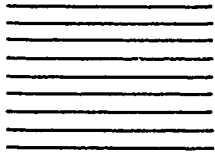


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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

MAJ. KOSEVICH RICHARD S.

THE BMP-EQUIPPED MOTORIZED RIFLE
BATTALION IN THE OFFENSE

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Student research report

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Major Richard S. Kosevich

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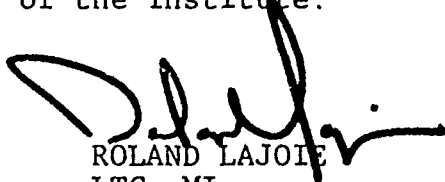
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F O R E W O R D

This research project represents fulfillment of a student requirement for successful completion of the overseas phase of training of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program (Russian).

Only unclassified sources are used in producing the research paper. The opinions, value judgments and conclusions expressed are those of the author and in no way reflect official policy of the United States Government; Department of Defense; Department of the Army; Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff of Intelligence; or the United States Army Institute for Advanced Russian and East European Studies.

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SUMMARY

This paper examines the BMP-equipped motorized rifle battalion in the offense, as it is discussed in the Soviet military press. Major emphasis of the paper is on maneuver elements and their interaction in that type of operation which the Soviets classify as "the offense". Topics include capabilities of the BMP, battalion capabilities, mission and combat formations, methods of launching and conducting the attack, continuation of the attack, the pursuit, and repulsion of enemy counterattacks. The final portion of the paper deals with the impact of the BMP on motorized rifle tactics and on combined arms cooperation in the attack.

OFFENSE

The offense is, and will undoubtedly remain, the basic form of Soviet combat operations. Other forms of military operations are not, of course ignored, but it is the offense that receives most attention. As stated in Reznichenko's book, Tactics: "Only by means of a decisive offense conducted at high speed and in great depth, can a full defeat of the enemy be achieved. Forces conducting an offense attack an opposing enemy force with nuclear weapons, air strikes, artillery and other combat support means and, capitalizing on the results, strike deeply into his position and destroy or capture enemy troops, weapons and equipment and seize a defined area of enemy territory."¹

This paper examines one element of Soviet combat capability, the BMP-equipped motorized rifle battalion in the offense. Major emphasis of the paper is on maneuver elements and their role in basic, typical, offensive operations. Related topics such as night operations, combat service support, operations in adverse terrain, reconnaissance and the meeting engagement are considered outside the purview of this paper. We will first examine characteristics and capabilities of the BMP and the basics of motorized rifle battalion offensive tactics, then

discuss the effect the advent of the BMP has had on these tactics and on combined arms cooperation.

Contrary to much that has been recently written about Soviet tactics, the Soviets themselves do not recognize the meeting engagement, breakthrough and pursuit as the three forms of their offensive operations. In Soviet terms there are four types of combat operations: the meeting engagement, the offense, the defense and the withdrawal. The meeting engagement, in the strict sense of Soviet definition, is not an offensive operation. It is, instead, that form of operation in which both sides simultaneously attempt to achieve different objectives and which has as its goals: defeat of an attacking enemy, seizure of a particular position and advantageous development of the battle.² In contrast to this, the offense is that type of operation in which one side deliberately attacks a defending enemy in order to achieve its mission. The Soviet offense has two methods of execution: the attack from march column out of a rear area and the attack from a position of immediate contact.³

BMP CHARACTERISTICS AND CAPABILITIES

The BMP (Boevaia Mashina Pekhoty - Infantry Combat Vehicle) was first paraded in Moscow in 1967 and is now found in quantity in forward-deployed Soviet divisions. It is much more than an armored personnel carrier. Armed

with a 73mm smoothbore gun, a launch rail for the SAGGER antitank missile and a 7.62mm machinegun, it combines features of a light tank, an antitank missile carrier and a personnel carrier. It is amphibious, air dropable, equipped with an internal CBR filtration system and has a cruising range of 500 kilometers. Maximum armor is 14mm thick.

