AD-A184 711 THE ROLE OF INITIATIVE IN SOVIET OPERATIONAL COMMAND 1/1
(U) ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT
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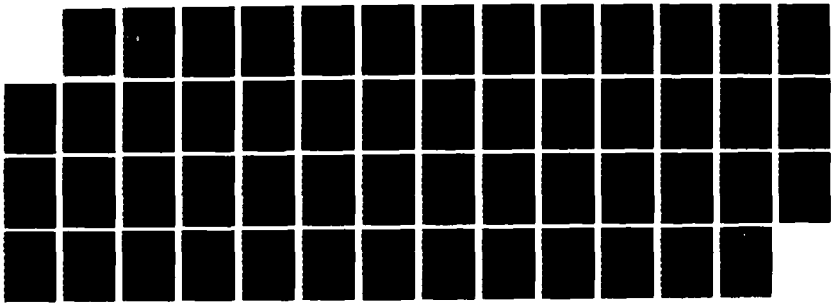

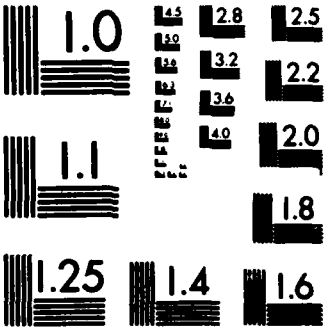

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The Role of Initiative in Soviet Operational Command

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by

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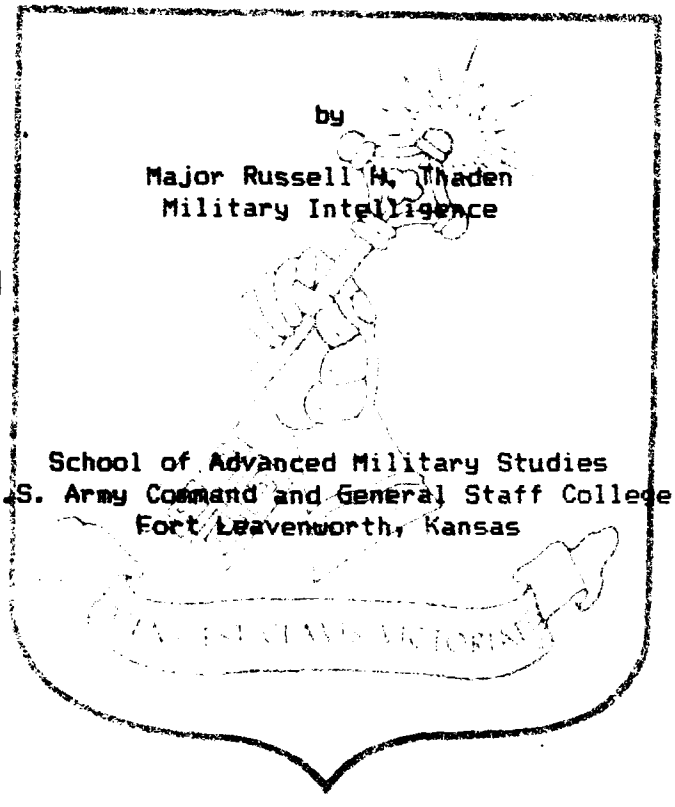
Military Intelligence



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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No 0704-0188
Exp Date Jun 30, 1986

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY	3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION School of Advanced Military Studies, USAC&GSC 6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) ATZL-SWV	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION 8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. / PROJECT NO. / TASK NO. / WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)
The Role of Initiative in Soviet Operational Command (U)

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)
MAJ Russell H. Thaden, USA

13a. TYPE OF REPORT	13b. TIME COVERED	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day)	15. PAGE COUNT
Monograph	FROM _____ TO _____	87/05/20	50

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION

17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	Soviet Army	Battle of Kursk	Rotmistrov
			Soviet doctrine	mobile group	Koniev
			initiative	Popov	World War II

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

This monograph examines the role of initiative in Soviet operational level command. It seeks to answer the question: Do Soviet operational commanders have the personal initiative and latitude to react to unexpected or changed situations on their own responsibility? This question is prompted by a real perception that Soviet commanders tend to be rigid and inflexible due to over centralized command and control. If this perception is correct, the Soviet Army may be unable to react rapidly to changing situations. If it is false, Western military doctrine and planning may be based on false assumptions.

This paper begins by defining the terms of the discussion. It defines the concept of personal initiative as it relates to military command. The paper points out that there is a common view that the Soviet concept is more

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20 DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT	21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
☒ UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☐ SAME AS RPT. ☐ DTIC USERS	UNCLASSIFIED

22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL	22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code)	22c OFFICE SYMBOL
MAJ Russell H. Thaden	(913) 684-2138	ATZL-SWV

DD FORM 1473, 84 MAR 83 APR edition may be used until exhausted. All other editions are obsolete.

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

UNCLASSIFIED

19 continued:

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Next the monograph discusses the changes that have impacted on the initiative of Soviet commanders since World War II. Major factors are the complete mechanization of their forces, the impact of the atomic bomb, the role of advancing technology, and the changes in Soviet society and government. All of these changes tend to make it more necessary and possible for Soviet commanders to exercise their initiative.

The monograph concludes that Soviet commanders are quite capable of exercising initiative in planning and conducting operations. This has a significant impact on U.S. doctrine and operational planning. The implication is that understanding the personality and skill of opposing Soviet commanders is extremely important as it affects Soviet capabilities as much as does their armament and doctrine.

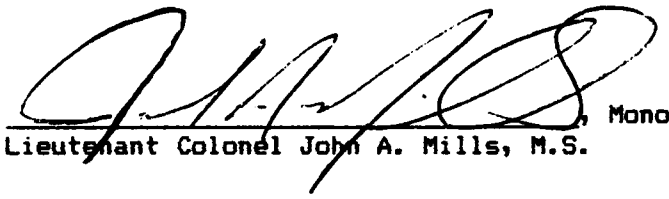
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

Name of Student: Major Russell H. Thaden

Title of Monograph: The Role of Initiative in Soviet Operational Command

Approved by:



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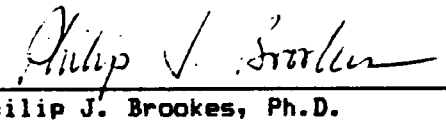

Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D., Director, Graduate Degree Programs

Accepted this 27th day of May 1987.

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF INITIATIVE IN SOVIET OPERATIONAL COMMAND: by Major Russell H. Thaden, USA, 46 pages.

This monograph examines the role of initiative in Soviet operational level command. It seeks to answer the question: Do Soviet operational commanders have the personal initiative and latitude to react to unexpected or changed situations on their own responsibility? This question is prompted by a real perception that Soviet commanders tend to be rigid and inflexible due to over centralized command and control. If this perception is correct, the Soviet Army may be unable to react rapidly to changing situations. If it is false, Western military doctrince and planning may be based on false assumptions.

This paper begins by defining the terms of the discussion. It defines the concept of personal initiative as it relates to military command. The paper points out that there is a common view that the Soviet concept is more restrictive than the U.S. concept, but concludes that there is really much in common. The paper also defines doctrine as it is used in the discussion.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Army doctrinal view of combat "the most essential element of combat power is competent and confident leadership."[1] While this has doubtlessly always been true, the nature of modern warfare makes this observation much more significant. Patton's Third Army exemplified the large scale mobile operations of World War II. Since that time there has been a tremendous leap in the ability of military forces to move rapidly over great distances and to strike targets with unprecedented range and precision. Added to this is the ever present threat of the use of nuclear and chemical weapons. These changes in warfare increase the always high probability that operational commanders will be faced with unexpected and rapid changes in the situation.

In order to win on a rapidly changing modern battlefield, a force requires great agility which is "the ability of friendly forces to act faster than the enemy."[2] A critical component in this agility is the ability of the commander to react quickly to changing situations. As FM 100-5 puts it, "leaders must continuously 'read the battlefield,' decide quickly, and act without hesitation."[3] This requirement clearly implies that an operational commander must be able and willing to exercise personal initiative in changing circumstances. He also must operate in a structure that allows sufficient freedom of action that he can achieve agility with respect to the enemy.

