Deception and the MRB Defense

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The Soviet victory at the battle of Kursk in July 1943 resulted from the Red Army's ability to create a favorable correlation of forces while also maintaining exceptional operational security.

The Red Army was able to conceal strategic reserves and to mislead German aerial reconnaissance and signal intelligence as to actual troop dispositions in the defense, which allowed the Soviets to concentrate forces on the Kursk salient. Soviet intelligence provided early warning of the German offensive, and deception enabled the Red Army to prepare for the attack near Kursk while creating the impression of offensive efforts elsewhere. Red Army commanders employed dummy troop concentrations—complete with deception radio nets, hundreds of dummy tanks in simulated assembly areas, and phony aircraft and airfields—to make the German Army think the Kursk salient had few or no strategic reserves. In fact, German intelligence failed to identify the Soviet strategic reserve concealed east of the city of Kursk, which created a force ratio of 3:1 in manpower and 1.5:1 in armor and set the conditions for a defeat of the German attack, as well as a deep penetration into German areas immediately following the attack.

Because of the success of deception in operations such as Kursk, Red Army doctrine came to incorporate deception into all its operational planning. This tradition of deception operations became a key element of Soviet operational doctrine and currently occupies a similar position in the doctrine of the opposing forces (OPFOR) at the U.S. Army's combat training centers.

The OPFOR at the National Training Center (NTC) relies on deception operations to create similar favorable conditions on the NTC battlefield. The benefits of these operations, however, have varied from mission to mission, depending—as in other operations—on an analysis of METT-T (mission, en-

emy, terrain, troops available, and time). Overall, deception has proved to be a successful combat multiplier for the OPFOR and is an integral part of all OPFOR operational planning, both offensive and defensive.

The use of deception in the motorized rifle battalion (MRB) defense is the one units training at the NTC most often encounter. The MRB defense is also where the most resource intensive deception operations occur during that training.

The cornerstone of OPFOR tactical operations—Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 350-16, *Heavy Opposing Force (OPFOR) Tactical Handbook*—discusses deception operations briefly under the heading of *Maskirovka.* The pamphlet provides a general explanation of this term and lists three goals for deception that Red Army commanders considered during World War II. A more thorough understanding of OPFOR deception tasks and the goals they seek to achieve comes from the literature of the former Soviet Union.

The Soviet Military Encyclopedia of 1978 describes the concept of *Maskirovka* as a complexity of measures directed to mislead the enemy as to the presence and disposition of forces, objectives, operations, and combat readiness, all of which contribute to the achievement of surprise for the actions of friendly forces, the preservation of combat readiness, and the increased survivability of objectives.

In sum, *Maskirovka* aims at causing the enemy to act, or refrain from acting, on a mistaken assumption, thereby preserving the operational freedom and combat power of friendly forces. The Red Army's dedication to deception operations was born of the success of employing *Maskirovka* at the operational level in such places as Kursk. The development of operational doctrine relied on deception to create a favorable correlation of forces at the decisive point on the battlefield.

OPFOR deception tasks on the NTC battlefield reflect this reliance on deception and acknowledge its potential for gaining tactical advantage over opponents on the battlefield. Knowing what guides OPFOR deception, we can get a better appreciation of tactical techniques from our own doctrine. Field Manual (FM) 71-123, *Tactics and Techniques for the Combined Arms Heavy Forces*, identifies four deception tasks that the OPFOR also performs: the *display*, the *demonstration*, the *feint*, and the *ruse*.

The *display* is simply a static presentation created for enemy collection systems to focus on. It is the most basic element of OPFOR deception in the defense at the NTC. The *demonstration* is a show of force in an area of a supporting effort meant to deceive the enemy as to the location of the main effort. Contact with the enemy is avoided when conducting a demonstration and, unlike the display, the demonstration requires active participation. More complex is the *feint*, which is a limited objective attack making contact with the enemy to create the appearance of the main effort. Finally, the placement of false information in the hands of the enemy falls under the heading of *ruse*, and is normally outside the sphere of MRB operations, although the OPFOR uses this task as part of a large deception operation.

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Of these four, the OPFOR primarily employs the demonstration and the display in the defense with complementary assets from the military intelligence (MI) company. With its limited resources, the MRB can accomplish these two deception tasks without degrading its defensive preparation. Before discussing these two tasks further, I want to introduce three principles that guide the MRB commander in his use of deception in the defense:

Deception tasks must be integrated into the maneuver plan. Deception operations help delay enemy maneuver units and disrupt the synchronized enemy maneuver plan and decision cycle. As part of the Estimate of the Situation, the OPFOR commander provides guidance as to the deception objective for the upcoming mission. The staff also chooses a specific target for the deception (almost always a brigade commander) and coordinates with appropriate combat support elements such as the OPFOR MI company. Adhering to FM 100-5, *Operations*, OPFOR deception operations target "the enemy commander and the decisions he is expected to make during the operation." The OPFOR commanders, or the MI company commander, specifically target enemy collection assets such as battalion scouts, which will influence the overall deception target.