Eight firing ports allow firing of individual weapons from inside the vehicle. The 11-man crew/squad consists of: the squad leader/vehicle commander; and a driver/mechanic; the vehicle gunner; one RPG-7 (anti-tank grenade launcher) gunner; two PKM (light machinegun) gunners; and up to five AKMS-armed riflemen and/or assistant gunners. Squad members sit back-to-back on adjustable seats facing the sides of the vehicle, under rather cramped conditions. The two PKM machineguns and six AKMS rifles are locked into the firing ports. Each port is equipped with a front-angled vision block on the hull above and a small vision port above the barrel of the weapon. An exhaust system dispenses with fumes and a bag attached to each weapon collects spent brass.

The main armament of the BMP is the 73mm, automatically loaded, smoothbore gun mounted in a small conical turret. It fires a fin-stabilized HEAT round which can penetrate armor of most medium tanks at 1000 meters. Basic load is approximately 30 rounds. To the right of the main gun is

the coaxially-mounted 7.62mm machinegun with an effective range of 1000 meters. Above the main gun is the launch rail for the SAGGER wireguided antitank missile. Each BMP carries 4 or 5 missiles. Hit probability of the SAGGER, against a stationary target, from a stationary position, is greater than 80% at a range from 1000 to 3000 meters. Below 1000 meters, hit probability is significantly reduced due to factors of time and limited visibility in tracking the missile immediately after launch. This dead space, however, is covered by the 73mm gun, giving the BMP good antitank capability from near ranges out to 3000 meters.⁴

The intended use of the BMP is extensive and includes: "employment as a major maneuver element during the development of successful combat deep into enemy defenses, as an enveloping force, for surprise attacks, for destruction of enemy reserves, etc. All of this is possible thanks to the high speed, mobility, armor and great firepower of the BMP."⁵

THE MOTORIZED RIFLE BATTALION

The motorized rifle battalion of the motorized rifle regiment consists of three companies with ten BMPs each, a 120mm mortar battery, an antitank platoon, plus the headquarters and logistics sections. The battalion is not an autonomous unit, but operates as part of a larger

combat formation, i.e., the regiment. A motorized rifle (hereafter abbreviated as "MR") battalion attacking as part of a first echelon may receive attachments of up to a battalion of 122mm howitzers, one or two tank companies and a sapper platoon. Normal tank attachment, however, is one company. Attached tanks usually remain directly subordinate to the battalion commander. In restrictive terrain, at night, or under similar conditions of difficult control, tank platoons may be attached to companies.⁶

MISSION, COMBAT FORMATION

The MR battalion is capable of attacking in the first or second echelon of a larger formation, acting as a reserve or acting as a forward detachment.⁷ The immediate battalion objective in an attack, which may have a depth up to 5 kilometers, and the direction of attack beyond the immediate objective are assigned by the regimental commander. The mission of a battalion attacking in the first echelon normally calls for "destruction of enemy personnel and weapons in the strong points of an enemy battalion of the first echelon and seizure of these strong points."⁸ The concepts of "main attack" and "secondary attack" are not normally the concern of a battalion. These are concepts applied to larger formations, such as to regiments within a division.⁹

Regardless of the method for launching the attack (from march column or from immediate contact), there are, at battalion level, two primary types of offensive maneuvers: the envelopment ("okhvat") and the turning movement ("obkhod"). The envelopment is a flanking maneuver in which subunits remain in supporting distance of each other. The turning movement is a deeper maneuver in which such support is not maintained. There is occasional mention of the frontal attack but it is adopted only as a last resort on the battalion level due to its obvious disadvantages.¹⁰

The battalion normally attacks in one echelon, but with two MR companies and the attached tank company forward and one MR company to the rear, in reserve. Although this reserve, on the battalion level, is not considered a second echelon, the forward subunits are still referred to as the "first echelon."¹¹ If nuclear weapons are employed, the battalion normally attacks on a 2000 meter front, with the tank company leading, followed by two MR companies separated by a 400-500 meter interval. MR companies attack on a front up to 800 meters, with no reserve. Each of the three platoons within a company attacks on a 200 meter front, with 100 meter interval between vehicles. When dismounted, riflemen maintain 6-8 meter interval in a line of skirmishers. In a non-nuclear environment, the maximum attack frontage for the battalion is 1000 meters.¹²