The question this paper seeks to answer is: Do Soviet operational commanders have the personal initiative and the latitude to react to unexpected or changed situations on their own responsibility? This issue is raised because the Soviet Union has a deserved reputation as a very centralized and tightly controlled society. The Soviet Army shares this reputation. Theoretically, an army that is so centrally controlled has the

potential of being unable to react quickly to changing situations. This can occur because its operational commanders are neither trained to develop personal initiative nor allowed the latitude to act on their own responsibility.

The answer to this question is important because the Soviet Army is clearly the largest and most dangerous army that the United States and its allies may confront. In addition, the majority of the smaller armies that are potential adversaries of the United States have been heavily influenced by Soviet theory and practice. Finally, our own doctrine and operational planning is based heavily on our perceptions of the Soviet way of war.

Central to these perceptions are our views about Soviet agility and the potential inability of centrally planned Soviet operations to respond to unexpected events. If an inability or unwillingness of Soviet operational commanders to react to unexpected events unhinges the Soviet plan, it may well leave the Soviets vulnerable to defeat. On the other hand, American commanders may incorrectly expect Soviet commanders to lack initiative and to be more rigid than they are. If this is so, it is the American commander's plan which will be unhinged. It is he who may be surprised and vulnerable to defeat.

Before examining the ability of Soviet operational level commanders to exercise personal initiative, this paper will briefly establish some terms of reference for the discussion. In order to discuss initiative, a common definition is required. Since doctrine is not synonymous in American and Soviet usage, it will also be defined.

Next, this paper will examine some of the prevalent Western perceptions of the Soviet operational command style. It will become clear that there is a

strong perception of operational rigidity on the part of Soviet commanders. Many believe this is a Soviet operational weakness that can be exploited.

The paper will then turn to an examination of Soviet operational initiative through World War II. This will include a look at the relevant Soviet doctrine and the degree to which Soviet doctrine perceived a need for commander's initiative. The Soviet Army had a well developed theory of operations that influenced them throughout World War II.

The actual Soviet operational experience was more important than the theoretical precepts that governed their thinking. To provide evidence regarding Soviet practice, three cases will be examined. The first will be Popov's attack in the aftermath of the Stalingrad campaign early in 1943. This attack resulted in a sharp defeat due to Popov's inability to react to a changed situation. The next case will be the operations of Rotmistrov's tank army during the Battle of Kursk in mid-1943. During this battle Rotmistrov demonstrated a great sense of personal initiative and responsibility as he reacted to rapidly changing circumstances. The third case will be an examination of the initiative shown by a front commander, Marshal Ivan Koniev, as he planned and conducted front level operations during the summer 1944 offensive.

From the historical analysis of Soviet experience through World War II, the paper will turn to an examination of the changes in Soviet doctrine and practice since World War II. Over the past 42 years great changes occurred in the technology of warfare. At the same time, the experienced Soviet wartime commanders largely left the scene. Except for the fighting in Afghanistan, the new Soviet army and front commanders have not had significant combat experience. Considering these factors, the paper will attempt to assess where

the Soviet Army is now in its ability to develop and tolerate initiative in its operational commanders.

Based on the doctrine and demonstrated performance of Soviet commanders, it will become apparent that the Soviet Army has a keen appreciation for the demands of modern warfare. This certainly extends to an appreciation for the need to seize and retain the initiative. Soviet theoreticians know that, in large part, this is done through an ability to act faster than the enemy which is the essence of agility. They also have a clear appreciation of the role of uncertainty in warfare and the necessity for being able to quickly react to changing circumstances. To the degree that American planners count on the Soviet to be rigid and predictable in their operations, they are counting on a Soviet weakness that has been substantially over rated.

Before turning to Western perceptions about the level of Soviet initiative, it is appropriate to clarify the terms of discussion. In the context of this paper, the kind of initiative that will be examined is the personal quality or trait of having "the spirit needed to originate action: a man of <u>initiative</u>."[4] To the degree that a campaign or major operation is shaped and conducted by the commander, the quality and degree of his personal initiative becomes an important factor in the outcome.

This kind of initiative is not synonymous with the ability to set or change the terms of battle which is the general sense of the term used in current doctrine.[5] However the two are clearly linked. A commander may be prevented by his personality, training, or the system he works within from exercising his personal initiative. If so, he will be unable to see and react quickly to changing situations. He cannot hope to achieve the operational initiative necessary to set the terms of battle.

It is also important to understand the Soviet concept of initiative. According to the Soviet Dictionary of Basic Military Terms, initiative of the commander is

> 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 the assigned mission, in utilizing favorable opportunities, and in taking the most expedient measures promptly, without awaiting orders from ones superior.[6]

This definition may seem compatible with Western concepts of initiative. However, there is a strong perception that the Soviet Army sees initiative in a greatly restricted sense. As an important example, a 1978 U.S. manual on the Soviet Army emphasizes the regimented nature of the Soviet Army. It asserts that "primarily, there is no provision for the unexpected. When initiative is seen in terms of finding a correct solution within normative patterns, a sudden lack of norms may place a commander, at whatever level, in an unexpected and perilous situation."[7]

Today, there is still a strong body of thought that the Soviet concept of initiative is very restricted. For instance, in his more recent study of the Soviet military, Cockburn cites this same passage from the U.S. manual. He uses it as evidence of Soviet inflexibility to support his thesis that the perceived Soviet threat has been greatly inflated.[8]

These views of the lack of Soviet flexibility are not unanimous. For instance, in a major study of Soviet operational concepts, Richard Simpkin strongly expresses his opinion that the Soviet definition of initiative is not more restricted than the Western version. He asserts that

> the Soviet concept of tank operations calls for at least the same degree of initiative right down to at least battalion level as did blitzkrieg or does

> Israeli armoured doctrine or General Starry's . . . 'landair battle'. Probably, just as in the armed forces of liberal democracies, an independent move is praised as initiative if it succeeds and damned as incompetence or even insubordination if it does not.[9]

From the Soviet definition it would be difficult to draw the restrictive interpretation that is frequently ascribed to the Soviets by Western observers. The definition emphasizes the need to work within the mission and the intent of the higher commander. However, the Soviet commander is clearly enjoined to take advantage of opportunities and to find the best method to accomplish his mission. He is expected to be ready to take a calculated risk and to act promptly without waiting for orders. This is entirely consistent with Western concepts of initiative. This paper will examine the degree to which Soviet operational commanders live up to this definition.

Before going on to the Western Perceptions of actual Soviet operational practice, it is necessary to clarify the use of the term doctrine in this paper. The Soviet use of the term is much broader than the American usage and encompasses both political and military aspects.[10] This paper will use doctrine in the more limited American sense which is that "an army's fundamental doctrine is the condensed expression of its approach to fighting campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements."[11]

WESTERN PERCEPTIONS

Turning now to the Western view of the Soviet military, it is clear that many apparent Soviet weaknesses relate directly to a perceived lack of initiative. For instance, one recent work that emphasizes Soviet military failings lists seven key weaknesses. Among these failings, the list states that the Soviet military relies too heavily on advance planning which contributes to a rigid operational style. The Soviet command style is stated to be too cumbersome for mobile warfare. There is excessive reporting and

orders that are overly restrictive. Finally, the emphasis placed on political indoctrination and control is incompatible with the initiative and freedom of action required in mobile war.[12] Purportedly this leads to a "paralysis of decision making based on excessive control."[13]

Much of this perception is based on Soviet performance during World War II as related by their former German enemies. Major General von Mellenthin provides one of the better known sources of information about the performance of the Red Army during World War II. Reading the account of his experiences in Russia, it is understandable why, in discussing Soviet officers, he would say that

