

~~TOP SECRET~~

3987

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

30 November 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : John N. McMahon
Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Meeting
Engagement in the Initial Period of a War

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article consists of four separate critiques of an earlier contribution that attempted to redefine the meeting engagement and also to introduce the concept of a "meeting operation." All four are in agreement that both attempts are poorly argued and based on false premises. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (63) for 1962.

2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

John N. McMahon
John N. McMahon

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~



Distribution:

The Director of Central Intelligence

The Director of Intelligence and Research
Department of State

The Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

The Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Intelligence
Department of the Army

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence
U. S. Air Force

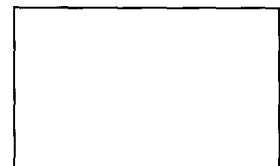
Director, National Security Agency

Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

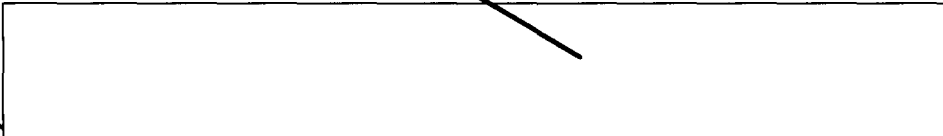
Director of the National Foreign Assessment Center

Director of Strategic Research

~~TOP SECRET~~



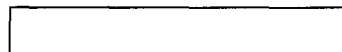
~~TOP SECRET~~



Intelligence Information Special Report

Page 3 of 27 Pages

COUNTRY USSR



DATE OF INFO. Early 1962

DATE 30 November 1978

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Meeting Engagement in the Initial Period of a War

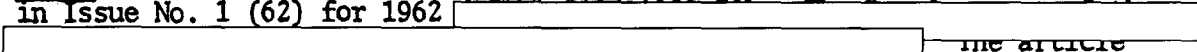
SOURCE Documentary
Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 2 (63) for 1962 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. This article consists of four separate critiques, by General-Leytenant of Tank Troops P. Govorumenko, Colonel A. Plotnikov, Colonel P. Gorelik, and General-Major I. Karev, respectively, of an earlier contribution that attempted to redefine the meeting engagement and also to introduce the concept of a "meeting operation." All four are in agreement that both attempts are poorly argued and based on false premises, particularly with respect to the use of nuclear weapons.

End of Summary

Comment:

Colonel Plotnikov also contributed to "Preparation and Conduct of a Front Defensive Operation on a Coastal Axis in the Initial Period of War" in Issue No. 1 (62) for 1962



it comments on was disseminated as



~~TOP SECRET~~

The Meeting Engagement in the Initial Period of a War

by

General-Leytenant of Tank Troops P. GOVORUNENKO

Colonel A. PLOTNIKOV

Colonel P. GORELIK

General-Mayor I. KAREV

The article by General-Leytenant L. SKVIRSKIY* raises a number of important questions concerning the conditions of the occurrence and nature of the meeting engagement, and it also proposes methods of conducting it in modern operations. The discussion and additional investigation of these questions are, in our view, extremely necessary and useful.

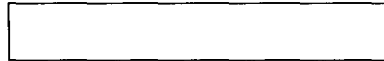
62-526-5657

It is known that in the last five to six years much attention has been devoted in our military press and in the operational training of staffs and troops to the study of the essence of a meeting battle and meeting engagements and of the methods of organizing and conducting them, although the author is correct in stating that far from everything has been investigated. In our opinion, he himself has made a number of comments which give rise to objections.

General SKVIRSKIY rejects everything that has been expressed before in print about the essence of the concept "meeting engagement," the nature of the engagement itself, its place and role in the operations of fronts and armies, and he gives a new definition.

Thus, about the meeting engagement he states: "It is the reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes and rapid offensive actions of operational groupings of both sides, in the course of which one exploits the results of one's own missile/nuclear strikes to accomplish major operational-strategic tasks in the given theater of military operations or on the given operational axis" (page 19). In our opinion, this refers to an offensive. One cannot agree with such a definition of the essence of a meeting engagement.

* Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought,' 1961, No. 5
(60).



Of course, there is no need to prove that the employment of missile/nuclear weapons exerts major influence on the nature and methods of organizing and conducting modern operations and on the achievement of their objectives. However, these weapons alone, without the decisive actions of groupings of the ground forces and of other branches of the armed forces, cannot accomplish all of the tasks of operations and as a whole achieve the aims of a war. This requires the coordinated participation of large units and formations of all branches of the armed forces and of all means of combat.

It is known that nuclear strikes can and will precede any engagements of major operational troop groupings, including meeting engagements. These strikes will be employed also in the course of these engagements and at their conclusion in order to exploit the success of our troops or to drastically change the situation if success is on the side of the enemy. But meeting engagements in a number of cases can be conducted with a limited number of nuclear warheads, and in certain periods without nuclear weapons at all. Meeting engagements will occur more often in offensive operations, but they can also occur in the defense when operational groupings encounter superior enemy forces.

Not every troop offensive that immediately follows nuclear strikes, no matter how decisive it is, can be interpreted as a meeting engagement. Nor can one take the mutual delivery of missile/nuclear strikes by both sides to be a meeting engagement and infer that the latter will occur even without an encounter of the principal ground forces groupings of the belligerents.

In our opinion, the author has oversimplified to the extreme the problems of organizing and conducting a meeting engagement by asserting that all of them are solved by reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes without deployment of the main forces of the operational groupings. Despite the disclaimer that in a meeting engagement encounters of the attack groupings of ground forces are not denied, the role of the latter is, in essence, reduced to that of the rapid completion of a march into the depth of the enemy disposition.

We believe that the deployment of operational troop groupings from the march and their decisive offensive actions with the use of missile/nuclear weapons, thanks to which they achieve the rout of the enemy troops advancing against them on one or several operational axes (and sometimes even on a strategic axis), are the distinctive feature of meeting engagements. All branch arms will participate in them, and so will many





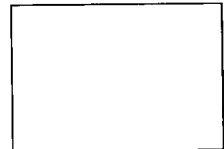
branches of the armed forces and -- in major engagements on strategic axes -- even the Strategic Rocket Forces.