These figures, however, are arithmetical and can be altered by the situation.¹³ The regimental commander determines the battalion frontage based on his concept of the operation, enemy strength and the extent of preparation of the defensive position, combat strength of the subordinate battalion, terrain and the degree to which enemy firepower is suppressed by nuclear weapons or conventional weapons of mass destruction. Width of the front should satisfy the conditions: achieve superiority of combat power along the direction of attack, from the beginning of combat through the immediate objective; dispersion of the battalion to lessen vulnerability to weapons of mass destruction; maximum effective use of all subunits and attached elements; creation of advantageous conditions for maneuver.¹⁴

Unless the battalion is assigned an independent mission such as an advance guard or forward detachment, the regimental commander determines the formation to be used by the battalion in the attack (when on an independent mission, the battalion commander is normally allowed to determine his own formation).¹⁵ There are three basic categories of formation: the march column ("kolonna"); approach march formation ("predboevoi poriadok"); and, combat formation ("boevoi poriadok"). The approach march formation, which provides speed as well as ease of movement into combat formation, normally consists of platoon columns arrayed in wedge or echelon right or left.¹⁶

In combat formation, platoons are normally on line within companies formed on line ("v liniiu"), echelon right or left ("ustupom vpravo ili vlevo"), wedge ('uglom vpered") or inverted wedge ("uglom nazad").¹⁷

THE BATTALION RESERVE

The reserve may vary in size from a platoon to a company, with a company being most probable. It is committed in the attack in order to capitalize on a success achieved by the first echelon, neutralize an enemy strong point or repel a counterattack.¹⁸ The reserve may also be used for relief of another subunit, for changing the direction of attack or for seizing new objectives.¹⁹

Before commitment, the reserve is normally centrally located at a distance up to 3 kilometers from the first echelon. Riflemen remain mounted; vehicles move in approach march formation. The commander of the reserve usually remains with the battalion commander, keeping abreast of the situation. When committed, reserve subunits enter combat either through the interval between first echelon companies or around their flank.²⁰

The difference between a second echelon and a reserve is that a second echelon is created with a precisely-defined mission in mind, to intensify the attack from a specified position and exploit success. A reserve is

created for improvisation during the course of combat and is not assigned a specific mission until the need arises.²¹

MOUNTED VERSUS DISMOUNTED ATTACK

The preferred method of attack is the mounted attack, used whenever enemy firepower is suppressed by a nuclear strike, air or artillery, when terrain permits and when the enemy does not possess a great antitank capability. The mounted attack is considered especially suited for penetrations into the depths of enemy defenses.²² Such an attack is conducted at full speed, with BMPs normally following behind tanks.²³

Particular attention is paid to enemy antitank fires in determining whether an attack is to be conducted mounted or dismounted. The BMP, being only lightly armored, is extremely vulnerable to antitank fires. When nuclear weapons are not used, it is felt that artillery and air strikes alone may not be sufficient to suppress AT fires and that dismounted riflemen should attack behind tanks and in front of BMPs. Dismount should take place after deployment into combat formation, as close to the FEBA as possible.²⁴

Another criterion in reaching a decision to dismount is the extent to which enemy defensive positions have been prepared. If, during the attack, a subunit commander discovers that enemy positions are better prepared than anticipated, he may give the command to dismount. If, however, they are not well prepared,

the system of fires is not well organized, there are no minefields or obstacles, or AT weapons are not in position, then the attack is performed mounted.²⁵

Doctrine in this area does not appear to be entirely firm, however. Some commanders believe that full utilization should be made of the BMPs capabilities for mounted combat and it is usually senseless to dismount because this limits speed and restricts maneuverability and flexibility. Speed and maneuver are "the best countermeasures" against enemy AT weapons. Dismounting should be considered only when penetrating an extremely well-developed position, when seizing an enemy river crossing or strongpoint deep in the enemy rear or when it is not possible to bypass a strongpoint into the rear or flank.²⁶ In addition, the absence of use of nuclear weapons should not always signal a dismounted attack. The best AT countermeasure may be a swift mounted attack with tanks, BMPs and mounted riflemen firing on the move, preceded by a violent artillery attack which is lifted only seconds before subunits reach the FEBA.²⁷

THE ATTACK FROM MARCH COLUMN

The basic, preferred manner of launching the attack is from march column with subunits moving out of rear areas. Unlike the attack from immediate contact, the battalion, prior to beginning the attack, is not committed.²⁸ Such

an attack decreases vulnerability of subunits during preparation for combat and offers excellent opportunity for surprise, flexibility and massing of forces along one direction of attack. Its negative aspects include the necessity for exact planning and coordination between subunits and support elements and dependence on timely entry into combat. Also, commanders may not have the opportunity to study terrain and enemy disposition prior to combat.²⁹

