Target the leaders

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Illustration by Terry L. Moehlman

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The medicine chief's pony galloped away, riderless. With their esteemed leader, Roman Nose, and other valued chieftains fallen, the Cheyenne warriors broke off their attack, sparing the outnumbered defenders. This was the improbable outcome of the unequal struggle at Beecher's Island, Colorado, on the South Platte River, 17 September 1868.

The battle pitted a small, trapped force of soldiers and scouts against perhaps one thousand well-armed, aggressive Plains Indians. The defenders' advantages included discipline and favorable position, accentuated by accurate, economical shooting. The Cheyenne leaders made tempting targets because of their prominent positions in the onslaught and their distinctive battle paint, attire, and war bonnets. On the modern battlefield, these aspects would comprise a "target signature." Just such attrition of battlefield leadership, or command, control, and communications (C^3) might likewise provide the margin of victory today.[1]

The U.S. Army should train antitank guided missile (ATGM) crews to identify, target, and destroy the enemy's battlefield C^3 systems as their top priority. These TOW gunners, serving as large caliber snipers, can sift the "target-rich environment" of current land warfare.[2] As they destroy the enemy's C^3, they disrupt, delay, and render him defeatable.

The following factors buttress this training goal:

Army tactical doctrine and logistics.

The tactical precepts of our most likely adversaries, the Soviets.

Exploitable aspects of Soviet doctrine.

The available means to develop the necessary training.

These elements support the requirement to train TOW crews as unerring, bit bore snipers.

Army tactical doctrine assumes we must fight to win, though outnumbered and outgunned.[3] One key to such victory is the engagement of the enemy at the maximum effective range of our weapons. When his deplete units become combat ineffective, they are vulnerable to counterattack.[4] The TOW is the most capable direct fire weapon available to the battalion task force (BN TF). It has impressive range, good target acquisition, and proven lethality, but despite these strengths, the TOW may have a logistical shortcoming. Since not all of the plentiful enemy targets can be engaged at once, and since reloads may be limited, ammunition resupply becomes critical. Since every precious shot must do the utmost damage, our valuable but limited TOW missiles can wreak the most destruction if fired at lucrative C^3 systems and leaders.

Significant aspects of Soviet tactical doctrine invite attack upon their C^3. Our opponents' force structure and training encourage crippling damage from TOW targeting of their C^3. Above all, the Soviets insist upon unrestrained and decisive offensive action. Their headlong advance is supposed to by-

pass pockets of resistance and drive deep into vulnerable NATO rear areas to capture key objectives and conclude the campaign quickly. If disrupted or delayed, this intensified Blitzkrieg can be blunted.

The Soviets also centralize their C^3 in the hands of a few, select leaders. These men make the many operational decisions regarding air support, artillery coordination, air defense, resupply, and the like. This centralization is rigid at regimental and subordinate echelons, resulting in inflexibility and lack of initiative. One clear example emerges in platoon radio networks, wherein only the platoon leader can both send and receive transmissions.

Rigidity of control also appears in the Soviet's geometric, textbook formations. Every soldier, vehicle, and weapons system has its prescribed place and no deployment or formation is exempt. Therefore, even C^3 vehicles are assigned exact, doctrinal positions, many of which are conspicuous and within TOW range. The rigidity of Soviet doctrine highlights the locations of C^3 systems upon which our adversaries depend. TOW gunners can be trained to identify and destroy these resources, eliminating assets key to enemy success.

Just as Soviet tactical doctrine invites destruction of their C^3, it also exposes potential vulnerablities which best can be exploited through the recommended training. At least four major vulnerabilities stand out.

Soviet offensive goals require them to bypass resistance pockets. This subjects the flanks and depths of their formations to fire.[5] Well-trained and resolute TOW crews can spot and destroy the C^3 systems, thus exposed, even better. Moreover, any delay, disruption, diversion, or local defeat confounds the Soviet offensive game plan. Once thrown off schedule, their staying power comes into question. Confused troops and avenues of approach congested with burning C^3 and their vehicles will hinder the momentum of following echelons. It is worthwhile to create such turmoil amidst the ranks of an antagonist whose operations are so time dependent.