> the junior officers, and many among the middle command group, were still clumsy and unable to take decisions; because of draconian discipline they were afraid of shouldering responsibility. Purely rigid training squeezed the lower commanders into the vice of manuals and regulations and robbed them of the initiative.[14]

Another senior German officer, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, wrote that one of the reasons for the Soviet defeats early in the war was "the lack of ability and of initiative, as well as the lack of readiness to accept responsibility on the part of the higher, intermediate, and subordinate officers."[15] While admitting that the Soviets learned a great deal during the war, Manstein down played any improvements in Soviet flexibility and initiative. He states that, while the Soviet commanders did learn to concentrate forces against selected points, "this was easily fulfilled through the massive numbers which the command had at its disposal."[16] He also emphasizes the stereotypical nature of Soviet operations and writes that "a certain sameness in the planning of operations was retained."[17]

The former German officers provide an invaluable source of information about the Soviet Army. However, it should be kept in mind that they are not a totally objective source. The German memoirs and accounts are subject to the

normal human tendency to emphasize one's own accomplishments and discount the enemy's skill. Because of this, the German accounts emphasize the role of Soviet numbers and mass in "steamroller" attacks. They tend to down play the considerable operational flexibility and initiative that many Soviet commanders exhibited in the last half of the war.

The German view of the Soviet Army is still widely held. Peter Vigor makes the case that the "common view among NATO officers is that initsiativa equals 'initiative,' and that the Soviets do not display it." As he quite rightly points out, the key question is whether this NATO view is correct.[18] The question this paper will seek to help answer is the degree to which the personal initiative of the Soviet operational level commander can be expected to be a part of the Soviet method of conducting war.

It is apparent that there is a strong body of opinion in the West that believes one of the major weaknesses of the Soviet Army is the lack of initiative of its operational commanders. Having shown why it is extremely important to have an accurate view of this issue, this paper will now turn to the historical record of Soviet doctrine and practice through World War II as a spring board to the present.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

PRE-WORLD WAR II DOCTRINE

During the 1920's and 1930's the Red Army developed its theoretical and doctrinal concepts of operation. In particular, Tukhachevsky, a renowned Civil War hero and leading military theoretician, oversaw the development of the concept of deep battle and deep operations. As Colonel Glantz, a close student of Soviet military history, describes it, "the Soviets built an improving military force in the mid-thirties which was designed to conduct

mobile war and refined a military doctrine which emphasized extensive maneuver by mechanized forces at the tactical and operational level."[19] As another author points out in an analysis of the Russian use of mobile forces, the Red Army understood how "important was the need to take a flexible, creative approach toward the execution of their tasks; to show initiative and to be alive to the many possibilities inherent in mechanized warfare."[20]

The Red Army did more than discuss the concept of initiative on a theoretical basis. Specific guidance was officially promulgated as doctrine in the Field Service Regulations: Soviet Army, 1936 (Tentative) which stated under the section on general principles that

> personal initiative on the part of subordinates is of utmost importance when confronted with a sudden change in the combat situation. Intelligent personal initiative on the part of subordinates should always be encouraged and properly utilized by the commander in the general interest of the battle. Intelligent initiative is based on a proper understanding of the plan of the commander and an endeavor to find a better means for executing his plan, and the utilization of every available opportunity in the rapidly changing situation.[21]

These same regulations go on repeatedly to emphasize the importance of personal initiative in the section on control in battle. For instance they state that

> the best results will be achieved in battle when all commanders, from the highest to the lowest, are trained in the spirit of bold initiative. Personal initiative is of decisive importance. [Emphasis in original] Proper control on the part of the senior commander involves: a clear and succinct manner of setting forth missions; the proper selection of the direction of attack and the timely concentration of sufficiently strong forces for the purpose; provision for proper cooperation of units and for the greatest possible utilization of personal initiative; support and exploitation of success at any particular point of the front.[22]

WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCE

Having looked briefly at Soviet pre-war doctrine, the key question is how did the higher level operational commanders actually function. In this regard, Mellenthin's comments in his memoirs about the junior and middle rank officers' lack of initiative strongly overshadow his comment about the higher level commanders. As he points out, "during the war they were improving all the time, and the higher commanders and staffs learned much from the Germans and from their own experience. They became adaptable, energetic, and ready to take decisions."[23] This observation should be kept in mind as this paper examines the performance of a number of Soviet commanders.

As is well known, the initial German offensives in 1941 totally shattered the Soviet defenses. The Soviet response was poorly coordinated and frequently inept. As a generalization, the German observations about the lack of initiative on the part of Soviet commanders are undoubtedly true of this period. Eventually the Soviets did hold and stop the German offensive short of Moscow and even launched major counteroffensives. The next year the Germans attacked again and were only held at Stalingrad. The tide turned with the Soviet counteroffensive that surrounded the German Sixth Army in Stalingrad in November 1942. Before the front finally stabilized in March 1943, a series of Soviet offensives nearly destroyed the entire southern wing of the German Army.

General Popov - February 1943

The first commander this paper will examine is Lieutenant General M. M. Popov. He served as one of the key operational level commanders during the series of Soviet offensive operations early in 1943. These offensives grew out of the optimistic Soviet estimate in January that the entire German southern wing was conducting a strategic withdrawal.[24] General N. F.

Vatutin's Southwestern Front was to play the main role by attacking to the southwest and south. His mission was to outflank Manstein's Army Group Don and pin it against the Sea of Azov. Vatutin had four armies and an army-sized 'front mobile group' commanded by General Popov for this operation.[25]

General Popov had one of the most potent forces in the Southwestern Front for his role in Operation Gallop. Popov's force included 55,000 soldiers with four tank corps [actually division size units], three rifle divisions, two tank brigades, and one ski brigade. His tank strength had eroded to 212 during the recent operations, but it still represented approximately half of the total front tank strength.[26]

Popov's mission was to pass between the Soviet 6th and 1st Guards Armies and attack first southwest from the Donetz River toward Krasnoarmeiskoye and then nearly due south to Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. This would cut off the enemy withdrawal from the Donbas region. According to Glantz, Popov's tank corps were

> to advance up to 300 kilometers deep, slice up the enemy defensive formations, pin them into population centers . . . so that rifle forces could destroy them piecemeal, and pave the way for a decisive and rapid advance of front main forces. To avoid the problems of deep operations experienced in the middle Don operation, most tank corps cooperated with specific rifle divisions which were reinforced with motor transport or whose men rode on the tanks.[27]

The formation of a front mobile group was apparently somewhat experimental at this time. Popov's mobile group was an ad hoc organization that was formed on 27 January and went into action only two days later.[28] The brief time that Popov had to prepare for this operation may have had an influence on the problems he experienced during the attack.

Although Popov made some progress in his attack, his force was unable to move into the depths of the German defenses nearly as fast as desired. On 6

February two of his tank corps were still tied up in fighting for Kramatorsk well short of Krasnoarmeiskoye. Neither had the strength to conduct any kind of sustained drive. At the same time Popov's other two tank corps were still bogged down supporting rifle units further north.[29] However, the Germans were not in good shape either. The XXXX Panzer Corps opposing Popov's mobile group was down to only 16 and 35 tanks in its two panzer divisions.[30]

Acting on Vatutin's orders, on 11 February one of Popov's tank corps broke free from Kramatorsk and conducted a forced march, over terrain the Germans considered impassable, to seize Krasnoarmeiskoye.[31] Four days later a second tank corps managed to reinforce the tank corps now bogged down in Krasnoarmeiskoye. Finally, Popov sent a third tank corps into Krasnoarmeiskoye. While these units had all they could do to hold on against the German counterattacks, the Southwest Front continued to order them to attack. In fact, while German units were beginning to bypass Popov's units and move north, he was ordered to surround the German forces and not permit them to withdraw.[32]

By the middle of February, Popov's mobile group was down to 13,000 men and 53 operational tanks. He had lost 90 tanks in just two days. At the same time the Southwest Front was aware of the movement of German tanks and motorized units in the area. These German concentrations were interpreted to be covering forces for the continued withdrawal of German forces to the Dnepr River. Vatutin decided to 'broaden' his offensive and ordered Popov to continue his attack to the south to Stalino and Mariupol.[33]

Ultimately, the situation of Popov's mobile group became quite desperate. Finally on the night of 20-21 February, he requested Vatutin's permission to withdraw northward. "Vatutin scolded Popov for his request stating that such a movement would permit an enemy withdrawal . . . and would

also expose the flank and rear of 6th Army." Vatutin prohibited a withdrawal, ordered Popov to accomplish his attack mission, and directed that Popov use part of his force to begin a pursuit of the supposedly withdrawing Germans.[34]

From 20 through 24 February the German XXXX Panzer Corps resumed its attack north. Popov's mobile group was defeated and forced to pull back virtually to its original start line. Regardless of the defeat, the captured Soviet officers continued to state that the mobile group's mission was to prevent a German withdrawal.[35] In only three weeks of fighting one of the most powerful forces in Vatutin's Southwest Front was totally defeated and virtually destroyed. The Germans regained the initiative and went on to expand the scope of the Soviet defeat.