Before the attack, subunits are positioned in assigned waiting areas ("vyzhidatel'nyi raion") located to the rear and along the direction of attack. Companies are dispersed up to 1500 meters. Ground and air security are established, maintenance is performed on vehicles and weapons, supply and general preparation for combat is performed. The battalion CO and his unit commanders perform a map and, if possible, a ground reconnaissance of the avenues of approach and enemy defenses. The battalion commander then assigns company objectives and directions of attack, designates methods to be used to suppress enemy fires, safety measures to be taken during nuclear strikes, method of passage through minefields or obstacles and location of company and platoon lines of deployment. Radio silence is observed from entry into waiting areas until beginning of the artillery preparation. Artillery is positioned so as to be able to commence

fire no later than one hour before the scheduled beginning of the artillery preparation.³⁰

At a specified time, MR companies and the attached tank company leave their waiting areas, form into battalion march column and, moving at maximum speed, cross the point of departure ("iskhodnyi punkt"). Upon reaching the line of deployment into company columns ("rubezh razvertyvaniia v rotnye kolonny"), the battalion assumes approach march formation, normally consisting of company columns followed by the battalion command post and reserve. This line of deployment is normally located at a distance from the FEBA which "significantly minimizes the probability of destruction of subunits by enemy artillery or mortars."³¹

If nuclear weapons are to be used in the attack, the next control measure to be encountered is the nuclear safety line ("rubezh bezopasnogo udaleniia"), at which subunits take protective measures against a friendly nuclear strike. Subunits remain halted until the strike is over, continuing the advance as soon as the shock wave passes.³² Ideally, the subunits reach this line just moments before the strike takes place.³³

Lead companies change formation again upon reaching the line of deployment into platoon columns ("rubezh razvertyvaniia vo vzvodnye kolonny"), normally located at the distance from the FEBA where subunits may come under

fire from tanks and direct fire weapons. Companies form into three platoon columns; there is no company reserve. The battalion, at this point, is still in approach march formation.

Combat formation is assumed prior to reaching the line of attack ("rubezh ataki"), the purpose of which is to ensure organized movement of subunits into the attack. If the attack is to be conducted dismounted, a dismount line ("rubezh speshivaniia") or dismount areas ("raioni speshivaniia"), are designated just before the line of attack.³⁴ Dismount is performed in defilade, if possible, with maximum effort taken to protect riflemen from machine-gun fire and BMPs from AT fires. Maximum use is made at this time of BMP-mounted weapons.³⁵ The dismount line and line of attack are located as close to the FEBA as possible. For a mounted attack, the general rule is that the line of attack be no more than 1000 meters from the FEBA. Proximity of the line of attack (and dismount line) to the FEBA is even more critical when attacking dismounted and it is necessary to minimize exposure of riflemen to enemy fire.³⁶

The most probable appearance of the "first echelon" of the battalion as it crosses the line of attack would be: the attached tank company, in combat formation, in the lead, followed by two MR companies, also in combat formation. To the rear would be the battalion CP and the

reserve, most probably in approach march formation and no more than 3 kilometers from the lead subunits. Attached or direct support artillery displaces with the first echelon.³⁷ Forward observers are normally located with each company.³⁸ Distances between subunits of the first echelon do not appear to be firm and, as we will see below, are presently a topic of debate amongst Soviet tacticians. One very probable variant, however, would be: tanks on line, followed at 200 meters by a line of skirmishers (if attack is conducted dismounted), followed at 200 meters by a line of BMPs. Such a variant is felt to provide the best "mix" of tank weapons, small arms and BMP-mounted weapons without endangering BMPs to enemy close-range AT weapons but keeping them close enough to support tanks. BMPs 600 meters or more behind tanks cannot support them in the assault.³⁹

Drivers are trained to maneuver their BMPs in bounds from one defilade position to another, protecting their vehicles from AT fires and, at the same time, creating favorable conditions for the gunners to fire.⁴⁰ Fire from the BMP is best conducted through the intervals between dismounted squads or from their flank. The danger of hitting one's own troops, except in mountainous terrain, is usually too great to allow firing over their heads. This method is not rejected entirely, however.⁴¹

