

APPLICATION OF THE SOVIET THEORY OF “DEEP OPERATION” DURING THE
1939 SOVIET-JAPANESE MILITARY CONFLICT IN MONGOLIA.

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by

OLEKSIY NOZDRACHOV, LIEUTENANT COLONEL,
THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF UKRAINE
B.C, Kharkiv Tank Institute, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 1997

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Lieutenant Colonel Oleksiy Nozdrachov

Thesis Title: Application of the Soviet Theory of “Deep Operation” During the 1939
Soviet-Japanese Military Conflict in Mongolia

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Jonathan M. House, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Bruce W. Menning, Ph.D.

_____, Member
LTC Randy G. Masten, M.A.

_____, Member
John R. Pilloni, M.A.

Accepted this 11th day of June 2010 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

APPLICATION OF THE SOVIET THEORY OF “DEEP OPERATION” DURING THE 1939 SOVIET-JAPANESE MILITARY CONFLICT IN MONGOLIA by LTC Oleksiy Nozdrachov, 113 pages.

During the Interwar period, the Soviet theory of “deep operations,” like Soviet military science as a whole developed in parallel with Soviet armed forces organizational reform, including rearmament and preparation for current threats. The determining factors which created favorable conditions for the emergence of the theory were rearmament and reorganization of the Red Army and the combat experience of previous wars of 20th century. However, Stalin’s 1937-1940 repression impeded the development and application of the theory. At the same time in the Far East, a full-scale undeclared war developed between Japan and the Soviet Union. The 1939 war became the real battlefield for examining the Red Army, its capability to deploy combined joint forces, to organize comprehensive combat and logistic support of its troops, and to coordinate the efforts with the Mongolian People's Army. The 1939 military conflict in the Far East demonstrated the growth of the Soviet theory of the “deep operation,” as well as the leadership talents of General Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov. This thesis explores aspects of the “deep operation” development and its application during the 1939 Soviet-Japanese military conflict in Mongolia.

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ACRONYMS

AF	Air Force
AOO	The area of operation
CCP	The Chinese Communist Party
COMINTERN	The Communist International
FR RKKA-36	The Field Regulations-1936
RKKA	The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
HQ	Headquarter
KOMDIV	Division Commander
KOMKOR	Corps Commander
KOMMANDARM	Army Commander
NARKOMAT OBORONY	The People's Commissariat of Defense of the Soviet Union
NKVD	The Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Soviet Union
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics

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CHAPTER 1

THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND DEMANDS FOR THE SOVIET THEORY OF “DEEP OPERATION” TO EMERGE

Over the last decade Western military historians and analysts have come to appreciate the enduring contributions of Soviet officers to the study and conduct of war at the operational level, that is, at echelons above corps and on the scale of theater-strategic campaigns. This appreciation stands in stark contrast to the situation two decades ago when the very term ‘operational art’ was dismissed in the West as mere pretention, an artificial creation imposed between tactics and strategy without content, rigor or merit.

—James J. Scheider, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute*

Each historical epoch of humanity and military conflicts has its corresponding ways of warfare and wars as a whole. When the Soviet Union and its military formations emerged on the political map of the world, Soviet military science began intensive development. The tasks of Soviet military science were to identify the essence of war, the factors ensuring victory, the ways and means to support the war in diplomatic and economic sense, the principles of the armed forces’ development and their comprehensive training. Soviet military art was a significant component of the Soviet military science and researched the methods to conduct the war. Soviet military art consisted of strategy, operational art and tactics. Strategy researched the methods of preparation and conducting the armed struggle and the war in general, while operational art described the methods of command and control of strategic military formations of military services, its different types and scales, during the operations. Tactics then developed the methods of combined armed battle.¹

¹V. A. Semenov, *Brief Description of the Development of Soviet Operational Art*. (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, 1960), 3.

The studies of the Soviet military theorists of the 1920s and early 1930s testified that operational level warfare can exist only under specific conditions. These conditions are: a sufficient quantity and quality of the armed forces, adequate armament and capability of the country to sustain the military formations.² For example, the operational art could not appear in the 17th and 18th centuries, since the necessary conditions had not been created. States could not recruit, support and prepare large-scale armies, mass produce armaments, or develop transport and means of communication. The outcome of war was solved by two or three decisive battles; at the strategic level success was achieved by the precise preparation of the state for the campaign and by the application of superior tactics on the battlefield. An intensive growth of the world's population, the development of industry, the invention of the automobile, telephone and telegraph all facilitated emergence of conditions for development of large-scale armies and appearance of the elements of operational art in the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. This new strategic environment permitted and required the rapid mobilization of large-scale military formations, multimillion-man armies operated at the enormous front's lines which extended for hundreds and thousands of kilometers. Commanders had to concentrate defensive forces over large frontages and considerable depths to defeat such large-scale military formations of enemy. Generals planned to destroy enemy units consecutively, overcoming the enemy's resistance on several operational defense lines. One or even several battles would not achieve the annihilation of the enemy. War became protracted. In order to solve the tactical stagnation of warfare, the belligerents of World War I tried to apply new approaches to tactics, to reorganize small and large tactical

²Ibid., 4.

units, and to utilize enormous artillery barrages, air and armor attacks and weapons of mass destruction. These developments caused massive casualties, but did not significantly change the dispositions of the belligerents. However, for a long period of time military theorists did not recognize the appearance of the operational art as a new phenomenon of warfare. Military science in Germany and the Soviet Union began to study operational art in detail, separating it as an independent theory and exercising it during military training and the military conflicts of the interwar period. Several significant factors impacted the Soviet operational art's development; some of them facilitated while others impeded the emergence and practical application the theory. The determining factors which created favorable conditions for the emergence of the theory were the rearmament and reorganization the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA),³ the Russian army's combat experience during the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and the RKKA's combat experience during the 1918-1920 Civil War. At the same time Stalin's repression in 1937-1940 impeded the development and application of the theory.

After World War I, the development of technology took a strong step forward. Enormous achievements appeared in rifle armament, artillery, tank construction, aviation, engineering technology, and communication. The European armies had been re-armed very poorly in the 1920s. This was explained by the fact that a lot of World War I armaments remained in storage. Many Western countries upgraded their aviation and introduced new models of tanks into their inventories. However, new technology

³The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was created by the decree of the Council of People Commissars dated 15 January 1918. In 1943 RKKA began to be called the Red Army, and from 1946–1992 the Soviet Army.

appeared only in the form of prototypes, and mass production did not begin until the 1930's, after Adolf Hitler's accession to power in Germany.

The poor state of the Soviet defense industry caused delays in the rearmament of the Red Army. A critical stage in this rearmament came in the address by the head of the military department, M. V. Frunze, to the Third *Vsesouzniy s'ezd Sovetov* (Congress of Soviets) on 19 May 1925. In his remarks, Frunze emphasized the delay in modernization of the Red Army compared to the armies of Western countries. Shortly thereafter, the Red Army reform saturated all military branches with new models of weapons. For example, between 1925 and 1939 the number of artillery pieces increased by 140 percent, armor by 43 times, and aviation by 6.5 times.⁴ The Army began to deploy tactical and operational formations with the more complex and more diverse composition of military equipment, formation of new task organized units, combined arms units and the branches of services. Infantry and cavalry forces were reinforced with tank units, anti-tank and air defense artillery, and automatic small-arms. The infantry was organizationally divided among the troops of fortified areas, the airborne and motorized troops. Artillery became a major fire support force. The cavalry was significantly reduced. Armored forces became an independent branch of service-first called moto-mechanized, and then the tank forces, being gradually converted into the main strike forces of the Soviet "deep operation." In 1929 the Red Army formed its first mechanized regiment, followed in 1932 by the first mechanized corps in history, which later were reorganized into tank corps. The Air Force (AF) became an independent military service. The new military service was divided into the aviation of the Supreme Command, the front, the army and close air support. The AF

⁴Ibid., 104.

also formed new branches of service: fighters, bombardment, ground support and reconnaissance aviation. Organizationally the AF's units were divided into regiments and divisions. The organization of large armored and air formations, reinforced infantry and cavalry divisions, laid the basis for the combined arms operational formations necessary for the Soviet "deep operation."⁵

Adoption of new weapon systems led to a change in the strategic environment, reorganization of the armed forces, and planning of military campaigns, operations and battles. In the reorganization of the Red Army, mechanized and tank brigades in the corps required a further development of military science and especially of operational art. At the beginning of the 1930s two schools of thought in Soviet military science collided. The representatives of "the old school" insisted on the development of operational art theory according to the results of previous imperialistic wars. Meanwhile, young military theorists emphasized the experiences of 1918-1921, taking into account the new models of armament and discounting the experience of World War I. In order to understand the essence of both schools' points of view we need to review this combat experience.

Elements of the operational art clearly appeared during the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. Both belligerents possessed advanced weapons systems such as rifles with firing range up to 2000 meters, new rapid-fire artillery with firing ranges of six to seven km and heavy machineguns. Military units' headquarters had been widely equipped with telegraph, radio and wire communication that facilitated more effective and efficient command and control. The combat actions had begun with serious naval battles, followed

⁵V.V. Larionov, *Evolution of the Military Art: Stages, Tendencies, Principles* (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, 1987), 145-146.

by amphibious operations and Japanese force projections on a field army level. Large scale operations occurred in the areas of Port Arthur, the Liao-yang fortified area, the Shak-ho River and the Mukden region. The operational art's elements appeared especially vividly in the Mukden battle. Both sides were prepared for the offensive, but the Japanese army begun earlier and forced the Russian army to transfer to the defense. The battle developed along a front of 105 km, and it was completed by stretching that front to 150 km. The defense in depth of Russian armies was also 150 km. In the battle five Japanese armies clashed with three Russian. During the battles belligerents widely exercised frontal attacks from both sides, penetration of the enemy's front, turning movements and double operational envelopment by the forces of two Japanese armies of the flanks of Russian armies. The experience of the war showed a further increase in the spectrum of the tactical forms, which arose in the consequence of the mass character of armies, the development of military equipment and the assets of command and control, and also the significant complication of the conditions for warfare.

World War I became the decisive stage in the development of the theory of operational art. Mass armies reached unprecedented sizes. At the beginning of the war Russia had an army of approximately 5.5 million troops, Germany-about 3.9 million, France-3.8, and Austria-Hungary-2.3.⁶ The development of railroads ensured the operational-strategic deployment and sustainment for armed forces of belligerent states in short periods of time. The belligerents equipped their armies with large quantities of machine guns and artillery, which adapted both in the defense and in the offensive. The military actions in both the Western and the Eastern theaters occurred on the enormous

⁶Ibid., 17.

spaces in the form of the mobile operations of different scale. In order to facilitate command and control of large military formations the belligerents began to form fronts⁷ or groups of armies. The initial period of war was characterized by the army's operations being conducted mainly independently. The desire to attain the end of the war in a short periods and the Entente's poor coordination of the offensive operations led to an attritional, stalemated war. The breakthrough of the deep defense zone of enemy became the basic tactical problem of the time. Together with the application of new technical equipment such as tanks, aviation, mass artillery barrages and chemical weapons began to appear in the new forms of the offensive operations as solutions to penetrate the deliberate defense: attack on a narrow front in one direction; or attack on a wide front in one direction and attack on a wide front in several directions. Meanwhile, the strength of defense grew considerably more rapidly than did the offensive ways and means. The development of an entrenched defense forced offensive forces to seek a powerful initial strike. The offensive army massed large forces, large quantity of artillery, aviation and tanks on a narrow avenue of approach. Even penetrating an entrenched tactical zone required large follow-on reserves in order to exploit the success and to rotate the exhausted military units. After the penetration of the enemy tactical defense zone, commanders planned for exploitation in operational depth but were never able to achieve it, in part because it meant committing operational reserves without a pause in the engagement. The defensive operation consisted in fighting to retain defensive positions, building up the defense force by moving the front and army reserve in the threatened

⁷A front was a Russian operational-strategic field force usually created at the onset of a war and intended to accomplish operational-strategic missions in several operational sectors of a continental theater of military actions.

directions, organizing and conducting strong counterattacks, and attempting to restore the initial position of defense line. However, the defense was not planned as a necessary condition for conducting a sequential offensive operation. The experience of World War I at the South-Western Front⁸ showed that the simultaneous attack in several directions across a wide frontage was the most successful operation. In the history of the operational art the Russian Army conducted this operation known as the Brusilov Offensive, in 1916. General A. A. Brusilov conducted his offensive on a front of approximately 470 km. The penetrating forces performed four nearly simultaneous strikes against breakthrough areas of about 35 km each. The main effort of the decisive operation was concentrated on the right flank of the offense. In 13 days of offensive the Russian army moved 40-75 km while inflicting enormous losses on the Austro-Hungarian troops.⁹ From the point of view of operational art the narrow front offensive was the new form of penetration of the enemy's defense. However, the densities of military equipment, in particular artillery, were much lower compared to those at the Western Front, deep penetration forces (second echelon) were not sufficiently supported by operational reserves and they could not operate at a long distance away from the main attacking positions. The enemy's reserves lost their freedom of maneuver because they were unable to immediately determine the direction of the main effort's attack. The successful penetrations of the enemy's defense line in several directions simultaneously crushed the defense in the

⁸The Eastern (Russian) front included the North-Western (against Germany), South-Western (against Austro-Hungary) and Caucasian (against Turkey) fronts.

⁹Frederick C. Turner, "The Genesis of the Soviet 'Deep Operation': The Stalin-era Doctrine for Large-Scale Offensive Maneuver Warfare" (Ph. D. dissertation, Duke University, 1987), 64.

separate isolated sections and created advantageous conditions for the destruction of enemy in detail. The Russian offensive could be considerably more successful.

Unfortunately, the Russian army did not have enough mobile (motorized) exploitation forces as an operational reserve, which would be launched into the defense's gaps for the exploitation in the operational depth. This reserve could increase the rate of advance and detain the enemy's operational reserves.

The problem of planning and conducting offensive operations against an enemy's defense line was not solved in World War I. The main reasons for this failure were the insufficient development of armed forces, the weak combat capabilities of operational formations (army, front, and group of armies) and delayed theoretical development for operational art. Cavalry did not act as the mobile force for the exploitation in the operational depth. Operations had a linear nature, which increased the width of the offensive and decreased its effectiveness. Tanks appeared at the end of the war. Their capabilities could ensure solution of the problem by the penetration of enemy defenses and the exploitation in the depth, but the technical state and absence of the application concept did not make it possible to successfully use a new branch of services. The experience of World War I combined with RKKA operational experience during the 1918-1920 Civil War to become the basis for development of the theory of the deep operation in the interwar period.

Special features of the 1918-1920 Civil War included the fact that World War I was still continuing in the West, while in central Russia the Soviet regime was established. Like the majority of civil wars in history, conflict in Russia was fragmented and ideological. The war ended not with the conclusion of a mutually beneficial peace

treaty, but with the complete annihilation of the opposing ideological class. Thus, the quantity of casualties was proportionately, twice exceeded the level of Russian casualties during World War I. A new army, economy and society arose. Meanwhile, the ideas of equality and peace encouraged people to revolt against the White army and foreign invaders, creating favorable conditions for RKKA success. Another special feature of the Civil War was the fact that its operations were mobile. This was influenced by such factors as the enormous geographical spaces of the military theaters, weak concentration of belligerent's forces, dynamic partisan actions, and the deployment of large masses of cavalry.

The Perekop–Chorgarskaya operation of the Southern Front's forces can serve as an example of RKKA maneuver warfare. In November 1920 the Southern Front launched an operation to penetrate the advanced defenses of the White army on the Perekop and Chorgara Isthmuses. The entrance to the Crimean peninsula was 12 kilometers wide and fortified according to the rules of defense in depth. In addition, the defensive flanks were enhanced by concrete bunkers with machine gun and cannon fire support. From the sea the White army was supported by two flotillas, and divisional artillery in the second and third echelons was able to deliver fires to a depth of 10 km. The command of the Southern Front deployed offensive forces in three echelons: 6th and 4th Armies were in the first echelon, in order to penetrate of the entire depth of the White army's defense; 1st and 2d Cavalry armies were located in the second echelon in order to launch the exploitation in operational depth; 13th Army composed the third echelon as the operational reserve. The offensive of the first echelon began with a night attack on 7 November. The unexpected and powerful impact of the first echelon forces made it

possible in three hours to open a breach in the enemy's defense and to launch the second echelon to exploit success at the operational depth in the direction of Efpatoria, Simferopol and Sevastopol. The front's aviation supported these operations, which made it possible to neutralize the enemy's flotillas and suppress the enemy's artillery fire. The experience of the 1917-1920 Civil War showed that the RKKA preferred a maneuver type of warfare versus delivering frontal attacks on a broad front.

Soviet military science tried to solve a wide spectrum of problems during subsequent years: motorization of the army, balance of the branches of services and military services, creation of large mechanized formations, and development of the principles of their utilization in operations. The works of V. K. Triandafillov, M. N. Tukhachevskiy, and G. S. Isserson created the Soviet theories of "deep battle" and "deep operations," which were included in the 1936 field regulations of the RKKA (FR RKKA-36) and the draft of FR RKKA-39.¹⁰ In describing the development of Soviet military science in the interwar period, we cannot neglect a significant historic fact that influenced the development of the theory of operational art and the ability of the RKKA to apply the theory as a modern element of the warfare. That fact is Stalin's repression. His manic illness, which between 1937 and 1941 decapitated the RKKA, eliminated the majority of achievements in developing the army and removed thousands of the most experienced RKKA commanders. This purge created an environment for the victorious movement of the German Army into the Soviet Union's territory. Almost the entire "back bone" of the RKKA's commanders, which consisted of the competent, well prepared leaders capable

¹⁰Wars with Japan and Poland in 1939 and with Finland in 1940 contributed significant changes in the regulation. The final approval of the regulation was scheduled for 24 June 1941, but Germany's aggression started on 22 June.

of deploying the army in the case of war, was destroyed in the repressions. Over the course of three years (1937-1940), more than 40,000 commanders, from the Marshals of the Soviet Union¹¹ to regimental commanders and below, were arrested, and the majority of them were executed. Almost all these commanders had experience from either World War I or the 1918-1920 Civil War, or both. At the end of December 1937, on Marshal Kliment Voroshilov's instruction, military districts provided lists of all officers and NCO's of foreign extraction, including Germans, Latvians, Poles, Estonians, Lithuanians, Finns, Koreans, Chinese, and others. Further, his order said: "To reveal all who were born, lived or have relatives in Germany, Poland and other foreign states and the presence of a connection with them." The lists were obtained, and all these commanders, irrespective of their honesty, combat experience, commitment to the Communist Party, and participation in the Civil War, were discharged from the Red Army. Furthermore, Voroshilov ordered that the lists of these discharged in the reserve commanders be sent to the NKVD.¹² It is not difficult to surmise their further fate.¹³ In 1937, the NKVD arrested all key General Staff Academy theorists of the RKKA's military art. Similar arrests were made in other military academies and military colleges. M. N. Tukhachevskiy and A. A. Svechin were arrested and executed, while G. S. Isserson was exiled to Siberia. The purge eliminated the majority of the authors of the Soviet theories of "deep battle and deep operations" and banned their works for research and practicing. V. K. Triandafillov

¹¹The highest military rank in the Red Army.

¹²*Narkomat vnutrenih del*—the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

¹³Vladimir Karpov, *Marshal Zhukov. His Companions-in-Arms and Enemies in the Years of War and Peace*, <http://www.litportal.ru/genre197/author2959/book13754.html> (accessed 2 December 2009), 30.

had died in an air accident in 1931. Almost all commanders of military districts were arrested and executed. The number of senior officers executed is shown in table 1.

