

WEAPONS CORNER

SNIPER RIFLES THEN AND NOW



Soviet Mosin-Nagant M91/30

1. A standard Russian infantry rifle since the 1st World War, the M91/30 Mosin-Nagant fires a rimmed cartridge—the 7.62x54R—whose external ballistics approximated those of our own service cartridge, the .30/ 06. Fitted with a 3.5 power telescopic sight which worked well out to around 500 yards, this was the standard Russian sniper rifle of World War II and saw service in the Korean War and Vietnam as well. This is a reliable, accurate rifle which some German snipers in Russia preferred to their own Mauser sniper rifle, because the looser tolerances of the Mosin-Nagant enabled it to function better than the Mauser in extreme cold. (Photo courtesy National Infantry Museum)

2. The Model 1903A4 Springfield was adopted as the U.S. Army and Marine Corps sniper rifle in 1943. While the 2.5 power scope limited its effective range to around 500 yards, it continued to be used through the Korean War and into the early years of the war in Vietnam.

Due to some of the low scope mounts, the 1903A4 would not eject spent cartridges as designed, and was often used as a single shot rifle. It is nevertheless a highly accurate and powerful rifle. (Photo courtesy National Infantry Museum)



U.S. Model 1903A4 Springfield



Garand M1C

3. The Garand M1C .30/06 sniper rifle became the standard issue sniper rifle in June of 1944, and served well and reliably in World War II, in Korea, and in the early days of Vietnam. Although its 2.5 power scope limited its range to around 500 yards, it is nevertheless a powerful, rugged, and thoroughly reliable rifle. (Photo courtesy National Infantry Museum)

4. The U.S. Army M21 sniper system is based on the M14 National Match Rifle and fires the powerful 7.62x51mm NATO (.308 Winchester) round. A standard 3-9X variable scope extends its effective range to well beyond 700 yards, and match-grade ammunition ensures consistent hits even at extended ranges. (Photo courtesy U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit)



U.S. M21 Sniper System



Soviet Dragunov/SVD

5. The Dragunov fires the same 7.62x54R cartridge as the M91/30 sniper rifle of World War II, but its 4-power scope extends its effective range to well beyond that of its predecessor. The rifle was introduced in 1963 and was issued down to platoon level. Originally made in Russia, they have since been manufactured in China, Romania, and other former Soviet Union surrogates. U.S. forces first encountered the Dragunov in the Vietnam War. (Photo Courtesy National Infantry Museum.)

6. The U.S. Army's M24 sniper system is based on the proven Remington 700 bolt action rifle action and is fielded in two calibers, the 7.62x51mm NATO and the .300 Winchester Magnum. The former fires a 175-grain match bullet at a muzzle velocity close to 2,700 feet per second (fps), and the latter a 195-grain projectile at 2,900 fps. (Photo courtesy U.S. Army Sniper School)



U.S. M24 Sniper Rifle



U.S. Model M107 Barrett .50 caliber

7. The Barrett M107 is chambered for the powerful .50 caliber Browning Machine Gun (BMG) cartridge. It fires a 700-grain bullet at over 2,900 fps and has an effective range of over 1900 yards against materiel targets. The semiautomatic weapon fires from a 10-round magazine and also uses standard ball ammunition for the Browning M2 machine gun. (Photo courtesy U. S. Army Sniper School)

SNIPER WEAPONS AND THEIR EFFECTIVE RANGES

<u>WEAPON</u>	<u>CALIBER</u>	<u>CAPACITY</u>	<u>RANGE</u>
MOSIN NAGANT	7.62x54R	5 rounds	500 yards
M1903A4	.30/06	5 rounds	500 yards
Garand M1C	.30/06	8 rounds	500 yards
M21 System	7.62x51mm NATO	20 rounds	>700 yards
Dragunov/SVD	7.62x54R	10 rounds	650 yards
M24 System	7.62x51mm NATO	20 rounds	>800 yards
M107 Barrett	.50 BMG	10 rounds	>1900 yards

Note: Effective ranges are approximate, and the increased range of weapons having similar external ballistic characteristics (.30/06, 7.62x51mm, 7.62x54R) with newer weapons is a function of improved optical sights and ammunition.

THE LOGIC OF FAILURE

G. GABRIEL SERBU

“In war, as in art, there are no general rules. In neither can talent be replaced by precept.”

