

AirLand Battle Doctrine —the Red Army responds



by CPT F. Michael Real
and Penelope Schmitt

 After watching the Red Army operate under a first strike doctrine for more than three decades, western analysts saw a change. In 1979, the Frunze Academy launched a major study of defensive operations. At the same time, the Soviets suddenly fielded new combat engineer equipment, including heavy earthmoving vehicles and scatterable mine systems. Why?

The recent appearance of the Soviet Manual *Engineer Support of Combat in Special Conditions*¹ suggests an answer. It formulates the Soviet engineer response to U.S. AirLand Battle Doctrine and to NATO's Follow on Forces Attack concept. Like AirLand Battle doctrine, FOFA calls for strikes behind the enemy forward edge of the battle area. The goal—destroy or cripple opposing armies before they can fully commit their forces to an attack.²

The Red Army Response

The Soviet prescription for successful attack requires heavily massed forces. It defines a 3 to 1 ratio of superiority as minimal. But the Soviets now appear to want ratios of up to 8 to 1 to assure success—they expect heavy losses on the AirLand Battlefield.

Warsaw Pact materiel superiority over NATO forces actually runs at a ratio of only 2 to 1. Attacks must be concentrated if the Soviets are to achieve desired strength. Elsewhere

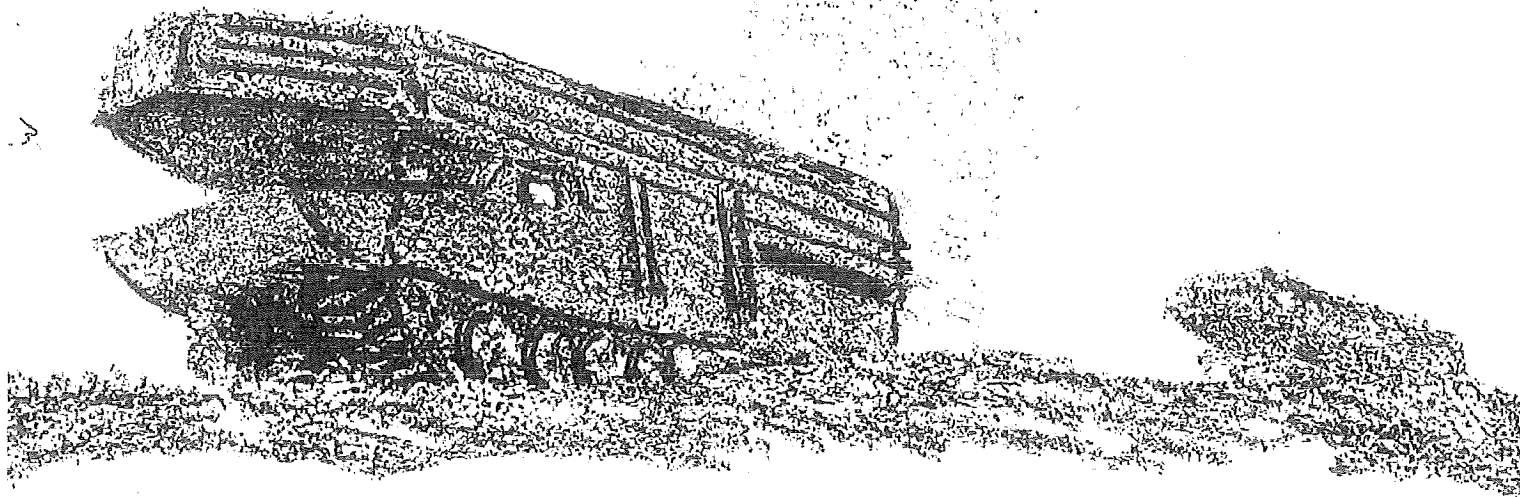
on the front, the Soviets must economize, relying on defenses to prevent an enemy breakthrough.

To maintain the attack on the AirLand Battlefield, the Soviets see an urgent need to preserve mobility. "Under these conditions it is expedient to echelon forces and means of reconnaissance, to overcome obstacles throughout the entire depth of the troop formations, and to ensure constant readiness for employment. It is also necessary to quickly neutralize the enemy's remote mining with artillery fire and air strikes."³

Among Soviet countermeasures, the most important is the tactic of deploying scatterable mine systems (FASCAM) against reconnaissance, communications, command, and control systems (C³). Since C³ assets are critical to coordinating a combined arms attack, protecting them must now be a top priority task.⁴

The Red Army is also taking steps to enhance the survivability of attacking elements. More traffic control personnel are being fielded to guide troops and vehicles through areas infested with remotely delivered mines. More elaborate camouflage, deployments concentrated in radar dead space, and heavier terrain fortifications can also be expected.

Troops may be more dispersed, and armor is unlikely to be openly



deployed in columns in the rear areas. Tactics to protect armored vehicles and self-propelled weapons reportedly include setting small fires along advance routes, to draw heat-seeking munitions away from their intended targets.⁵

The Engineers' Role

The Soviets are building an increased engineer capability to fight the AirLand Battle. In the past, Red Army doctrine has placed engineers squarely in the front lines. In rear areas, engineer tasks centered on water supply and logistical mobility. Now Soviet concern for survivability, mobility, and countermobility in depth calls for combat engineer presence through the entire battle area. This includes—

- Greatly increased earthmoving and entrenching capabilities to enable armor and troops to dig in as a defense against deep strike munitions.
- Increased countermine assets in response to FASCAM, deployed around assembly and supply areas and lines of communication to counter FASCAM and other rear area obstacles.
- Highly mobile engineer teams available to support gap-crossing sites throughout the battle area, and stockpiles of structural assets near all likely crossing sites to respond to expected accurate,

deep strikes against bridge and crossing sites.

Implications for the West

The message is this—the Soviets are on to us. They are moving to adopt strategies and weapon systems similar to our own. They are diagnosing our tactics to invent defenses that can degrade our effectiveness—and countermeasures that can cripple an attack.

On the positive side, AirLand Battle doctrine is causing the Warsaw Pact armies to invest heavily in defensive equipment, personnel, and strategy for the first time in 30 years.

But the Soviets have consistently found ways to restructure and re-deploy their assets in order to counter powerful enemies. If we are to maintain the offensive strategy inherent in AirLand Battle doctrine,

we can't let our tactics become stale formulas, or assume that our defenses are impregnable.

Today, we hold the initiative. Only continued inventiveness will allow us to keep it.

CPT F. Michael Real is Threat Manager, Directorate of Combat Developments, USAES. He has also served as Brigade Engineer Company Commander and S4 with the 10th Engineer Battalion, 3d Infantry Division in Germany, as a Soviet Engineer Intelligence Analyst at FSTC, and Platoon Commander, XO, and assistant S3 in the 4th Engineer Battalion, Fort Carson. CPT Real has a B.S. in Geology from Weber State College, and is a graduate of EOAC, the Joint Intelligence Managers Course, and the CGSC.

Penelope Schmitt is Features Editor for ENGINEER.

Notes

¹ *Engineer Support of Combat in Special Conditions*, 1985; translated from Russian by U.S. Army Foreign Science and Technology Center, FSTC-HT-1024-85 (August 1986).

² Sally Stoecker, "Soviets Plan Countermeasures to FOFA," *International Defense Review*, November 1986, p. 1607.

³ *Engineer Support of Combat in Special Conditions*, p. 175.

⁴ For a recent discussion of this issue, see MG Thomas S. Swalm, USAF, "AirLand Battle Doctrine and the C²CM Strategy," *AirLand Bulletin* No. 86-4, 31 December 1986, pp. 6-10.

⁵ Stoecker, p. 1608.