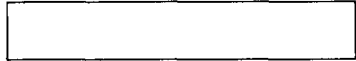
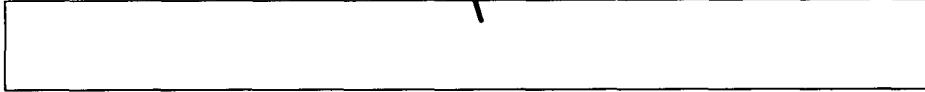
A meeting battle or engagement is a very complex type of action. The superior morale and fighting qualities and high training standards of the personnel and the skilful leadership and control of the troops will have a positive effect on the organization and conduct of the meeting engagement. Striking the enemy groupings with nuclear weapons before they come into contact with our troops does not rule out the need to prepare the latter to conduct complex forms of combat actions, rapidly attack the enemy, and overcome his stubborn resistance.

Meeting engagements will be conducted primarily by major troop groupings made up predominantly of tank units, large units, and even formations. And this predetermines the especially fierce and stubborn nature of the engagements. That is why one cannot agree with the author when he gives "preference to the maneuver of the troops immediately following the nuclear strikes, that is, to movement forward primarily at the rate of a march, rather than to a deployment and attack."

The author correctly believes that in front and army operations, especially in the initial period of a war, meeting engagements may predominate over other types of combat actions of the operational groupings. But then it is necessary to investigate the nature and methods of conducting meeting engagements, without losing sight of the key conditions that give rise to them, while correctly assessing the capabilities of all of the branches of the armed forces, the requirements imposed on them, and the tasks to coordinate their efforts to achieve the objectives of the operations.

We believe that under modern conditions it will be possible to foresee the beginning of a meeting engagement in the first and subsequent operations of the armies and fronts in the initial period of war and to carry out measures which will create favorable prerequisites for the troops to enter a meeting engagement and achieve success during it. In order to do this, deeper reconnaissance than was formerly the case is required so as to discover with timeliness the location of the enemy's nuclear means and dispersed groupings which may deliver a meeting attack to our troops. It is also important to opportunistically deploy our own rocket troops and aviation and to prepare our nuclear warheads so as to deliver a preemptive strike against the enemy's missile/nuclear means, aviation, and ground forces groupings and destroy or weaken them. As before, it is necessary to capture advantageous lines and areas so as to provide our own troops with





the best conditions for deploying, going over to the attack from the march, and maneuvering during the engagement.

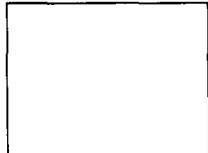
The following are of enormous importance in conducting a meeting engagement: the organization of area air defense on the axes of action of the main groupings, the employment of airborne landings to capture advantageous points, the security of the flanks, the coordination of the efforts of the large units and formations operating on disconnected axes, the rapid negotiation of zones of radioactive contamination by the troops, the skilful conduct of night actions, and also the establishment of reserves within short periods of time and the organization of troop control.

One should deliver attacks from the march, immediately after nuclear strikes, most often with tank troops, against the enemy groupings on a flank or in the rear, maneuver extensively during the engagement, exploit the actions of the troops to the depth, and build up their efforts. On certain axes it may be necessary to eliminate an enemy success by various methods, even going over to a defense.

This is the reason why we do not consider the author's statements as correct where he excludes the encounter of forward detachments with the enemy and reduces them merely to an exchange by both sides of missile/nuclear strikes without deployment of the main troop groupings. Special cases should not be taken as the basis for military theory and be recommended for troop training.

One cannot agree with the author's assertion that "the main strike is directed primarily against the nuclear weapons, missiles, and tactical aviation, although the destruction of nuclear attack means is not an end in itself" (page 23). The last proviso, above all, causes astonishment. The destruction of the enemy's nuclear means will always constitute a most important combat objective during the engagement and throughout the entire operation. The author, in defining the essence and direction of the main strike in a meeting engagement, as he does also in other places in the article, shows a tendency to isolate nuclear weapons from the actions of ground forces groupings and frankly underestimates the role of the ground forces.

In our opinion, the main strike in a meeting engagement is directed towards destroying the enemy's missile/nuclear means, aviation, and principal troop grouping. The troops deliver attacks against the enemy's weak spots: the flanks, the rear, and the groupings subjected to nuclear





strikes, as a result of which their combat effectiveness is impaired.

We believe that the employment of nuclear weapons must be carried out taking into consideration the nature of the meeting engagement. Thus, before the main forces of the ground forces begin the meeting engagement, the organization and delivery of the nuclear strikes will be carried out according to the decision of the front and army commanders, and during the engagement according to the decision of the commanders of the divisions operating on isolated axes out of contact with other large units. In these cases, special attention must be devoted to ensuring the safety of one's own troops.

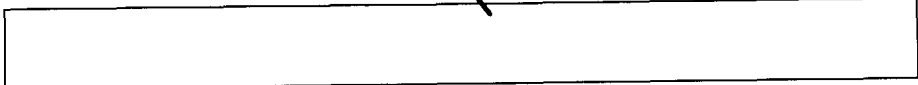
In every engagement, including a meeting engagement, one should not underestimate the enemy's capabilities nor his will to achieve victory nor his methods of combat. In particular, the American military command attaches great importance to the ground forces, to arming them with nuclear weapons and tanks. The principal function of such groupings, according to the views of the US Army command, is to complete the destruction of the enemy's troops and occupy his territory. Thus, we will not be able to avoid engagements, including meeting engagements, with enemy groupings.

The main thing in the art of organizing and conducting meeting engagements under modern conditions is the skilful and timely employment of nuclear weapons and the execution of troop attacks against the enemy groupings which will ensure their defeat without protracted engagements, and a rapid development of the offensive, not at the rate of a march, the author maintains, but at a high rate of average daily advance as high as 80 to 120 kilometers per day and sometimes even more. There may also be unsuccessful instances when meeting battles and engagements on certain axes become protracted.

The author believes that if one of the sides suffers a reverse in a meeting engagement, then it will no longer be able to stabilize the situation. But in our opinion, even under present conditions, the side which has suffered a reverse will be able to repel a successful enemy offensive.

In examining the need for introducing among the categories of operational art the notion of "meeting offensive operation," the author has justified his recommendations by the fact that, owing to the nature of combat actions, both sides will strive to achieve the decisive objectives of the initial period of a war by conducting offensive operations with the troop groupings created in the theaters of military operations during





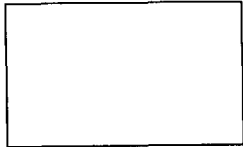
peacetime. This is correct. But it seems to us that the author has completely failed to substantiate his views on the essence and nature of a front meeting offensive operation and on the procedure for planning and conducting it. Perhaps this would be difficult to do in a single article.