— von Moltke the Elder

Von Clausewitz wrote in his famed *On War* that “There is only one decisive victory: the last.” Victory, in other words, is only achieved once the enemy is **completely** defeated, once he has no longer the ability to launch a successful offensive or to organize a coherent defence. But, concealed behind von Clausewitz’s obvious point, rests another one: **initial** success has also some serious side effects, significant psychological costs, which can affect future performance in the conduct of warfare.

One of the most dangerous by-products of a military victory that does not lead to the complete defeat of the enemy is undeniably the successive use of the same successful method to fairly similar challenges, against the same enemy or against a different opponent at a later time. Underestimating the ability of the opponent to adapt, to learn from his or someone else’s failures and mistakes is a grave and common error.

In an attempt to overcome the nightmare of static trench warfare, the Germans used, during World War I, Stormtroopers, elite shock infantry units designed to infiltrate enemy positions by using the momentum of surprise and speed. They ultimately failed because their tactics, although highly successful, lacked support, which could only be provided by a mechanized, mobile army. In the interwar period, military visionaries such as Basil Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller or Heinz Guderian recognized the tremendous potential of tanks if used “enmasse,” while exploiting their mobility. Concentrations of armor could rapidly smash through enemy lines

and into his rear, provoking havoc, destroying the communications and lines of communication, wiping out soft echelons and generally bringing mayhem to a zone that was traditionally for the troops on the front line the psychological comfort zone. The result would be disorganization, panic, loss of morale, and confusion. What’s more, mechanized infantry would exploit the breaches in the enemy’s line, thus giving the opponent a “coup de grace.” No military analyst or historian would challenge the brilliance of the Blitzkrieg. The doctrine gave the classical German canon of encircling the enemy through a strategic offensive, but then fighting a tactical

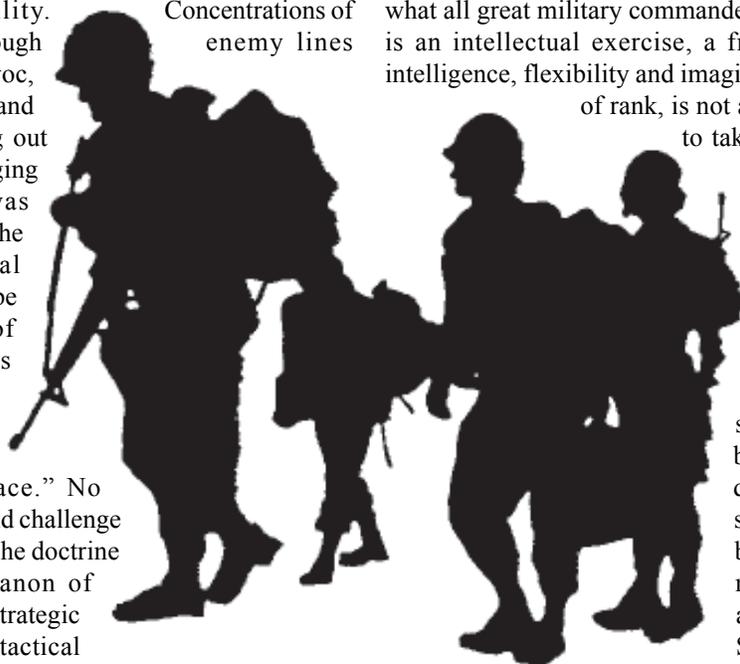
defensive battle on favourable terms to prevent the enemy breaking out of the trap, a final masterstroke.

The Blitzkrieg with its practice of using the armor’s momentum of surprise and speed proved enormously successful in France and in the first months of Operation Barbarossa. Unfortunately for the Germans, the Soviets demonstrated to be more than the “crash test dummies” portrayed by Nazi propaganda. They learned from their blunders and from the opponent’s successful strategy, a process greatly helped by other factors such as the enormous and difficult territory that the Germans had to cover. The enemy will eventually adapt: therein lies the danger of military success through the *ad nauseam* application of the same unbeaten strategy.

Today’s successful innovation is tomorrow’s dogma. And all dogmas, especially military doctrines, are bound to fail the test of history. Moreover, the struggle for imposing a brilliant innovation — strategic or technical — is directly proportional with the effort put into getting the military establishment to abandon the very same idea. Paradoxically, a tactical or strategic approach should be abandoned not only when it fails, but also when it works. Otherwise, one becomes predictable; and predictability breeds defeat.