The Soviet's highly centralized control invites disruption and resultant

The BTR-60 armored fighting vehicle (top) can be readily distinguished from the BTR-60 PA command and control variant which lacks a weapons turret and displays a unique, railing-like antenna array. It is a prime candidate for early, selective destruction.

The crew of an armored artillery command and reconnaissance vehicle deploys the counter mortar/counter artillery radar "Big Fred" which sets the system apart from all other variants of the MTLB artillery tractor.

chaos when crucial C^3 links are eliminated. Despite pro forma emphasis on troop initiative in propaganda, most Soviet soldiers neither seek nor display independent action. Products of a repressive, unforgiving social system, they fervently avoid making "wrong" decisions. Paralysis or inflexible compliance with the last order given is often the result. This lack of initiative is a noteworthy shortcoming, ripe for exploitation.

For example, a Soviet Lieutenant Colonel commanding a motorized rifle regiment (MRR) of 2300 men must control over 130 armored infantry fighting vehicles (AIFV), 40 main battle tanks (MBT), 18 self-propelled howitzers, reconnaissance and engineer companies, mortar, signal, chemical, air defense, and supporting units. With a miniscule staff, he must coordinate the many activities of his regiment, including communications with subordinates and higher headquarters. Simultaneously, that latter element demands he achieve ambitious advance rates. This commander is very busy, perhaps overburdened, and indispensible to the C^3 equation. Remove him and the calculations become confused. Aggravate the damage by eliminating the deputy commander, the maintenance chief, artillery and air control parties, the target acquisition and communications teams. TOW crews can inflict such damage, reducing a potent, well-equipped force to an uncontrolled, uncertain mass. Lack of initiative and overly centralized control, vested in indentifiable C^3 systems present liabilities we should exploit.

The modifier "identifiable" discloses the third major vulnerability, the distinctive appearance of Soviet C^3 systems. Since their leaders and C^3 vehicles occupy assigned positions, trained TOW gunners can template Soviet formations, anticipate the locations of these vital assets, and engage them early.[6] Admittedly, the battlefield is never as tidy as are training graphics. Terrain contours, concealing vegetation, adverse weather, masking smokes and aerosols, camouflage, and deception measures inhibit target acquisition. Nonetheless, the enemy will adhere to his prescribed formations whenever possible.[7] Even were that not so, the C^3 systems can be recognized by their singular appearance. This suggests a fourth vulnerability.

The Soviets have modified standard battlefield systems for the C^3 role. In so doing, they have given these assets distinctive target signatures, including extra antenna displays or turret modifications on standard MBT or AIFV. More sophisticated variants display radars, irregular generators, optics, or singular antennas, and some totally unique vehicles exist.[8] Recognition listings of these C^3 resources are available to train TOW crews on their characteristics.[9]

Therefore, the textbook positioning of Soviet C^3, coupled with distinctive target signatures, beckon for selective priority targeting.

While only four major vulnerabilities have been addressed, these alone should be profitably exploited by training TOW crews to defeat Soviet attacks by sniping enemy C^3.

No matter how clear the tactical justification, or how vulnerable the enemy may appear, the Army cannot benefit unless the recommended training is undertaken. While it is outside the scope this proposal to suggest training methodology, such a program could be started with case.

This is so because the TOW gunners and their marksmanship skills exist and are augmented daily by increasingly high caliber recruits. Also, the TOW weapon system is widely available and has earned a record of formidable combat success. With the fielding of more capable warheads, this lethality will improve. Moreover, the training materials for the recommended program already exist in the variety of FM, TM, and GTA which depict Soviet formations and individual C^3 systems as well. In fact, TOW gunners already train to master differences between NATO and Soviet bloc systems using aids ranging from playing cards to actual Soviet equipment.[10] For recognition of specific C^3 systems, quality publications at various levels of classification are, as cited above, already available.