When preparing the first offensive operations and taking into account the actual situation and the specific enemy, one can and must foresee the occurrence of meeting engagements with his groupings and develop variants of the delivery of nuclear strikes and the actions of our troops to destroy them. But does this mean that the first offensive operations of the armies and fronts must be planned as meeting offensive operations? We do not believe that this should be done. And to carry out such planning will even be impossible.

The author oversimplifies the nature of combat in the course of modern offensive operations, reducing everything to continuous meeting engagements. When preparing front operations to a depth of 1,000 to 1,200 kilometers and frequently even to the entire depth of the theater of military operations, it is necessary to plan the disruption of the enemy's nuclear and air strikes and the delivery of an initial powerful nuclear strike against his missile/nuclear means, aviation groupings, carrier strike large units, and ground forces. At the same time, it is necessary to prepare one's own troop groupings for decisive actions and for their rapid breakthrough into the depth of the enemy's disposition, for the destruction of his aggressive groupings in meeting engagements, for the negotiation of the enemy defense on advantageous lines, and for the assault crossing of major river obstacles. It would be a mistake to orient the troops towards conduct of only some one single type of combat actions.

One must also not stereotype the solution of the problem of the first offensive operations as meeting engagements without taking into consideration the possible nature of actions of the specific enemy. The probable enemy will employ varied forms of combat actions. On certain axes he will set up screens of troops, minefields and nuclear obstacles, and extensive zones of radioactive contamination, and he will not want to engage in meeting engagements with us. What then?

One can agree with the author only on the fact that the successful conduct of the first meeting engagement with the opposing enemy grouping will have a great effect on the rapid development of the first offensive operation of an army or a front. But yet any engagement will lead to the achievement of only individual objectives of the operation.



~~TOP SECRET~~

Page 10 of 27 Pages

It is known that, in the first operations of the initial period of war, the Strategic Rocket Forces will have the capability of delivering nuclear strikes earlier than army and front troops against an enemy aggressor. Under these conditions, the divisions forming a part of the first-echelon armies will often enter into a first engagement with those enemy large units which have not sustained heavy losses from our nuclear weapons. Great decisiveness in action will be demanded of the ground forces to take the initiative in their hands with limited use of nuclear weapons, and at times without them.

In the article the spatial scope of the meeting engagement has been overexpanded to the scale of a theater of military operations, and its operational importance has been raised to the level of an operation. This, in our view erroneous, understanding of a meeting engagement has led the author to conclude that it is necessary to develop a front meeting offensive operation.

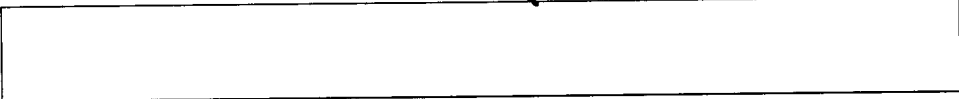
* * *

General-Leytenant L. SKVIRSKIY has attempted in his article to examine anew a number of the basic questions of a meeting engagement in the initial period of war. The importance of working out the given topic is perfectly obvious; however, negligible space has been devoted to its investigation in the periodical military press and in theoretical works and also to its study in actual operational training. In this connection we fully share the author's concern.

But as concerns the grounds on which specific questions are based in the article, several of them, in our opinion, are not only presented unconvincingly but unfortunately are not even characteristic of a meeting engagement. The impression obtained is that the views on the preparation and conduct of a first offensive operation have been to some extent mechanically carried over to the specific aspects of the preparation of a meeting engagement and to the way it occurs and is conducted.

At the beginning of the article the author subjects to criticism the current definitions of the concept "meeting engagement." He thinks that these definitions are not in conformity with the conditions of missile/nuclear war because they ignore the role of nuclear weapons and provide for the obligatory deployment of operational groupings of both sides and the involvement of the greatest possible number of divisions in

~~TOP SECRET~~



meeting engagements. He perceives in this notion of the essence of the meeting engagement the cause for the deficiencies of a number of exercises.

In the critiques of the command-staff exercises conducted in the years 1958 to 1961, the Minister of Defense more than once remarked that in the course of the exercises there were frequent instances when the combat actions of the troops of both sides developed uniformly and methodically, and frontal attacks -- sometimes on the very same axes -- predominated as in the past. This inevitably led to protracted frontal battles and to the offensive of troops on a continuous front, instead of their exploiting the results of the employment of nuclear weapons, attacking exposed or poorly covered flanks and frequently unoccupied areas, and rapidly advancing to the depth. In our opinion, it is not a matter of a supposedly obsolete definition of the concept "meeting engagement," but rather that both sides were still striving to conduct an offensive using methods that were characteristic of the past war and carrying them over to modern conditions of the massed employment of nuclear weapons and of the increased mobility of troops.

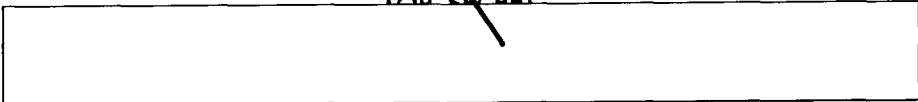
In connection with what has been cited above, the author's assertions concerning the unsoundness of the existing definitions of the concept "meeting engagement" create doubts.

We believe that under modern conditions a meeting engagement can occur only when troops of both sides are advancing towards each other. The encounter of such troop groupings leads to the occurrence of a meeting engagement and constitutes its fundamental essence. Without the presence of such conditions there is no meeting engagement.

We do not share the definition the author proposes of the concept "meeting engagement," which recognizes reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes as being its fundamental content. It is precisely nuclear strikes, which are the principal fire striking force, that are the decisive factor making it possible to rule out a meeting engagement. The skilful employment of nuclear weapons, as the author admits, can, already long before the direct encounter of the forward detachments, inflict grave damage on enemy groupings and compel them to give up the offensive. From this it follows that enemy groupings will be obliged to go over to the defense or to withdraw, and this means that no meeting engagement will take place in such a case.