But the staleness of successful methods is not the only costly side effect of victory: rigidity, complacency and an inevitable tendency towards indolence are other vicious consequences of military triumphs. Why bother to think, improvise and innovate, when a sound military doctrine offers ready-made, already chewed and digested ideas. “In war as in art there are no general rules. In neither can talent be replaced by precept.” Von Moltke expressed what all great military commanders knew: the conduct of warfare is an intellectual exercise, a free creative activity requiring intelligence, flexibility and imagination. A true soldier, regardless of rank, is not an automaton, but someone able to take care of him and others in the most unpredictable situations.

During World War II, *Operation Citadel* (pinching off in 1943 the Soviet held salient centered around Kursk) failed because the Germans relied on the principles of the Blitzkrieg: speed was hampered by boobytraps, minefields, anti-tank ditches, scarps and counter-scarps, hedgehogs, road blocks, barbed-wire entanglements and a myriad of other anti-tank and anti-personnel obstacles. Surprise failed to be achieved,



since Soviet intelligence was aware of the exact date and time of the attack.

The Russians learned from German achievements, but never from German mistakes. They, too, blindly and mechanically, without consideration, applied the lessons of a Blitzkrieg ferociously unleashed upon them with initially devastating results. The Germans simply lured them forward and then struck them hard on the flanks after the impetus of their armor attack had been lost. What ultimately saved them (apart from the lend-lease program, *Operations Husky* and *Overlord*, Bletchley Park, etc.) was Hitler's obsession with clinging to every inch of the "Lebensraum."

In the book *Lost Victories*, Erich Von Manstein later observed: "His way of thinking conformed more to a mental picture of masses of the enemy bleeding to death before our lines, than to the concept of a subtle fencer who knows how to make an occasional step backwards in order to lunge for the decisive thrust."

It's a clear symptom of psychological rigidity conditioned by previous military successful approaches: Hitler's own experience of the Western front during World War I.

Obsessed with mass and quantity, the Soviets also elaborated the concept of "artillery offensive," implemented by "artillery breakthrough" divisions (by the end of the war they were massing 670 guns per kilometre). The idea behind this artillery juggernaut was the pulverization of just about anything above the ground, especially anti-tank guns. The Soviets were extremely proud of their innovative approach, which became, after numerous successes, a doctrine. What they didn't know was the fact that, after being blown to smithereens a few times, the Germans were, through aggressive intelligence, aware of the exact time of the artillery barrage. They just retreated to a safe location, behind the initial position, waited for the end of the artillery barrage and re-occupied their original line of defence.

The Blitzkrieg validated, after *Case White* and *Case Yellow*, the extensive use of the air force and long-range artillery to soften the opponent's positions, just before the offensive. Extremely successful in Poland and France, the very same strategy

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failed at Cassino and Stalingrad. The obliterated buildings offered great cover for the defenders fighting in the rubble.

It is puzzling how general staffs still applied at the beginning of the 1970's, principles stated in the 1920's and 30's, innovative at that time, but mere dogmatic ghosts in the 70's. Ignoring what happened at Kursk in July 1943, Cassino and in Normandy in 1944, in Korea (between 1950 and 1953), the Israelis used armored spearheads in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The anti-tank Egyptian teams took a heavy toll on the tanks, especially in Port Suez, where the Israeli armour engaged on urban terrain. History proved that tanks are as vulnerable to anti-tank weapons, just as much as the infantry is to machine guns. It is futile to throw armor against a well-prepared foe expecting the attack and determined to repulse it. Rommel knew better than anyone that applying without discernment what has been so far an undefeated strategy would eventually end up in disaster. Unleashing his panzers against a braced foe would have been a misapprehension. Rommel and his staff became conscious of the fact that tank versus tank was a useless recipe. Far better was to destroy your opponents' tanks by luring them into the open, where he could be decimated by anti-tank guns, a job greatly facilitated by the superb 88mm FLAK. Moreover, he used dummies so as to bait the enemy. By tactical audacity and ruse, he assertively manned the PAK in the forefront of the battlefield, often alongside the panzers. It is an illustration of astonishing flexibility. The same man that had so successfully used the armour as a

spearhead force in France, dramatically change his tactical approach when dealing with a new enemy in a new environment. Surprise can only be achieved by incessantly innovating.