In sum, the clear need for the espoused training is reinforced solidly by the readily available means to conduct it. What awaits is the directive to fuse the existing resources into a productive training curriculum.

The U.S. Army must train to defeat a more numerous and equally well-armed enemy. To offset this disparity, Army tactical doctrine seeks to exploit the defender's advantages, including the use of precise, long range fires. Such fires are provided the BN TF by the TOW which must be employed accurately and economically for full effect.

Outnumbered TOW crews must make every shot do the utmost damage by selectively eliminating enemy C^3 assets.

This desirable attrition is invited by the aspects of Soviet doctrine enumerated above as well as by their inflexible deployments.. Important, exploitable peculiarities and weaknesses arise from these doctrine precepts. Among these are time dependence and questionable sustainability, limited numbers of decision makers, uncertain initiative, and clearly distinguishable C^3 resources.

Given the need to destroy enemy C^3 and the resultant advantages therefrom, the necessary training should be initiated. The trained soldiers, the weapons, and the instructional tools are available to begin training now.

To attain our stated tactical goals, we must train our TOW crews to identify, acquire, and eliminate Soviet battlefield C^3 resources as their foremost targeting priority. This will help to redress significantly the numerical imbalance we face by degrading the enemy's control over his forces. Our opponent's troops may then falter as did the leaderless Cheyenne warriors at Beecher's Island. With his efforts blunted and lacking direction, enemy collapse may become general and his defeat more sure. The training espoused would enhance the likelihood of that defeat, and should be undertaken without delay. The enemy's war bonnets are numerous but they make irresistable targets.

The model 1974/2 armored artillery command and reconnaissance vehicle (top) resembles no other Soviet battlefield system. It is a critical link in Soviet fire coordination capabilities.

A Soviet M1974/1 armored artillery command and reconnaissance vehicle (bottom) moves along with the 152mm self propelled M1973 howitzers whose fire it controls. The ACRV is essential to their effective fire support and should be a top engagement priority.

Endnotes

[1]The more current and inclusive term, C^3I, is not addressed, since the elimination of intelligence assets lies outside the scope of this argumentation.

[2]Tube launched, optically tracked, wire-guided, heavy ATGM of about 127 MM diameter, and possessing an effective range of up to 3750 meters.

[3]FM 100-5 and associated *How to Fight* manuals provide the specifics of this doctrine.

[4]The Soviets would probably judge a unit as no longer serviceable for combat when attrition reached 30%. They would then attempt to pass through the next echelon of at least comparable size to continue the attack.

[5]In their adaption of the Blitzkrieg, the Soviets have accepted the threat to their flanks, trusting in speed and firepower to preserve their spearheads. They plan for nuclear or toxic chemical bombardments and *mop up* echelons to reduce any islands of resistance.

[6]This rigidity of positioning ranges from the location of a dismounted platoon leader to the march sequence of fire support control vehicles. There is even an unyielding formula for the locations of reinforcements and attachments.

[7]An excellent depiction of these strict formations and the positioning of the C^3 systems herein, is found in Mr. Dale D. Best's *Soviet MRR, BMP (Reinforced)* threat graphic. This system template, in three sections, is available from U.S. Army TRADOC, Threat Directorate.

[8]More widespread examples include the PA (or command) models of BMP, BTR-60 BTR-50, BTR-60 FAC, BRDM, MILB, ACRV and reconnaissance and target acquisition versions of the BMP.

[9]The most comprehensive of these publications may be *Soviet Command, Control, and Communications Vehicles and Platform Handbook*, a SECRET (title unclassified), 5 May 1982, (S/NF/WN) USAF Electronic Security Command document.

[10]In particular, the OPFOR (Opposing Force) programs, using weaponry acquired after the 1973 Mid East War, familiarize U.S. troops with Soviet systems on a *hands-on* basis.

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