After crossing the line of attack, the next concern of the battalion will probably be the breaching of enemy minefields or obstacles. The creation of lanes through minefields is attempted first of all during the artillery preparation.⁴² Sapper teams and/or tanks with mine plows are used. One lane is normally cleared for each MR platoon. During the breaching, BMPs occupy defilade positions from which they can bring effective fire on the FEBA.⁴³ Under cover of fires from other BMPs in a platoon, one tank, followed by one BMP, may advance to overcome an obstacle. The other BMPs concentrate their fires on forward enemy positions. After passage, the lone BMP assumes a good firing position and, using machine-gun and cannon fire, covers the advance of the other BMPs.⁴⁴

Subunits go into the final assault moving at maximum speed. Artillery and mortar fires are shifted to the enemy rear when lead subunits reach 200 meters from the FEBA.⁴⁵ Assault fire is conducted on the move or from short halts. If riflemen remain mounted, small arms fire is conducted from the BMP against enemy infantry on the FEBA. Dismounted riflemen assault in a line of skirmishers. Upon reaching a distance of 25-30 meters from enemy forward positions, they, at command, throw hand grenades, charge forward shouting "ura" (hurrah) and destroy enemy infantry in trenches.⁴⁶

THE ATTACK FROM IMMEDIATE CONTACT

The attack from immediate contact is adopted when the battalion changes from the defense to the offense, when terrain offers covered movement of subunits into attack positions close to the FEBA or when a lack of road network precludes use of an attack from march column. This manner of launching the attack offers the best opportunity to: study terrain and enemy dispositions; organize the battle, especially with respect to neutralization of enemy strongpoints, establish coordination with adjacent and higher units and fire support elements; and to conduct a simultaneous combined arms attack. Negative aspects of the attack from immediate contact include: stationary disposition of subunits in proximity to the enemy, which makes them vulnerable to weapons of mass destruction; the possible necessity of engineer preparation of passages through one's own defense positions; and, the difficulty in achieving surprise.⁴⁷

The attack is initiated from a departure area ("iskhodnyi raion") which may be part of, or directly behind, a defensive position. The departure area is chosen to provide concealed and covered disposition of subunits, minimize the effect of an enemy nuclear strike or attack by conventional weapons of mass destruction, provide stability in case of enemy ground attack and facilitate movement into the attack. The position may be prepared by defending troops and occupied

by the attacking troops at night, observing strict security measures. A tank company attached to the battalion may occupy a waiting area to the rear. Preparation for combat is normally conducted in place, employing maximum camouflage and deception measures.

The attack may begin with a nuclear strike against enemy strong points, followed by artillery fire and direct fire on the FEBA. If a nuclear strike is used, troops launch the attack immediately after passage of the shock wave. Tanks normally lead the attack, followed immediately by dismounted riflemen or by BMPs if the attack is conducted mounted. The attack will most probably be conducted mounted if a nuclear strike is used. If nuclear weapons are not employed, and the attack is to be conducted mounted, riflemen mount their vehicles during the artillery preparation.⁴⁸

Once the line of attack is crossed, the attack proceeds in the same manner as the attack from march column described above.

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK AND THE PURSUIT

After immediate objectives are seized, subunits continue the attack into the enemy rear. New company and platoon objectives are assigned on the move, by radio, if possible. Because speed is critical, continuation of the

attack is normally conducted mounted. If the assault was conducted dismounted, remounting is performed as soon as possible after neutralization of enemy resistance on immediate objectives.⁴⁹ Riflemen will almost always remain mounted during operations in the enemy rear due to the possibility of rapid changes in the situation and the need for quick reaction and maneuverability.⁵⁰

Subunits initially remain in combat formation but, if not in direct contact, may revert to approach march formation for greater speed. Strong points in the rear are bypassed, if possible, in order to deeply develop the combat. If they cannot be bypassed, an attempt is made to attack them from flank or rear. If this fails, a reinforced attack is organized as quickly as possible. The battalion commander employs all means of combat support, including air, to neutralize such a strong point. After this is accomplished, the formation is reorganized and the advance into the enemy rear is continued at top speed.⁵¹