In looking at this operation it is clear that Popov neither took nor was allowed any room for personal initiative. The front commander gave him specific orders and continually pushed him to keep attacking. On those occasions when Popov recommended that the attack be stopped and that his forces should be withdrawn, he was sarcastically overruled. In the end, his mobile group was rendered combat ineffective and forced to retreat back nearly to its original start line.

It is difficult to assess how much Popov's lack of initiative related to the Soviet command and control system. Communications do not appear to have been a problem. There is no indication that Vatutin and Popov were unable to contact one another. It also seems apparent that Popov could communicate with his subordinates. He clearly was aware of the diminishing strength of his units and the increasing German resistance that they faced.

An important factor in Popov's lack of initiative may have been his personality and his personal relationship with his commander. Popov did not have Vatutin's confidence to the degree that Vatutin would take his

recommendations. Failing that, Popov obviously was unwilling to risk the disapproval of his commander. He could not or would not take independent action even in the face of a totally changed situation.

This case presents the kind of inflexibility and lack of initiative that a Western military commander would hope to see. Popov and his commander provide strong support for the German perceptions about Soviet performance. It would be good to remember, however, that the Soviet senior leadership was continually learning and improving. Also, Popov's force was an ad hoc organization created and committed to combat in haste. It was perhaps too much to expect it to be an agile and flexible team so quickly. Perhaps a more important insight is that Popov was not punished for the results of this operation. A few months later he was promoted to Colonel General and received command of a front.[36]

General Rotmistrov - July to August 1943

From an example of poor initiative, the next case study will turn to a clear example of strong personal initiative. Lieutenant General Pavel A. Rotmistrov commanded 5th Guards Tank Army (5GTA) during the Battle of Kursk. Like General Popov, Rotmistrov faced unexpected and changing situations. Unlike Popov, Rotmistrov demonstrated a great willingness to decide and act rapidly even when his commander disagreed. As will become apparent, Rotmistrov not only took the responsibility to change the manner of execution of his mission, he took the responsibility to change his mission when the situation dictated.

During the several month lull in operations prior to the Battle of Kursk, Rotmistrov took over the newly formed 5GTA. His army initially was part of the Soviet strategic reserve. This was later formed into the Steppe Front commanded initially by Popov and later by Colonel General Koniev.

Rotmistrov was specifically responsible for training the armored forces under Koniev's command.[37] Easing Rotmistrov's task greatly was the fact that the Soviets adopted a new totally mechanized structure for their tank armies. This replaced the the composite mix of tanks, infantry, and cavalry previously used.[38]

On 9 July 5GTA was subordinated to Vatutin's Voronezh Front and ordered to concentrate northeast of Prokhorovka. This required a difficult forced march of over 225 miles. Lead elements of 5GTA began to arrive late on 9 July.[39] Rotmistrov's original force of two tank and one mechanized corps was filled out with two more tank corps giving him a total of 850 tanks.[40] For the actual battle, Rotmistrov was now under the command of the same General Vatutin who had been so unwilling to allow Popov to exercise his initiative in the winter battles.

Three days later, on 12 July, a giant meeting engagement took place near Prokhorovka as the Germans attacked north and Rotmistrov attacked south. According to Erickson there were 900 German tanks with 100 heavy Tiger tanks against a similar number of Soviet tanks under Rotmistrov.[41] Rotmistrov writes that the numbers were in German favor and states that he didn't take his objective in the attack.[42] In any case, approximately 300 German tanks were destroyed along with a similar number of 5GTA's tanks in the largest tank battle in history.[43] According to Glantz, 5GTA's losses may have been as much as two-thirds of its tank strength.[44] The German offensive was stopped and the Russians prepared to launch their counteroffensive.

The battle at Prokhorovka was a prelude to the important role Rotmistrov's 5GTA played in the Voronezh and Steppe Front counteroffensive known as Operation "Rumyantsev". This operation eventually took Belgorod and Kharkov. It began the series of offensives that ejected the Germans from the

Ukraine and southern Russia. Rotmistrov had shown his ability to slug it out with the Germans. With his army greatly reduced in strength, Rotmistrov now demonstrated his ability to exercise personal initiative. During Operation "Rumyantsev" he conducted a series of difficult operations in a rapidly changing situation.

For Operation "Rumyantsev" 5GTA went back to its original structure of two tank and one mechanized corps. Rotmistrov's army, "reduced to a strength of 150-200 tanks after the major tank battle at Prokhorovka (12 July), was brought up to a strength of over 500 tanks by 3 August."[45] The plan called for Rotmistrov's army to be committed on the first day of the operation as a front mobile group. He would begin operations after Lieutenant General Zhadov's 5th Guards Army in the first echelon had penetrated 10 kilometers in to the German defenses.[46] Rotmistrov's mission was to advance approximately 100 kilometers into the German depths within three days.[47]

The Soviet attack began on 3 August and quickly penetrated the German defenses. The 5GTA was committed the first day, as planned, and was 26 kilometers into the German rear by nightfall.[48] However, the next day Rotmistrov's two tank corps ran into the deployed 6th Panzer Division and were only able to gain 3-4 kilometers. Initially, Rotmistrov decided to commit his second echelon mechanized corps to crush the resistance. However, on Koniev's request, Vatutin ordered Rotmistrov to release his mechanized corps temporarily to the Steppe Front. Without the mechanized corps, several more attacks on the 6th Panzers failed. Learning of the success of 1st Tank Army (1TA) on his right flank, Rotmistrov immediately ordered one tank corps to swing west and south in an envelopment of the enemy while his remaining tank corps attacked from the front.[49]

The envelopment worked and Rotmistrov's lead tank corps was able to advance 30 kilometers on 5 August. Just before dawn on 6 August, its lead elements ran into the 3d Panzer Division which was just arriving from the south. The Germans had moved the 3d Panzer Division up in an hasty attempt to plug the gap in their lines. Later in the day Rotmistrov's second tank corps arrived, but both were stopped by the Germans. Rotmistrov ordered his mechanized corps south just as it was returned to him from Koniev's front. Using all of his forces, Rotmistrov was able to continue a slow advance through 8 August.[50]

Against the stiffening German resistance, Rotmistrov's attacks had little chance of success. On 10 August, Vatutin ordered Rotmistrov to break off his attack and shift his army to an assembly area 40 kilometers to the west. Expecting to support 1TA in its new attack, 5GTA moved out on 12 August only to run into SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" and a major German counterattack. After achieving no success in his attack,

> Rotmistrov met with his corps commanders at the army observation post east of Bogodukhov. After discussing the days's activities, like Katukhov of 1st Tank Army, Rotmistrov ordered his exhausted corps to go on the defense.[51]

It was at this point that Rotmistrov showed his willingness to take personal responsibility to the extent of disobeying unrealistic orders. The German counterattacks forced the 1TA to withdraw which uncovered Rotmistrov's right flank. He had to defend his sector and protect his flank with only 100 remaining tanks. At the same time both Vatutin and Koniev ordered him to "smash through to Novaya Vodolaga" which was approximately 50 kilometers to his southeast.

