

The BTG Is Dead, Long Live The BTG!

We examine recently 'recovered documents' outlining a new Russian doctrinal replacement to the BTG system.



Simplicius The Thinker

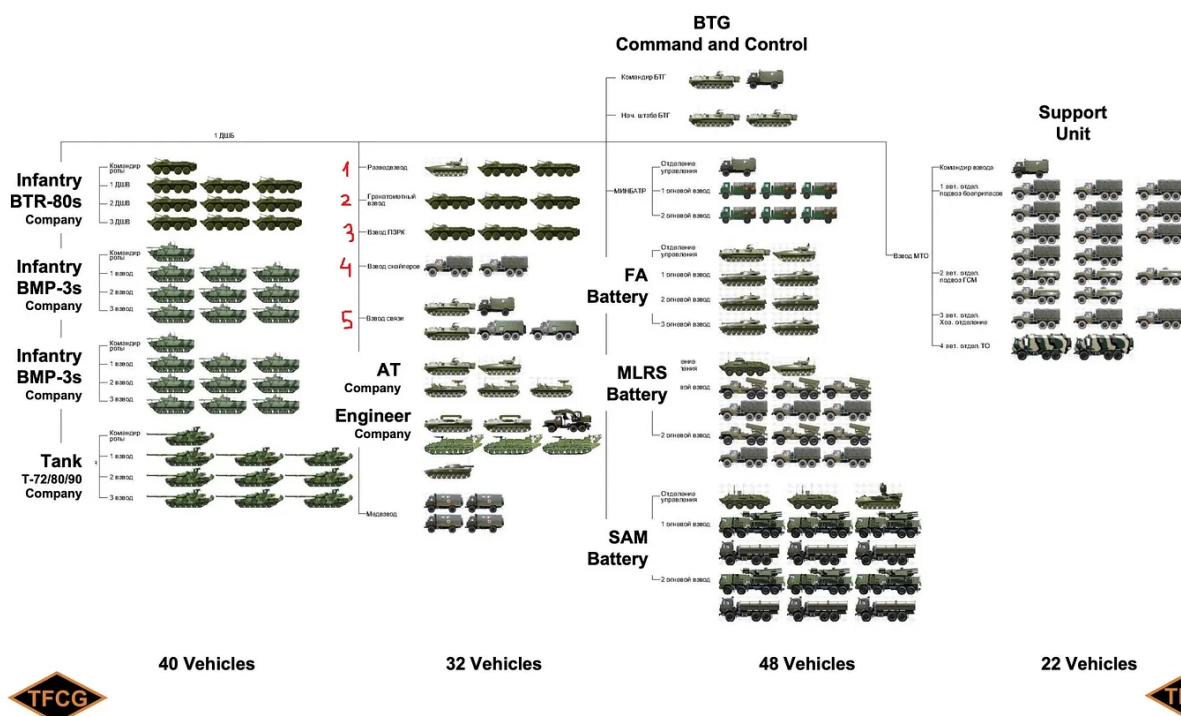
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TYPICAL RUSSIAN BTG



A [Ukrainian reserves military officer has written](#) a very interesting twitter thread, which was subsequently picked up by a host of other analysts from DailyKos to a retired Major General in the Australian army.

It details a purported major doctrinal shift in Russian combat group structure in Ukraine, which was discovered by way of (reportedly) captured documents. While typically, things like this are to be taken with a pinch of salt, in this case there are no obvious incentives for the UA officer to lie or make it up, seeing as how it's not something that paints Russia in a negative light (well, they *attempt* to do so anyway), but in some ways the reverse. And secondly, to the keen observer, it's something

that's already being corroborated by actual on the ground circumstances we're seeing as well as British intel MI6 reports—but more on that later.

So—what is the big doctrinal shift? It's the complete replacement of the infamous 'BTG' or Battalion Tactical Group as a core structural component of the Russian armed forces with a new, even smaller and more focused unit termed the 'Assault Unit' or 'Assault Detachment'.

Now, of course, you have to know how to parse the barely clothed propaganda and denial/cope from the UA side in order to get to the real morsels of truth. So when this anonymous 'officer' claims that the reason for the structural shift is the spectacular 'failure' of the BTG's, in reality it only shows either his lack of strategic-depth understanding, or simple malicious intent.

As a quick contextual primer—the BTG was not created for the type of conflict that this war has transitioned into. And while Russia may have used the BTG structure in the opening—the tenor of *that* conflict was far different than what it is today.