The speed, mobility and firepower of the BMP make it particularly suited for deep operations, raids, surprise flank blows and the pursuit.⁵² When the enemy withdraws, tank subunits may be used for a direct pursuit, while BMP subunits, due to their greater speed and mobility, conduct a parallel pursuit, occasionally striking the enemy in the flank.⁵³

If the enemy delays, it is considered senseless to directly attack a prepared delay position with the entire battalion. The enemy can reinforce his position, employ preplanned fires and maneuver against the advancing battalion. Instead, a dismounted subunit may be used to pin down the enemy, while the battalion main body, preceded by an artillery barrage, strikes a mounted flanking blow, neutralizes the position and continues the advance.⁵⁴

Delays in the advance of adjacent subunits or the development of greater than normal gaps between subunits cannot be expected to affect the speed of advance. The Soviets believe that "the best possible assistance to neighboring subunits is headlong forward movement."⁵⁵

REPELLING ENEMY COUNTERATTACKS

Reaction to enemy counterattacks is determined by the size of the counterattack force. If it does not exceed an infantry company reinforced with tanks, the MR battalion expects to repel the counterattack by mortar and artillery fire and a mounted assault. If attacked by an equal force, the battalion, using all available combat power at its disposal, is expected to outmaneuver the counterattack force and strike its flank or rear. Attached artillery may be used here in a direct fire role. If the battalion is attacked by a significantly superior force, it is to occupy and prepare a temporary defensive position

and repel the counterattack in concert with other battalions or subunits of the next higher headquarters. ⁵⁶

This temporary position is formed in one echelon to provide maximum firepower forward, with special attention paid to organizing AT fires and engaging approaching tanks at maximum range. Riflemen dismount and BMPs remain 100-150 meters to their rear. ⁵⁷ Each BMP attempts to destroy at least one approaching tank with one ATGM. Tank subunits, moving at maximum speed and under cover of the BMPs, then attack to within 1500-1300 meters of the counterattack force, that is, within the distance in which it is not feasible for the enemy to use a nuclear strike. Under cover of the tanks, mounted BMP subunits then attempt to strike the counterattack force in the flank. ⁵⁸

COMBINED ARMS COOPERATION IN THE ATTACK

The majority of articles about the BMP which have appeared in the Soviet military press repeatedly discuss methods of the most effective employment of BMP subunits in coordination with tanks. The tank is still, in Soviet eyes, the main weapon on the battlefield, but the BMP, due to its exceptional combat capabilities and its effect on established doctrine, has been the object of much recent attention. According to COL-GEN V. Merinskii, Deputy Chief of the Main Ground Forces Training Center, "the search for new combat methods and the most effective use of the

BMP in modern combat is one of the most important tasks of officers of the Ground Forces. . . The exchange of information on the use of the BMP, searches for new tactical methods and maximum utilization of all positive qualities of the BMP must be accomplished year after year."⁵⁹

The essence of combined arms cooperation in the attack, as expressed in an article written by COL A. Tonkikh, is the timely and correct division of targets on enemy defensive positions between tanks, artillery and motorized rifle subunits.⁶⁰ For example, tanks attacking with MR subunits should be assigned targets which hinder the advance of MR subunits. If riflemen are mounted, tank targets are ATGM. If riflemen are dismounted, tanks should concentrate their fires on machineguns, artillery and mortars. In their turn, MR subunits destroy weapons which are dangerous to tanks: recoilless rifles, ATGM and close range AT weapons. Artillery destroys targets in enemy strong points, concentrating on ATGM and counterattack forces. Such cooperation should be continuous throughout the attack. From the time when subunits go into approach march formation until they reach the FEBA, they must be covered by unceasing and intense fires from air, artillery, mortars and, possibly nuclear weapons.