> Rotmistrov replied that, 'if he moved his forces the enemy would take Bogodukhov.' Despite the front commander's desires, 5th Guards Tank Army remained riveted to its defenses until 17 August when, after

> fighting in the Bogodukhov sector quieted down, 5th Guards Tank Army was ordered to renew its offensive operations.[52]

When Rotmistrov attacked on 18 August, it was after a night move on 17-18 August of his army to an assembly area 30 kilometers back to the east. He attacked at 0700 with an attached rifle corps and one of his own tank corps in the first echelon. His plan was to commit his mechanized corps and remaining tank corps in succession after penetrating the German tactical defenses. The Germans halted his attack in the forward defenses so Rotmistrov committed the mechanized corps early to keep the attack moving. Even with the impetus of the mechanized corps, he realized that the attack was not going to succeed. Shortly after noon on the 18th he stopped his tank corps before it was committed. Rotmistrov pulled back his tanks and went back on the defense.[53] Apparently these decisions were all taken on Rotmistrov's own initiative. Finally, on 20 August Rotmistrov's army was released to Koniev to help encircle and capture Kharkov. This ended Rotmistrov's role in Vatutin's Voronezh Front.[54]

During the six weeks that Rotmistrov served under Vatutin, he amply demonstrated his willingness and ability to exercise personal initiative. When advance was possible, he showed great ability to move his forces rapidly and decisively into the depths of the enemy defenses. When faced with unexpected and changed situations, he reacted quickly and decisively. A typical example was his rapid shift into 1TA's sector to envelop a panzer division that was holding him up. When the enemy situation made continued advance impossible, Rotmistrov went to the defense on his own authority. The combined urgings of two front commanders was not enough to make him give up the courage of his convictions. Only after another quick redeployment did he go back on the offensive. Again, he made decisive and timely decisions. He

committed his second echelon early. Then he halted his third echelon rather than continue an attack that was obviously failing.

Beyond some of the specific instances cited, it can be inferred from some of 5GTA's activities over the six weeks that Rotmistrov exercised great initiative and agility. His army changed front commands twice, successfully fought the largest tank battle of the war after a 250 mile forced march, and completed a major reconstitution. It rapidly planned its participation in a major new operation, redeployed over substantial distances at least six times, made at least four major attacks, and accomplished frequent and substantial task organization changes. It is beyond comprehension that this could have been done by a rigid, centrally managed structure without the active and intelligent initiative of the army commander.

In addition to Rotmistrov's display of initiative, it is noteworthy how tolerant his superiors seemed to be of his deviations from the plan. The same General Vatutin who allowed Popov no latitude in his operations allowed major deviations from Rotmistrov. This was true even though Rotmistrov had only been under his command for a few weeks. For whatever reasons, Rotmistrov obviously had the confidence of his commander. Rotmistrov was quite willing to act on his own responsibility. When his commander disagreed, ultimately Rotmistrov managed to convince his commander to accept Rotmistrov's decision.

As with Popov, the technical means of communications do not seem to have been a factor. There were no apparent delays in executing orders because they were not received in time. At the same time, Rotmistrov seems to have been able to keep his commander informed about his situation. However, he did not wait for permission to act when time was critical.

General Rotmistrov's career survived his displays of personal initiative quite well. During subsequent operations under other front commanders, he

continued to display the same degree of initiative and flexibilty in his operations.[55] Although he never commanded a front in combat, Rotmistrov rose in rank to be the first Marshal of Armored Troops by early 1944. For years after World War II he played a key role in the Soviet military training system and was ultimately promoted to Chief Marshal of Armored Troops.[56] He was widely respected both for his professional skill and knowledge.

The two examples looked at thus far are insufficient for any sweeping generalizations. But, it does seem apparent that by mid-1943 the Soviet Army was learning to deal with the practicalities of modern warfare. Beyond Rotmistrov's own display of initiative, the rapid changes that Vatutin made in his own plans are evidence that Vatutin displayed considerable initiative at the front level also. The next case will specifically look at a different front commander during major operations in 1944.

Marshal Koniev - July to August 1944

By mid-1944 the strategic situation on the Eastern Front had turned decisively in favor of the Soviet Union. By March 1944 a series of major offensive operations had cleared most of southern Russia and the Ukraine from German hands. The Germans still held most of the Baltic states as well as Belorussia. Although the Soviet Union had overall superiority, the German Army was still a potent force capable of effective defense and sharp counterattacks. During the operational pause in the spring both sides prepared for the new Soviet offensives that both sides knew would come soon.

In May 1944 Ivan S. Koniev, now a Marshal of the Soviet Union, took command of the 1st Ukrainian Front. He immediately began his preparations for the 1944 summer offensive. When the preceding series of Russian offensives stopped in March, the Red Army's main effort had been south of the Pripet Marshes with the 1st Ukrainian Front. The Germans fully expected the

1st Ukrainian Front still to be the Russian main effort in the upcoming summer campaign.[57] The Germans perceived a Soviet opportunity to strike 280 miles from Koniev's front to the Baltic. This would have created a giant encirclement that would have encompassed the German Army Groups Center and North. To counter this perceived enemy intention, the Germans reinforced Army Group North Ukraine with numerous units including panzer divisions from other Army Groups.[58]

In fact, Koniev's visible attack preparations served a dual purpose. His force was indeed preparing a major attack against the Germans. However, these prepartions were also part of a large scale Soviet deception effort. The deception plan was designed to conceal the true Soviet main effort which was to be the multi-front offensive further north. This offensive actually shattered the German Army Group Center in June and July.[59] Koniev would attack only after the main attack. Enough time was allowed to elapse so that the Germans were forced to shift units north out of Army Group North Ukraine to block the Russian main effort.

The Germans opposing Koniev had favorable terrain on which to prepare their defenses and they took advantage of it. They formed their defense in three main belts to a depth of 50 kilometers. They also fortified the Dniestr, San, and Vistuala Rivers and numerous towns for a protracted defense. The most powerful German units occupied positions on the main avenue of approach east of Lvov.[60] Infantry occupied the first two belts, while most of the armor was held back about ten miles in reserve. Even after the defeats of the winter, Army Group North Ukraine was a substantial force with 600,000 combat troops, 900 tanks and assault guns, and 700 aircraft in a total of 38 divisions. This excludes six more German divisions that had to be transferred to Army Group Center in an effort to stop the main Soviet attack.[61]

Popov and Rotmistrov's forces in the previous examples were relatively small. In contrast, Koniev's forces were extremly large. For the Lvov-Sandomierz operation Koniev's front had

> seven combined arms armies, three tank armies, and one air army, a total of 80 rifle and cavalry divisions, 10 tank and mechanized corps, 850,000 combat troops (1,200,000 with rear services), . . . nearly 2,200 tanks and assault guns, and 3000 aircraft.[62]

Such a massive force was hardly excessive for the circumstances. This operation was the only time during the war that a single Soviet front was expected to attack and defeat an entire German army group.[63]

As Koniev developed the plans for the attack on his 440 kilometer frontage, he decided to make two main attacks with a supporting attack in the south. One main attack would be in the north towards Rava-Russkaya with two combined arms armies, one tank army, and a cavalry-mechanized group. The second main attack would be in the center towards Lvov with two combined arms armies, two tank armies, and a cavalry-mechanized group. Finally two combined armies would make the supporting attack on a frontage covering half of the front's sector. Koniev retained one combined arms army for his second echelon.[64] Koniev's intent was first to encircle and destroy German forces concentrated east of Lvov. Then he would split Army Group North Ukraine in two, driving 4th Panzer Army northwest beyond the Vistula into Poland and 1st Panzer Army southwest into the Carpathians.[65]

Beyond the obviously large responsibility entrusted to Koniev for such a huge force, it is noteworthy how much his own initiative and force of personality was responsible for the specific concept of the plan. At the time it was a firmly established Soviet doctrine that a front could only manage and sustain one main effort. As innocuous as it may seem, Koniev's decision to

plan two main attacks was a substantial deviation from this doctrine. He was required to justify his plan personally before Stalin.