Consequently, nuclear strikes, as the factor having a decisive effect on the drastic change of the balance of forces in one's own favor, cannot



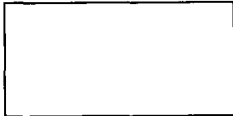


be classified as the fundamental and distinctive feature of a meeting engagement of the future. It is more correct to speak of the decisive role of the fire of nuclear weapons in destroying the enemy's offensive groupings or his advancing reserves even long before they encounter our troops on the offensive. Thus, there are now real possibilities of ruling out the meeting encounter of attacking groupings and of creating conditions for the rapid advance of troops into the depth.

The methods of front troop combat actions the author has set forth and attributed to the meeting engagement -- rapid movement of the main forces into the depth, usually at the rate of a march, and the possibility of deploying only a certain portion of the forces for attacking the enemy from the march (when decisive damage has been inflicted on the latter with nuclear weapons and he has given up the offensive) -- will be more typical of an offensive, not a meeting engagement. It is known that each type of combat actions has its own inherent characteristic features. Thus, it is precisely the meeting encounter of the troop groupings of both sides that are advancing towards each other that differentiates a meeting engagement from a purely offensive type of combat action. Without this characteristic feature, the definition of the meeting engagement loses all meaning.

Incidentally, the author nevertheless admits (page 19) that these encounters will occur most often in those cases when missile/nuclear strikes have not brought about a radical change in the balance of forces, that is, they have not led to the destruction of the attacking or advancing enemy groupings nor to the disruption of their offensive. It follows from the acknowledgement of the author's conclusion set forth above that under different conditions, when by means of nuclear strikes one has succeeded in weakening to the maximum the enemy offensive groupings, and as a result they have been compelled to go over to the defense or to withdraw even before the deployment and encounter of the forward detachments has occurred, a meeting engagement, naturally, does not take place.

In examining the conditions of the occurrence of such an engagement, it is also hardly possible to agree that meeting engagements and battles are now becoming the nearly predominant type of troop combat action. The maneuvering nature of the actions of units and large units and the endeavor of both sides to accomplish their tasks by an offensive, as a result of which conditions will be brought about more often for the occurrence of a meeting battle and engagement: these, of course, are all correct arguments. But in this process one cannot fail to see its other side, namely, that the growing tactical and striking power and mobility of the troops (with skilful use of nuclear weapons and of extensive troop





maneuvering) will make it possible to preclude meeting battles and engagements, avoid such encounters with the enemy, and direct the main efforts of the troops toward a rapid advance into the depth.

Furthermore, in terms of its organization and conditions of conduct, a meeting engagement (battle) is the most complex form of maneuver actions, and its employment may contribute to lowering the rates of advance. One should hardly, therefore, deliberately direct the troops towards a meeting engagement under any and all conditions of the situation. Rather, a meeting engagement is a forced method of conducting offensive actions to be used in a situation where nuclear weapons have not succeeded in destroying the enemy's offensive groupings and their rapid advance will inevitably lead to a meeting encounter with our troops. Only under these conditions must the tasks of defeating the enemy be accomplished during a direct meeting encounter of the troops of both sides.

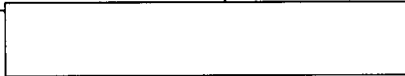
But the author's reasoning leads us to the conclusion that a meeting engagement under the conditions of the initial period of war is the most advantageous method of conducting combat actions and that is why both sides in all cases must strive to accomplish their tasks specifically in a meeting engagement. Thus, the article points out that, according to the views of the probable enemy, immediately following surprise massed nuclear strikes in the first operations, strong troop groupings will move forward from the depth for the purpose of delivering attacks in a meeting engagement. But why precisely in a meeting engagement? It is more realistic to assume that, as the enemy ground forces groupings go over to the offensive, they will avoid meeting engagements with our troops so that their main forces may penetrate as rapidly as possible into the depth and capture the most important areas. And to destroy reserves moving forward from the depth they will use nuclear weapons primarily.

Thus, in order to achieve greatest success under modern conditions, it is more advantageous to avoid conducting a meeting battle and engagement as this is the most complex form of maneuver action, one which can often slow down the rate of advance and, should the outcome be unfavorable, lead to the disruption of the troop offensive on the given axis.

Naturally, all of this cannot but affect the scale of meeting engagements, in which, in the author's opinion, the main forces of a front will most often take part.

Under conditions of the initial period of war, when it is possible that both sides will extensively employ nuclear weapons, it is difficult to





imagine what aftereffects the results of the initial nuclear strikes will lead to and what effect they will have on the nature and scale of the combat actions of the ground forces. But it is more realistic to assume that, as a result of these strikes, the troops of both sides will suffer significant losses and that a situation may develop in which, out of the major part of the divisions both sides have deployed for the offensive, only individual regiments and battalions will remain combat effective, that these will have to be brought together into independent detachments, and that they will accomplish the assigned tasks. At the same time, the large zones of radioactive contamination with high levels of radiation may not only slow down the advance of the troops of both sides, but altogether rule out their actions on these axes for a long time. The author himself admits (page 19) that during the move of the main forces into the depth to conduct a meeting engagement, only a portion of the forces may be deployed to attack the enemy from the march.

The scale of meeting engagements is affected by the fact that the combat actions of the troops will most likely develop simultaneously over a great depth and that these actions will be conducted by different methods: on some axes, where the enemy's offensive has been disrupted by nuclear strikes, front troops may penetrate deeply into his disposition and continue the offensive or go over to the pursuit; on other axes where such results have been achieved, some of the large units may conduct meeting combat actions against approaching enemy reserves; on still other axes, individual large units and units which have suffered heavy losses or have encountered superior enemy forces will not be able to move forward and will be compelled to temporarily go over to defensive actions.

An analysis of these factors reveals that during the initial offensive operation, meeting actions of individual large units may occur most frequently whereas a meeting engagement that involves a considerable part of the army or front forces will rarely occur. Therefore, in our opinion, the relative significance of meeting battles and engagements will nevertheless be minor and they will hardly be the predominant form of troop combat actions.

In our opinion, the depth of a meeting engagement has not been accurately defined in the article. The author thinks that in the past this depth depended on the operational disposition of the given troop grouping and usually included the disposition area of the second echelons and reserves but that under modern conditions it will depend on how far away the rocket troop groupings are. (Note that these may be 30 to 200 kilometers away from the border.) Consequently, if one accepts these





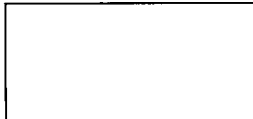
arguments, the depth of a meeting engagement increases to 200 kilometers or more.