Table 1. The number of the Red Army's leadership executed from 1937 to 1941			
	<i>Number in May 1937</i>	<i>Surviving in June 1941</i>	<i>Executed</i>
Marshal of the Soviet Union	5	2	3
Army commissar 1 rank	2	-	2
Flag officer of the Fleet 1&2 rank	4	-	4
Flag officer 1&2 rank	21	6	15
Army commander 1&2 rank	16	2	14
Army Corps commander	67	7	60
Division commander	199	63	136
Brigade commander	397	176	221

Source: Vladimir Karpov, *Marshal Zhukov. His Companions-in-Arms and Enemies in the Years of War and Peace*, <http://www.litportal.ru/genre197/author2959/book13754.html> (accessed 2 December 2009), 31.

The removal of the senior command personnel lowered the quality of the RKKA. According to foreign military observers, the new high command was stamped either by mediocrity or lack of experience.¹⁴ As an example, at the conference of regimental commanders in the summer of 1940, 225 commanders had not had appropriate academic education; only 25 had graduated from military schools and 200 from courses for junior lieutenants. In 1940, more than 70 percent of the regiment commanders had worked in their positions for one year or less, indicating that most of their predecessors had been arrested. In 1937 and 1938 alone, about 44,000 commanders of different ranks were discharged, including more than 35,000 of the Army, about 3,000 of the Navy and more

¹⁴Otto P. Chaney, Jr., *Zhukov* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 34.

than 5,000 of the Air Force. After their discharge, almost the entire commander's corps was arrested, executed, or dispatched to labor camps. In 1937–1938, the government replaced all commanders-in-chief of the military districts (except Budennyi), 100 percent of their deputies and chiefs of staff, 88.4 percent of the Army corps commanders and 100 percent of their assistants and deputies; 98.5 percent of divisions and brigades commanders, 79 percent of regiment commanders, 88 percent of the chiefs of staff of regiments, 87 percent of battalion commanders, and almost 100 percent of the chiefs of the recruiting centers.¹⁵ The scale of the repression is difficult to describe in a few pages. However, I should add that not only the Armed Forces were beheaded; the leadership of the country, the Soviet Republics, and all regions of the USSR were equally affected. This factor caused a delay in the design and development of mobilization resources of the country. Soviet industry and agriculture were deprived of experienced leaders and highly-competent specialists, which slowed down the rearmament of the armed forces and the establishment of the modern military-technical base, especially development of a new military system's prototypes.

In summary, it should be understood that the Soviet theory of “deep operation” and the entire body of Soviet military science had been developing in parallel with the Soviet armed forces organizational reform, their rearmament and preparation for the threats in response to challenges of the Interwar period. The determining factors which created favorable conditions for the emergence of theory were rearmament and reorganization of the RKKA and the combat experience of previous wars of 20th century. However, Stalin's 1937-1940 repression impeded the development and application of the

¹⁵Karpov, 32.

theory. Meanwhile, in the Far East, a full-scale undeclared war developed between Japan and an alliance of China, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union. The 1939 war became the real battlefield for examining the Red Army, its capability to deploy combined joint forces, to organize comprehensive combat and logistic support of its troops, and to coordinate the efforts with the Mongolian People's Army. The 1939 military conflict in the Far East demonstrated the growth of the Soviet theory of deep operations, as well as the leadership talents of General Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov.

CHAPTER 2

OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS BY VARIOUS SOVIET MILITARY THEORISTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF “DEEP OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS” THEORY

An advanced military theory absorbs the best military experience of the last wars. However, for qualitative development of the military theory, including the operational art's theory, experience alone is insufficient. At the same time, in the epoch of mass armies and rapidly growing military technologies the precise foresight of future wars and operations is not feasible. World War I could not solve the primary tactical problem: the breakthrough of the enemy's positional defense. Nonetheless, the war introduced to the world new military equipment and a tendency to increasing mass armies, but the old elements of the military art (strategy and tactics) remained unchanged. This remained so, despite the faith that many military theorists realized the necessity for an intermediate element between strategy and tactics. Significant contributions in the emergence of operational art and the theories of “deep battle” and “deep operation” had been done by military researches and publications of A. A. Svechin, M.N. Tukhachevskiy, V. K. Triandafillov and G. S. Isserson. They rightfully rank as architects of the modern world's operational art, which for the first time became an independent element of military art successfully practiced by the Red Army.

For the first few years after World War I, the problem of how to describe the new element of warfare remained unsolved. “Grand tactics” or “lower strategy” were employed but without wide acceptance. Along with other military theorists, the Military Academy of the RKKA under command of General M. N. Tukhachevskiy conducted research on the new element. Only in 1923-1924 did Alexander Andreevich Svechin

(1878-1938) propose terminology for the intermediary category, which he called operational art. Svechin's definition of operational art as "the totality of maneuvers and battles in a given part of a theater of military action directed toward achievement of the common goal, set as final in the given period of the campaign" served as a fundamental thesis for his book *Strategiya* (Strategy), published in 1926. For the first time Svechin describe the nature of "operational art" and its relationship with strategy and tactics:

Battle is the means of operation. Tactics are the material of operational art. The operation is the means of strategy, and operational art is the material of strategy. This is the essence of the three-part formula given above.¹⁶

A.A. Svechin is one of several Russian military strategists with a worldwide reputation. He began World War I as a regimental commander. Then he served in various headquarters, including liaison officer for Stavka, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's headquarters. In March 1918 Svechin joined the RKKA and was immediately appointed as the Chief Main Staff of the RKKA. His conflicts with the RKKA Commander-in-Chief, General I.I. Vatsetis (former colonel, the commander of a Latvian division in the tsarist army), caused Svechin's appointment to the Academy of the General Staff of the RKKA. He had perhaps the best understanding of modern strategy and tactics in the RKKA. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Svechin forecasted much of the entire scenario for World War II on the Soviet front. He foresaw absolutely accurately the entire initial stage of World War II in the east. For example, he identified Poland as the first

¹⁶Jacob W. Kipp, "Mass, Mobility, And the Red Army's Road To Operational Art 1918-1936," <http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/resources/biblio/interwar.asp> (accessed 25 December 2009), 10.

object of Hitler's aggression, because of the fact that the strategic array of its troops would be extremely advantageous for subsequent German operations.

In 1924 Svechin argued against the idea that a future aggressor would conduct the main offense on the most economically developed regions of the Soviet Union, in particular, the Ukraine, where terrain was convenient for the rapid advance of mobile and mechanized forces. Instead, Svechin advanced the thesis that in the initial stage of future war the political purposes of enemy would predominate above the economic. He was confident that the enemy would conduct his main offensive through agricultural Belorussia, but not through the economically developed Ukraine, because Belorussia was the shortest path to Moscow, the political center of the Soviet Union. Svechin was particularly anxious about the fate of Leningrad. He warned against further industrial consolidation and population in this gigantic city, which was extremely vulnerable in view of its geographical location: "the disadvantages of the strategic position of Leningrad still are aggravated by its isolation from the sources of fuel, bread and raw material." One example of Svechin's deep and even audacious foresight is the defense plan in the southern direction (the Ukraine), in which he proposed to leave the right bank of the Dnepr to mobile defense actions, and anchor a defense in depth on the left bank, after converting the Dnepr into an impervious antitank ditch. The adoption of this plan could have avoided the 1941 Kiev strategic defense operation's catastrophe, in which the Red Army delayed the Germans for a short period at the cost of heavy Soviet losses.

Friction between Svechin and Stalin about RKKA development and the country's defense led to Svechin's arrest and subsequent execution.¹⁷ However, Svechin was a contributor to the theory based on historical facts, and his operational concepts helped define operational art as the intermediate link between strategy and tactics. He described their interconnectivity and outlined directions for future development. Meantime, Svechin became a world-class strategist, with his area of expertise centered on national preparation for war. His book *Strategy* (Strategiya) explained the political and economical preparation of the nation for war. His formulation (after Delbruck) of two competing strategic postures, annihilation and attrition, raised important issues regarding the relationship between operational art and a paradigm for future war.¹⁸

To summarize Svechin's contribution in the development of the Soviet military science, his main points included: the establishment of a political-economic foundation for strategy; the division of strategy into two types, annihilation and attrition; the delineation and assertion of operational art in a new understanding for the concept of an operation; a redefinition of combat's role in operations; denial of the importance of the single engagement and the transformation of combat into an on-going, episodic process; radical reduction of the role of march-maneuver to contact as a major strategic factor; emphasizing the role of transportation and communications in strategy and significance

¹⁷Sergey Ivanchenko, *Aleksandr Svechin Voenspec*, <http://militera.lib.ru/science/svechin1/about.html> (accessed 10 January 2010).

¹⁸Kipp, "Mass, Mobility, And the Red Army's Road To Operational Art 1918-1936," Combined Arms Research Library, <http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/resources/biblio/interwar.asp> (accessed 25 December 2009).

of military-technical superiority. He understood operational art as the means by which the senior commander transformed a series of tactical successes into operational “frames” linked by commander’s intent and plan for strategic success in a given theater of military actions.¹⁹ Svechin’s theoretical introduction of operational art created favorable conditions for the future emergence of “deep operation” theory.

While Svechin and a few other military theorists in the RKKA Military Academy worked on a theoretical justification for operational art, the Army still needed a practical solution to the World War I tactical problem—the breakthrough of enemy defense zone. The tactical solution was introduced by M. N. Tukhachevskiy.

Before analyzing the theoretical heritage of Tukhachevskiy’s works, one must first review the key stages of his life and military career. Tukhachevskiy received his military education in the First Moscow Empress Ekaterina II cadet corps (high school) and Alexander military college. After his graduation in 1914 he was deployed on the Russian North-Western Front where, in 1915, he was captured by the Germans. In October 1917 he succeeded in escaping to Russia and joined the Bolshevik movement. The Bolsheviks and especially Vladimir Ilich Lenin noted Tukhachevskiy’s solid military training, rich World War I combat experience, and his outstanding leadership and oratorical abilities. At the beginning of 1918 Tukhachevskiy joined the Bolsheviks and assumed the post for Military Commissar of the Moscow defense area. Soon thereafter, the revolt of the Czechoslovak Corps created an emergency in the Russian Far East. The Bolshevik Central Committee assigned Tukhachevskiy to command to the 1st

¹⁹V.K. Triandofilov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, trans. William A. Burhans, and Jacob W. Kipp (Newbury Park, Ilford: Frank Cass and Co., 1994), xv.

Revolutionary Army. Over three months, the 1st Army liberated the Volga Region and a substantial part of the Ural Mountains. Combat experience convinced Tukhachevskiy of the superiority of offensive and mobile tactics over their defensive variant. His Civil War experience included successful operations leading to the annihilation of Krasnov's army on the South Front, General Kolchak's army on the Eastern Front, General Denikin's army on the Caucasus Front and conquest of the Ukraine on the Western Front. In spite of fiasco in the Warsaw operation Tukhachevskiy earned the laurels of a talented and experienced commander. However, his image was tarnished by conducting bloody suppressions of "counterrevolutionary mutinies" at Kronstadt and in the Tambov region.

The Kronstadt sailors' mutiny in March 1921 was a reaction to the policy of Military Communism, which persisted even after the end of Civil War. Insurgency in the Tambov region and a number of other provinces simultaneously raged. The peasantry ruined by *prodrazverstka* (state confiscation of agricultural goods from peasants in a war time) suffered more, even after the White armies had been destroyed. The majority of the Kronstadt garrison was composed of descended from the peasantry. They knew what had occurred in their villages. Kronstadt's sailors spoke in support of reform to facilitate the development of agriculture. Regardless of the fairness of these demands the Bolshevik government decided to punish the sailors. V.I. Lenin appointed Tukhachevskiy to suppress the mutiny. To remove the stain of defeat in the Warsaw operation Tukhachevskiy wanted to choke the mutiny and sent a secret telegram with detailed instructions about the treatment of the enemy: "Treat the rebels severely, execute them

without any regret . . . do not take prisoners.”²⁰ The official outcome of the suppression was about 1,000 sailors killed, more than 2,000 wounded and 2,500 imprisoned. The combat losses of the Tukhachevskiy’s troops were 527 killed and 3285 wounded. In assaulting Kronstadt the RKKA lost about one and a half times more casualties than the defenders, but less than half the number killed. With the assault of such a fortified position as Kronstadt, especially under the conditions of a frontal attack on the ice surface with no cover, the attacking side must suffer losses exceeding the defenders’ losses. If the truth were to be told, the RKKA shot the majority of surrendering sailors without any trial.²¹

At the end of April 1921 Tukhachevskiy was appointed commander-in-chief of Tambov province, with the task of choking a powerful peasant revolt headed by A. S. Antonov, a former school teacher and member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The Tambov Military District had a combat strength about 120,000 troops. Against the rebels were 53,000 soldiers, reinforced by nine artillery brigades, four armored trains, six armored vehicles units, five armored vehicle detachments, two air squadrons, 63 cannon, 463 machine guns, and eight aircraft. The RKKA had no shortage of ammunition. The rebels had 18,000 soldiers, five cannon and 25 machine guns, for which there were insufficient projectiles and cartridges. Antonov had support from the local population, the ability to disperse rapidly, and the capacity for converting his personnel into peaceful peasants or gathering them into armed forces again for a new fight. On 12 May, the day

²⁰B.V. Sokolov, Mikhail Tukhachevskiy: Life and Death of “Red marshal,” <http://militera.lib.ru/bio/sokolov/index.html> (accessed 20 January 2010).

²¹Ibid., 196.

of its arrival into Tambov, Tukhachevskiy published executive order №130. In accordance with this order a rebel's family members were to be taken away as hostages, and the property confiscated. The family would be detained for two weeks in a concentration camp. If the rebel surrendered to the RKKA staff and surrendered his weapons, his family and property would be released. However, if rebel would not surrender within two weeks his family would be sent to Siberia for forced labor.²² Rebels began to surrender immediately. On 1 May 1921, 7,000 people gave up their weapons, and from May to August, 15,000. Meantime, Antonov's insurgency remained strong in several wooden areas. In order to completely eliminate Antonov's units, Tukhachevskiy launched a full scale offensive supported by artillery bombardment with gas and public execution of hostages. The RKKA launched the first gas attack on 13 July. On this day the artillery battalion of the Volga military district fired 47 chemical shells. By 15 July not more than 1200 rebels remained in the Tambov province, and they had been driven into the forests, hungry, almost without ammunition. On 16 July Tukhachevskiy reported victory to Lenin: "As a result of counterinsurgency operations for a period of 40 days the counterrevolutionary rebellion in the Tambov province is liquidated."²³

After the end of the Civil War Tukhachevskiy returned his efforts to further strengthening and developing the RKKA to face a new strategic environment's challenges. Appointment as chief of the RKKA Military Academy on 25 July 1921 allowed him to share his rich combat experience and to become acquainted with contemporary military theory. He also began serious work in military theory. His areas of

²²Ibid., 209.

²³Ibid., 224.

research were strategy and tactics. As a talented strategist he was proponent of “annihilation” and on repeated occasions he disagreed with Svechin’s vision of preparing the country for a war of “attrition.” Between 1922 and 1937, Tukhachevskiy held the positions of Western Front commander, chief of staff of RKKA, Leningrad military district commander, the chief of RKKA’s armament, the deputy chief of People’s Commissariat of Defense and the deputy chair of the Revolutionary Council. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s Tukhachevskiy concentrated his efforts on the reconstitution and re-armament of the RKKA, as well as establishing a new form of tactics, later known as “deep battle.” In January 1930 Tukhachevskiy drafted a report about the reorganization of the armed forces on the basis of the growth of technology and capabilities of military industrial production. The main idea of the report was a quantitative and qualitative increase for the different branches of services, which would influence the appearance of new forms of operational art. He proposed development to increase the quantity of divisions, artillery, aviation and tank forces. However, Stalin and Voroshilov did not support the program; moreover, they resisted the reforms. Stalin declared that the program’s approval would cause transition from socialistic development to “Red militarism.”²⁴

Tukhachevskiy also initiated development of airborne forces. In September 1934 during the Leningrad Military District’s maneuvers an airborne regiment conducted an airdrop; in 1936 the RKKA conducted a division airdrop, which was supplied with fuel and ammunition from the air and coordinated with troops on the ground and close air

²⁴M. N. Tukhachevskiy, *The Selected Works. Volume I* (Moscow: The Ministry of Defense of USSR, 1964), 12.

support. The appearance of new military branches and the saturation of the armed forces with tanks and aviation created conditions for the destruction of the enemy in his entire tactical depth. Taking into account these possibilities, Tukhachevskiy developed the theory of “deep battle” and incorporated the theory within the RKKA training cycle. In order to demonstrate the theory in practice, Tukhachevskiy in 1933 and 1934 orchestrated tactical exercises on the themes: The breakthrough of enemy’s fortified defense at the narrow front by the reinforced rifle division, encirclement, and breakout from encirclement.

Tukhachevskiy described his theory in a series of lectures for RKKA commanders and in his 1933 Temporary Instruction on the Organization of Deep Battle. The early concept of deep battle split attacking forces into strike groups of first echelon, second echelon and fixing group. The first force in contact was the fixing group with the mission to fix the enemy in his position and pull in the enemy’s reserve. The mission of the first echelon strike group was the breakthrough of the first enemy defense line, predominantly via his flank and to facilitate a follow-on attack by the second echelon strike group. The mission of the second echelon strike group was to exploit into the depths of the enemy’s defense, destroying enemy C2, reserves and logistic units. The initial air and artillery barrages had to suppress the enemy’s defensive fire system, in order to minimize enemy antitank artillery and machine gun fire against the attacking forces and to facilitate deep penetration of the defense by infantry reinforced with close infantry support tanks. Reinforced infantry of the second echelon would exploit in depth by isolating the enemy’s C2 and reserves, subjecting them to fragmentation and even annihilation. At the same time airborne operations supported by aviation would disrupt the enemy rear. Thus,

the success of infantry deep penetration depended on robust coordination with attached tanks, a majority of artillery support tanks, and tanks supporting infantry.²⁵ Generally speaking, in the early 1930s the RKKA forces frequently practiced deep encirclement and envelopment, including vertical envelopment. The new theory relied on infantry as a main striking force, with tanks, artillery and aviation in combat support functions only. Truth be told, this theory of deep battle met strong resistance in the initial stage, first of all among veterans of the Civil War. In particular, Voroshilov strongly criticized the theory and only the support of S.S.Kamenev made possible its introduction into the training system of the RKKA.

The rapid growth of Soviet military industry and science, the Soviet doctrine of shifting the combat operation to the territory of the attacking enemy, as well as the first combat experience during the 1936-39 Civil War in Spain, modified the theory of “deep battle.” Field regulations for the Red Army 1936 (FR-36), developed under Tukhachevskiy’s supervision, asserted the superiority of deep offensive battle versus a defensive posture.²⁶ The main innovation of FR-36 was the transfer of the mission for penetrating the enemy tactical defense zone from reinforced rifle units to the units of long-range tanks.²⁷ Chapter 181 of FR-36 states:

The decisive role of the long-range tanks in penetrating an enemy defense zone in its entire depth requires that the use of the long-range tank group is actually consistent with the situation. . . . The long-range tank groups have the tasks of penetrating the rear of the defender’s main forces, of destroying his reserves, and

²⁵Ibid.,16.

²⁶Department of Commerce, *Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army 1936* (Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, June 1986), 4.