A good deception plan must be believable. A credible deception plan will let the enemy task force or brigade intelligence officer see what he wants to see. In other words, deception operations should try to portray the intelligence officer's concept of the enemy's situational template. This template and scout reports will influence the targeted commander the most, and when deception replicates what is likely and believable, it succeeds.

Deception operations must be properly resourced. The OPFOR devotes enough resources to its deception operations to make them believable. Engineer vehicles and support platoon assets are dedicated in the MRB defense. In his operations order, the MRB commander normally charges engineers, MRB reconnaissance, and a motorized rifle company (MRC) to accomplish certain deception tasks along with its survivability, countermobility, and reconnaissance tasks common to the defense.

For the OPFOR commander, the benefit of following these three principles is realized when a deception operation provides a necessary delay or disruption of enemy combat elements that supports the maneuver plan or even directly contributes to the destruction of the enemy. Equally, deception seeks to counter the enemy's initiative and pre-

vent him from massing overwhelming combat power at the decisive point on the NTC battlefield. Moreover, if a display or demonstration delays a maneuver force in a deliberate attack long enough to prevent the premature occupation of fighting positions in an MRB defense, precious combat power can be protected from enemy close air support (CAS) and indirect fire. Further, a display can delay a maneuver unit in an engagement area, serving the same purpose as a fixing obstacle, allowing MRB combat vehicles to engage the enemy with volley fire in a well-developed engagement area. But the success of the maneuver plan should not depend on the success or failure of a deception operation.

Deception serves to enhance the maneuver commander's ability to create a favorable correlation of forces in a given battle space with the maneuver plan based on direct fire. Deception also helps shape the battlefield along the same lines as special munitions, CAS, and indirect fires.

The OPFOR uses the following techniques with the *display* and *demonstraton* tasks to create deception during an NTC rotation:

OFPOR *display* tasks largely affect enemy ground reconnaissance, but OPFOR commanders also factor in other collection systems the rotational unit may bring to the battlefield. In recent rotations, OPFOR displays have been intended to deceive aerial reconnaissance, intelligence and electronic warfare (EW) collection and jamming platoon operations, and brigade combat observation lasing teams (COLTs), as well as divisional cavalry and armored cavalry air scouts, particularly the OH-58D. OPFOR deception accounts for the enemy's ability to use airborne and ground radar, infrared and electro-optical collection devices, and simulated laser targeting devices. Common examples of OPFOR displays include simple scrapes in the terrain meant to replicate two-tier vehicle fighting positions, unserviceable T-72 visually modified (VISMOD) turrets replicating dug-in vehicle turrets complete with gun barrel, vehicle camouflage nets, thermal signatures from charcoal, bicycle reflectors, infrared chemical lights, or any combination of these simple displays.

The *demonstration* is routinely used along with the display. For example, a demonstration of vehicular movement in the deception area and deception radio traffic from the display location make a display appear all the more real.

Like displays in an MRB defense, OPFOR demonstrations usually involve engineer assets, MRB reconnaissance vehicles, unserviceable VISMOD turrets, and MRB combat vehicles to portray combat support operations (CSOP) or forward defense vehicles. As in the creation of a display in an MRB defense, the commander normally tasks his combat reconnaissance patrol (CRP) vehicles, as well as a designated MRC awaiting survivability and countermobility assets, to create deception. This usually requires two or three combat vehicles from an MRC to assist the CRP demonstration and display.

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Unlike a static display, the demonstration relies on activity in the deception area of operations. MRB vehicle activity in the deception area can come from the support platoon, helping to create the display as well from MRB combat vehicles on counterreconnaissance and those awaiting engineer support.

Generally, an MRB defense will use a mix of the demonstration and the display to create the desired effect identified in the MRB operations order. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. Again, communications security along with deception radio traffic can considerably increase believability. Ironically, the more effective and aggressive an enemy collection and jamming platoon is, the more helpful it can be in adding credibility to a deception operation. The MRB, along with OPFOR EW assets, can assess the rotational unit's EW capabilities and factor them into the overall deception operation, using different levels of phony radio traffic to create misleading information, and consequently misleading intelligence, for the deception target.

Further, engineer assets critically enhance deception signatures in several ways. For instance, the M9 armored combat earthmover performs a critical function in preparing phony fighting positions, creating dust signatures, or simply demonstrating engineer support in the deception area of operations for enemy collectors. The commitment to resource deception tasks with engineer assets lends authenticity to the overall deception operation. The M9 normally comes from the movement support detachment (MSD) attached to the MRB in the defense. While the M9 is of limited use in preparing survivability positions in an MRB defense, it can significantly contribute to deception without degrading its mission capability during the battle. Additionally, such deception obstacles as single-strand concertina and phony antitank ditches, also a prime role for the M9 in the defense, may not appear convincing on close inspection. But if done correctly, they can create the illusion of a CSOP or MRC engagement area to distant ground and aerial reconnaissance.

Similarly, smoke, which traditionally helps in a screening or obscuring maneuver, can contribute to deception operations. The most familiar doctrinal applications of smoke on the battlefield are screening, obscuring, and marking, but smoking operations, on their own or along with other deception tasks, can confuse and mislead the enemy.