Apparently it would be more correct to say that in the past a meeting engagement usually arose in the course of an offensive operation after the enemy's tactical zone of defense had been broken through, in his operational depth during the movement forward of reserves whose defeat was possible only in a direct encounter of the advancing troops with them. But under modern conditions meeting engagements may develop and be conducted, as the author admits, at different depths -- directly at the state border (at the beginning of the operation) or during the performance of the immediate and subsequent tasks.

Consequently, the depth of a meeting engagement in each specific case will be measured not by the distance separating the groupings of rocket troops of both sides on the given axis, but by the distance from the line where the meeting engagement is joined (where the forward detachments meet) to the line at which for each of the sides the engagement turns into another type of combat action -- into a transition to the defense, a disengagement and retreat, or an offensive. With the fluidity of combat actions, it is impossible to express the depth of a meeting engagement in specific quantities or numbers, but neither is it correct to define it, as the author does, as the distance separating the rocket troop groupings.

As concerns a meeting operation, in one article the author could not expound its essence and convincingly prove the necessity of introducing such a concept. In our opinion, there is no objective reason at all for this concept, and the arguments set forth by the author relate primarily to the overall problems of preparing and conducting a first offensive operation and scarcely go beyond the scope of the particular features of a meeting engagement.

Thus, the author deems it possible to plan and prepare a meeting engagement in peacetime, believing that this process is the principal and most crucial part of the preparation of a first offensive operation. But, in our opinion, what makes the preparation of a meeting engagement in the initial period of war unique is the fact that neither in peacetime nor even immediately prior to the war does it seem possible to plan a meeting engagement in advance, much less to organize troop actions according to objective, place, and time. All of these matters will be decided when combat actions start, especially during the forward movement of the troops as new information on the enemy and on one's own troops is received, and also as the moment of the actual meeting engagement approaches. One must



~~TOP SECRET~~

Page 16 of 27 Pages

not fail to keep in mind that the results of the initial nuclear strikes of both sides will have a definite effect on the chance of the occurrence and conduct of a meeting engagement and on its scale. But if one accepts that the principal content of the preparation of a first offensive operation, its most crucial part, is the planning for the meeting engagement, then this means that in advance he deliberately directs front troops towards the conduct of the most complex type of combat action.

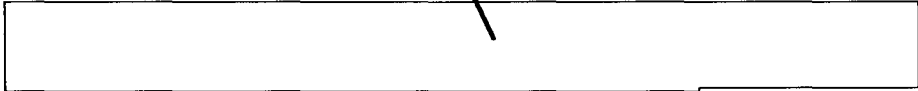
In our opinion, the principal content of the preparation of a first offensive operation is to carry out the measures ensuring the constant combat readiness of the troops -- and of the means for employing nuclear weapons, above all -- for prompt actions, and also to determine the most expedient methods of conducting the operation which will ensure the attainment of the assigned objectives with fewest losses and in the shortest period of time.

Certain other characteristic features are inherent to a modern meeting battle and engagement. Among these are the considerable changes, as compared to the past war, in the methods of troop combat actions, in preemption of the enemy, and in the execution of maneuvers, in the nature of the strikes by fire, in the increased role of forward detachments in seizing and holding favorable areas and objectives with an increase in the numbers and a decrease in the numerical strength of these detachments, and also in the rapidity of the deployment of the troops and of their breakout to the enemy's lines of transportation. All of this has a substantial effect on the organization, conduct, and completion of the meeting engagement. New features are also manifesting themselves in the methods of closing in with the enemy. For the purpose of conducting a meeting battle and engagement, the troops will apparently deploy most frequently from the march, and closing in with the enemy will be done on a wide front and in dispersed formations. In the course of a meeting engagement it is possible that various battle, approach, and march formations will be combined more frequently.

* * *

The article "The Meeting Engagement in the Initial Period of a War" is written with a certain aspiration to effect a radical change in the area of concepts that have developed concerning the meeting engagement. This is evident already from the first pages of the text.

~~TOP SECRET~~



As a matter of fact, citing several definitions of the concept "meeting engagement," but without going to the trouble of seriously analyzing the deficiencies of each one of them (not to mention the fact that all of them have many merits), the author comes to the conclusion that "the cited definitions of meeting engagement are not meant for the conditions of missile/nuclear war" and consigns them to the category of "anachronisms" (page 18). Yet, in our opinion, the definition the author himself has devised of the concept of the "meeting engagement" suffers from methodological weakness.

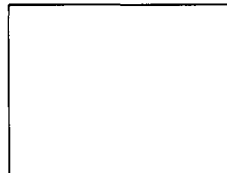
Marxist-Leninist methodology recognizes the well-known importance of brief definitions in the process of scientific research and in actual practice. There is no need to make a fetish of definitions, to transform them into the starting point for search, and to substitute the definition for the essence of the phenomenon itself.

The way to correctly define a concept is through a profound analysis of the essence of the phenomenon, by isolating the basic features characterizing it, and by selecting those features which incorporate the most universal and at the same time the most distinctive attributes.

It seems to us that the author has wholly disregarded these methodological principles, which are valuable for our military science, and the result was not long in showing up. Instead of analyzing the essence of the meeting engagement, bringing out the most important and essential aspects of this phenomenon, and on this basis, arriving at a new definition of the concept, the article has made an attempt to obtain a definition of it from a comparison with the other definitions.

What is it that does not suit the author in the existing definitions? One must say that, as a result of the poor analysis of them, it is difficult to find in the article a well-grounded or in any way complete answer to this question. Apparently, the author finds the principal deficiency of these definitions in the fact that they do not reflect the employment of missile/nuclear means and also in the fact that troops cannot be oriented towards a meeting engagement as the totality of meeting battles or the offensive actions of the operational groupings of both sides. The author proposes incorporating into the definition of the concept of the "meeting engagement" an indication that "a meeting engagement is reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes" (page 19).

One cannot but agree that the employment of missile/nuclear weapons is a most important condition for achieving success in a meeting engagement.