In the beginning of the SMO, Russia was hardly even assaulting positions, but rather doing what in Soviet military parlance were called 'raids'. As is always the case with American/Western exoticization of all things Russian, they deliberately created a factitious 'mythos' surrounding the BTG which never existed in reality, for the general purpose of later declaring it a 'failure' when in actuality they've never fundamentally understood it.

The vast majority of Western 'experts', completely misunderstand the purpose and origins of the "BTG", owing to this delusional aggrandizement and mythicization. I'm going to demystify how and why the BTG was formed very succinctly for the laymen amongst us:

In very simple terms, the Russian BTG's were really formed due to a chronic shortage of troops that could potentially constitute most brigades. Now, this isn't a problem solely inherent to the Russian forces. Truth is, most militaries in the world can't *really* fill all their brigades completely to their absolute 'on paper' 100% composition. Even in Ukraine today, both sides commonly operate brigades that are 40-60% constituted.

So, in the post-Soviet era, when the Russian armed forces had been *particularly* gutted by budget cuts, the BTG formula allowed a system by which a brigade could be scaled

down into a smaller maneuver unit that had 100% “readiness”, and was stocked with fully trained, professional (non-conscripted) soldiers.

Russia needed a basic, self-sufficient unit which could have all the same maneuvering and asset capabilities as a brigade, but have complete, guaranteed readiness, so they began to structure the armed forces around these BTG’s. Also, in an era of more centralized corruption and lackluster command chains / OODA loops, it was better to use a unit structure which retained its own inherent capabilities. For instance, why rely on having to phone in the central anti-air command to notify them you need help shooting down an enemy plane/UAV, in an era where such cross-unit communications were not exceptionally streamlined or efficient, when you can just have the air defense yourself under your own roof. Same goes for artillery, etc.

In floundering around this BTG concept, most ‘analysts’ gabble on about the wrong things, but omit the key central precept behind its formation: that of ‘high combat readiness’. This translates into full manpower constitution, assured training of the unit (as opposed to having part of the unit be lesser trained conscripts, or some mishmash), and professional contract troops. In short, BTG’s were something done more out of temporary necessity than some far-flung or deeply engraved doctrinal shift or re-conceptualization.

In fact, many experts noted that BTG’s were never meant to be a permanent staple:

“American military experts on Russia at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), Fort Leavenworth, KS, believed that BTGs were an intermediate construct, temporarily employed to push modernization into Russia’s current force, and that at the end of the modernization program, the Russian Army will return to a divisional structure with fully manned, equipped and deployable brigades – especially if faced with a peer competitor such as the United States. There are, however, several reasons to predict that the return to a divisional structure could be several years away. In the meantime, the BTG may remain Russia’s deployable organization of choice.”

So now, back to Ukraine. BTG’s excel at fighting other large, near-peer formations. This is why the [U.S. Army itself conducts stringent studies](#) revolving around how their [BCT](#)’s (U.S. BTG equivalent) can fight against and defeat Russian BTG’s. The reason I say near-peer is because the whole purpose of a BTG is to have everything ‘in house’, including your artillery, air defense, auxiliary units, etc. If you’re fighting a

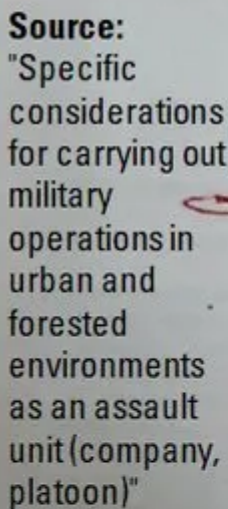
very primitive force without any air capabilities of their own for instance, then what's the use of lugging around AD companies, etc?

The Russian BTG was used in the opening of the SMO because it was a self-sufficient maneuvering force capable of solving their own limited objectives at a time when the resistance of the AFU was not yet great. But, as I mentioned before, the tenor of the conflict has drastically shifted. With the defense-first and stalemate/attritional-minded current focus of the AFU, there is not much room and opportunity for 'maneuver' war presently, which is why not only have [I myself written at length](#) about the hypothetical 'death of maneuver war', but as have other [more prominent outlets](#).