²⁷Ibid., 58.

headquarters, to destroy the main artillery group, and to cut retreat routes for the bulk of enemy forces.²⁸

Thus, the long-range tank groups, supported by artillery and close air support, had to penetrate entire depth of the enemy defense and to seize lines of communication and withdrawal. This is the crucial difference between the early concept of “deep battle” and the innovations implemented in FR-36.²⁹

The FR-36, as a “swan song” of Tukhachevskiy, was the most significant document of the RKKA in interwar development. The regulation nailed down “deep battle” as the predominant form of tactical battle and introduced the “deep operation” as a logical sequel at the operational level. It also consolidated almost 15 year’s work by Soviet military theorists on solving of the World War I tactical problem of breakthrough of a positional defense. The RKKA received a clear picture of military-strategic end state, implementing an “annihilation” method of warfare versus an “attrition” one, while armies and divisions accepted the “deep operation”-“deep battle” form of armed engagement.

The event which conclusively sealed the marshal’s fate occurred in 1936: the Civil War began in Spain. Stalin, supported by Voroshilov, proposed to send RKKA troops to reinforce the Republican Army. Tukhachevskiy stated that the consequences of that decision for RKKA development would be destructive. The RKKA had only limited numbers of qualified personnel and deploying the best pilots, artillerymen and tankers would impede military reform.

²⁸Ibid., 59.

²⁹Tukhachevskiy, 256.

Stalin was clearly dissatisfied. However, Tukhachevskiy was not one of those who worried about impressing “authorities.” He continued to argue his case. The RKKA had great achievements, but at the same time it had large deficiencies which were immediately would be obvious to western military experts, thereby decreasing the prestige of the USSR. The RKKA had developed dynamically and the armed forces felt a deficit of commanders, especially at senior and highest ranks. In the majority of European armies military personnel received a military training and education from adolescence, but in the RKKA more than 40 percent of senior commanders did not have even a high school diploma. Tukhachevskiy supported the idea of limited military assistance to Spain, first of all, armaments and medicine. Meantime, the deployment of the Soviet troops caused an immediate reaction from Germany and Italy, which sent troops to Franco. The war would drag on and would cost the RKKA many victims. The reorganization of the RKKA would be prolonged and command losses on the Spanish soil would increase uncertainty.

Tukhachevskiy’s negative position about Spain triggered his arrest and subsequent execution.³⁰ While “deep battle” took deep roots in the tactics and training requirements of the RKKA, the theory of “deep operation,” a new superior level of military art would be called into question.

Another talented military theorist and commander of the RKKA was Vladimir Kiriakovich Triandafillov. His book *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* is one of the most important works in the development of Soviet military theory from the interwar period. He was credited with making a major contribution to the theories of deep

³⁰Karpov, 21.

battle, successive operations, and deep operations, and to the study of “future war.” His approach clearly identifies that future war will be different from past combat experience, but study of the character of armed conflict is important for understanding the evolution of military art.³¹

Triandafillov was born on 14 March 1894 in a Greek peasant family. After his graduation from the Trans-Caucasian Pedagogical Seminary in 1914 he was conscripted into the Russian army at the outbreak of the World War I. In 1915 he attended officer training in a Moscow warrant-officer school, which he successfully completed in November 1915. On the front of World War I he rose to the rank of staff captain, commanding a battalion on the Southwestern Front. In the chaotic period of 1917 Triandafillov was so popular among the 6th Finnish Regiment’s soldiers he was elected to the command of the regiment and later to the 7th Army’s commanding position. On 1 June 1918 Triandafillov joined the RKKA and participated as the commander of different units in operations of the Ural Front, the South and Southwestern Fronts, which let him to the rank of Kombrig (brigade commander). On 17 September 1919 he was assigned to the distance learning faculty of the Military Academy of RKKA, which finished as top graduate on August 1923. Another significant event occurred in Triandafillov’s military career. In 1921 he took part in the suppression of the Tambov peasant revolt, when he served under Tukhachevskiy.³² Triandafillov was closely associated with Tukhachevskiy for the next decade, fully supporting his theory of “deep battle” and developing the next step of military art: theory of “deep operation.”

³¹Triandafillov, trans. by Burhans, and Kipp, vii.

³²Ibid., xi.

Following his graduation from the Military Academy in 1923, Triandafillov was assigned to the Main Staff of the RKKA, where he took over as Chief of the Operations Directorate in 1924 and after a short tour as a rifle corps' commander returned to Moscow as Deputy Chief of Staff for RKKA in 1928. In 1931 his life tragically ended in a fatal flight accident. However, Triandafillov's invaluable military-scientific works contributed to the Soviet military theory the fundamental knowledge of command and control of the strategic-operational formation. His major publications, including: "Interaction between the Western and Southwestern fronts during the summer offence of the Red Army on the Vistula in 1920," "War and Revolution," "Perekop operation of the Red Army," "The 1918-1921 Civil War," "The scale of the operations of modern armies" and "The nature of the operations of modern armies," established the foundation of "deep operation" theory.

The last Triandafillov book, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, published in 1929, deserves precise attention because of its influence on the development of the theory and its legitimatizing, in the RKKA, field regulations 1929 and 1936. The focus of operational art's study is upon future battles and wars. The objectives are to use past experience, current capabilities and tendencies to predict the nature of future operations. Taking into account economic development, socio-political shifts and technological changes of the country, he frames the evolution of military art. The special interest was his analysis of technological progress during World War I decade, beginning with infantry weapons and shifting to artillery, chemical weapons, tanks, command and control assets, and aviation. Triandafillov examined not only the status of such weapons but also the tendencies in their further development. He emphasized the question of an

interwar period: whether future armies would be small, professional, mechanized forces or million-man, mass armies. Analyzing capitalist societies, he concluded that mass, mechanized armies will dominate future wars.³³

For purely economic reasons mechanization in the different armies is carried out to unequal degrees. According to the degree of mechanization all armies can be divided into two groups. The first group is West European armies. A shining example is France. The second group is Eastern European. Typical examples are Poland and our Red Army.³⁴

Triandafillov claimed that in the West, mass, mechanized warfare had already become possible, when the underdeveloped Eastern armies were based on a “peasant rear” and this fact would drive implementation of new forms of warfare and the concept of sustainment. However, Triandafillov’s entire operational vision supported Tukhachevskiy’s strategic concept of “annihilation.”

The value of Triandafillov’s concepts is the manner in which they specified the numerical densities of troops and artillery support, the “correlation of forces” needed for penetration, breakthrough, exploitation and pursuit of the enemy’s defense forces. He concluded that, in a major war between large countries, no single operation could be decisive, and victory would be possible only by conducting a series of successive and coherent operations. The concept of integrating a tactical success into an operational and sequential strategic victory led him to analyze in depth two other aspects of the operational level of war—command & control and logistic capabilities. Triandafillov drew the attention of his readers to the offensive with a shock army and the significance of

³³Ibid., xvi.

³⁴V. K. Triandafillov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, <http://militera.lib.ru/science/triandafillov1/index.html> (accessed 2 February 2010), 12.

concentrating forces to secure a breakthrough of a deliberate defense and to advance into the depths of the enemy position. The organization of a shock army, as proposed by Triandafillov, would include 4-5 rifle corps with their organic artillery assets, 4-5 artillery divisions and 8-12 tank battalions. Moreover, he developed detailed concepts of operation, sustainment and schemes of maneuver for different types of terrain and enemy situations. Triandafillov's *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* was a complete campaign plan for future war to a depth of 250 km into the enemy's territory. The suggested plan could be applied to possible future conflicts with the Baltic countries, but would be inappropriate to use it against Poland and Finland. We have to understand that Triandafillov's theory was developed and introduced to the Soviet audience in the late 1920s. The Soviet Union had not yet achieved economic strength during the first Five Year Plan ("piatiletka" plan of industrial development, 1929-1934) and adequate means for the RKKA did not yet exist to accomplish the "shock" mission with superior mechanized forces. In spite of this lack of mechanized assets for the "future war," Triandafillov examined the technical aspects of an army's operation—the armament of modern armies of the West, their quantitative and qualitative characteristics, as well as other factors of the world operational-strategic environment, which influence the nature of warfare. Based on this data, he researched the modern tactics, separate operations and number of sequential operations. Triandafillov emphasized that his research's conclusions are essential for the beginning of future war only. The nature of the operations of subsequent periods, naturally, will undergo changes in accordance with

dynamic battlefield evolution, which in the course of war unavoidably will occur in the armament, quantity, organization and training of forces.³⁵

The works of Triandafillov and Tukhachevskiy were embodied in the 1929 and 1936 RKKA field regulations and established the theories of “deep battle” and “deep operation” as the essential forms of the RKKA’s warfare. These theories as part of the operational and tactical level of engagement became integrated in the Soviet strategy of annihilation with the determinants of battle being maneuver of a mass of infantry’s units reinforced with tanks, artillery and air supremacy. Stalin’s purge impeded the evolution of such theories after 1936.

Only a few Soviet theorists continued developing the theories based on the rapidly changing environment and victorious march of Fascist-Nazi ideology into Western Europe. One of them was Colonel Georgii Samoilovich Isserson.

The War will never be declared. It begins with the previously deployed armed forces. Mobilization and concentration relate not to the period after the war’s declaration as it was in 1914, but unnoticeably, gradually carried out a long time before the clash. The preparation cannot be of course completely hidden. In various cases the mobilization and concentration of forces become known. However, a crucial step always remains from the war’s declaration to the clash. While one country struggles with a doubt about the enemy military appearance or real threat, another country continues the concentration of forces along the border until the enormous armed force is ready to receive the signal and the war immediately bursts on its total scale.³⁶

The fate of Isserson was unfortunately typical for the RKKA military elite of the late 1930s. The veteran of the Civil War, chief of operational department of General Staff

³⁵Ibid., 14.

³⁶G.S. Isserson, *Novie Formy Borby* (The new forms of struggle), <http://militera.lib.ru/science/isserson/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2010), 1.

Academy and talented military theorist repeated the destiny of the majority of the high ranking officers. He was arrested and exiled to Siberia for 15 years. The 1955 Khrushchev amnesty saved his life, but never allowed him to return to military service. Isserson's books, such as *The New Forms of Struggle*; *The Evolution of Operational Art*; and *Operational Prospects of the Future*, examined the development of Soviet operational art and its theories, and could elevate the level of the theories' implementation. Isserson's "researcher's battlefields" were the 1936 Civil War in Spain and the 1939 German conquest of Poland. His contribution to the evolution of "deep operation" theory was important and catastrophically neglected by Stalin's military authority. However, some of Isserson's concepts deserve to be emphasized as part of the Soviet interwar military theory.

Isserson like the majority of Soviet military theorists found his way to introduce operational art through a deep analysis of military art's evolution. His book *The Evolution of Operational Art*, published in 1932, introduced the development of operational level of warfare from the Napoleonic wars to Moltke's era, and from World War I to Colonel Duffeur and General Dubenet's concepts of correlation movement, maneuver and penetration of the enemy's front. Being the chief of the Department of Armies' operations in the General Staff Academy, he could monitor the evolution of the "deep operation" in the RKKA and similar theories abroad, particularly in Germany. Isserson noticed significant, but hidden, deviations from the Soviet "deep battle" tactics in the development of German methods of deep penetration (later called Blitzkrieg). The Soviet theory relied on infantry as a key tool of breakthrough whereas the Wehrmacht widely and successfully exercised moto-mechanized penetration. Isserson's book *The*

New Forms of Struggle reversed these tendencies, which appeared slightly during the 1936 Civil War in Spain and re-emerged on the higher level of warfare during Germany's conquest of Poland in 1939. Isserson insisted that the German-Polish war revealed not just the new conditions of the operational (East-European theater) environment, under which modern maneuver warfare was possible, the Polish campaign also demonstrated the capabilities which had to be applied for new maneuver warfare, the methods required for the warfare, and the forms which the struggle must exercise.³⁷ Generally, Isserson was a stickler for maneuver warfare and "deep operation" as the method of its application. In his book *Operational Prospects of the Future*, he emphasizes that deep battle and deep operation, as new forms of employing modern combat means, have turned their cutting edge against the fire front. Their basic task consists of breaking and destroying this front to the entire depth. The essential condition for destroying the enemy's defense is the penetrating force of the attack, which is characterized by deep forms of struggle. At the same time, without clear and decisive superiority on the main attack axis, not a single offensive mission will be resolved.³⁸ In contrast to Triandafillov's "peasant rear" concept, Isserson insisted that the deep operation was, above all, an operation comprised by an enormous mass of tanks, artillery, and aviation. Only a mass of technical combat means, concentrated in the necessary quantity, would permit the deep operation to attain its developed execution.³⁹ It is amazing that he made

³⁷Ibid., 67.

³⁸Harold S. Orenstein and David M. Glantz, *The Evolution of Soviet Operational art, 1927-1991: the Documentary Basis. Volume I* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 78.

³⁹Ibid., 88.

this conclusion based on the Republican Army's experience during the 1936 Civil War in Spain, when the Soviet military authority, driven by a wrongheaded assessment, disbanded the RKKA tank corps, reconstituting them into brigades. In the wave of the purge, Isserson's competent concepts of future warfare were abandoned and their author shared the destiny of thousands of talented military experts in exile. Meanwhile, some the Red Army commanders took charge of implementation of the concepts during the military conflicts in the Far East, where their employment was preferable.

In conclusion, his overview of the works of Soviet military theorists during interwar period shows the theory of operational art was developed to a level of operational formation - army and front. The main form of the operational art was the "deep offensive operation," where the defense had to block the enemy offensive on the Soviet border during the initial stage of war and creates the conditions for a RKKA successive offensive, in order to shift the military engagement onto the enemy's territory. Fundamentally, the theory acknowledged that future offensive operations, in contrast to those of World War I, will bear a more active maneuver nature and will take the form of sequential blows at the entire operational depth of the enemy's defense. Regardless of any increase in the operational and tactical density of enemy forces, significant strengthening of firepower and defensive fortification, the availability of contemporary tanks and mechanized assets will ensure penetration of the enemy's defense and exploitation of the offensive operations in its operational depth.

The theory of the "deep offensive operation" was developed on the basis of historical analysis. The Soviet theorists studied the reasons that limited the depth of offensive operations in the World War I. The war assessment showed that the positional

nature of the war was caused by the belligerents balance of forces, absence of sufficiently effective penetration assets, and an inability of military theory to find the solution to the problem of the operational defense's penetration. The theory of "deep offensive operation" examined the essence of operational breakthrough, the methods of breakthrough, the creation of the shock formation and tactical densities.

Operational Breakthrough: The deep offensive operation begins from the penetration of an enemy's deliberate defense. The first phase is the deep penetration in the different directions, in order to separate enemy's defense and create conditions for the sequential flank attacks. The essence of the operational breakthrough of the enemy's defense consists of the penetration of tactical defense in the specific sectors; the exploitation of tactical penetration into an operational penetration with its expansion to the side of flanks; the destruction of the enemy's operational reserves before they deployed for counterattack, and identification of the enemy's defensive lines in operational depth. For the mission's accomplishment Soviet theory foresaw: the fire & shock means (artillery, tanks, aviation) for suppression of the enemy's tactical defense simultaneously in entire depth; the means of exploitation in operational depth (mechanized and mechanized cavalry formations, supported by aviation); the means for destruction of the enemy's reserves (mechanized and mechanized cavalry groups, supported by aviation). The destruction of the enemy's forces must be conducted sequentially, encircling the divided and isolated forces and destroying them in detail. The end state of the operational breakthrough is defeating the enemy to such an extent it would be unable to organize new a defense in its rear.

Methods of Breakthrough: When the enemy's defense does not have open or weakened flanks an offensive operation has to be performed, such as a combination of frontal attack, envelopment and turning movement. The Soviet theory identified two main methods of breakthrough: the breakthrough of the tactical zone of defense and breakthrough of fortified areas.

The breakthrough of the tactical zone of defense by infantry formations, reinforced with artillery, aviation, and tanks, is the most difficult but natural method employed against enemy's deliberate defense. With this method of breakthrough the infantry penetrates the defensive zone without changing its dispositions. The second and third echelons do not change, but they strengthen the first echelon, increasing the force of the strike. After the breakthrough of the first defensive zone and seizure of the second, mechanized and cavalry formations exploit the tactical success into the operational. At the same time, rifle units of the first echelon expand the width of the breakthrough in the side or flanks. The offensive into the enemy's operational depth is exploited by introducing the second echelons of corps and armies. In this manner, the breakthrough to the entire depth of the enemy's defense is conducted by one massive blow, without a significant change to the array of operational forces.⁴⁰

The breakthrough of fortified areas initially requires a significant surge of artillery, tanks and combat engineer assets. The breakthrough of fortified areas differs from the previous method of overcoming the defense, as it is conducted by the sequential seizure of separate fortified positions, choke points and fortified defensive zones. Tanks are used for direct support of the infantry. Engineers follow the first echelon of infantry,

⁴⁰Semenov, 116.

in order to remove obstacles for the advance of the main forces and to prepare the artillery positions. The operational array of forces requires an additional reserve of maneuver units and special purpose units in depth, in order to compensate for high losses among the forward storm units. For this particular method the most appropriate form of maneuver is a frontal attack.⁴¹

Forms of Operational Breakthrough: On the eve of World War II, Soviet theory described three main forms of operational breakthrough. First, the powerful blow of several armies in one narrow sector of the front. This form adapted the offensive to the strongly fortified enemy's defense. The application of this form gave the potential to rapidly overwhelm enemy positions in tactical depth, to enlarge the breach from the side of flanks by the combined arms forces, and into the defensive depth by mobile groups. The mobile group usually consisted of one or two tank corps equipped with medium and light tanks in combination with a heavy tank brigade. The second form of operational breakthrough was an offensive of several shock armies across a broad front for the purpose of the rapid and complete defeat of enemy. This form could be used against a weak enemy defense and required considerable fire and shock capabilities (artillery, tanks and aviation). Third, the blow of several armies in the different sectors of the front was complex, but more effective, form of operational breakthrough. The successful breakthrough in several sectors crushed the enemy front, created conditions for further encirclement of the enemy and destruction in detail. In order to economize forces and provide the maximum effect during the operational breakthrough the Front formed the shock army. Essential requirements for the shock army were to be able to penetrate

⁴¹Ibid., 117.

the enemy's defense on main direction of the attack and conduct a number of sequential operations from the beginning to the end.⁴²

The Soviet theorists calculated the density of artillery, tanks and aviation on the basis of the means available for wartime. Thus, for conducting offensive operations an average of up to 50 cannons per square kilometer were required. The desired tank density was 10 tanks per kilometer of front and 45 tanks in depth. Aviation supported the actions of corps with up to eight attack aircraft, while a shock army had at least 30-50 reconnaissance aircraft and up to 30 attack aircraft. According to the RKKA field regulations, to provide efficient deployment of forces the breakthrough's frontage was: for a division-3 km., corps-6-8 km., a shock army-25-30 km., and a front-60-80 km. These estimates had been adopted based on Triandafillov's theoretical calculations.