But are reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes the essential and distinctive characteristic of the meeting engagement specifically? (After all, this is the only requirement the characteristics chosen for a definition must meet.) It seems to us that the answer is no. The employment of missile/nuclear weapons in the offensive and in the defense draws immediate enemy retaliatory (that is, reciprocal) missile/nuclear strikes. Right now both sides possess means providing for the launching of missiles the moment the flight of enemy missiles is detected with the help of radar, that is, even before the enemy's deadly cargo falls upon the means of delivering nuclear weapons to the target. Now, this technical capability does not apply only to the conditions of a meeting engagement, does it?

Not to take this into account means not to see the entire complexity of the conditions involving the preparation and conduct of modern operations of all types, and to oversimplify these conditions as they apply to everything that is not a meeting engagement. At the present time, when both sides possess nuclear weapons, reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes are an attribute of all types of operations and all types of engagements of a modern war. Therefore, the definition of any operation or any engagement can include an indication concerning "reciprocal missile/nuclear strikes." However, the employment of missile/nuclear weapons has become so firmly a part of operational training practice that it has come to be taken for granted. Even if one were to include it in a definition, it would be incorrect to think that this was the main point essentially distinguishing a meeting engagement from the other types of engagements or operations.

Yet, the author openly writes that "since for the achievement of victory it is necessary to destroy the enemy's means of mass destruction, the main thing in the proposed definition of a meeting engagement is the missile/nuclear strikes of both sides. The successful results of these strikes may inflict maximum losses on the enemy and compel him, already long before the direct encounter of the forward detachments, to give up the offensive. Herein lies the principal distinguishing feature of the meeting engagement of the future"(page 19).

Here, in our opinion, new errors appear. The statement, which is correct in itself, that the successful results of missile/nuclear strikes may "inflict maximum losses on the enemy" and compel him to give up the offensive "long before the direct encounter of the forward detachments" is misconstrued in the article. In quoting this consideration as "the principal distinguishing feature of the meeting engagement of the future," the author, whether he wants to or not, in effect comes to a denial of the meeting engagement. This consideration is as irrelevant in the given



article as if discussions on the methods of extinguishing a fire were based on the thesis that a fire could not occur at all.

One might disregard this formal misunderstanding, but it leads to significant errors in the concept of the meeting engagement. This consideration focuses the attention on a simplified variant of the meeting engagement, where everything will be solved by missile/nuclear weapons.

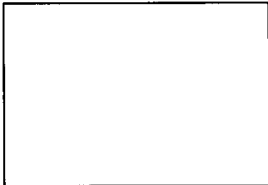
In this connection, certain analogies with other types of actions suggest themselves. Really, does not the preparatory fire that precedes an offensive against a defending enemy have the purpose of inflicting maximum losses on him, of gaining fire superiority, of creating gaps in the defense, of clearing a path into the operational depth for one's own troops? But no one has yet expressed the idea that, because of the reliable neutralization of the enemy, an offensive is transformed into a parade march.

Really, does not the employment of missile/nuclear weapons in the defense likewise have the purpose of inflicting maximum losses on the enemy, of nipping his offensive in the bud, and of causing him to give up the attack? However, no one assumes that this resolves all of the problems of a defense or that the mere employment of missile/nuclear weapons suffices to achieve the objective of the defense.

We do not have the right to rely solely upon the omnipotence of missile/nuclear weapons. While recognizing their vast destructive capabilities and looking upon them as the main means of destruction, one must not forget that the employment of these weapons cannot always produce the expected effect because of the incomplete data on the enemy, because of the difficulty of reconnoitering his principal targets, etc.

Based on these and a number of other factors which we cannot dwell upon in detail within the framework of comments on an article, Soviet military art believes that, together with missile/nuclear means, there should be forces that are capable of exploiting the results of the employment of these means for the final defeat of the enemy. Within the framework of an operation, these forces are the combined-arms large units. They must resort to different types of actions, depending on the specific conditions of the situation -- in an offensive, to complete the defeat of the enemy; and in a defense, to repel his offensive.

Tactics and the operational art theoretically interpret and develop such types of combat actions as offensive against a defending enemy



~~TOP SECRET~~

Page 20 of 27 Pages

pursuit, defense, etc. In combat and operational training practice these types of actions occupy a relatively significant place. Then why does the author make an exception for the meeting engagement, asserting that, as a result of the employment of nuclear weapons, it may not even occur?

One cannot agree with this at all. It is precisely under the conditions of an incipient meeting engagement, when both sides are on the move towards each other and are seeking active solutions (this is characteristic of the first operation of the initial period of war), that one can least of all expect that missile/nuclear strikes against the enemy's troops and his operational-tactical missile/nuclear means will fully produce the expected results. Those factors hindering the effective employment of missile/nuclear weapons which we mentioned above will exert even greater influence under these conditions than in other types of actions characterized by a certain stability in the conditions of the situation as compared to the drastic fluidity of a meeting engagement.

At this time, the delivery of strategic missile/nuclear strikes against political and military-industrial centers, fixed missile siting areas and airfields, and major rear services installations will turn out to be extremely effective. But operational groupings of enemy troops do not, because of these strikes, lose their ability to operate in the first hours and days of a war.

The meeting engagements that are played out in the border zone and in the enemy's immediate operational depth will undoubtedly be characterized by fierce fighting. Only after a certain time, when the initial strikes of the Strategic Rocket Forces begin to tell and when reconnaissance is able to operate more effectively, no longer limited by peacetime conventions in selecting the methods and forms of discovering the enemy's major targets, will the operational-tactical missile/nuclear means be able to exploit all of their capabilities of destroying the enemy.

In discussing his definition, the author raises the question of whether a meeting engagement will take place if most of the large units and units of both sides have not been deployed. Arguing for the affirmative answer, he explains that a meeting engagement will take place because "the principal fire and attack forces and means of both sides" will participate in it. This formulation of the question was needed by the author so that he might later on indicate that "once the missile/nuclear means of both sides have joined action and accomplished their tasks, then what remains for the armies and divisions of a front to do is to carry out a rapid move against the enemy's flank and rear in order to exploit the results of the

~~TOP SECRET~~



missile/nuclear strikes and complete the defeat of the enemy" (page 19, our emphasis -P.G.).

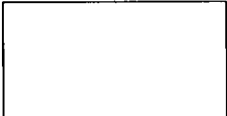
Here one must single out two points.