Even more astonishing is the fixation on the importance of high ground. The control of high ground for the purpose of observation and prevention of efficient cavalry charges dates back to Napoleonic wars. High ground also offers the advantage of great fields of fire and increased range for weapons. Unfortunately, troops amassed on such positions are exposed and vulnerable to artillery attacks. As John A. English and Bruce I. Gudmundsson observed in *On Infantry*, it is far better to:

"Erecting defenses on a rear slope had the effect of placing an impenetrable barrier (i.e., the crest of the hill) to much of the enemy's artillery fire and most of his artillery observation. This made the small forts that made up the intermediate zone difficult for enemy artillery observers to locate and almost impossible for the big guns to knock out."

The control of high ground is just another successful innovation turned into a dogmatic tactical approach, which reverberates like an echo throughout the ages.

Another psychological spin-off of victory is the disregard for an organized retreat as a viable strategy or in case of a military hindrance. After a long streak of triumphs, the military commander will increasingly ignore the plans for a retreat in case things go wrong. He will also be less likely to use it as bait. There are innumerable books written by various military analysts and historians on offensive, defensive battles and approaches to battle, but very few on the art of retreat. Retreat is perceived as somehow shameful, the admission of a setback or at least of the inability to deal with a present threat. Retreat, if used elegantly, can be a decisive weapon against an impulsive foe. Manstein called this particular approach the "backhand stroke," a smashing counter-blow against the extended flanks of an opponent's offensive. In war it is vital to maintain the momentum. But that doesn't necessarily mean a forward momentum. Feigned retreat has also been used by Muslim warriors since the seventh century.

The Seljuk Turks and the armies of Salahaldin were particularly good at it. What can be more rewarding for a military commander than to successfully lure the enemy into a trap?

For Hitler, who always thought of warfare in terms of the Western front of the First World War, retreat was anathema. The excuse for his rigid approach was twofold: first, that by surrendering ground, one might surrender critical military or economical centres; second, that the retreat wrecks the morale of an army. Although his observations are in some way legitimate, it is always “healthier” to lose the morale of an army, than the actual army, always better to lose a few important military and economical hubs, than the war. Hitler was more interesting in last heroic stands, than in flexible retreats. So much for Manstein’s “operational elasticity”.

A classic example of a retreat, smoothly and efficiently conducted, occurred in March 1943, when Hitler was persuaded to evacuate the dangerous salient of Vyaz’ma Rzhev on the front of Army Group Center. This operation was known by the code name *Buffalo* and was described in great detail by von Mellenthin in *Panzer Battles, A Study on the Employment of Armour in the Second World War*.

Another emotional offshoot of victory, and one of the most dangerous, is over-confidence. This is how Ronald Lewin describes the catastrophic effect of superciliousness in military affairs in his book *The Life and Death of Afrika Korps*:

“In May/June 1942, with a strong Luftwaffe and a feeble Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility for long-suffering Malta to have been captured by the Axis, and it is certainly difficult to assess the full range of benefits that the availability of the island, as a base for the U-boats and bombers, might have produced. Still less, it is easy to imagine how, without Malta, the British could have re-established a significant interdiction of the Panzerarmee’s supply lines. At the end of May, therefore, when Rommel attacked at Gazala, the Axis had committed itself to battle in the wrong place –and when the Afrika Korps went on to take Tobruk, the psychological effect of success was such, as will be seen, that Hitler and Mussolini dropped *Herkules* with hardly a pang. This was self-mutilation.”

Ironically, instead of unmanageable euphoria, any military victory should trigger, in the camp of the victor, a cheerless, stern celebration, because the narcotic elation of martial triumph bears the seeds of future defeats. It is paramount for the military commander never to give in to an uncontrollable enthusiasm that could encourage him to see himself as an invincible warrior. The gods of war favour only those they can’t seduce.

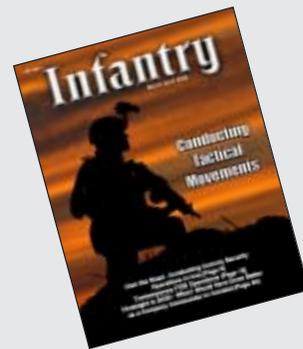
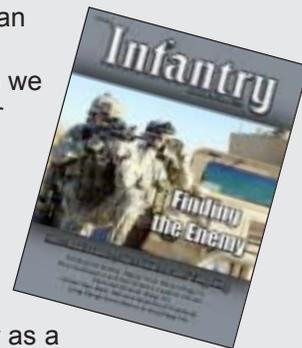
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