OPFOR missions have successfully used smoke alone on its own in a supporting area of the battlefield to create a situation in which units assumed that smoke was screening the main effort. Smoke has the potential for delaying and disrupting reconnaissance in this way. Likewise, smoke can degrade the ability of an advance guard company team to identify and close with the enemy, disrupting the synchronization of the maneuver plan. In a supporting

role, smoke can obscure displays and demonstrations to make them more difficult to identify.

Another illustration of the successful integration of deception tasks into the maneuver plan would be a demonstration that prompts an enemy commander to avoid a viable avenue of approach because of what he believes is there. Such demonstrations in the defense allow the MRB commander to focus his combat power on a single enemy course of action providing for minimal essential combat power to secondary efforts. In supporting economy of force missions such as this, demonstrations will also consume critical enemy reconnaissance efforts on misleading activity in an enemy named area of interest.

In a typical MRB defense, deception is created something like this: While engineer assets are working survivability positions and countermobility at the same time, CRP vehicles will be forward on counterreconnaissance. CRPs will supervise the emplacement of unserviceable visually modified turrets to create a deception battle position. Depending on the time available, one or two M9s will create phony two-tier fighting positions for the turrets. These phony positions will have spoil on the sides and to the rear of the hole, replicating a hastily prepared fighting position. The position is usually only about six inches deep but roughly of the same dimensions as an M551 Sheridan fighting position. The turret is placed as if it were on the firing platform, and a thermal signature (created by charcoal with a metallic reflector) is placed inside the turret. Ideally, turrets are emplaced just before EENT (early evening nautical twilight) with thermal signatures created immediately afterward. Deception positions have been convincing enough for COLTs and fire support vehicles to target on numerous occasions for precision guided munitions such as Copperhead.

This deception's benefit in terms of force protection cannot be overstated. Deception radio traffic to the deputy MRB commander from different locations in the deception battle position provides additional signatures for collectors. A CRP vehicle normally does this while supervising the preparation of deception positions. Vehicular traffic from hide locations to the deception battle position is provided by the MRC tasked to aid in the deception. These vehicles replicate repositioning rehearsals and routine traffic to and from hide positions. Vehicle camouflage nets may also be erected in deception hide positions to attract enemy indirect fires and aviation assets concentrated on the deep battle. Markers such as VS-17 panels and engineer tape are placed forward of the battle position to replicate target reference points (TRPs) in an engagement area and add to the authenticity of the position.

Except for the M9s of the MSD, no more than two vehicles at any given time are involved in deception tasks. Discarded concertina wire may also be emplaced in a single strand forward to provide an obstacle signature. If time permits, the MRB chooses to construct a more elaborate obstacle. The OPFOR records all deception positions using a global positioning system, which also enables the deception positions to act as TRPs for OPFOR indirect fires.

Other deception tasks depend on the terrain, the time available, and the MRB commander's intent for deception. Deception antitank ditches cutting through an avenue of approach surrounded by constricted terrain have been created using M9s from the MSD. The phony ditch, along with deception turrets, created the illusion of a CSOP overwatching an obstacle forward of the MRB's main defense. In this instance, the engineers dug the ditch to a depth of about 12 inches, pushing as much of the spoil as possible to the friendly side of the ditch to create a berm large enough to provide a believable signature. Additionally, a CRP vehicle supervised the positioning of the phony turrets in locations that were suitable for fighting positions but could be detected as overlooking the obstacle by enemy collectors.

In a recent rotation, an MRB had enough time and resources to create an authentic antitank ditch as part of a deception CSOP. The ditch augmented limited mines and wire and served to establish an engagement area for one of the MRC battle positions. The dedication of engineer assets to this deception made this display so convincing that the enemy templated it as a real CSOP and focused considerable firepower on neutralizing it.

Yet another MRB deception task attempted to portray an MRC battle position at the end of a narrow valley to prevent the rotational unit from choosing this as a possible avenue of approach. The operation used elements of both the demonstration and the display. The MRB used phony radio traffic in the deception area of operations and OPFOR EW monitored traffic from enemy intercept assets to evaluate its success. In this case, two OPFOR vehicles really were dug in to cover the approach, but deception turrets, a phony wire obstacle, and additional vehicle traffic created the appearance of a full MRC battle position. The MRB's reconnaissance vehicles provided counterreconnaissance to distance potential enemy collectors from the deception area with early warning coming from regimental scouts far forward.

In the end, OPFOR deception operations in support of the ground maneuver plan provide an exceptional combat multiplier. OPFOR deception is rooted in the Red Army's successful operational doctrine in World War II, emphasizing deception as an integral part of shaping the battle space and concentrating forces at the decisive point on the battlefield. Although simple and limited in scope, OPFOR deception operations at the NTC succeed because they are believable, well resourced, and well integrated into the maneuver plan. Ultimately, OPFOR deception seeks to make the enemy act, or fail to act, long enough to create conditions favorable to victory on the NTC battlefield.

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