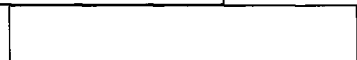
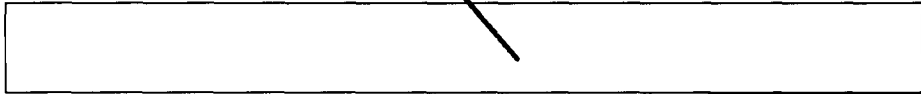
First, employing considerations already presented in this article, one can conclude that in the given case a meeting engagement will not take place at all because, should we employ missile/nuclear weapons effectively, the enemy will give up the offensive, but in the author's own opinion, a meeting engagement is a rapid offensive action of both sides. This means that the affirmative answer is not so unconditional after all.

Second, the completion of the enemy's defeat, even if only in the final phase of the meeting engagement, will require the "encounter" and deployment of the troops. Whether it is "most" of the large units or part of them will be revealed in the concrete situation. It is important to emphasize that one or the other variant is possible. On the general theoretical plane this question must not be resolved in a one-sided manner, because in so doing, theory limits and impoverishes practice, directing it only towards one of the possible variants instead of revealing the diversity of conditions under which operational tasks will have to be accomplished.

It may be pointed out to us that theory must point out the predominant variants and disclose the principal tendency. This is perfectly correct. And as applied to the subject of the concept of a meeting engagement of the initial period of war, we believe one cannot orient himself towards a simplified variant of actions for the ground forces formations and large units and reduce these actions to a march. It is in this that we see the author's basic deficiency in his approach to a definition of the meeting engagement. The increased interest in the march and the great importance that is currently attached to the march training of the troops does not at all mean that a march replaces other types of actions. The nature of modern war leads one to the conclusion that it will be necessary to carry out a march over a great depth before the encounter with the enemy and after the encounter, but not instead of it.

Even the author himself realizes the inconsistency of his approach and points out that "the definition presented does not deny, but emphasizes the possibility of an encounter of the large units of the attack groupings of the contending sides" (page 19). But this is only a declaration. It would be futile to seek not merely an emphasis on, but even a simple mention of, the encounter in his definition.





In conclusion, we want to emphasize that in our opinion, the author has absolutely without grounds discarded the existing definitions of the meeting engagement as obsolete. These definitions have a rational core -- the statement that the meeting engagement is the encounter of operational groupings of both sides mutually striving to achieve operational (but not strategic, as the author writes) aims through an offensive. This reveals the essence of the given type of action, its principal content, and the features which distinguish it from the other types of combat actions.

* * *

The author of the article under discussion has not, in our opinion, succeeded in fully expounding the content of a meeting engagement under modern conditions nor in convincing the reader of the legitimacy of introducing the concept of an independent "meeting operation."

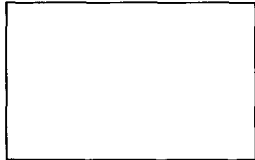
Let us stop to examine several of the questions the author has raised.

The definition of the meeting engagement presented in the article (page 19) does not include, in our opinion, the principal point -- the meeting encounters of the operational groupings of both sides -- which is fundamental to the definition of the given concept.

Under the conditions of missile/nuclear war, victory will be achieved through the delivery of massed nuclear strikes, primarily by strategic means, and through the decisive offensive of ground troops, which will complete the final defeat of the enemy groupings subjected to the nuclear strikes. In doing this, the troops will employ various types of combat actions differing from one another according to their purposes and methods of performance.

Thus, in an offensive, it is necessary to rout a defending enemy employing a system of fire organized beforehand or organized hastily. In so doing, most of the targets to be destroyed or neutralized by nuclear strikes or by chemical and conventional means will be area or point targets which are immobile for a considerable time.

In form, the meeting engagement is also a decisive type of combat action, an offensive -- though not against a defending enemy, but against a simultaneously advancing enemy whose actions are based on maneuver. Most of the targets in this case will be linear (narrow and long) and mobile



ones or area targets, but area targets that are small-sized and continuously maneuvering on the battlefield. The totality of the methods employed by the troops in order to perform the tasks involved in attaining the objective (an offensive against an enemy on the offensive) is the distinctive feature of this variety of offensive. The endeavor of both sides on the very same axes to achieve the decisive objectives of the offensive will inevitably lead to meeting encounters.

Historical experience shows that the probability and conditions of occurrence of meeting battles and engagements and their scale and specific features are determined primarily both by the nature of the war as a whole and also by the nature of its separate operations, as well as by the means of armed combat that are employed by the contending sides and by their capabilities. The meeting battle and meeting engagement are a standard occurrence which of necessity arises during the simultaneous conduct of maneuver actions by both sides.

Meeting engagements under modern conditions will frequently arise all throughout the first and subsequent offensive operations of the initial period of war. What is new in this type of combat action is the fact that both sides, in striving to decisively defeat the enemy, will extensively employ nuclear means and preempt the other in opening fire and in carrying out a maneuver and attack, which will inevitably exert exceptional influence on the nature of the engagement itself.

Based on this, such a complex occurrence in operational art as the "offensive against an enemy on the offensive" can, in our opinion, be given the following definition: "A meeting engagement is the encounter of opposing operational troop groupings in which both sides are striving to achieve decisive operational objectives through an offensive based on the maximum exploitation of the results of nuclear strikes through maneuver actions of the troops."

It seems to us that in the problems of researching modern operational art we should proceed on V.I. LENIN's instructions about the historical approach to an understanding of the essence and content of any phenomenon, "... to approach this question from the standpoint of how the given phenomenon arose in history, what principal stages it went through in its development, and, from the standpoint of its development, to examine what it has become today" (Works, volume 29, page 436).

Thus, reviewing the content of the tasks, the nature, and the possible combat action methods of both sides in the first offensive operation of the

~~TOP SECRET~~

Page 24 of 27 Pages

initial period of war, General SKVIRSKIY talks about the meeting operation (page 21) as a new phenomenon in operational art. One must suppose that the author views this operation as a further development of one of the methods of conducting combat actions -- the meeting engagement.

But the meeting engagement, as is well known, is not a new phenomenon; it has occurred in past wars. Throughout all of the history of the development of military art, the essence, content, and nature of meeting encounters, and also their role and place in the offensive, have always been determined by the methods and forms of conducting troop combat actions, which have changed according to the level of development of the economy, the organization of the army, and the status of the military equipment.