The Operational Array of Forces: During the penetration of the enemy's deliberate defense, and when terrain did not allow the deployment of armored formations, the first echelon of the offense consisted of rifle formations, and in the second echelon it consisted of mobile groups. Rifle units, supported by tanks, artillery and aviation, must accomplish a breakthrough of the entire depth of the first defensive zone and create conditions for the introduction of the army's mobile group into the operational depth. When the enemy's forces are in a hasty defense and their fortifications, as well as anti-tank capabilities, are insufficient for organized resistance, the first echelon of an offensive army would consist of mechanized and tank formations, and the second of rifle forces. In this case, the first echelon not only breaks through the enemy's tactical defense zone, but also exploits the success into the operational depth. The rifle forces follow the

⁴²Ibid., 118.

first echelon and destroy encircled enemy forces.⁴³ The operational array of forces, the depth and fortification of enemy's defense dictated another control measure of the offensive—the duration and depth of an operation. The theory of deep operation established the following requirements for tactical and operational units: the rifle division overcomes the enemy's defense (6-8 km) during the first day of army's operation; the rifle corps is capable of breakthrough in the entire tactical zone of the enemy's defense (8-12 km) during the first or second day of operation; the shock army spends three to five days to break through the entire operational zone of the enemy's defense (40-60 km), and a Front operation requires three to four weeks on a territory for 200-250 km in depth.⁴⁴

The preceding overview of how the Soviet theorists during the interwar period issued the RKKA field regulations and conducted military exercises gives us evidence that the RKKA, its command and control system, and its tactical as well as operational level commanders had an appropriate fundamental, theoretical knowledge for employing successful deep battle and deep operations. This testimony allows us to assume the RKKA's operational art theory was able to solve the World War I tactical problem: how to breakthrough the enemy's positional defense. The 1939 Soviet-Japanese full-scale military conflict would test the validity of this theory, as well as the ability of the Red Army commanders to appropriately apply the theory's concepts.

⁴³Ibid., 121.

⁴⁴Triandafillov, trans. by Burhans, and Kipp, 107.

CHAPTER 3

SOVIET PROSPECTIVES ON THE FAR EAST'S OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The victory over Germany in World War I and the euphoric reintegration process in Europe set conditions for the fragile peace of almost two decades. However, the Far East became a new area of the international tension. The rise of Japan as pretender to regional dominance, the world powers' activities in China, and the Soviet Union's interference contributed to the military conflict between the Soviet and Japanese forces in 1939.

Significant changes occurred over the years of World War I in the countries of the Far East. Economic development in Japan accelerated considerably. The volume of industrial production more than doubled and the number of workers involved in industrial production grew from 916,000 to 1.4 million people. The Japanese gold reserve grew from 350 million to 2 billion yen. Japanese exports increased from 653 million yen (in 1913) to 1.9 billion (in 1918) yen, and imports increased from 729 million to 1.7 billion yen. During World War I Japan became the supplier and creditor of the belligerent powers: it granted loans to the UK, France, and Russian Empire, totaling about 500 million yen. The special features of the Japanese economy's development were a growth of private capital, its influence on the government apparatus and an aggressive expansion throughout Southeastern Asia.⁴⁵ During World War I, Japan not only occupied German territories, but deeply penetrated the Chinese economy and political life as well. More

⁴⁵G. V. Efimov, A.M. Dubinskiy, and E.M. Zhukov, *The International Relations in the Far East. Volume II* (Academy of Science of USSR, Moscow: Publisher "Misl", 1973), 13.

than 30 percent of Chinese external trade was owned by Japanese companies. Japan masterfully pushed British and French businesses out of the Chinese market. Japanese ambitions in China received more legitimate support after the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In accordance with articles 157, 158 and 159 of the Versailles Treaty, Japan received control over the Chinese Shandong province and all German property in the province, including the railway, the railway's equipment and mines.⁴⁶ Moreover, militarily Japan achieved parity with the US and the UK in the Pacific, due to agreement made at the Washington Conference in 1922. The agreement obligated the USA and the UK to abstain from establishing naval bases nearer than five thousand kilometers from Japan. Additionally, the agreement's restrictions limited the fortification of the Aleutian, Philippine, and Guam islands.⁴⁷ Against the background of these successful external political achievements, the situation in China as well as an internal power struggle dragged Japan into an invasion of Manchuria and a protracted military conflict with China. The strengthening of the Chinese nationalistic movement, the creation of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and the 1925-1927 revolutionary movement against foreign presence, changed the political environment in China. The ideas of unification of the country and the limitation of the foreign influence became predominant themes among the Chinese population. At the same time, the political struggle inside the Japanese society came to a boil. In 1931 the new Minister of Defense Minami Dziro stated during a conference with the Japanese Army division commanders the necessity of the military invasion to Manchuria and Mongolia.

⁴⁶Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷Ibid., 44.

The Kwantung Army regarded itself as the guardian of Japan's frontiers. The Kwantung Army's officers came to believe that the Japanese War Ministry did not fully realize the dangers posed by the Soviet Union to Japanese holdings in Manchuria. To meet this threat, on 18 September 1931, the Kwantung Army provoked a conflict between Japan and a Manchurian warlord that ultimately enabled Kwantung Army units to extend their control throughout Manchuria. Following this, the Kwantung Army forced the creation, in early 1932, of a puppet state called Manchukuo. Neither the Chinese army nor international efforts could terminate the invasion. However, the latter pushed Japan to withdraw from the League of Nations. In January 1932, the Kwantung Army occupied almost all Manchurian provinces and moved its axis north to the Mongolian and Soviet borders. As result of the Japanese invasion China, lost more than 50 percent of its oil and 80 percent of its iron deposits. Beginning in 1936, the Kwantung Army began systematic acts of sabotage along the Soviet-Manchurian and Mongolian borders.⁴⁸ The developed Japanese economy, well organized and trained Kwantung army, and international influence on foreign policy in China gave Japan the position of the regional hegemon and set conditions favorable for an expansion into the northern territories including Mongolia and the Soviet's Far East and Siberia.

Historically, the United Kingdom was the dominant trading partner with China. The British commercial interests had been empowered by the Cabinet's foreign policy and the Royal Navy. In spite of that, during the course of World War I, the growth of Japan and the U.S. as world powers shifted the balance in China away from Britain. For example, in 1920 British exports to China were about 44 million pounds, but by 1936 the

⁴⁸Ibid., 111.

rate had dropped to five million pounds. The British textile industry's exports fell from 17 billion to less than 6 billion yards. However, British banks participated actively in the market and helped achieve the Chinese monetary reform in 1935.⁴⁹ The centers of British influence in China were Shanghai and Hong Kong. Despite economic competition from U.S. businesses in the region, the political sphere of these two countries was well coordinated. The Treaty of Versailles, the Washington Treaty, and the League of Nations are evidence of shared common success. In China both powers supported Jieng Jieshi's government, as well as resisted the Soviet influence and Japanese expansion and invasion. On the other hand, the appeasement promoted by the U.S. and the British foreign policies encouraged Japan to gain momentum and take the initiative in Southeastern Asia. The situation did not change even in 1937, when the Kwantung Army launched a full scale invasion of the central part of China. In accordance with the "neutrality" law the U.S. government reduced its military assistance to China and eventually withdrew the American military contingents, which had been billeted in China about 40 years. Driven by business interests, the U.S. continued to supply strategic materials until the end of 1940. The U.S. portion of Japanese overall import in 1940 consisted of: oil-65 percent, steel-90 percent, metals and alloys-99 percent, copper-90 percent, machinery—77 percent, airplanes-76 percent, and vehicles-65 percent.⁵⁰

The dynamic market of China was also attractive and desirable for German industry. German companies supplied the products of metal and heavy industry, railway equipment and locomotives, weapon and vehicles. German companies built the Nandgou-

⁴⁹Ibid., 118.

⁵⁰Ibid., 143.

Chuchgou railway, investing about \$300 million in the project. At the same time, Jieng Jieshi's government received a \$10 million loan for 12 years. The German-Japanese alliance favored German business expansion, allowing Germany to reach third place in the trade with China and push aside the U.K.⁵¹ The analysis of foreign influence in China shows primarily the economic and colonial roots. China served as a natural resources base and an outlet for the world powers but Japan and the Soviet Union perceived the country as the security buffer between the hostile forces.

Diplomatic relations and the promotion of the Soviet Union's interests in the Far East evolved through a long process. The Russian Civil War and liberation of Siberia and Primorie (Russian Pacific coast) were not complete until 1922. The world powers did not want to establish diplomatic relations with Moscow but participated actively in destabilizing the Soviet Far East. China, being under the influence of foreign countries, felt enormous external diplomatic and economic pressure against forming any relationship with the Soviet Union. However, the liberation of the Russian Far East from the White Army and the Entente, the initiation relationship with the Guomindang Party and the deployment of the RKKA contingent in Mongolia facilitated the process of strengthening the Soviet's influence in the region.

The victories over the White Army's Admiral Kolchak and Ataman Semenov in 1920 and over the Entente contingents in February 1922 convinced the world's countries of the legitimacy of the Soviets and began the process of the Soviet Union's recognition. Beginning in 1925 Germany, the U.K., France, China, Japan, and the U.S. recognized the Soviet Union and opened diplomatic relations.

⁵¹Ibid., 116.

The incessant border conflicts during the 1922-1931 periods between the Soviet Union, China, and Japan determined priorities in Soviet security policy. Stalin's regional policy to stabilize the Chinese border required the involvement of international organizations, loyal regional partners and pro-Soviet political movements in China. The League of Nations, as the most powerful instrument of international influence, was not available for the Soviet Union. The predominant positions within the League belonged to Italy, France and the U.K. The Soviet's "voice" did not sound strong enough and was often neglected, especially when the League discussed Far Eastern problems. However, Moscow used the Communist International (Comintern), created in 1919 as a small but flexible instrument of the influence. The 1921 establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Soviet aid to the nationalists exploited the capabilities of the Comintern and provided the corridor for the Soviet diplomacy and military assistance in China.⁵²

At the same time, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) became inseparable. In November 1924, the Great People's Khural (highest legislative body) of the MPR proclaimed independence and legitimized the RKKA forces' deployment onto its territory. The aggravation of the international situation in China and the deployment of the Kwantung Army on the Mongolian and the Soviet borders resulted in the signing of a protocol of mutual assistance. According to the protocol, the RKKA deployed the 57th Special Corps into Mongolia.

Japanese aggression in 1937, and the world powers' inability to resolve the Chinese stalemate, reactivated diplomatic and military cooperation between the

⁵²M. Alexandrov, *Vneshnopoliticheskay Doktrina Stalina* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University, 1995), <http://grachev62.narod.ru/alexandrov/content.htm> (accessed 18 March 2010), 74.

nationalist (Guomindang) government and the Soviet Union. The political efforts, with respect to the Chinese revolution, became the first independent experience of Stalin's foreign policy. At the beginning of the relationship in his strategy in China, Stalin relied basically on the Guomindang and its leader Sun Yat-sen. Stalin expected to convert the nationalists into the Soviets' allies, assist them to conquer all of China, and then to transfer this union to the inter-governmental level. Difficulties occurred when the unofficial leader of the Guomindang's radical wing and military commander, Jieng Jieshi, succeeded Sun Yat-sen after his death. Only the threat of losing China's sovereignty during the 1937 Japanese invasion persuaded Jieng Jieshi to cooperate with the Soviets and sign a truce with the CCP. On 21 August 1937, China and the Soviet Union signed Treaty of Non-Aggression, which allowed for expanding the Soviet's economical, military and financial assistance. On the basis of this treaty, from November 1937 to January 1942, the Soviet Union provided China with: \$300 million loans, 1,285 aircraft (fighters-777, bombers -- 408, training-100), 1,600 artillery, 82 tanks, 14,000 machineguns, 1,850 vehicles and tractors, a large quantity of rifles, artillery shells, rifle cartridges, aerial bombs, spare parts to the aircraft, the signal equipment, gasoline, drugs and medical equipment. The Soviet advisors trained 90,000 Chinese officers and soldiers, while about 700 Soviet pilots fought against the Japanese Air Force and more than 200 pilots gave their lives for China.⁵³

This review of Stalin's strategy in the Far East verifies the highest priority of the Soviet's foreign policy efforts. The Soviet government exercised all available instruments of power to reduce the threat approaching from the Japanese Empire and its satellites.

⁵³Efimov, 132-134.

Regardless of the resistance of the Chinese army and partisans, the Soviets' full-scale interference in the Far East's struggle, and swelling of international grievance concerning Japanese aggression, the conditions for future military conflicts between the Soviet Union and Japan had been set.

The first sign of the 1938 undeclared war occurred in the vicinity of Khasan Lake (see figure 1).

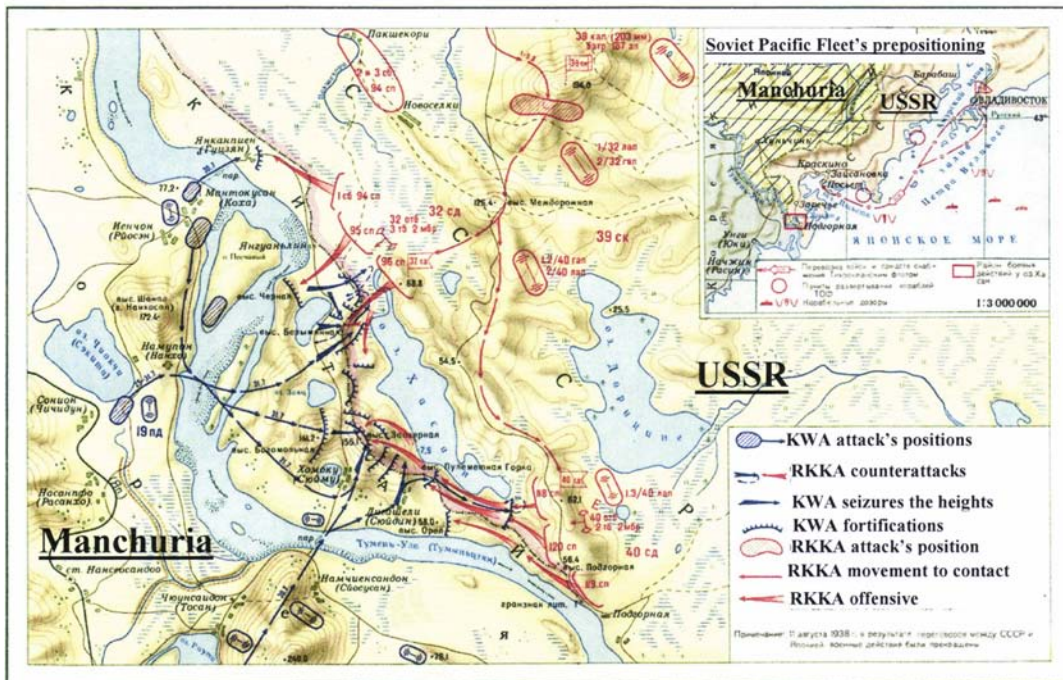


Figure 1. The 1938 Soviet-Japanese Conflict on the Khasan Lake
 Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, <http://hamster02.narod.ru/016.jpg> (accessed 10 March 2010).

The military conflict occurred over the boundary disputes between the Soviet Union and Japan as a result of the unwillingness of both countries to resolve the conflict in a peaceful way.

In July 1938, the Kwantung Army deployed three infantry divisions, a mechanized brigade, a cavalry regiment, three machine-gun battalions and 70 aircraft near the Soviet border. On 29 July two Japanese companies attacked the Bezimianaya height, but they were repulsed by a Soviet border guard detachment. In two days, two Japanese regiments from the 19th Infantry Division (total 20,000 men) stormed and occupied Bezimianaya and Zaozernaya heights. In order to defeat the Japanese forces, the Commander of the Far-Eastern Front, Marshal of the Soviet Union V.K. Blukher, committed the 39th Rifle Corps composed of the 40th Rifle Division, 32d Rifle Division and 2d Mechanized Brigade. Komkor G.M. Shtern led the Soviet forces in the Khasan region. The military conflict could be divided into three phases. The first phase (from 29 to 31 July)—the border's defense, conducted by the border guard forces and supported by the attached army units. The second phase (from 1 to 5 August) - the deployment of the 39th Rifle Corps and the preparation for the counterattack. The third phase (from 6 to 10 August)—the Soviet troops' counterattack and the complete recovery of the territory seized by Japan. On 10 August, Japan withdrew its forces after suffering 600 killed and 2,500 wounded. On 11 August, the Soviet Union and Japan agreed to a cease fire and began negotiations. The Soviets suffered 792 killed and 3,279 wounded.⁵⁴

The outcome of the Khasan Lake military conflict emphasized that both the Soviet Union and Japan had reached a level where diplomatic efforts to resolve territorial disputes had failed, employment of the military force was preferable to the negotiation process, the military forces were capable of combat engagement at a division level, and

⁵⁴A.P. Dekterev, V.P. Semin, *Russia in Wars and Military Conflicts*, <http://allruswars.ru/sffjre.html> (accessed 21 March 2010).

the threat of the military conflicts between the countries obtained characteristics of a protracted and undeclared war.

CHAPTER 4

THE 1939 SOVIET-JAPANESE MILITARY CONFLICT IN MONGOLIA

The encounter (Khasan conflict) was a great shock, and taught the Japanese forces in Manchukuo and Korea a lesson respecting the actual strength and determination of the Soviet forces in the Far East. The shock, however, was not severe enough to alter the views and policies of the leading elements of the Japanese armies (as is shown by Nomonhan less than a year later).

— Katsu H. Young, *Monumenta Nipponica*

The Anti-Comintern Pact between Japan and Germany in 1936, an anti-Soviet alliance with Germany and Italy, solidified a rapid deterioration in Soviet-Japanese relations. The Khasan case did not sober the Kwantung Army, did not change the complicated relations between the Emperor, the Japanese High Command and the Kwantung Army's leadership. The 1939 Khalkhin Gol military conflict became the biggest undeclared war with the Soviet Union and MPR on the one side and the Kwantung Army and Imperial Japanese Army on the other.

The military and territorial clashes occurred long before the conflict. The Soviet sources blamed the Manchurians for violations of the Mongolian border in 1935 in the vicinity of Khalkhin-Sume, where the Mongolian border guard fought the Kwantung's unit while across the international border. The military clashes occurred several times in 1936 with a commitment of airplanes and armored forces from both the Mongolian and Japanese sides.⁵⁵ The number of Japanese recorded violations of the frontiers of Manchukuo by both Soviet and MPR forces gradually increased from 1937 through 1939. In 1937 the Japanese government recorded 113 such violations. In 1938 there were 166

⁵⁵M. Novikov, *Victory on the Khalkhin Gol* (Moscow: Publisher "Politizdat," 1971),16.

and finally in 1939 a total of 195 violations were recorded.⁵⁶ The border incidents became more frequent and prompted the Mongolian government request the Soviet Union to deploy a military contingent on the Mongolian territory. In 1936 the Soviets signed a mutual assistance treaty with MPR, and in January 1937 the RKKA organized the 57th Special Rifle Corps consisting of the 36th Motorized Rifle Division, 6th Cavalry Brigade, 11th Tank Brigade, and 7th, 8th, and 9th Moto-Armored brigades and allocated to Tamcag-Bulak. These units moved into Mongolia in 1938.⁵⁷ The Kwantung Army responded to the Soviet forces with six infantry divisions, two tank brigades and four aviation brigades allocated in Amur area.⁵⁸ The mobilization of the Kwantung Army continued to grow and in July 1941 reached a level of 700,000 soldiers, 140,000 cavalry and 600 planes.⁵⁹ Both countries realized the strategic significance of the MPR territory. The Soviet Union bolstered its regional, ideological and military ally, whose loyalty guaranteed the security buffer between the Soviets and Japan. The Japanese Empire and its puppet state Manchukuo desired the Mongolian terrain in order to protect the strategic railways: Kharbin-Cicikar-Khailar (former the Chinese Eastern Railway or CER) and the new Soluni-Khaltun-Arshan-Ganchzhur. Historically, the poor road network in China was the biggest problem for the economy's development. Only the railways existed as

⁵⁶Katsu H. Young, "The Nomonhan Incident: Imperial Japan and the Soviet Union," *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, no. 1/2 (1967): 88.

⁵⁷G. K. Zhukov, *Reminiscences and Reflections. Volume I* (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1988), 182.

⁵⁸Edward J. Drea, *Nomonhan: Japanese Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 2.