As Erickson points out, Stalin received Koniev's plan for a double main attack with grave disapproval.

> Stalin argued that success before had been based on a single powerful thrust by fronts and now was no time to depart from this practice. Koniev, like Rokossovskii, argued back. Stalin insisted on one powerful attack in the direction of Lvov, and Koniev responded by emphasizing that a frontal attack on Lvov would merely give the German defence most of the advantages, the likeliest outcome of which must be that the Soviet offensive would fail. 'You are a very stubborn fellow. Very well, go ahead with your plan and put it into operation on your own responsibilty.' With that Stalin finally yielded and Marshal Koniev was free to fight as he saw fit, though he would personally suffer the consequences if the operation failed.[66]

It is apparent that in planning this major operation Marshal Koniev displayed the highest degree of personal initiative and sense of responsibility. He had the self-assurance to develop a plan which was a major deviation from well accepted Soviet doctrine. He was confident this was the best solution to the task he faced. In a hierarchy noted for its rigid centralization, he unhesitatingly stood up to Stalin. This is no small point given that Stalin was noted for his willingness and ability to impose his will brutally. Showing the courage of his convictions, Koniev argued vigorously for his plan and succeeded in getting it approved. Stalin's clear warning about the consequences of failure emphasizes explicitly the high degree of Koniev's sense of responsibilty and initiative.

Koniev continued to show the same degree of initiative and flexibility as he completed preparations for and carried out his offensive. The actual preparations required major redeployments of units, in some cases up to 400 kilometers.[67] While making his preparations, Koniev made a special effort to

conceal his northern main attack aimed at Rava-Russkaya. Front movements portrayed the movement of two tank armies into the southern sector to indicate that the main attack would come there. The Germans were presumed to be aware of preparations for attack on the more obvious Lvov axis.[68]

Koniev's northern attack was scheduled to begin on 13 July. Soviet reconnaisance efforts the day prior established that the Germans were pulling back their main forces in the north on the Rava-Russkaya axis. This apparently was an attempt to minimize the effects of the expected Soviet artillery barrage. Koniev ordered the northern two armies to attack without the normal artillery preparation. Their lead elements achieved substantial success. The next day the main bodies of the two armies were committed. By 15 July the entire tactical depth of the German defenses in the north had been penetrated.[69]

The main attack in the center sector opposite Lvov began late on 14 July and was far less successful at first. The first day only resulted in slight gains of 1 to 5 miles. Immediate German counterattacks by two panzer divisions and SS Division Galizien actually pushed back Soviet units.

Koniev realized it would take the early commitment of the tank armies to break the log jam. He committed 3GTA early on 16 July. Koniev's plan had originally called for a much deeper penetration before using his major exploitation forces. The entire tank army pushed through a very narrow penetration virtually in single column. The Germans made desperate attempts to close this corridor. The next day Koniev committed a second tank army, the 4TA, through this same narrow corridor.[70] According to one Soviet author, "This is the only case in the Great Patriotic War when two tank armies were sent into battle in the same direction along a narrow frontage while powerful enemy counterattacks were being repulsed on the flanks.[71] Koniev succeeded in

surrounding substantial German forces east of Lvov on 18 July. By 22 July 8 divisions had been destroyed with 30,000 Germans killed and 17,000 captured.[72]

As of 19 July there were virtually no significant enemy forces in Lvov. Koniev planned to seize it by a rapid frontal assault. The friction of war including heavy rains and mistakes kept the Soviets from seizing the city by 20 July as they hoped.[73] When German forces moved into the city around 21 July, Koniev quickly changed his plans and ordered the 3GTA and 4TA to envelop the city from the northwest and south. He wanted to avoid a protracted battle for the city. In his account of the battle, Koniev makes the point that "it is the task of the Front and Army commander always to take account, in the course of an operation, of changes in the situation."[74] What is particularly noteworthy again is Koniev's willingness and ability to make major changes in his operations on such short notice.

By late July Lvov was captured and Koniev had achieved his operational objectives. Army Group North Ukraine was split in two and forced to withdraw on divergent axes. At the same time, Koniev's forces began to attack on diverging axes also. Based on Koniev's recommendation, the Soviet High Command took Koniev's three left flank armies and subordinated them to a new front.[75] Koniev continued his attack to the northwest with great success. He accomplished a rapid crossing of the Vistula River and seized Sandomierz before stopping for an operational pause.

This example looked at a front commander during planning and execution of a very large operation. In both planning and execution, Marshal Koniev showed his ability to adapt to the situation. He proved to be willing to step outside of doctrine and defend his plan vigorously at the highest levels. This certainly showed that Soviet commanders could show initiative and high moral courage and survive professionally.

After preparing his operation in a thoroughly professional manner, Koniev showed that he was also flexible in execution. When opportunities presented themselves, as in the German withdrawal in the north to their second defensive belt, he adapted his plan to take advantage of the situation. When his main attack in the center bogged down and was nearly repelled, he correctly judged his capability to exploit a narrow, shallow penetration. He unhesitatingly committed two tank armies early. They attacked in column and in rapid succession to break the cohesion of the German defense. He attempted to seize a fleeting opportunity to take Lvov unopposed. When that failed, he rapidly changed his plan to surround and seize the city. When it became appropriate to do so, he recommended that part of his command be taken from him to ease coordination and facilitate the larger operation.

Like Rotmistrov, Koniev shows the high degree of personal initiative that Soviet commanders exhibited in the last half of the war. To an even greater degree than Rotmistrov, Marshal Koniev played a key role in the Soviet Army after World War II. At various times he served for extended periods as Commander in Chief of Ground Forces, Commander in Chief of Warsaw Pact Forces, and Commander in Chief of Group of Soviet Forces, Germany.[76] It is certain that his strong personality helped shape the Soviet Army opposing NATO today.

CONCLUSIONS FROM WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCE

Having examined the lessons that can be drawn about initiative from three Soviet commanders, this paper will examine what conclusions the Soviets drew from their own war experience. During the course of the war, the Soviet Army gained a vast amount of experience in all types of combat. The Soviet General Staff, as a conscious policy, collected data on Soviet war experience. This was done for the practical need to improve their doctrine, force structure, and combat performance. Each front and army was required to

dedicate top quality officers to the task of gathering and reporting this data. On a regular and timely basis the General Staff disseminated lessons learned throughout the Soviet Army.[77] A major product of this effort was a new set of Field Regulations published in 1944.

The Soviet 1944 Field Regulations were written in light of nearly three years of accumulated wartime experience. They provide a valuable and authoritative insight into the Soviet view regarding the importance of commander's initiative. It is worth quoting them at some length.

> Victory is always on the side of the one who is daring in battle, who constantly holds the initiative in his hands and imposes his will upon the enemy.
>
> Intelligent initiative is based on an understanding of the mission and the situation. It consists in striving under complicated situations to find the best means of carrying out the mission assigned; in the exploitation of all favorable opportunities developing suddenly and by taking measures immediately against any threats that may develop.
>
> The display of initiative should not go contrary to the general intentions of the higher commander and should make possible the most effective execution of the mission assigned.
>
> In case of a sudden change in the situation, the commander must make a new decision upon his own initiative and immediately report it to his superior and inform the adjacent units.
>
> The readiness to take responsibilty upon oneself for a daring decision and to carry it to the end in a persistent manner is the basis of the action of all commanders in battle.
>
> Bold and intelligent daring should always characterize the commander and his subordinates. Reproach is deserved not by the one who in his zeal to destroy the enemy does not reach his goal, but by the one who, fearing responsibility, remains inactive and does not employ at the proper moment all of his forces and means for winning victory.
>
> The initiative of subordinates should be encouraged in every way and exploited for achieving general success. . . .[78]

Even in our own doctrine, it would be difficult to provide a clearer or stronger statement of the importance of commanders having a personal sense of responsibility and initiative. Even the statement that "the display of initiative should not go contrary to the general intentions of the higher commander" is consistent with current U.S. doctrine. As FM 100-5 puts it, "If subordinates are to exercise initiative without endangering the overall success of the force, they must thoroughly understand the commander's intent and the situational assumptions on which it is based."[79]

That the Soviet doctrine on initiative was not empty words was shown by the performance of commanders such as Rotmistrov and Koniev in combat. Whatever degree of central control was called for by the communist system and Stalin's leadership style was mitigated by the practical necessity for victory against a powerful, highly skilled enemy. The Soviets learned to tolerate initiative and a degree of independence of action not because greater resources allowed them to. They tolerated and even encouraged it because they found that it contributed to their overall combat effectiveness.