In the past, meeting engagements occurred occasionally and were conducted primarily in a border zone while the troops were deploying. In the First World War, the employment of mobile troops, the cavalry, and in the Second World War, of tank and mechanized troops and aviation, as well as the highly mobile nature of the combat actions and the endeavor of the contending sides to conduct deep operations, during which drastic changes in the situation took place -- all of this served to bring about meeting engagements. In the course of front offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War, the accomplishment of tasks of not only tactical but also strategic importance was achieved through these engagements.

In modern offensive operations, the probability increases that meeting encounters will occur with any one of the methods and forms of conducting combat actions. This is favored by the endeavor of both sides to exploit the results of the nuclear strikes in order to achieve specific operational objectives through the offensive actions of the troops that have retained their combat effectiveness. However, despite the growing role and important place of meeting engagements in the offensive, they still will not, in our opinion, be the sole type of combat action.

The bilateral use of nuclear weapons against the advancing grouping of the enemy and the reserves moving forward from the depth may lead to the complete loss of combat effectiveness of the troops of one of the sides on some axes, which will make it inevitable that they go over to the defense, while on another axis it will lead only to a partial weakening of them, with one of the sides being able to develop the offensive. At the same time, on a number of separate axes, the troops operating in a dispersed manner and exploiting their high mobility, will manage to preserve combat effectiveness and maneuver capabilities.

~~TOP SECRET~~



In connection with this, the troops advancing on the various axes of the theater will be conducting different types of combat actions that are united by the common concept of the operation. These may be meeting engagements with a grouping equal in strength and -- in a favorable operational situation -- even with superior forces, where the decisive and maneuvering nature of combat actions manifests itself in full; offensive with the negotiation of a hastily occupied defense; pursuit of an enemy that has lost his combat effectiveness and is retreating; and defense for the purpose of repelling the counterthrust of superior enemy forces.

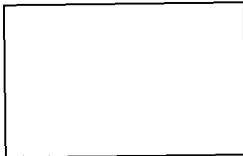
On the way to achieving the objective of the operation, front troops will have to accomplish a number of intermediate operational tasks, chief of which are the destruction of the enemy's missile/nuclear means and aviation as well as the defeat of the first and second echelons of the operational disposition of the enemy's grouping and his advancing reserves.

However, as shown by experience of the Great Patriotic War, the meeting engagement is not an end in itself, but one of the possible methods of combat actions in an offensive. The objective of the meeting engagement, which is an integral part of an operation, usually amounts to the defeat of a specific enemy grouping and the capture or holding of some area or operational line. It is achieved by accomplishing intermediate tasks and follows from the objective of the operation. At the same time, although the meeting engagement has something of a subordinate and limited operational nature, it can change the entire course of an operation. In the Great Patriotic War, meeting engagements most frequently arose at the most critical moments of an operation on the main axis, where both sides were seeking to decide the fate of the given operation.

A characteristic feature of the meeting engagement, resulting from the employment of nuclear weapons and the high mobility of the troops, is the fact that the engagement is acquiring an even greater spatial scope than it used to have, while at the same time its duration is shortened.

Consequently, the accomplishment of intermediate operational tasks on the way to achieving the objective of the first offensive operation will be done through the sum of different types of combat actions, among which the meeting engagement may be only the predominant but not the sole type. The backbone of the first operation is still the offensive.

Based on this, it seems to us that General SKVIRSKIY's conclusions regarding the 'meeting operation' as a new phenomenon in operational art are unsound and dictated by the desire to emphasize the growing role and





place of the meeting engagement, which is one of the most complex and characteristic forms of maneuver action during which both of the contending sides, with the help of means of mass destruction and a rapid offensive, will achieve decisive objectives in the first operation in short periods of time.

It is understandable that it is difficult in a single article to reveal completely the entire substance of the "meeting operation." But even the recommendation put forth concerning the necessity of developing a theory of the "meeting offensive operation" (page 22) not only is not corroborated by the conclusions presented, but on the contrary, it becomes questionable. Thus, the author does not examine in full the matter of planning the "meeting operation," but merely remarks that "the planning and preparation of the first meeting engagement of the initial period of war, as shown by experience (What experience? -I.K.), are carried out during the preparation of the first offensive operation" (page 25). Based on this, the author writes, "The variants of the front commander's decision for defeat of the enemy in a meeting engagement in the border zone must be known ahead of time to the commanders of the armies and the divisions" (page 26).

We cannot agree with these conclusions and recommendations because, when the military district (front) commander is organizing the operation in peacetime, he will adopt a decision, not for a meeting engagement, but for an offensive, taking into account the possible nature of the enemy's actions, including also the possible meeting engagements that may develop in the border zone. The direct organization of meeting engagements that may develop on the individual axes will be done while the troops are moving forward to the national border under conditions of the intensive employment of nuclear weapons and the countermeasures of enemy ground forces and aviation. But a subsequent meeting engagement occurring during the operation will be organized from the moment the first reconnaissance data are received about an advancing enemy grouping.

Also unsound are the author's proposals on the planning of the "meeting operation" (page 29), in particular his rejection of the working out of an independent plan for such an operation.

It seems to us that the first offensive operation of a front in the initial period of war must necessarily be planned while it is still peacetime. Based on the objective and content of the tasks of the ground forces in the operation, and also on an objective assessment of the enemy's capabilities and his operational-tactical views on the conduct of the first





operation, and on the basis of operational foresight, one must plan the employment of the forces and means in the operation. In doing this, as has already been remarked, the objective of the operation will be achieved through the employment of different types of combat actions and not only, as follows from the article, through meeting engagements.

When organizing meeting engagements that develop both at the beginning and also in the course of the first offensive operation, we must take into consideration their inherent characteristic features: the vagueness of the situation caused by frequent and abrupt changes in position of our troops and of the enemy troops; the preemptive fire strikes and maneuvering; and the limited time available to adopt a decision due to the high maneuver capabilities of the troops and the great fluidity of their combat actions. Although all of these are standard features when looked at objectively, still, when planning a "meeting operation" beforehand, it is simply impossible to foresee and take them into consideration. However, the knowledge and skilful consideration of these characteristic features by the front and army commanders when they are organizing a meeting engagement are one of the decisive conditions for the successful defeat of the opposing enemy grouping.

Overall, in our opinion, a considerable part of the recommendations in General SKVIRSKIY's article on the meeting engagement in the initial period of war are in need of substantiation and profounder development.