⁵⁹Young, 101.

more or less stable lines of communication and business. All military involving foreign powers conflicts in 20th century China erupted around the railways. The country, which possessed the railroad, possessed the key to the Chinese market and its natural resources. The possession of the Khalkhin Gol basin could eliminate the threat for the Manchukuo's railways.

The Kwantung Army purposely chose the Eastern bank of the Khalkhin Gol River. The terrain and country roads facilitated maneuver and the lines of communication and supplies lines were connected to railways located only 50 km from the battlefield. The opposite situation took place for Soviet-Mongolian forces. The border guard detachments were poorly sustained and scattered on long distances from each other. Command and control between the forces was not protected and secured. The nearest railway station was 750 km from the area.⁶⁰ Aerial reconnaissance and support were not established.

In order to seize the initiative, the Kwantung Army planned to occupy Mongolian territory along an area 80 km in width and 20 km in depth. From the beginning of January 1939 the Japanese troops began systematic provocations on the border, which were accompanied by the seizure of Mongolian frontier-guards, infrastructure and the weapons. The Japanese airplanes began to actively conduct reconnaissance. On 8 May 1939, a small Japanese unit penetrated the Mongolia border but was destroyed by a Mongolian frontier-guards' detachment. A Japanese soldier captured during the

⁶⁰Novikov, 25.

engagement proved to be a scout of the 23d Kwantung Infantry Division. All events of the beginning of 1939 served as indicators for the upcoming large scale conflict.⁶¹

The Khalkhin Gol military conflict or undeclared war, well known in Western history as Nomonhan's Japanese-Soviet conflict, erupted on 11 May and ended with the truce agreement between the Soviet Union and Japan on 16 September 1939. During the conflict the Soviet forces demonstrated the new tactics of the "deep battle." The RKKA and the Kwantung Army each began the Khalkhin Gol conflict with confidence in the superiority of their tactics. The FR-36 established the "deep battle" tactics, which promoted the close collaboration among the infantry, tank forces, artillery and close air support, exercising the blow of forces in depth by fixing the entire enemy defensive line, concentrating armor on the flanks to encircle the enemy, cutting the enemy's lines of communication, destroying enemy's artillery, and disrupting the enemy reserve's deployment. To make this movement and maneuver feasible the initial air and artillery barrages had to suppress the enemy's defensive fire system, in order to minimize Japanese antitank artillery and machine gun fire against the attacking forces and facilitate deep penetration of enemy defense by lifting and shifting of the fire in depth. The tactics were focused on movement, maneuver, and joint fires to annihilate the enemy forces before they could close to short range required for massing fires or hand-to-hand fighting.

The Japanese Army implemented a plan that was similar in concept but different in application. Dr. Edward J. Drea in his study *Nomonhan: Japanese Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939* researched the 1930s Japanese army's doctrine and emphasized:

⁶¹Ibid., 30.

By the 1930s, the IJA (the Imperial Japanese Army) planners realized more than ever that the Japanese army could not fight a war of attrition against the ever-growing might of the Soviet Union. Consequently, they designed and refined their tactics to wage a short war fought to a quick and decisive conclusion of hostilities ('sokusen sokketsu'). The goal of 'sokusen sokketsu' was to encircle the enemy and then destroy him. The tactics employed to achieve that end relied on unit mobility, initiative, concentration of forces, night attack and night movement, and close cooperation between artillery and infantry. Coupled with the spiritual or psychological values of offensive spirit and the belief in the absolute supremacy of Japanese arms, such tactics produced one of the finest infantry armies in the world. It was, however, still an infantry army whose emphasis on the value of intangibles like morale or Japanese fighting spirit on the battlefield perhaps resulted from its status as an army poor in the weapons of modern warfare. It was an army, in short, that tried to use doctrine to compensate for materiel deficiencies.⁶²

A comparison of the belligerents' tactics demonstrates the conceptual superiority of the Red Army's combined arms tactics over the Japanese model. However, in order to mitigate the weakness of the armored element in their tactics, Japanese forces widely employed night attacks, strengthened their command and control, stressed secrecy in movement and maneuver, and used hand-to-hand combat as well.

Chronologically, the conflict could be divided into three phases. The first phase, from 11 to 29 May, involved repelling the 23d Kwantung Infantry Division's advance by combined Soviet-Mongolian forces and the battles for the air superiority. The second phase, from 2 to 26 July, included the Japanese offensive and the Bain-Tsagan Hill's battle. The third phase, from 10 August to 15 September, was the buildup of the belligerents' offensive forces and the Soviet offensive.

According to Soviet and Mongolian sources, the first phase began on 11 May 1939 when two companies of the 23d Infantry Division penetrated the Mongolian border in the vicinity of Udzun-Nur Lake and a Mongolian border guard detachment. Suffering

⁶²Drea, 19.

major casualties, the Mongolian troops forced the Japanese units back to Manchurian territory.⁶³ Over three days, Japanese aviation bombed the 7th Mongolian border-guard detachment and the Commander of the 23d Infantry Division, Lieutenant General Kamatsubara (former Japanese Military Attaché to the Soviet Union,)⁶⁴ launched an offensive with three infantry companies and the 7th Bargut Cavalry Regiment. On 15 May, Japanese forces advanced 20 km into Mongolian territory and secured a footprint for future operations. Realizing the complexity of the situation, the Commander of 57th Special Rifle Corps, Komdiv N. V. Feklenko, committed a machinegun battalion, a sapper company of the 11th Tank Brigade, and an artillery battery of M1927-76mm regimental guns. At the same time, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army (MPRA) sent the 6th Cavalry Division with an armored car battalion to reinforce the Khalkhin Gol border. On 22 May, the Soviet-Mongolian forces charged across the river, overwhelmed and pushed the Japanese out of Manchurian territory, and set the border's defense.⁶⁵ In the period from 21 to 27 May, General Kamatsubara continued to concentrate forces along the Mongolian border. According to Soviet accounts, this concentration included the 64th Infantry Regiment (minus two battalions), the reconnaissance detachment of 23d Infantry Division, and the 8th Bargut Cavalry Regiment. The total strength of the Japanese task force was 1,680 bayonets, 900 sabers, 75 machineguns, 6-8 armored cars, and one tank. The 64th Infantry Regiment's commander, Colonel Yamagoto, commanded this task force. In return, the Soviet-

⁶³Novikov, 25.

⁶⁴Zhukov, 184.

⁶⁵Novikov, 32.

Mongolian forces could field 668 bayonets, 260 sabers, 58 machineguns, 20 regimental guns of the 76 mm caliber, and 39 armored cars.⁶⁶ The forces' correlation permitted the Soviet-Mongolian forces to combine the defense with an armored and mobile counterattacking reserve. At sunrise on 28 May, the Japanese offensive began with an air bombardment and artillery barrage. The right (Northern) flank of the attacking forces consisted of a reconnaissance detachment under command of Lieutenant Colonel Adzuma and a motorized company of Captain Kovako and they were the main effort of the decisive operation. The right flank forces had the task of penetrating the Soviet-Mongolian defense, to cut the lines of communication in the Soviet rear and to secure the bridge over the river delaying possible retrograde of the Soviet forces. Simultaneously, the 8th Bargut Cavalry Regiment attacked from the South in order to complete the encirclement of the defenders. The situation was turning dramatically as the Japanese forces pushed back the Mongolian advance guard's forces. The 8th Bargut Cavalry cracked the right flank of the Soviet forces by pursuing the Mongolian cavalry units. However, the masterly fire of combined artillery units under Senior Lieutenant U.B. Vahtin delayed the Japanese advance and created conditions for the counterattack by the machinegun battalion and sapper company. The successful Soviet counterattack almost wiped out the Japanese attacking forces.⁶⁷ The battle gradually shifted to the night time, when additional Soviet-Mongolian forces reinforced the 57th Special Rifle Corps. The 149th Regiment of the 36th Motorized Rifle Division, under the command of Major I. M. Remizov, arrived. The engagement continued throughout the night and by the

⁶⁶Ibid., 33.

⁶⁷Young, 90.

morning of 29 May the second wave of Soviet and Mongolian forces had arrived (see figure 2).

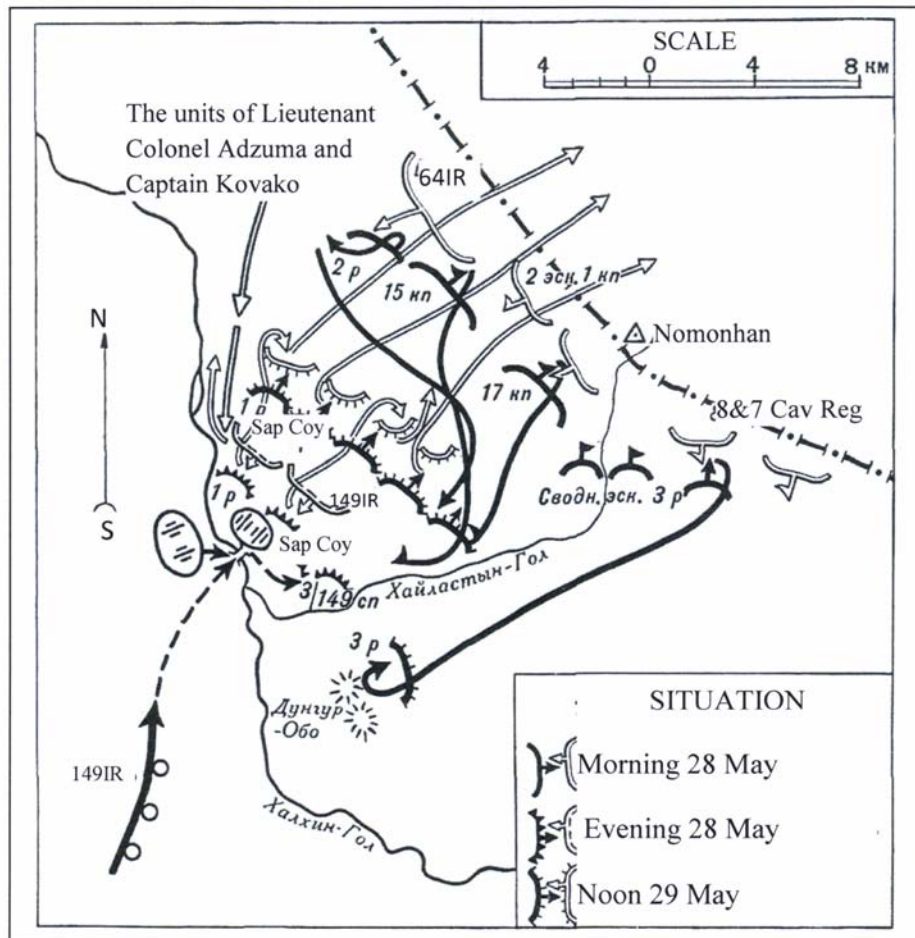


Figure 2. The Japanese Offensive 28-29 May 1939

Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

The new forces consisted of an artillery division (battalion equivalent) of the 175th Artillery Regiment and a squadron of the 6th Mongolian Cavalry Division.⁶⁸ The forces immediately engaged in battle and counterattacked the remaining Japanese forces. The Japanese offensive failed again and the forces withdrew back to Manchuria with 400 soldiers killed.

The most important leadership changes occurred on 5 June 1939. The People's Commissar for Defense K. Voroshilov assigned Komdiv (Division Commander) G. K. Zhukov to the 57th Special Corps. After appraising the situation in Mongolia, Zhukov came to the conclusion that the available forces of this corps would not be able to deter or disrupt the Japanese aggression. Zhukov's concept of operations foresaw holding the bridgehead on the right bank of the Khalkhin Gol, and at the same time preparing for a counteroffensive from Mongolian territory. In order to accomplish the proposed mission, Komdiv Zhukov requested reinforcements with air force units, three rifle divisions, one tank brigade and substantial artillery. Zhukov's request was satisfied by the General Staff, Komdiv Feklenko was relieved, and Komdiv Zhukov was assigned as the commander of the 57th Special Corps.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the fight for air superiority between the Soviet and Japanese Imperial Air Forces raged in the Mongolian air. The beginning of the air campaign belonged to Japanese pilots. Since their military assistance began, the Soviets had allocated the 100th Combined Aviation Brigade to the area, consisting of the 70th Fighter Regiment with 38 fighters and the 150th Bomber Regiment with 29 high-speed bombers. The majority of

⁶⁸Novikov, 37.

⁶⁹Zhukov, 180.

the Soviet airplanes were old and half of them were out of order. Japanese aviation was based on the Khailara airbase, which had a take-off runway with full-strength pavement. The total strength of the Khailara's air force was 30 fighters, about 40 scouts and bombers. The first air battle of the conflict occurred 22 May, when five Soviet fighters attacked a group of five Japanese fighters. In this clash each side lost one airplane. On the same day, the Tran-Baikal military district sent reinforcements: the 22d Air Fighter Regiment, under command of Major N.G.Glazykin, and the 38th High-speed Bomber Regiment, brought an additional 63 fighters (I-15, I-16) and 59 SB-type bombers.⁷⁰

The new Soviet tactics of "deep battle" required air supremacy and a robust collaboration between the ground and air forces. In order to gain air supremacy, the Soviet Air Force implemented a new fighter doctrine known as "mutual support." A fighter regiment was mixed with the more maneuverable I-153 "Chayka" ("Seagull") and faster I-16 "Ishachok" ("Donkey") airplanes. I-16 fighters had the task of fixing the enemy's aircraft formations by fire and creating conditions for the I-153 to complete the enemy's annihilation.

On 29 May, the Soviet Air Force Command decided to increase the effectiveness of the air battles over Mongolia and sent pilots who were veterans of the Spain and China wars to Tamcak-Bulak. The Soviet pilots' group consisted of 21 Heroes of the Soviet Union under command of Komkor Y.V. Smushkevich (Spanish call sign - Douglas), the former senior air force adviser to the Republican Air Force of Spain. The next month of training in Mongolia reaped a positive outcome. In the afternoon of 22 June, 95 Soviet fighters clashed with 120 Japanese I-97s. The Soviet victory was stunning for the

⁷⁰Ibid., 39.

Imperial Air Force. On that day the Soviets achieved the first victory in Mongolian air, with the Japanese losing 34 airplanes in contrast to 14 Soviet losses. The battles in the Mongolian air continued until September 1939. The most difficult were in June and July. On 24 and 26 June, Soviet pilots shot down 64 Japanese airplanes.⁷¹ On 27 June, the Japanese Air Force launched an air operation to destroy the Soviet airbases. 70 Japanese fighters and 23 bombers attacked the Soviet airbases around Tamack-Bulak, destroying approximately 20 Soviet airplanes and suffering minimal losses. The dramatic air battles continued during Bain-Tsagan Hill's battle on 4, 5, and 8 July, when the Japanese lost approximately 50 airplanes. On 10 July about 180 fighters from both belligerents clashed in the air. The Soviets claimed 11 Japanese fighters were shot down with one Soviet lost. The Soviet aviation's effectiveness increased after the regiments received upgraded I-16s and I-153s. The new I-16 was armed with two 20mm guns instead of two 7.62mm machineguns; some I-153s received an enhanced airframe and experimental air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles. On 3 July, the bombardment aviation launched its operations against the Japanese rear. 108 SB bombers from the 150th and 38th Bomber Regiments hit the Japanese maneuver units, command and control lines, and logistic stocks and trains near the lakes Yankhu, Udzur-Nur, and Namon-Khan-Burd-Obo's Heights. On 4 July, reorganized Japanese air defense system shot down seven Soviet bombers, mostly by air defense artillery. The lack of the experience, anti-air defense maneuvers, and poor coordination with the escort's fighters caused the destruction of another two Soviet bombers the next day. After this first painful experience the bombing techniques changed. Flight routes were established at an altitude of 7000 meters with a short dive on

⁷¹Zhukov, 180.

the target to release the bombs, the navigators received additional machinegun training and the coordination between fighters and bombers was fixed. The bombers began conducting operations in a large unit formation and received a list of specific targets: Japanese railway stations, artillery positions and ground forces concentrations. The Soviet losses from air-defense artillery declined significantly. On 24 July, five Soviet bombers were lost, however, 11 Japanese fighters never returned back to their airbase. On 8 July, 23 heavy TB-3 night bombers also began their duty. They flew at an altitude of 1000 meters in formations of one or two aircraft. Japanese aviation did not fly at night time and the Kwantung air defense artillery could not effectively target the airplanes, so all TB-3 units avoided losses. Not only had the Soviet aircraft improved technically, but Soviet pilots displayed outstanding courage. Alongside the Japanese pilot's culture to conduct ram attacks against the enemy's airplanes, the history of the Khalkhin Gol air battles recorded many cases when the Soviet pilots also conducted ram attack against Japanese airplanes. On 20 July, Senior Lieutenant Skomorohin used his airplane's propeller to attack a Japanese fighter, destroying it and returning to base with minor damage. On 3 August, a squadron commander of the 56th Fighter Regiment, Captain Kustov, performed the same act of bravery. His squadron intercepted a large group of the Japanese bombers, and when all ammunition was expended Captain Kustov hit a Japanese bomber with his propeller and destroyed it. It was the first time that a fighter's ram attack had destroyed a bomber. On the next day, Lieutenant Moshin conducted a similar ramming attack, but against a Japanese fighter. The same day, Commissar of the 150th Bombardment Regiment Uukin directed his burning bomber into the enemy's

artillery position.⁷² The intensity and fierce fighting continued until the truce agreement of 15 September 1939, but the ratio of the air victories claimed by Soviet pilots consistently favored to the Red falcons. However, it would be inappropriate to neglect the Japanese viewpoint.

The Japanese air force involved in the conflict was the 2nd Hikoshidan (Division), commanded by General Giga Tetsuji. At the time of the Soviet August offensive it consisted of four scout planes attached to the air force headquarters, 15 scout planes serving with the ground troops, and two combat wings with 125 aircraft: 12th Hikodan with 88 fighters (three fighter groups: 1st Sentai commanded by Maj Yoshida Tadashi; 11th Sentai; and 64th Sentai commanded by Cap Kato Tateo) and 9th Hikodan with 24 light and 13 heavy bombers, commanded by Maj Gen Shimono Ikkaku. The combat units included one squadron of the 10th Sentai (light bombers plus two scouts), three squadrons of the 16th Sentai (light), and one squadron of the 61st Sentai heavy commanded by Col Mikami Kiso. In July, the Japanese had claimed 481 Soviet planes while losing only 14 of their own. In August, they claimed 134 while losing 23. However, the loss ratio was four Soviet airplanes to one Japanese in May and was to 1:3 in June, 1:4 in July, and 1:10 in August. The Japanese officially claimed as casualties 141 killed, including 17 officers of squadron leader or higher rank, and 89 wounded. The statistic does not include the Japanese pilots taken by the Soviets as prisoners of war and kept in the Soviet camps until 1946. More than one third of losses were across the enemy lines: 10 percent of casualties in May and June, 26 percent in July, 50 percent in August, and 14 percent in September. The expansion of the Khalkhin Gol conflict in the air

⁷²Novikov, 40-48.

deserves a separate research but, the emphasis of the above mentioned extract is to facilitate understanding of the complexity of the 1939 Soviet-Japanese conflict's environment. Regardless, alternating tactical success in the air neither Soviet nor Japanese air forces gained air supremacy in the air. Nevertheless, the attritional air struggle affected the Japanese Air Force more than the Soviet's, the second and third effects of the failure in this attritional war appeared later during the war in the Pacific, by significantly impeding air support of the Japanese ground forces.⁷³

Analyzing the first phase of the battle in depth it is worthwhile, in order to underline that neither Soviet nor Japanese units exploited their tactical innovations. The Japanese infantry could not apply its tactical methods of surprise and short distance engagement, because of the advantages of the Soviet superiority in armored forces and timely reinforcement. Moreover, as a result of the 1937 purge, most of the Soviet brigade and regimental commanders were in the rank of Captain and Major, which did not constrain the combat effectiveness of the units, but delayed the application of the "deep battle" tactics at the beginning of the conflict. The actions of the Soviet troops still tended to linear tactics and immediate action drills. Komdiv Feklenko and some officers of his staff demonstrated poor initiative, situation awareness and understanding, as well as lack of agility.