One problem encountered by the Soviets in achieving such ideal combined arms cooperation is associated with the varying speeds of attacking elements (tanks, BMPs,

dismounted troops) and the separation that develops between them during an attack because of these differences. Speed is of extreme importance to the Soviets, especially because of the ATGM threat. Since modern Soviet tanks can fire on the move at 25-30 km/hr, why should their rate of advance be slowed down, as an example, by dismounted infantry?⁶¹

A partial solution to this problem is offered by several Soviet military writers. They suggest that BMPs, before dismounting their riflemen, increase speed, catch up to tanks, then halt for dismount immediately behind the tanks. Riflemen form a line of skirmishers and rush into the assault behind tanks, while BMPs support by fire from their rear.⁶² In addition, dismount should be performed no farther than 500 meters from the FEBA, under cover of artillery, tank and BMP-mounted weapons. Experience has shown that riflemen dismounted more than 500 meters from the FEBA cannot keep up with tanks and a combined arms assault cannot be achieved.⁶³ BMPs, in their turn, should follow close enough to support riflemen, but far enough away to reduce the threat of enemy close-range AT weapons. Ideally, they advance by bounds, supporting each other by fire and moving from one defilade position to another.⁶⁴ One writer offers 300 meters as the closest distance BMPs should approach dismounted riflemen; closer than this they are too vulnerable to AT weapons. In order to achieve maximum

effect from BMP supporting fires, the interval between attacking squads should be no less than 50 meters.⁶⁵

Another aspect of the speed-associated problem is the great speed of which the BMP itself is capable. Because the BMP is a faster vehicle than the tank, it is sometimes necessary to hold back mounted BMP subunits in the attack in order to achieve combined arms cooperation.⁶⁶ One suggested solution is to allow tanks to leave their waiting areas and cross the line of departure alone, ahead of BMP subunits. Moving at their own maximum speed, BMP subunits join the tanks before reaching the line of attack. In a meeting engagement, for example, a MR battalion could dispatch faster BMP subunits forward to contact where they could cause the enemy to deploy and develop the combat before arrival of the slower main body with attached tanks.⁶⁷ Since the BMP incorporates features of a light tank, another possibility is that BMP subunits be given missions independent of tanks or on separate, converging directions of attack.⁶⁸

Another suggestion is the "line" concept advocated recently by several Soviet military writers.⁶⁹ It proposes that battalion subunits attack in two or three lines (not echelons) within supporting distance of each other. The first line would consist of tanks followed by BMPs at a distance of 50-100 meters. 200-300 meters behind this first

line comes the second line, consisting of tanks, assault guns and AT weapons. Company and battery command posts follow this second line. The third line, consisting of BMPs and leftovers from the other two lines, follows at 200-300 meters. The battalion CP brings up the rear. There is no battalion reserve. Success, according to the authors, is achieved by the great punch of the first line. Combat vehicles of the second and third lines support the first line by fire and point out targets. This concept would supposedly increase the density of combat power, lessen casualties, facilitate command, maneuver, coordination and cooperation, especially between tank and MR subunits. It could be employed only with riflemen remaining mounted, otherwise too much distance would develop between the lines.

CONCLUSIONS

The exact nature of the impact the BMP has had on Soviet tactics has probably not yet crystallized. This is evidenced by the extensive discussion of its proper employment, particularly in cooperation with tanks, found in the Soviet press in the last few years. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, it must be recognized that the advent of the BMP, with its exceptional firepower, mobility and

excellent provisions for protected mounted combat, has significantly enhanced the combat capability of the motorized rifle battalion. The BMP is no panacea, however. Due to its light armor, it remains very vulnerable to antitank weapons. This is probably its greatest liability and will limit its offensive capability. This vulnerability is offset somewhat by high speed, mobility and a low silhouette. Regardless of its limitations, the BMP affords the motorized rifle battalion a greater capability to attack with tanks and achieve greater combined arms cooperation.

Because the BMP incorporates features of a light tank, it is possible that BMP-equipped subunits may be used, independently from tanks, for offensive missions which require great speed and maneuverability, such as raids or parallel pursuit.

Very little discussion is encountered in the Soviet press on the use of the BMP-mounted cannon or ATGM. This is undoubtedly due more to censorship than to lack of interest or subject matter.

Speed and continuation of the advance are of utmost importance in the offense. Unopposed subunits cannot be expected to slow down their advance to wait for adjacent subunits. When possible, enemy strong points are bypassed in order to continue the advance and develop the combat deep in the enemy rear. BMP subunits are particularly suited to such operations.

Soviet doctrine on combat formation, distance between tanks, dismounted riflemen and BMPs, dismounted versus mounted attack, etc., is not rigid and may be altered by the situation. Based on information available in the Soviet military press, however, it can be expected that the motorized rifle battalion in the offense will, whenever possible, conduct a mounted combined arms attack from march column with tanks leading, followed at several hundred meters by BMPs.

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