The Soviets place great emphasis on sound planning and are reputed to be unwilling to change a plan. However, as Leites points out in discussing the Soviet "style" in warfare, "so far from being weak and evil, changing a plan in mid-operation expresses skill and dedication. He goes on to quote General Lelyushenko who wrote that "the operation of L'vov-Sandomir increased our arsenal of combat and operational-tactical experience. We acquired the habit of quickly replanning the introduction of tank armies into the breakthrough in a new direction in the dynamics of the operation."[80] Certainly both Rotmistrov and Koniev showed their willingness to change the plan when circumstances dictated.

The evidence presented in this study would tend to suggest that Soviet commanders during World War II did exercise a remarkably high degree of personal initiative. This is particularly true of the latter half of the war. While their overall level of initiative started out low, it rose rapidly as commanders gained experience. Until the middle of the war commanders like Popov were perhaps more the norm. However, from the earliest days of the war the best Soviet commanders showed high levels of initiative and flexibility. By the middle of the war it was easy to find commanders who were quite willing to act on their own responsibility without waiting for approval. Commanders such as Rotmistrov who decided to go on the defense in the face of two front commanders urgings to attack or such as Koniev who argued with Stalin to have his plan adopted were rewarded and promoted because they got results.

A major analysis of Soviet combat performance performed by the Historical Evaluation and Research Organization (HERO) concluded that its studies "give clear evidence that many Soviet commanders did possess flexibility and initiative in World War II. There can be no doubt that this quality is being stressed in contemporary training."[81] This paper will next discuss some of the changes since World War II to see if that assertion is true.

CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

There are at least four major factors in the post-war era that affect the Soviet Army and the likelihood that its commanders will exercise personal initiative in combat. The first was the complete mechanization of what was only a partially mechanized force during World War II. The second was the need to adapt to the changes brought about by the existence of nuclear weapons. The third factor is the continuing development of technology with its impact both on new weapons and on the means and methods of command and

control. The fourth is the changing and evolving nature of the Soviet government and society in the post-Stalin era.

The combined impact of the first three factors tends to cause forces to be more widely dispersed and more mobile. Command posts are further separated and are forced to move more frequently. Enemy jamming is likely to disrupt communications and reduce the ability to centrally control forces. The use of nuclear weapons will rapidly and dramatically change the situation facing the Soviet Army while simultaneously making command and control more difficult. Soviet theorists and writers are very conscious of the affect these changes will have on their ability to control operations.[82]

Richard Simpkin does an excellent job of describing the changes that have occurred in Soviet operational practices since World War II. He shows clearly that the time necessary to prepare for an operation is greatly reduced and that the tempo of operations is much greater.[83] This certainly has a substantial impact of the role of initiative in the Soviet style of command.

One major factor that stifled the initiative of Soviet commanders was the iron fisted personal dictatorship of Stalin. His ability to intimidate and strike fear into his subordinates hardly needs to be recounted here. The decapitation of the Red Army's officer corps in the purges of the 1930s could hardly have contributed to a willingness to exercise initiative. While the Soviet Union is still a totalitarian dictatorship, it cannot be disputed that the climate of fear is drastically reduced from Stalin's time.

At the same time, the educational level and quality of manpower available to the Soviet Army has greatly increased.[84] This is especially true in the officers ranks. During World War II, the majority of junior and middle rank officers only had a few short months of officers training. Today approximately 45 percent of Soviet officers have engineering or technical

degrees.[85] Even more important is the high level of professional military education that senior Soviet officers have received.

As the HERO study of combat effectiveness pointed out,

> under the more relaxed political atmosphere of the 1970s Soviet commanders may be expected to be more flexible than they were under the rigid Stalin regime of World War II. Writings of Soviet analysts clearly show the emphasis being put on flexibility and initiative, both in training and during maneuvers and field and staff exercises. It would be a mistake to put confidence in the probability of Soviet commanders blindly following prescribed patterns without using imagination and their own initiative.[86]

If anything, the trends referred to above are likely to have increased in importance in the last few years. Whatever motives are driving Gorbachev's push for 'glasnost' or 'openness', it is hardly likely to take away any initiative Soviet commanders might otherwise display. On the contrary, in the short term, the willingness of Soviet commanders to accept responsibility and make significant operational decisions on their own initiative is likely to increase.

Recent Soviet writings reflect a strong awareness of the changes in warfare since World War II referred to above. It is apparent in these writings that the likelihood of rapidly changing situations and the importance of acting quickly make initiative as important in Soviet doctrine and practice as it ever was in World War II. For instance, in an important work on operational art and tactics, Savkin writes that

> actions of initiative of commanders and staffs of all levels are an important part of the art of controlling troops and an invariable condition for the conduct of active combat actions. . . . Lack of initiative on the part of subordinates, lack of resolve, and awaiting instructions from above may lead to a loss of time, and the time factor now largely will decide the outcome of both individual episodes of armed conflict and the outcome of battle and operations as a whole.[87]

Another post-war Soviet military author, Colonel A. A. Sidorenko, discussed the lessons of World War II and their relevance for current offensive operations. He pointed out the crucial role of the combined arms commander in coordinating the actions of a wide variety of disparate units "in accordance with a single concept and plan." Going on in relation to the topic of this paper, he observed that this need for unity of effort

> caused the further development of the centralization of troop control, especially in the preparation of an offensive. At the same time, the maneuver character of combat actions and quick and sudden changes in the situation required flexibilty in control of the troops and the manifestation of creativity and initiative by commanders of all echelons.[88]

Lacking the recent test of major combat operations, there can be no certain answer about the degree of initiative to be expected from modern Soviet commanders. It is clear that they are as fully aware of the significance of the changes in warfare, technology, and society as analysts in the west. Recent Soviet writings continue to emphasize the need for flexibility and initiative at all levels. The experience of World War II, particularly the successful experience of commanders like Rotmistrov and Koniev is studied closely. The post-war Soviet Army was largely shaped by the World War II commanders who succeeded because they took responsibility and initiative.

Although the Soviets themselves still write about the problems of getting their commanders to show initiative, it would be foolishly optimistic to rely too heavily on such Soviet comments. While such Soviet observations are probably sincere, the U.S. should expect the average Soviet army or front commander to be willing and able to use his initiative to respond to changing situations. The contemporary Soviet commander is certain to be more experienced and better trained than the commanders the Germans found to be so

rigid at the beginning of World War II. He expects operations to move quickly and knows he is responsible for successful mission accomplishment above all. Even though a Soviet attack might not be led by commanders as experienced as Rotmistrov and Koniev, it will probably be lead by commanders more in their mold than in the mold of Popov.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on this paper's brief examination of Soviet doctrine from the pre-war era to the present, it is clear that the Soviet army has a clear theoretical conception of initiative. Soviet doctrine on the subject has a remarkable continuity over more than fifty years of experience. Their conception is not dissimilar to Western ideas which expect subordinate commanders to use their initiative to accomplish the mission within the higher commander's intent. While the Soviet Army may be very centralized in planning, it expects and allows for rapidly changing situations during actual combat.