The surge of Japanese forces on the Mongolian border, as well as the enemy reconnaissance actions in the air and on the ground, grew with the conflict's escalation and the preparation of the Japanese offensive. July 1939 erupted with two dynamic and

⁷³Japan v. Russia, 1939 - Air Force Battles, [http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?16023-The-Nomonhan-Campaign-\(05-09-1939\)-Japan-side](http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?16023-The-Nomonhan-Campaign-(05-09-1939)-Japan-side) (accessed 25 March 2010).

controversial episodes in the conflict. In the second phase, from 2 to 26 July, the Kwantung Army launched a new offensive that was disrupted by Soviet-Mongolian hasty counterattack. Thereafter, the two opposing armies engaged in the Bain-Tsagan Hill battle and the seizure of the eastern bank of Khalkhin Gol.

During the last week of June, the Soviet contingent in Mongolia continued to receive reinforcements and reorganized into the First Army Group. The columns of 11th Tank Brigade, 7th, 8th, and 9th Moto-Armored Brigades, and the 24th Regiment of the 36th Moto Rifle Division moved from Undur-Khana to Tamcag-Bulak. The Kwantung Army reinforced the Nomonhan forces with three infantry and one cavalry regiments of the 23d Infantry Division, two regiments of the 7th Infantry Division, 3d and 4th Tank Brigades, three Bargut regiments of the Khingan Cavalry Division, the 1st Separate and 7th Heavy Artillery Regiments, two battalions of air defense artillery, and several anti-tank companies. Close air support was provided by the 2nd Hikoshidan to a total of about 225 airplanes. On 1 July, the Japanese forces' strength in the zone of conflict included 38,000 troops, 158 machineguns, 186 howitzers, 124 anti-tank guns, and 145 tanks and armored cars.⁷⁴ Japanese historian Katsu Young, in his essay *The Nomonhan Incident: Imperial Japan and the Soviet Union*, claimed the Japanese forces' strength was about thirteen battalions, 112 anti-tank guns, 70 tanks, 400 motor vehicles, and 180 warplanes. At the same time Soviet forces secured a bridgehead about 20 km in length and 10 km in depth on the eastern bank. In the center of the battle, arrayed in the hasty defense were the machinegun battalion of the 11th Tank Brigade, two battalions of the 149th Rifle Regiment, and the 9th Moto-Armored Brigade. On the left flank, Soviet forces had the

⁷⁴Novikov, 49.

6th Mongolian Cavalry Division, and the right flank was covered by the 8th Mongolian Cavalry Division. The rest of the forces were assembled in Tamcag-Bulak, about 120-130 km away from the border. The Soviet-Mongolian forces' strength was 12,541 troops, 139 machineguns, 86 howitzers, 23 anti-tank guns, 186 tanks and 266 armored cars, and 82 airplanes. In order to mitigate a disadvantageous imbalance between the belligerents, Komdiv Zhukov relocated 11th Tank and 7th Moto-Armored Brigades and 24th Moto Rifle Regiment to the north-west, 20 km away from Bain-Tsagan Hill.⁷⁵

Indeed, the Japanese concentrated their forces in the Khalkhin Gol region to launch an offensive operation named the "Second period of Nomonhan incident" against the Soviet-Mongolian forces on the eastern bank of the river. The objectives of the operation were:

1. to surround and defeat of the entire group of the Soviet and Mongolian troops, located east of the Khalkhin Gol River;

2. to cross Khalkhin Gol River, to seize the western bank of the river in order to defeat of Soviet forces' reserves;

3. to secure the footprint on the west bank of Khalkhin Gol to create conditions for subsequent operations. In accordance with the Concept of Operation the main operation was to attack and penetrate the left flank of the Soviet troops; cross the river and defeat the enemy's reserve; and continue the attack to the south in order to finish encirclement of the Soviet troops. The shock group under the command of Major-General Kobayasi had been assigned for this mission and composed of two infantry and one engineer regiments with organic artillery. The secondary operation was to fix the enemy

⁷⁵Novikov, 50.

forces in the center, to penetrate the right flank the enemy forces by the tank blow, to chop the enemy forces and complete its annihilation by the Bargut cavalry. The group of forces under command of Lieutenant-General Yasuoka had to conduct the secondary operation with three infantry battalions, two tank regiments, and three regiments of the Khingan Cavalry Division. In order to conduct subsequent operations, the Kwantung Army began deployment of the 6th Army. The forthcoming Japanese offensive operation had to be completed in the first half of July, so it would be possible to finish all military actions within Mongolia during the fall. To publicize the success of the upcoming operation, the Kwantung Army's Command invited the correspondents and the military attaches of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.⁷⁶ Khailastyn Gol River is where the 149th Moto Rifle Regiment and a battalion of the 9th Moto-Armored Brigade held their positions. The Soviet troops recognized the attack by 80 Japanese tanks of the General Yasuoka's group (see figure 3).

⁷⁶Zhukov, 181.

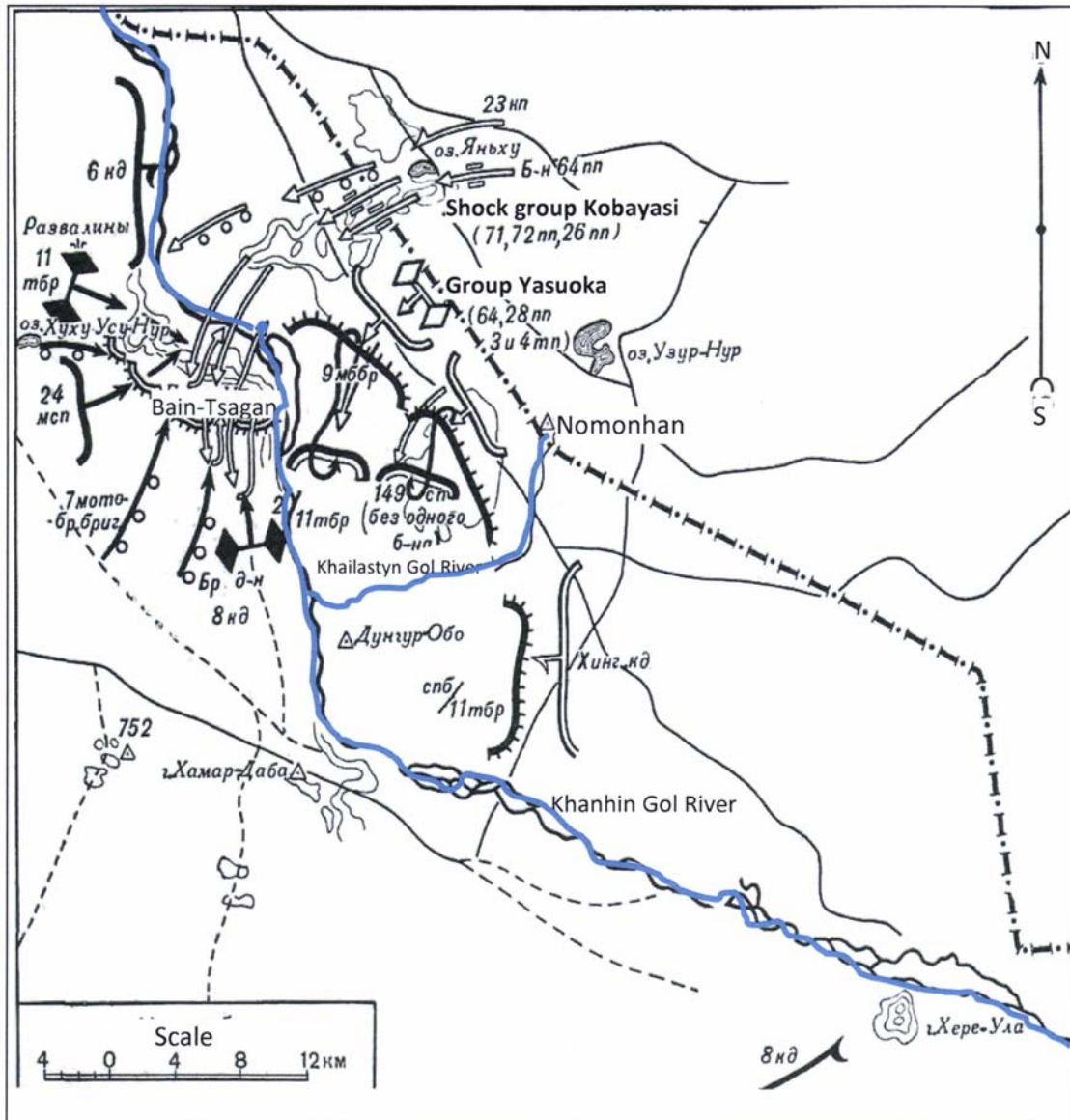


Figure 3. The Japanese Offensive and the Bain-Tsagan Hill's Battle
 Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

At 2100 on 2 July, artillery barrages shattered the darkness north of the Khlakin Gol. The Soviets claimed 30 tanks destroyed with 11 tankers taken as POWs.

Nevertheless, after a few hours of the night fighting Japanese forces squeezed the Soviet troops out of their hasty defensive positions and forced them to retrograde south-east to Bain-Tsagan Hill.⁷⁷ On 3 July, General Kobayasi's shock group, under the cover of the night, crossed the Khalkhin Gol River and attacked positions of the 15th Regiment of the 6th Cavalry Division. Exercising surprise and superiority in numbers, they seized the hill. The 6th Cavalry Division withdrew its forces north-west of the hill. The critical situation had appeared on the North flank of the Soviet-Mongolian forces caused by General Kobayasi shock group's deep penetration of the defense. The only forces available to delay the encirclement were the artillery battalion of the 185th Artillery Regiment and the 175th Artillery Regiment Command Post's personnel. Fortunately, the armored battalion of the 6th Mongolian Cavalry Division had arrived and the commander of the 175th Artillery Regiment, Major Polianskiy, committed the Mongols to secure the bridge over the river.⁷⁸

The chaotic situation and the absence of a clear picture about the direction of the main Japanese attack forced Komdiv Zhukov to move to the command post near the Bain-Tsagan Hill. Immediately, Zhukov launched a counterattack with all available reserve's forces to close the gap and stave off the encirclement. The 11th Tank Brigade of Kombrig (Brigade Commander) Yakovlev was to attack from the march in close interaction with the 24th Moto Rifle Regiment of Colonel Fedyninsky and the 7th Moto-Armored Brigade. The second echelon of the attacking forces was comprised of the remaining armored units of the 8th Mongolian Cavalry Division. At the same time, all

⁷⁷Novikov, 52.

⁷⁸Ibid., 53.

available aviation received the order to launch an air strike against Japanese forces in order to block their advance and disrupt the enemy from massing forces in the hill's area. At 0900 the Japanese forces secured the biggest part of the Bain-Tsagan Hill's area and deployed over 10,000 soldiers, 100 howitzers and 60 anti-tank guns. The Soviets could respond with only 1,000 soldiers and 50 guns but 150 tanks and 154 armored cars. The enemy controlled the high ground and began to fortify its anti-tank positions. The tank attack without infantry support could cause enormous losses to the Soviet armored forces. On 3 July at 0915, General Zhukov met Kombrig Yakovlev to ask about the possibility of launching the tank attack in order to gain momentum. After discussing the situation, Zhukov and Yakovlev agreed to attack without delay. Zhukov's hasty concept of operation implied a simultaneous strike and included the decisive operation: an attack on the Japanese flanks by tanks of the 11th Tank and heavy armored cars the 7th Moto Armored Brigades, and a shaping operation: the 24th Moto Rifle Regiment attacking the center of the Japanese defense to fix the enemy forces.⁷⁹ Just before the counterattack, hundreds of Soviet and Japanese airplanes clashed in the air. Burning fighters and bombers were falling down onto Japanese positions, as well as thousands of kilograms of the air bombs. As a result of the air battles from 2 to 5 July, the Soviets shot down 45 Japanese airplanes, including 20 dive-bombers, and lost many of their own.

At 1045 the Soviet armor's counterattack erupted, but the attacking forces' concentration was not completed at the time, so when 11th Tank hit and penetrated the Japanese defense, the 24th Moto Rifle had not finished the fixing operation. Moreover,

⁷⁹Novikov, 56.

the 7th Moto Armored delayed the attack and engaged only in four hours!⁸⁰ Fortunately for the Soviets, the Japanese were exhausted by the long battle and suppression by the Soviet air and artillery fire, and did not exploit the Soviet disorganization in time. However, Japanese forces fought heroically to the last soldier. Soviet records indicate that, when General Kamatsubara with his staff left the battle on 4 July, the situation on the battlefield became tragic as Japanese soldiers attacked Soviet tanks as “kamikazes”. On 4 and 5 July Kamatsubara ordered several counterattacks to rescue forces from Bain-Tsagan Hill’s encirclement but the Soviets locked the Japanese forces in, repelled all counterattacks, and began the annihilation of the encircled forces. Facing the threat of penetration in depth, General Kamatsubara ordered the destruction of the bridge which linked the Khalkhin Gol River’s banks. On Bain-Tsagan Hill and on the western bank of the Khalkhin Gol River the battle had ended by the morning of 5 July. The Bain-Tsagan Hill battle was a classic mobile defense operation of the Red Army, after which the Japanese forces no longer attempted to cross the Khalkhin Gol River. The Bain-Tsagan Hill battle was over, but the dynamic clashes on the eastern bank continued until 26 July. During July 1939, the 23d Kwantung Infantry Division launched three more massive attacks on the eastern bank of the river. On 8 July, Japanese attacked the 149th Rifle and 5th Machinegun Regiments; on 12 July, the 603d Infantry Regiment; and on 23-25 July, the northern flank of the Soviet forces.⁸¹ The majority of attacks were conducted with elements of surprise and at night. Unfortunately, in July’s engagements the Soviet forces lost two of their most experienced and talented commanders—commander of the 11th

⁸⁰Zhukov, 183.

⁸¹Novikov, 65

Tank Brigade, Kombrig M. P. Yakovlev, and commander of the 149th Rifle Regiment, Major I. M. Remizov. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR designated both commanders as Heroes of the Soviet Union posthumously. Air engagements continued without a day's pause. From 23 July until 4 August, the Japanese Air Force lost 116 airplanes, but continued reconnaissance missions. Suffering enormous losses, Japanese forces shifted their efforts to fortify their defense along the entire front.

In summary, an analysis of the July engagements indicates:

1. the Kwantung Army troops accomplished their July offensive mission partially and gained a footprint on the eastern bank of the river;

2. the Kwantung Army troops culminated their offensive capabilities and would not be able launch massive attack during the next two to three weeks;

3. the Japanese air force was exhausted, its most experienced pilots shot down and it would not be able to perform any significant air operation but reconnaissance and minor bombing raids;

4. Japanese forces were capable of planning, conducting and sustaining short term full scale offensive operations, however, the operation was not planned and sustained in depth;

5. the Japanese logistic system was not designed to support units in contact during an unexpected protracted battle;

6. the Kwantung Army's tactical formations were well organized, trained and had high morale;

7. Japanese small tactical units adopted and widely exercised the doctrine of a short war fought to a quick and decisive conclusion of hostilities (“sokusen sokketsu”), where surprise and night operations were the key requirements;

8. the Japanese soldiers and junior commanders were brave, flexible and agile while senior officers had a lack of knowledge of how to fight against armored forces, poor initiative, rigid command and control, reluctance to commit reserve forces and their actions were predictable;

9. Japanese formations were stronger in the center and vulnerable on their flanks, coordination between the units was not rigid and tactical commanders could not exercise the flexibility of hasty defense, as a consequence of no mobile reserve or a flexible second echelon;

10. the decisive blow of the Soviet forces in the Bain-Tsagan battle was conducted by the 11th Tank and the 7th Armored Brigades and the Mongolian 8th Armored Battalion supported by the artillery and air force;

11. the battle showed that Soviet tank and motorized units had gained knowledge of the combined attack, could cooperate skillfully with the air assets and artillery, and were the key's means for the future decisive operation;⁸²

12. the Soviet–Mongolian forces gained dominant ground to launch the major offensive;

13. the Soviet forces in Mongolia received the operational and strategic level command and control pre-eminence over the Kwantung Army by creating on 15 July the

⁸²Zhukov, 185.

1st Army Group under command of Komkor Zhukov (promoted 31 July) and the Front Group under command of Kommandarm (Army Commander) 2d rank Shtern.⁸³

The battle of Bain- Tsagan created conditions and opportunities to complete the annihilation of Japanese forces east Khankhin Gol during August. The 1st Army Group received the mission to conduct offensive operations in order to encircle and completely annihilate the Japanese forces and restore the Mongolian border.

To accomplish this mission Zhukov decided to fix the center of Japanese forces and launch powerful converging blows on the enemy's flanks in order to encircle and completely annihilate the enemy between the Khalkhin Gol River and the Mongolian border.⁸⁴ In order to accomplish Zhukov's restated mission, the Military Council of the 1st Army Group developed an operational plan. In accordance with the plan, the offensive forces were deployed in three groups—South, Center, and North.

The Shock group "South" (Colonel Potapov) consisted of the 57th Rifle Division, the 8th Moto Armored Brigade, the 6th Tank Brigade (minus one battalion), a division (battalion) of the 185th Artillery Regiment, tank and machinegun battalions of the 11th Tank Brigade, an anti-tank battalion, and a flamethrower tank company. The group had the task to attack in the direction of Nomonhan from the south and, in coordination with groups North and Center complete the encirclement and subsequent annihilation of the enemy's forces. Be prepared to repulse enemy counterattacks from Manchukuo territory,

⁸³Novikov, 68.

⁸⁴Ibid., 68.

the Khingan Cavalry Division in coordination with the 8th Mongolian Cavalry Division was to delay possible counterattacks of and defend the area of Eris-Ulyn-Obo heights.⁸⁵

The Shock group “North” (Colonel Shevnikov) consisted of the 601st Rifle Regiment of 82d Rifle Division, the 7th Moto Armored Brigade, two tank battalions of the 11th Tank Brigade, the 87th Anti-Tank division (battalion), and the 6th Cavalry Division. The group was to attack from the north to Nomonhan’s lakes, in coordination with groups South and Center complete encirclement and subsequent annihilation enemy’s forces.⁸⁶

Group “Center” (directly subordinated to Komkor Zhukov) consisted of the 602d and 603d Rifle Regiments of the 82th Rifle Division, the 24th and 149th Rifle Regiments of the 36th Moto Rifle Division, and 5th Machinegun Brigade. The group was to conduct a frontal attack and seize the Remizov and Peschannaya heights and in coordination with groups South and North complete the encirclement and following annihilation of the enemy’s forces. The group had the most artillery (112 tubes) to disrupt any reserve commitment within the circle and to conduct a counter battery mission. The 1st Army Group’s reserve consisted of the 9th Moto-Armored Brigade, a battalion of the 6th Tank Brigade, and the 212th Airborne Brigade.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Ibid., 72.

⁸⁶Ibid., 73.

⁸⁷Ibid., 74.

