methods in the care and handling of weapons as well as in the choice of maintenance materials, for otherwise they failed to function in the extreme cold.

Individuals assigned to the trains and supply units had to be trained as full-fledged combat soldiers in order that they might counteract these tactics of infiltration. It became necessary to give protection to all roads and towns near the front or to prepare them for all-around defense. These measures also had to be taken in rear areas against partisan bands; units of adequate fighting strength had to be immediately available for engaging them.

C. Russian Offensive Tactics:

Except for small, local patrol actions, the Russians invariably attacked on a broad front and assembled overwhelming forces for the purpose. Co-ordination between the different arms was noticeably improved and patterned after the German form of attack, except, of course, for the assault-team attack. The Russian offensive tactics were subjected to many changes by the lessons learned during the course of the war. Following is a summary of their development:

1941-42: In the winter, after reserves had been brought up, the Russians went over to mass attacks, often improvised, supported by strong, but unsystematic artillery fire. Co-ordination among the various infantry weapons was also poor. Attacks against tactical boundary points posed a definite threat, and such points were sought out and frequently discovered.

1943: This year brought a distinctly new concept of offensive tactics. Sudden artillery fire concentrations were supplemented by massed surprise fire from mortars. The Russians attempted to infiltrate at known soft spots in the German lines. For this purpose they preferred wooded areas or depressions which had previously been designated by the tactical command. If they were successful in dribbling through by this bellwether system, they immediately dug in and eventually laid mines. Then came the critical moment, for the forward displacement of the artillery and heavy weapons was slow and co-ordination was no longer possible.

1944: Again there was a revolutionary change in Russian tactics. Attacks were now made by tanks followed by deep wedges of infantry. Although there was good support from the artillery initially, liaison frequently broke down later. Penetrations were extended as deeply as possible and kept stubbornly in a straight line. Then there was a halt in order to allow the infantry to move up during the night in as large numbers as possible. Upon reaching the most advanced attack elements, the infantry immediately dug in. The attack wedges were brought up by echelon.

1945: Since the Germans during the previous year had frequently closed in when tanks were cut off from the infantry, the Russians now began to make deep armored thrusts with infantry riding on the tanks. These thrusts were frequently not co-ordinated with the main forces and often completely and recklessly separated from the main body of troops.

Except for reconnaissance or combat patrol activity, no night attacks were made by the Russians throughout the entire war.

Snipers were employed even during attacks for picking off individual targets. At home, these snipers enjoyed special privileges which increased in proportion to their total score. They wore huge medals, for example, and enjoyed free admission to motion pictures, free transportation on streetcars, etc.

Large quantities of alcoholic beverages were issued to the Russian soldiers immediately before an attack.

It was a constant source of amazement how quickly the Russians after a successful local break-through could organize a defense. They continued to dig in even when they occupied former German trenches.

The Russians were particularly vulnerable immediately after a successful penetration. Energetically executed German counter-thrusts could dislodge them very quickly even when undertaken with numerically inferior forces.

German countermeasures: German prewar defensive tactics did not measure up to the requirements of the war in Russia. Employment of two-thirds of the forces in the first trench and one-third as reserves did not prove satisfactory. If this was done, strong fire preparation decimated the main force before it engaged the enemy, and enemy tanks, once they had broken through the front line, had to fear only little opposition from infantry or armor-piercing weapons. The previously customary placing of positions on forward slopes had to be abandoned in favor of locations on reverse slopes in order to achieve concealment and to avoid direct fire. The following plan for field fortifications (MLR for large-scale operations) proved to be the strongest: Forward trench on reverse slope with clear field of fire to the crest. Prior to the major attack, observation of the line to be prevented by combat outposts. Not more than one-third of the personnel to be assigned to man the forward ~~XXXXXX~~ trench and combat outposts. The second trench to be located at a distance of about 200 to 300 meters from the forward trench,

and possibly a third one at a similar distance behind the second one. According to the situation, the second and third trench could serve as a base for continued defense or as a line of departure for the launching of a counterthrust or counterattack. Most of the heavy weapons and all of the artillery to be located back of the last trench. Antitank action was initially limited to Panzerfaeuste [recoilless antitank grenade launchers], bazookas, and antitank rifles, so that the location of the AT guns would not be prematurely divulged. In terrain suitable for tank attack, AT guns had to be set up, if possible, in positions where they could achieve flanking and surprise fire against the tanks. It was necessary to construct as many well-camouflaged alternate positions as possible for all weapons.

All forces held in readiness for counterthrusts had to be made thoroughly familiar with their possible operations and, after detailed terrain reconnaissance (especially for tanks, had to practice constantly all maneuvers they might be called on to execute. An alert reaction, strong use of fire, and great élan could always repulse the Russians at once.

Signal communications had to be carefully secured, and, in the event of their breakdown, the heavy weapons and artillery had to fire according to a predetermined plan.

The following new concepts were introduced into the defense:

MLR consists of several trenches, is located on the reverse slope, is weak in front and strong at the rear.

Powerful, mobile reserves have to be formed at all cost and must be in a constant state of combat readiness.

An abundance of alternate positions.

No fire from the actual line of fortifications except in case of a major attack.

All positions concealed from land and air observation.

Constant regrouping.

The MLR had to be like a rubber band which gives under pressure, but which rebounds all the faster.

Because the front was often thinly held and full of gaps, the Russians made use of infiltration. This practice could be met by:

Increased use of mines, increased reserves with tracked and wheeled vehicles, intensive reconnaissance activity by combat patrols within the MLR.

The customary strong-point type of defense had too many disadvantages to be designated as the correct one.

IV. Combat under Special Conditions

The mentality of the Russians led them to prefer combat in woods and towns, for there they could bring their cunning into full play. On the other hand, they showed a strong aversion to the German night attacks.

It was natural for the Germans also to train for combat in woods and towns, so that they would not need to shun it. But particular value was placed on training for night operations in order that the Russians' weak spot could be struck repeatedly.

During the later years, the short-term training necessitated by the war allowed hardly any night operations, for such action required well-trained men who could operate as a team.

V. Delaying Action and Retrograde Movement

Observations of the Russian tactics in retrograde movement could best be made in the first years of the war. When they suffered defeat on a broad front, they re-established broad defense lines only after reaching an area far to the rear. At such times, massed marches at maximum speed were made. At this point it was important to keep after them with all means in order to deny them any opportunity for a renewed defense. The German practice of delaying action by leap-frog employment of units and lines of resistance in close succession was unknown to the Russians. At any rate, this method which required great mobility and leadership of high quality was not used by them.

VI. Conclusion

This work was intended as an over-all view of the combat methods employed by the opposing sides and of the countermeasures taken by the Waffen-SS against the Russian tactics.

The "How" of the training will be taken up in further studies.

Translated by Mr. Britt Bailey