The three Soviet commanders examined show examples of both rigidity and great flexibility. They do not provide sufficient evidence to argue conclusively that the typical Soviet World War II commander did or did not exercise a high degree of initiative. They do show that commanders who showed great initiative by any standard could succeed and prosper in the Soviet system. They also show that the tolerance for initiative was not even consistent for the same commander over time. The same front commander who tolerated no initiative from a subordinate on one occasion, tolerated great initiative from another subordinate only a few months later.

The important points to draw from the Soviet doctrine on initiative and from these three Soviet commanders are the implications for U.S. doctrine and operational planning. It should be clear that U.S. doctrine should not be

based on any presumed Soviet rigidity. In attempting to apply the AirLand Battle tenets of initiative and agility, the U.S. Army needs to understand that Soviet commanders are equally familiar with these concepts. In their own way, the Soviet Army puts equal emphasis on initiative and agility. U.S. doctrine needs to avoid reliance on a concept of Soviet rigidity that may have been true in 1941 and 1942, but was much less true later in World War II and is probably not true today either. Unjustified reliance on a presumed Soviet lack of initiative could all too easily result in a false sense of overconfidence.

There is another implication for operational planning against the Soviet Army. That is the desirability of understanding the personality of the opposing commander. The evidence of this paper would suggest that the experience, personality, and skill of Soviet commanders can be as variable as in any Western army. Although current Soviet commanders have been trained and developed in a very centralized system, their individual traits will still affect the design and execution of their operations.

To the degree that modern Soviet commanders are inheritors of the legacy of Rotmistrov, Koniev, and numerous other skilled Soviet commanders, their operations will be planned ingeniously and executed with skill and initiative. Relying on a doctrinal template of typical Soviet operations may be necessary for defensive planning, but it is fraught with hazard. U.S. planning must allow for Soviet deviations from their own doctrine and concede Soviet willingness to adjust their plans rapidly as circumstances change.

Because specific biographic information is hard to collect, operational plans probably must be designed in view of an "average" Soviet opponent. If the U.S. Army ever fights the Soviet Army, the enemy commander will not be an

"average" commander. He will be a specific individual whose strengths and weaknesses must be understood and exploited if at all possible.

FM 100-2-1, The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics provides an excellent summary of the Soviet doctrine and practice that the U.S. could expect to face. It points out that

> Soviet operations and tactics are not as thoroughly rigid as is perceived by many Western analysts. The amount of flexibility exhibited increases with the rank of the commander and the size of force commanded. . . . It is not likely that they [Soviet officers] would rigidly adhere to a plan faced with imminent failure if an expedient to success were at hand.[89]

FM 100-2-1 goes on to observe that

> Flexibilty in Soviet operations has been evident since the final years of World War II. Since the mid-1960s, Soviet military writers and theorists have emphasized:
> - The need for rapid concentration and dispersal of combat power on the modern battlefield.
> - The rejection of the classic "breakthrough" achieved by massed forces.
> - The need to attack on multiple axes.
> - The lack of a continuous front.
> - The exploitation of weak points in an enemy defense.
> - Swift transfer of combat power from one point to another on the battlefield.
> - The achievement of surprise.
> - Speed in the attack.
> - Independent action by commanders.
> - The need to carry the battle deep into the enemy rear.
>
> These concepts are not descriptive of a rigid offensive doctrine, but of one that is both mobile and flexible.[90]

As FM 100-5 puts it, "The skill and personality of a strong commander represent a significant part of his unit's combat power."[91] Understanding the skill and personality of Soviet commanders is no less important than understanding the capabilities of their weapons or the concepts of their doctrine. Such an understanding will avoid the pitfall of overconfidence and allow the sound planning that is the key to victory.

NOTES

[1] FM 100-5, Operations (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, May 1986), 13.

[2] FM 100-5, 16.

[3] FM 100-5, 16.

[4] "Initiative," Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, 1963.

[5] FM 100-5, 15.

[6] Professor General-Colonel A. I. Radziyevskiy, Dictionary of Basic Military Terms, trans. DGIS Multilingual Section, Translation Bureau, Secretary of State Department, Ottowa, Canada (Washington: Govermnent Printing Office, 1976), 92.

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[8] Andrew Cockburn, The Threat: Inside the Soviet Military Machine, 1983 (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 277.

[9] Richard Simpkin, Red Armour: An Examination of the Soviet Mobile Force Concept (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1984), 26-27.

[10] Radziyevskiy, 37.

[11] FM 100-5, 6.

[12] F. W. von Mellenthin and R. H. S. Stolfi, Nato Under Attack (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 80.

[13] Mellenthin and Stolfi, Nato Under Attack, 143.

[14] Major General F. W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles, trans. H. Betzler, ed. L. C. F. Turner (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 353.

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[16] Manstein, 150.

[17] Manstein, 151.

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[19] LTC David M. Glantz, Toward Deep Battle: The Soviet Conduct of Operational Maneuver (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, May 1985), 9.

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[22] Field Service Regulations, 42.

[23] Mellenthin, Lost Battles, 352.

[24] LTC Lawrence L. Izzo, "An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign on the Russian Front, 1942-43" (Advanced Operations Studies Fellowhip paper, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, 1986), 27.

[25] John Erickson, The Road to Berlin (Boulder: Westview Books, 1983), 45-46.

[26] LTC David M. Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr: A Study of Soviet Offensive Operations, Dec 1942-Aug 1943, draft study (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, undated course special reading., unpublished), 107-108.

[27] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 112.

[28] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 172.

[29] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 125.

[30] General Carl Wagener, "The Counterstroke of 40th (GE) Armored Corps Against the Breakthrough by Mobile Group Popov in the Donets Basin, February 1943," trans. Richard Simpkin, 1984 Art of War Symposium: From the Don to the Dnepr: Soviet Offensive Operations, December 1942 - August 1943, Proceedings, Center for Land Warfare, 26-30 March 1984 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, October 1985), 196.

[31] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 130-131.

[32] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 139.

[33] Erickson, 48-49.

[34] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 155.

[35] Wagener, 221-224.

[36] Erickson, 74.

[37] Erickson, 70-74.

[38] Erickson, 83-84.

[39] Geoffrey Jukes, Kursk: The Clash of Armour (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), 100.

[40] Erickson, 105-106.

[41] Erickson, 109.

[42] Marshal Pavel A. Rotmistrov, "The Role of Armoured Forces in the Battle of Kursk," The Battle of Kursk, trans. G. P. Ivanov-Mumjiev, ed. Major General Ivan Parotkin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 172.

[43] Jukes, 103.

[44] LTC David M. Glantz, "The Belgorod-Khar'kov Operation, 3-23 August 1943," 1984 Art of War Symposium: From the Don to the Dnepr: Soviet Offensive Operations, December 1942 - August 1943, Proceedings, Center for Land Warfare, 26-30 March 1984 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, October 1985), 342.

[45] Glantz, "Belgorod-Khar'kov Operation", 393.

[46] Glantz, "Belgorod-Khar'kov Operation", 367.

[47] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 268-269 see maps 548.

[48] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 292.

[49] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 304-305.

[50] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 333-335.

[51] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 360-363.

[52] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 364-365.

[53] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 367-368.

[54] Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr, 406.

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[62] Dupuy and Martell, 167.

[63] Panov, 374-376.

[64] Panov 376.

[65] Erickson, 232.

[66] Erickson, 207.

[67] Panov, 376.

[68] Erickson, 233.

[69] Panov, 376.

[70] Erickson, 235.

[71] Panov, 376.

[72] Erickson, 240.

[73] Erickson, 240-241.

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[75] Erickson, 243-244.

[76] Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott, The Armed Forces of the USSR (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 143, 205, and 207.

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[79] FM 100-5, 15.

[80] Leites, 188.

[81] HERO, 199.

[82] HERO, 198.

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[89] FM 100-2-1, The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics, (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, July 1984), 2-12.

[90] FM 100-2-1, 2-12.

[91] FM 100-5, 14.

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