Total strength of the Soviet-Mongolian forces reached 57,000 troops, 634 mortar and artillery tubes, 2255 machineguns, 498 tanks, 385 armored vehicles, and 515 aircraft (see figure 4).⁸⁸

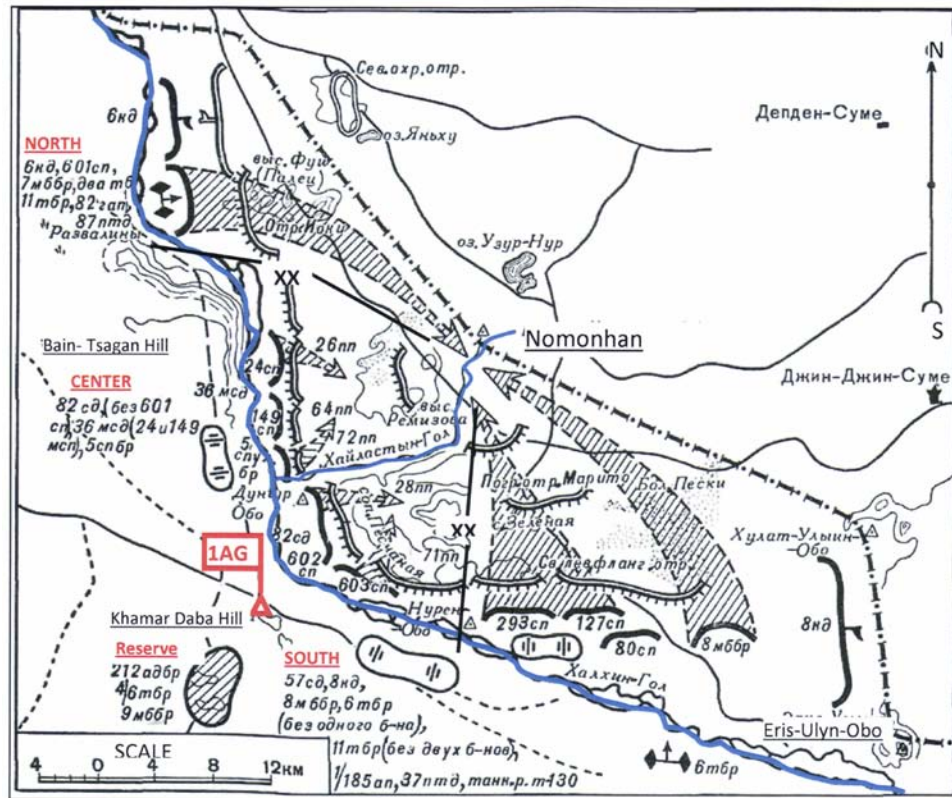


Figure 4. The 1st Army Group's Operational Plan

Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

For the purpose of qualitative organization of the offensive additional efforts were employed for the engineer's preparation of the battlefield, reconnaissance, logistics, and

⁸⁸Ibid., 67.

the deception operation. To centralize command and control over the engineer assets, an engineer task force was established on the basis of the 1st Army Group's Engineer service. During the offensive's preparation, Soviet combat engineers established about 60 water wells, upgraded 20 km of lines of communication, and built 12 bridges over rivers. In order to cover the pontoon bridges from enemy artillery and aircraft some of them were sunk and the unit crossed the river in twenty inches of water. Additionally, the reconnaissance of infantry and tank fording sites had been done to increase the river crossing capabilities of the forces.⁸⁹

The lack of experience and a poor understanding of the reconnaissance role by many unit commanders caused a failure to gain the initiative at the beginning of the conflict. The best example of this is the Bain-Tsagan battle, when Japanese forces had been identified after they crossed the river and established hasty defense on the right bank. Considering mistakes in the past, the 1st Army Group made numerous efforts to reconstruct the enemy's defense prior to the August offensive.⁹⁰ The ground reconnaissance units were rarely effective, because of the complexity of the terrain and density of the enemy's defense's positions. Intelligence gathering had been impeded by an absence of the local population as source for human information. Some Barguts (a Mongol ethnic group in Manchuria) defected to the Soviet side, but their information was neither relevant nor faithful. Aerial reconnaissance provided a significant amount of photographs, but Japanese forces skillfully used the assets of tactical and operational camouflage, exploiting dummy models of the military vehicles. The most reliable method

⁸⁹Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰Zhukov, 188.

of reconnaissance used by the Soviets was reconnaissance by fire. However, this method could not provide information about the enemy's rear and reserve allocation. Regardless of the environmental complexity, by the middle of August the combination of reconnaissance means helped to identify the weakest spots in the enemy's defense, artillery batteries and the enemy reserve availability.⁹¹

At the same time, enormous effort had been employed to concentrate logistical support for the offensive. In order to sustain future offensives, Soviets logisticians delivered 24,000 tons of ammunition; 15,000 tons of fuel; 4,000 tons of food; and 12,000 tons of other items. To deliver the supplies 4,900 trucks were required, while only 2,636 were available. The 1400 km logistic trail took five days to drive. To speed up the delivery process Zhukov used combat vehicles with cargo capacity. The decision was risky but the enemy situation required assuming this degree of risk.⁹²

The offensive operation required unprecedented measures of secrecy. Only the army group commander, a member of the Military Council, the Chief of the political department, the chief of staff, and the chief of operations participated in the developmental process of the operational plan. The units' commanders were familiarized with the plan only a short period of time before the offensive. Radio and telephone messages were limited and did not carry information about the offensive. The battlefield's units had pretended to prepare for a deliberate defense, receiving winter clothes, defense battle's field manuals, and heaters. The supplies were positioned in the rear, but were capable of immediately deploying to the front line. The concentration of

⁹¹Ibid., 189.

⁹²Ibid., 186.

shock groups on the flanks and in attack areas had to occur in the few nighttime hours of August 20.⁹³ The Soviet-Mongolian forces then prepared for a final crushing offensive.

The Kwantung Army did not waste time either. Front line units fortified their positions. The Japanese defense consisted of a multi-echelon defensive area with anti-tank centers of resistance, a fortified bunker system capable of protecting the defenders against 152mm artillery shell, and kill boxes. By 10 August, Japanese forces established the 6th Army under General Rippei with the mission of annihilating the Soviet-Mongolian forces near the Khalkhin Gol River.⁹⁴ Total strength of the 6th Army was 55,000 troops, 300 mortar and artillery tubes, 1,283 machineguns, 135 tanks and armored cars, and 350 warplanes.⁹⁵ The army prepared to launch its offensive on 24 August.

The morning of 20 August (see figure 5) was sunny. The 6th Army command, confident that Soviets were preparing defense positions, allowed a weekend's leave to its officers and many of them were far away from their units. At 0645 the Soviet massive artillery fire opened against the Japanese air-defense positions to suppress and illuminate the enemy air-defense's targets for the Soviet bombers. In a few minutes, 150 bombers escorted by 100 fighters launched a two hours air strike against the first defensive line of the Japanese ground forces.

At 0845, the air strike had shifted forward to destroy the enemy's rear targets and an artillery barrage against the remaining targets of the first enemy line. Meantime, all command and control assets transmitted the signal to move the attacking forces into

⁹³Ibid., 187.

⁹⁴Young, 91.

⁹⁵Novikov, 67.

contact and all three groups of the Soviet-Mongolian forces, covered by artillery and attack aircraft, advanced.⁹⁶

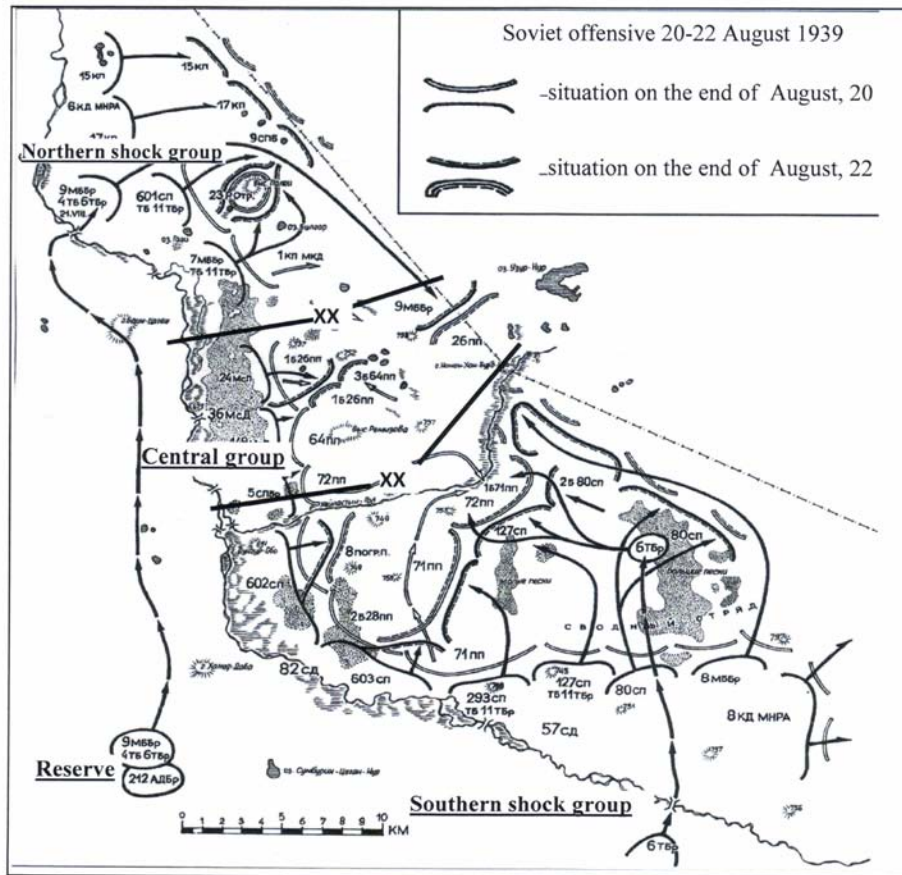


Figure 5. The Red Army Offensive during 20-22 August 1939
 Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

The Southern shock group (decisive operation), whose 6th Tank Brigade experienced problems crossing the river, wiped out the left flank of Japanese forces, crushed the Khingan (Burgut) Cavalry Division using the 8th Mongolian Cavalry

⁹⁶Zhukov, 192.

Division, seized the Eris-Ulyn-Obo height, and reached the southern part of the Mongolian border. By the end of the first day the 57th Rifle Division breached the enemy's defense to a depth of 10-12 km, repulsed minor enemy counterattacks and began encirclement of the enemy south of Khalaystyn River. The success might have been greater if the 6th Tank had been able to cross the river on 20 August, however, on 21 August success had been exploited and the Southern shock group continued penetration to link with the shock group North.⁹⁷

A difficult situation occurred for the Center group (shaping operation). Strong Japanese resistance and developed fortifications impeded the movement in depth. During the first day, Soviet forces advanced 1000-1500 meters into enemy defenses by just.⁹⁸ On the left flank of the attacking forces, the Northern shock group, in a violent cavalry charge by the 6th Mongolian Cavalry Division, annihilated two Burgut cavalry regiments and seized positions south-west Yanhu Lake. At the same time, the 7th Moto-Armored Brigade and 601st Rifle Regiment could not seize fortified position "Palec," the commander of the 601st was killed and the attack stalled. In order to continue the Northern advance, Zhukov committed his reserve, the 9th Moto-Armored Brigade and 4/6 Tank Brigade. At 1700, the Soviets sent the word first for rocket-armed aircraft to attack Japanese fighters. Five Soviet I-16s, equipped with eighth air-to-air rockets, attacked a group of Japanese I-97s and destroyed two of them. During the first day, Japan Air Force lost 24 I-97 fighters.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Novikov, 81.

⁹⁸Ibid., 82.

⁹⁹Ibid., 85.

The first day of the offensive showed the Soviet-Mongolian forces had produced a wedge in the enemy's defense, but they did not achieve all their objectives. Japanese forces had not given up their positions without strong resistance. All of the Japanese reserve forces west of the Mongolian border were already committed to the battle and had culminated its defense capability.

The second day of the Soviet offensive brought more tactical success to the Southern shock group. All units were slowed, but masterfully seized Japanese positions and the 6th Tank Brigade, committed only on the morning of 22 August, exploited the tactical success. However, the Center group moved slightly into the enemy's defense slightly. The Northern shock-group received the 9th Moto-Armored Brigade as reinforcement and increased pressure on the Japanese fortified position "Palec."

Generally, the second day of the defense did not contribute much to the Japanese defeat. In order to break the battle stalemate, Zhukov ordered the shock-groups to bypass the enemy's centers of resistance, surround and isolate them, and keep attacking until they linked up with friendly forces to complete encirclement as soon as possible. The Center group received the order to limit its efforts by fixing the enemy's center, preventing enemy forces from reinforcing to the flanks, and providing comprehensive support to the shock-groups.¹⁰⁰

During 22 and 23 August (see figure 6), the Soviet forces broke the stalemate and finished their encirclement of Japanese forces. On the evening of 22 August, in the area of operation of the Northern shock-group, 200 enemy soldiers (mostly Manchurians) had capitulated. On the night of 23 August, Japanese forces concentrated two infantry

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 88.

regiments on Manchurian territory to release the surrounded forces, but were slaughtered by massive Soviet artillery and night air strikes.¹⁰¹

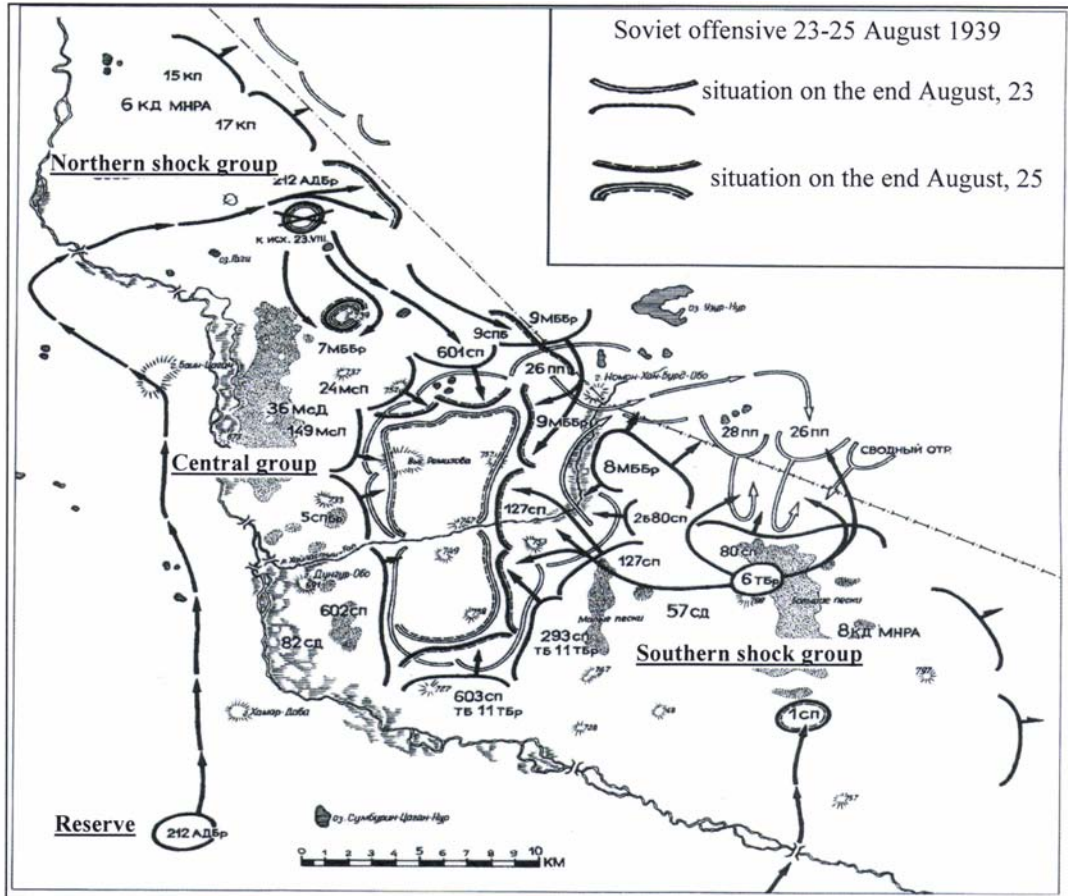


Figure 6. The 1st Army Offensive during 23-25 August 1939

Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

In the morning, Komkor Zhukov committed his last reserve, the 212th Airborne Brigade, to destroy the fortified position “Palec” in AOO North and all three groups

¹⁰¹Ibid., 89.

began strengthening the circle around the Japanese forces west of the Mongolian border.¹⁰²

During the next six days (26-31 August), the Soviet-Mongolian forces continued to break down the surrounded Japanese forces and repulse enemy's counterattacks from Manchurian territory (see figure 7).

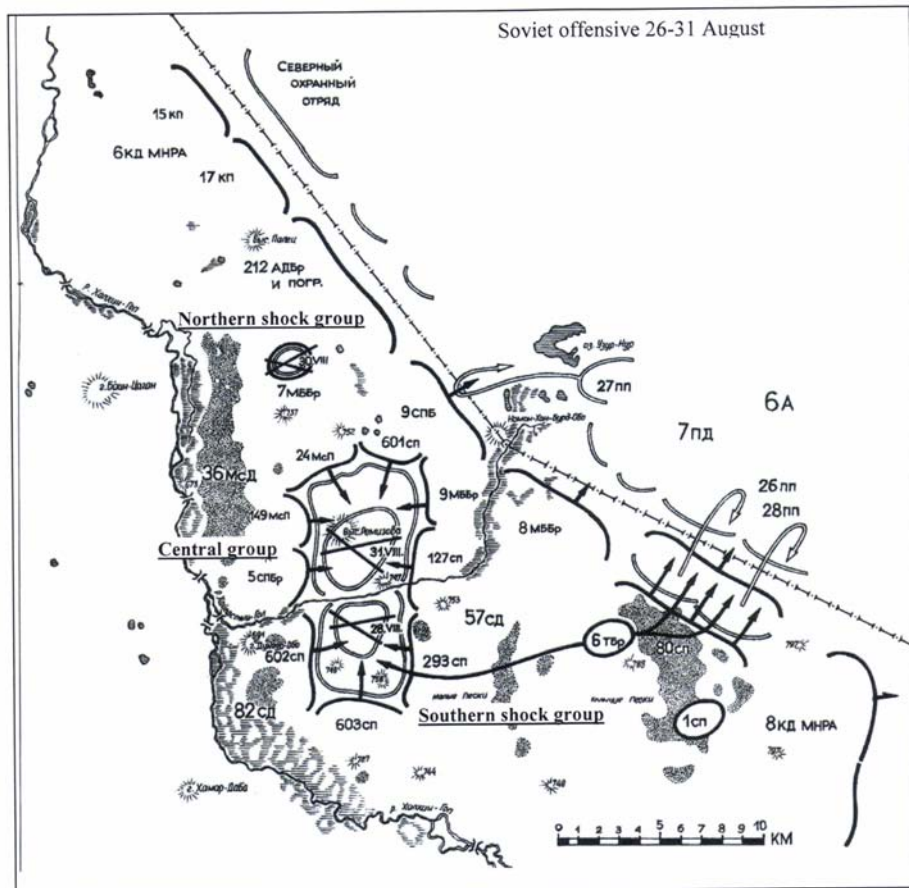


Figure 7. The 1st Army Group Offensive during 26-31 August 1939

Source: Military-Topographical Directorate of the General Staff of the USSR. *Maps from the History of World War II, Vol 12*, http://militarymaps.narod.ru/maps.html#2002_2 (accessed 10 March 2010).

¹⁰²In his memoirs General Zhukov mentioned that complete encirclement had been finished only 26 August but Novikov's book, which describes the battle in details, claimed the end of the encirclement 23 August and the beginning of full annihilation of the Japanese forces on 24 August.

