

Russia's Lessons Learned from Syria: Reinforced Companies



General Aleksandr Dvornikov, Commander of the Southern Military District

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By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from *Voyennaya Mysl*, the monthly journal of the Russian General Staff, features an article coauthored by General Aleksandr Dvornikov, Commander of the Southern Military District, about how Russia's Syria experience is causing change in Russian military training practices. The article discusses how reinforced companies are the preferred unit of action for dealing with an irregular enemy, and that small unit commanders must avoid the use of "stereotypical tactics." The article goes on to describe the importance of force-on-force (company vs. company) exercises to hone skills and create better leaders.

An interesting aspect of the article is the terminology used. The article specifically refers to a "reinforced company" [усиленная рота] instead of the term "company tactical group" [ротная тактическая группа (РТГр)], which has been used in other Russian military publications. Given that both terms mean "a company with attachments," and the term "battalion tactical group" [батальонная тактическая группа (БТГр)] is used many times in the article, there is likely some significance to the author's use of the term "reinforced company" instead of "company tactical group."

The author of the article is also notable. General Dvornikov is not only the Commander of the Southern Military District, but is also proffered as a likely candidate to be Russia's next Chief of the General Staff. Clearly influential, the results of his experiments in the Southern Military District may well be implemented throughout the Russian armed forces.

“Unconventional thinking, skillful use of own advantages and leveling the enemy's superiority, misleading the enemy, and achieving a surprise effect—this is what is required for the successful conduct of combat operations in modern military conflicts and this is what we should teach commanders and military formations of the Russian Federation Armed Forces.”

Source: General A.V. Dvornikov and Colonel R.R. Nasybulin, “Актуальные направления совершенствования боевой подготовки войск с учетом опыта, полученного в Сирии (Current Ways to Improve Combat Training of Troops Using Experience Obtained in Syria),” *Voyennaya Mysl* (the monthly journal of the Russian General Staff), July 2021. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/pdj6wywh3M.pdf>

Analysis of modern armed conflicts, including in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), indicates that the active use by the opposing parties, along with regular troops, of irregular armed formations (IAF), applying tactics and methods of conducting combat operations that are atypical of military subunits, is becoming an objective reality.

As early as the initial stage of the armed conflict in the SAR, the ineffectiveness of the straightforward, stereotypical tactics of the government army in the armed struggle against the IAF of the so-called opposition, which rather effectively resisted the regular troops, was revealed. Their mobile small groups penetrated the battle formations of the Syrian army and delivered short but painful strikes against them, taking them by surprise. Only militia detachments that fought on the side of the government forces were able to successfully counteract the IAF, since they used nonstandard methods of operation the enemy did not expect...

Unconventional thinking, skillful use of own advantages and leveling the enemy's superiority, misleading the enemy, and achieving a surprise effect -- this is what is required for the successful conduct of combat operations in modern military conflicts and this is what we should teach commanders and military formations of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. Of course, tactical exercises remain the main form of training troops and improving their field proficiency. It should be understood that the above qualities, abilities, and skills cannot be acquired and developed in conditions where the trainee's opponent is a "piece of plywood," that is, in a static target environment. This requires opposition from a real rival and elements of competition, which is achievable only in bilateral exercises. It is for this reason that all tactical exercises in the Southern Military District, starting with company-level ones, are conducted in a bilateral format...

At the same time, it was necessary to take steps to improve the leadership of exercises. The point is that all existing manuals and guidance documents were developed for conducting exercises with motorized rifle (tank) subunits without reinforcement assets. Meanwhile, modern combat experience attests that autonomous actions of small motorized rifle (tank) subunits reinforced by specialists, personnel, and equipment of other services and combat arms of the Armed Forces, fully equipped and comprehensively provided with everything necessary, are the most effective and, as a rule, lead to success. That is why in the Southern Military District, bilateral tactical exercises are conducted with reinforced motorized rifle companies (MRC), the combat capabilities of which are significantly higher than those of the standard MRC...

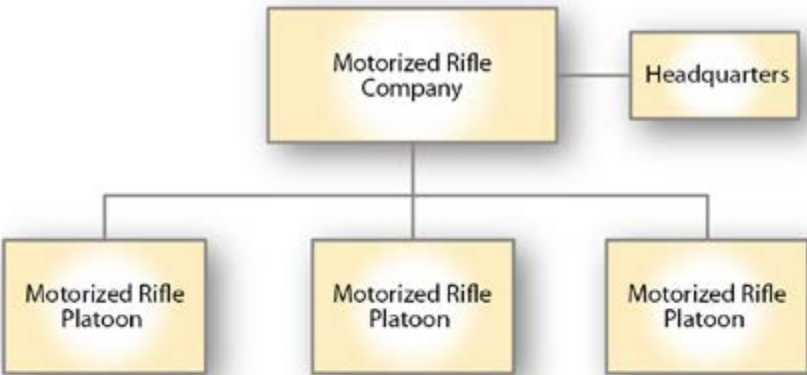
Continued: Russia’s Lessons Learned from Syria: Reinforced Companies

Continued Source: General A.V. Dvornikov and Colonel R.R. Nasybulin, “Актуальные направления совершенствования боевой подготовки войск с учетом опыта, полученного в Сирии (Current Ways to Improve Combat Training of Troops Using Experience Obtained in Syria),” *Voyennaya Mysl* (the monthly journal of the Russian General Staff), July 2021. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/pdj6wywh3M.pdf>

Correspondingly, command and control of a reinforced MRC is also expanded -- in addition to the company commander and his deputy for military-political work, it also includes an operator of UAVs and an attached forward aircraft controller.

To enhance the spirit of competition, two-way training usually involves companies from different battalions. Naturally, this kind of exercise should be conducted by a commander two levels above the subunits being trained, that is, a regiment (brigade) commander should conduct a two-way company-level tactical exercise. However, in order to comply with the principle of “each commander trains his subordinate” and to develop (maintain) the skills of commanders of motorized rifle (tank) battalions, the practice has been introduced in the Southern Military District whereby one exercise in a battalion is conducted under their leadership, but also in the two-way format...

Standard Motorized Rifle Company Structure



Reinforced Motorized Rifle Company Structure