In order to restore operational flexibility, Komkor Zhukov reassigned the 6th Tank Brigade as the 1st Army Group's reserve and committed it against Japanese counterattacks along the border. However, minor counterattacks of the Japanese forces continued until 16 September. Since 27 August, the priorities of the Soviet-Mongolian forces had been shifted to the security of the border. The border was fortified and the counterattack's reserve was established.

On 31 August, the last source of Japanese resistance was annihilated. The last battle of the undeclared Khalkhin Gol war occurred in the air. On 15 September the Japanese air force launched an air operation to destroy Soviet aircraft and airdromes in the rear.¹⁰³ 200 Soviet fighters intercepted 120 Japanese bombers and fighters. In this air battle, the Japanese lost 20 airplanes and shot down six Soviets aircraft.¹⁰⁴

On 15 September 1939, the Japanese Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Togo Shigenori, and the new Peoples' Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, signed a truce agreement to take effect on the 16th. Both sides agreed to an exchange of prisoners of war and establish a joint commission to resolve disputes along the length of the border. The military losses were more dramatic than the truce agreement's description. The Soviet casualties throughout the conflict were about 10,000; while the Japanese lost 52,000 to 55,000 men.¹⁰⁵ The 23d Infantry Division took 73 percent casualties. The 71st Regiment suffered over 93 percent losses. In contrast, the Japanese took 28 percent casualties at Mukden, the hardest fought battle of the 1904 Russo-

¹⁰³Zhukov, 195.

¹⁰⁴Novikov, 97.

¹⁰⁵Chaney, 57.

Japanese War. In Japan, the Kwantung Army suffered a significant loss of prestige. Lt. Gen. Komatsubara Michitaro, commander of the 23rd Infantry Division, was disgraced. In early September Lt. Gen. Ueda, commander of the Kwantung Army, was reassigned to Japan, effectively ending his career. The Kwantung Army ceased to be a law unto itself and was brought back under the centralized control of Tokyo. The Japanese were very careful not to provoke the Soviets again. Even when they signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in March of 1941, the Japanese hastened to sign a non-aggression pact with the USSR as well.¹⁰⁶

General of the Army (promoted after the conflict) Zhukov provided an overview of the 1939 Soviet-Japanese conflict during his introduction to Stalin, Molotov, and Kalinin in the summer of 1940. In his analysis of the Japanese Army, he emphasized the high level of tactical training and morale of the Japanese soldiers and junior officers, however, senior officers were characterized as barely knowledgeable, with poor initiative and inflexible command styles. The Japanese armament, equipment and method of tactics were evaluated as inferior to the Soviets and inappropriate to current operational requirements. Zhukov assessed the Soviet units and equipment as well. He underlined some failures in the unit's formation, training, and particularly sustainment. The Soviet BT-5 and BT-7 tanks demonstrated superior technical and tactical advantages over the Japanese tanks; however, they were highly flammable. Zhukov recommended increasing the quality and quantity of the Soviet tank forces.¹⁰⁷ However, as result of

¹⁰⁶Timothy Neeno, "Nomonhan: The Second Russo-Japanese War," <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/20thcentury/articles/nomonhan.aspx> (accessed 3 April 2010).

¹⁰⁷Zhukov, 204-205.

misunderstanding the Spanish Civil War, the Red Army command disbanded the seven mechanized corps and distributed the tanks throughout the rifle divisions as support weapons.¹⁰⁸

As recognition, General of the Army Zhukov was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union and given the post of Commander of the Kiev Special Military District—the best military district in the Red Army.

The echo of the Red Army victory over the Kwantung Army gained worldwide advantages for the Soviet Union. In the diplomatic arena, the Soviet Union increased its prestige and claimed the status of the dominant regional power in the Far East. As World War II hit Europe, Stalin was free to focus his attention in the West; the threat from Japan had been reduced significantly. In the end, Nomonhan eliminated the so-called “Northern Axis” faction that had dominated Japanese strategic thinking until that point. Now the “Southern Axis” faction, led by the navy, would be dominant. The Southern Axis leaders looked primarily at the oil rich Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia), at strategic Malaya and Singapore, and at Burma and Indochina, as World War II fixed the British and French. The only force stopping the Japanese now was the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Informationally, the Soviet Union sent a message around the world about the superiority of communist ideology over Japanese militarism. The peoples of China and all of Asia received hope in the struggle against Japanese aggression.

Militarily, the superior Soviet weapons, tactics, and leadership cooled down some “hot heads” and demonstrated the critical vulnerabilities the Japanese forces. For some period of time, the Soviet Far East’s border had been relieved from military pressure. The

¹⁰⁸Chaney, 59.

military forces and the Red Army's commanders received enormous combat experience, which they employed later, during the 1941 Elnya offensive operation also under General Zhukov's command.¹⁰⁹ A majority of these commanders would build successful military careers during World War II.

Economically, the Soviet Union expanded the market for its weapons. During World War II, the Soviet Foreign Trade Bank received from Mongolia 2,500,000 tugriks, \$100,000, and 300 kilograms of gold. These funds paid for 53 tanks for the front. The Mongolian government bought an air squadron and turned it over to the Soviet Air Force. In 1941-1942 the Red Army's cavalry received from Mongolia 35,000 horses as a gift.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹Zhukov, 201.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 202.

CHAPTER 5

THE 1939 SOVIET-JAPANESE MILITARY CONFLICT AS A TEST OF “DEEP OPERATIONS”

As a result of the symbiosis of almost two decades of the development of military theory and the industrial growth of the Soviet Union, the Red Army began implementation of the “deep operation” and its lesser but relevant component, “deep battle”. Under the influence and control of Tukhachevskiy and Egorov the Red Army widely exercised the “deep battle” and “deep operation” during the regular training cycle. The theory distinguished two levels of warfare: tactical and operational, at the same time, united them in the interdependent concept.

To perform the “deep battle” in the early 1930s, the rifle corps, supported by a large number of tanks, artillery and aviation, conducted a tactical breakthrough of enemy division defense line. The “deep operation,” an extension of “deep battle,” would develop this tactical success into an operational one, where large tank and mechanized forces supported by artillery and aviation would exploit a tactical breakthrough, drive into the enemy rear to cut off its lines of communication, encircle and then destroy the forces in positions and the reserves. The mission of “deep battle” was to penetrate enemy defense positions up to about 12 km or the rear of the enemy division defense line. The “deep operation” was to advance at least 50-60 km into the enemy reserves, airfields and army-level HQ.

The theory’s development systematized the “deep operation” and divided it into three phases. The first was a breakthrough of the tactical defense and the establishment of a breach by combined-arms forces, supported by artillery and aviation with infantry

playing the main role. The second was a commitment into the breach of large tank and moto-mechanized forces to convert tactical success into operational success. Often the second phase would be followed by simultaneous airborne landings in the enemy rear to fix and destroy enemy reserves. The third phase was an operational pursuit to the complete destruction of the enemy forces, seizing the objective of the operation and creation favorable conditions to launch a new operation.¹¹¹

The first phase was accomplishing by the “deep battle” and was essential to begin the second and third phases. The key to success of the “deep battle” was combined-arms collaboration supported by artillery and aviation. The second and third phases were dependent on large and mobile forces such as tanks, moto-mechanized, and mechanized cavalry as well as airborne units operating in the enemy rear. On the main axis shock corps and armies were to deploy, and air superiority was a critical requirement to isolate the area of operation so as to prevent enemy reinforcement and resupply.¹¹²

The culmination of the enormous military reforms was the Belarus Military District Maneuvers in September and publication of FR-36 in December 1936. The regulation officially sanctioned the “deep battle” and “deep operation” and directed basic requirements and guidance for the training and the battlefield.

In 1937, the “deep operation” of the Red Army indeed became a fait accompli. However, Stalin’s purge began the crucifixion of the theory, its authors, instructors, and supporters. During the next few years the theory as well as successful military reform

¹¹¹Turner, 242.

¹¹²Ibid., 243.

was becoming leaderless. A few talented practitioners of the “deep operation” survived, one of them being Zhukov.

Being a follower of Tukhachevskiy and Yegorov, a student of Isserson in military academies, and a friend of Triandafillov, Zhukov would prove the theory’s worth and rehabilitate it in the 1939 Soviet-Japanese Military Conflict.

The exceptional victory of the 1 Army Group under Zhukov’s command had been achieved by appropriate application of the “deep operation” concept within some political and military limitations. The “deep operation” made the 1st Army Group’s command and control structure, organization of force, and tactics superior advantage over the Japanese warfare.

The complexity of the Khalkhin Gol area of operation, its extended lines of communication, undeveloped road network, absence of inhabitants and the potential quantitative superiority of the Kwantung Army forced Zhukov to reorganize the Red Army’s command and control system from the tactical to the operational level.

The 57th Special Rifle Corps command and control system was insufficient for the operation. In order to bridge the gap the Narkonat Oborony (People’s Commissariat of Defense) reorganized the Red Army forces in Mongolia into the 1st Army Group under the command Komdiv Zhukov. The logistical and combat service support of the Trans-Baykal Military District, which included the area of operation Mongolia, had been managed by the Group of Fronts under the command of Kommandarm 2d rank Shtern, intentionally created for the Soviet-Japanese military conflict. The primary role of the Front Group was to facilitate the logistics and mobilization, in case the conflict extended onto Soviet territory. The role of the 1st Army Group was to establish distinct

coordination between the forces in contact and reserve. With this purpose the 1st Army Group HQ deployed enormous radio and wired networks on the middle of the steppe. In order to coordinate the supplies and reinforcement Zhukov had online radio communication with Moscow and Chita (the Front Group) (see figure 8).

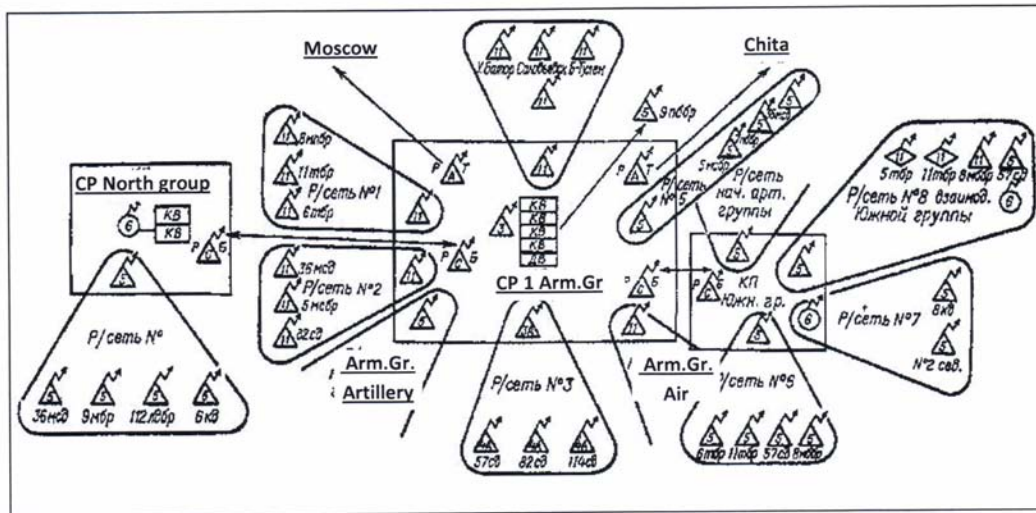


Figure 8. The Scheme of 1st Army Group's Radio Network
 Source: V.N. Sheptura, "The Influence of the Theory of "Deep Operation" on the Communication's Development on the Eve of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945," *The Journal of Military History*, no.7 (2006): 26-30.

During the August offensive Zhukov's command post (the Central group) controlled by wired network the command posts of Northern, Southern shock groups, and Reserve as well as the air component, and by radio networks for all units down to the brigade HQ (see figure 9).

coordination between the military branches and services, as well as allowed Komkor Zhukov to focus on the on-going operation.¹¹³

In order to achieve the offensive's objective, the 1st Army Group received appropriate forces and supplies. The organization of these forces permitted them to conduct a deep penetration of the enemy defense line with subsequent encirclement and annihilation of the enemy units in depth of a tactical zone. Zhukov organized his forces into three combat groups: a Northern and Southern shock groups, and the Central group. The names of the combat groups describe the mission as well as set of forces to perform the offensive. Chapter I, article 3 of the FR-36 provides guidance to array forces for combat:

It is impossible to be equally strong on all fronts. To ensure success it is necessary to shift forces and materials so as to gain a decisive advantage over the enemy in the crucial area. In secondary areas only sufficient forces are needed to hold the enemy down.¹¹⁴

The main axis of Zhukov's offensive was on the enemy flanks. The Northern and Southern shock groups were performing their breakthrough missions on these directions and they received the required forces to make it happened. Both the 6th and 11th Tank Brigades were assigned to the shock groups. The Central group operated with infantry (rifle) units in accordance with the specifics of the mission: to fix the enemy forces by frontal attack and support their encirclement by the Northern and Southern shock groups.

Artillery and aviation received the tasks to delay enemy movement in its rear and prevent the commitment of the reserve forces. The greatest amount of artillery supported

¹¹³Novikov, 79.

¹¹⁴US, Department of Commerce. *Provisional field regulations for the Red Army 1936* (Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, June 1986), 2.

the Central group. It allowed not only supporting the attack of its infantry, but striking the enemy rear in the area of responsibility of the neighbors. Furthermore, the Central group was under command of Komkor Zhukov, who as commander of the operation could commit reserves, artillery and air fire throughout entire area of operation. Moreover, the reserve forces consisted of the 212th Airborne Brigade and appropriate air assets to conduct an airborne landing in the enemy rear, if required. However, the close proximity of the international border and restrictions to extend the combat actions on the Manchurian territory made the airborne landing impossible. The force array for the August offensive completely corresponded to the situation in the area of the conflict, available forces and requirements of the “deep operation.”

Command and control and the organization of forces were the support elements of the tactics of “deep operation” employed on the battlefield by the 1st Army Group. In order to analyze the August offensive in terms of the components of the “deep operation” it is worth quoting the FR-36 requirements for the offensive:

164. In joint operations by all branches and services, the offensive operation must have the objective of simultaneously overwhelming the entire depth of the enemy defense. This can be accomplished as follows:

- a. by air attacks against the reserves and the rear areas of the enemy defenses;
- b. by artillery attacks against the entire depth of the enemy “tactical zone”;
- c. by tank penetration the depth of the tactical defense zone;
- d. by infantry penetration, accompanied by escort tanks, into enemy positions;
- e. by advancing mechanized and cavalry units into the far rear areas of the enemy;
- f. by large-scale use of smoke screens to conceal friendly movements and to confuse the enemy in less important sectors.

In this way the enemy is to be tied down, encircled, and destroyed in the entire depth of his position.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵Ibid., 53.

Furthermore, FR-36 Chapter XI (Operations under special conditions) specifies the requirements for steppe warfare:

302. In the attack it is useful to conduct the main assault by the infantry, supported by massed artillery, tanks and aircraft, against the defender's flank, first having found the flanks and advance guard of the enemy's defensive position and having held the enemy down by a frontal attack. Simultaneous attacks by aircraft and mobile units against the enemy's reserves and rear can lead to success. The main thrust into a flank can usefully be combined with an encircling movement in a less important direction.¹¹⁶

As we can see, the field regulation provided Zhukov a very specific and concrete pattern to perform the "deep operation," however, it did not restrict him in applying the various tactical methods in accordance with the terrain, enemy considerations, and the status of force.

The study of the August offensive shows that the 1st Army Group applied the "deep offensive operation" pattern in its full breadth. The offensive began with massive air strikes against the enemy artillery positions, airfields, command and control infrastructure, and reserves. The first wave of aircraft revealed the positions of the air defense artillery. The 1st Army Group's artillery's barrage immediately suppressed the Japanese air defense and struck the first enemy defensive line, artillery positions and command posts. The second wave of airplanes shifted the bombardment into the enemy rear, while artillery was destroying the Japanese antitank positions.¹¹⁷ The joint fire organization indicates the well coordinated fire attacks against the entire depth of the enemy "tactical zone". Meantime, the low density of artillery caused casualties among

¹¹⁶Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁷Novikov, 80

the tank forces when the Japanese repaired antitank positions and opened fire against the advancing Soviet forces.

The tank and infantry penetration of the enemy's defense zone started after the artillery barrage and ended in three days with the complete encirclement of Japanese forces. The mechanized and cavalry forces were sent into the breaches of the enemy's defense and exploited the penetration. The tank and infantry attacks were supported by artillery and close air support's aviation. The short and long-range bombers attacked the enemy rear, lines of communication, and reserves.

The study of the conflict confirms that the 1st Army Group waged the August offensive in a manner that corresponded completely to the FR-36 and the theory of "deep operation." The Red Army possessed the appropriately trained forces, leadership, and weapons to apply the offensive in the depth of the enemy's tactical zone. The area of operation did not have true operational depth and the 1st Army Group did not possess enough forces and planning time to perform at the operational level of warfare. From this we can conclude that the August offensive of the 1st Army Group was a tactical battle, this is the "deep operation's" first phase—"deep battle."

At the same time we have to emphasize some weaknesses in the August offensive as well as in theory of the "deep operation."

FR-36 divided responsibility to support the infantry in the attack between tank forces and artillery in an inefficient way:

Artillery and tanks facilitate the infantry's advance while attacking by neutralizing enemy machineguns and other weapons. When tanks are used, the

primary task of the artillery is the neutralization of enemy antitank fire. The tanks primarily attack enemy machineguns.¹¹⁸

Such an allocation of responsibility caused a significant loss of tanks in the Northern shock group. While tank forces were eliminating machineguns' positions the Japanese anti tank artillery was attacking the tanks.

The density of artillery did not provide reliable suppression of the enemy's artillery and could not effectively support attacking forces.

According to the tactical norms the daily advance of the forces was supposed to be 12-15 km. The 1st Army Group completed encirclement the Japanese forces only after three days, which is evidence of the overestimation of the force ratio for the offensive. As second and third effects of that overestimation, on the second day of the operation Zhukov committed almost all the reserve forces to reinforce the Northern shock group, which put the operation at great risk. If the Japanese forces had counterattacked the Center or South, the operation could have collapsed.

In conclusion, in the 1920s and 1930s Red Army military theory achieved significant success in the solution of the World War I tactical stalemate. The problem of the breakthrough of the enemy defense had been solved by employment of the massive attacking mechanized forces in depth. This solution became feasible only with the development of tank and mechanized forces as well as artillery, aviation, and combat service support system.

In 1939 the Red Army possessed the theory of "deep operation," an appropriate number of the field regulations, and trained forces to apply the theory in the Far East

¹¹⁸Provisional field regulations for the Red Army 1936, 3.

theater. The superiority of the theory, weapon systems, and leadership became the crucial factor in the 1939 Soviet-Japanese military conflict in Mongolia. However, the practical application of the “deep operation” revealed a number of weaknesses associated with the set of forces, density of fire support, logistic and operational measures of performance.

Unfortunately, the Red Army would not be able to compensate for these weaknesses prior to World War II because of Stalin’s purge, which destroyed the entire officer corps and its military science.

The victory in Mongolia enhanced the Soviet influence in the Far East, deterred the Japanese aggression and raised the star of World War II General of the Army Georgii Zhukov.

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Department of Military History
USACGSC
100 Stimson Ave.
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

Dr. Bruce W. Menning
Department of Joint and Multinational Operations
USACGSC
100 Stimson Ave.
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

LTC Randy G. Masten
Department of Joint and Multinational Operations
USACGSC
100 Stimson Ave.
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

Mr. John R. Piloni
Department of Joint and Multinational Operations
USACGSC
100 Stimson Ave.
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301