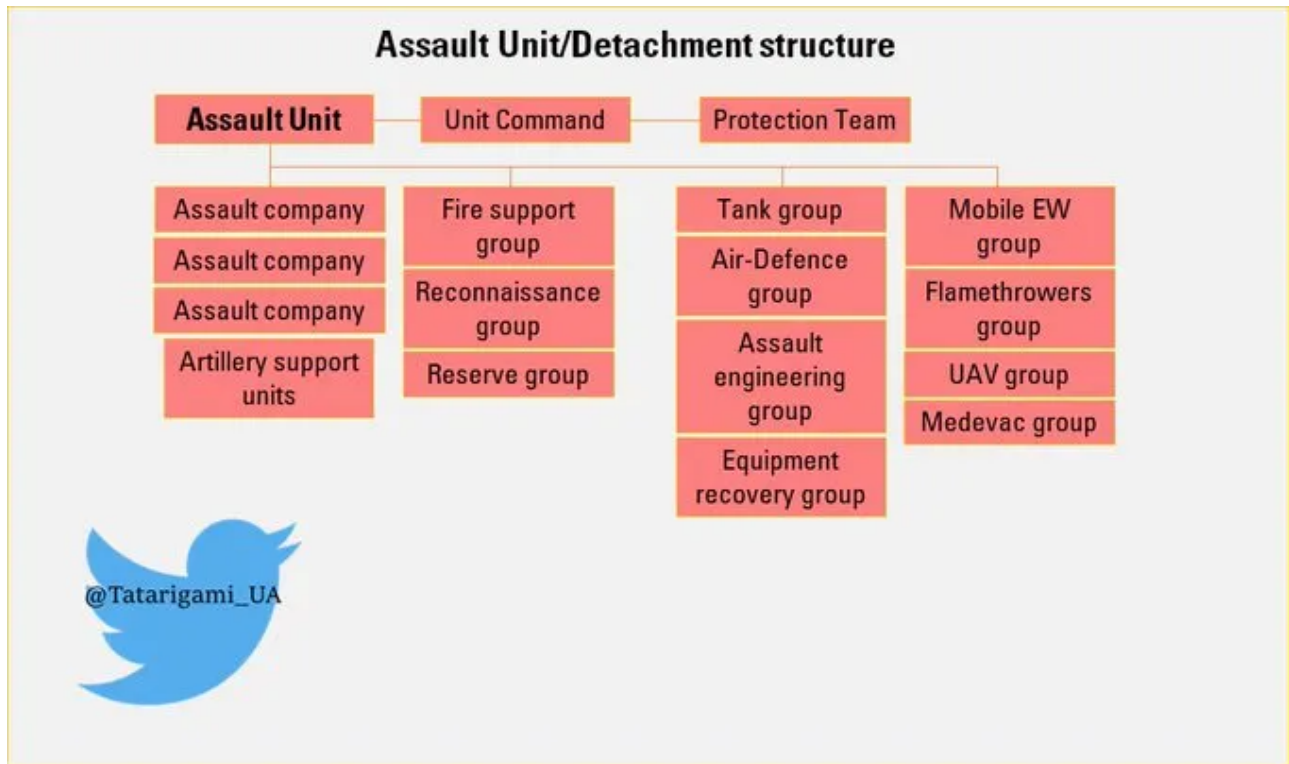
The current scope of the conflict primarily revolves around highly entrenched positions, typically along the 'tree lines' which make up the geometric gridirons of farm fields of the Ukrainian heartland. Typically, the combat mission profiles consist of Russian forces attempting to breach these trenches and fortified positions (various dugouts, revetments, caponiers, etc.) while negotiating minefields and evading enemy artillery situated to the rear of the 2nd and 3rd echelon trench lines which lie several kilometers back (AFU artillery almost exclusively fires from about 10-12km behind the contact line).

So, now that you have this basic primer of how the conflict is currently situated, let's dig in to this UA officer's report, and see how it develops on what I've said:

Based on a captured russian manual, the Assault Unit (or Detachment) is a battalion-sized force designed to perform assaults in fortified tree lines and urban environments. It is essentially a reinforced battalion with a specific focus on assault operations.



3/16 The Assault Detachment is customizable to mission requirements and consists of 2-3 assault companies, a command unit, an artillery support unit, and other groups: recon, tank, EW, AD, fire support, UAV, Medevac, flamethrowing, assault engineering, reserve, equipment recovery



Ok, so far this is essentially identical to a BTG. BTG's are also customizable to 'mission requirements', within parameters, and also can include all of the listed support units. But once again, we strike that key note of 'assault companies'—which appears to be geared more for a specific *kind* of 'shock' assault, like the leading vanguard.

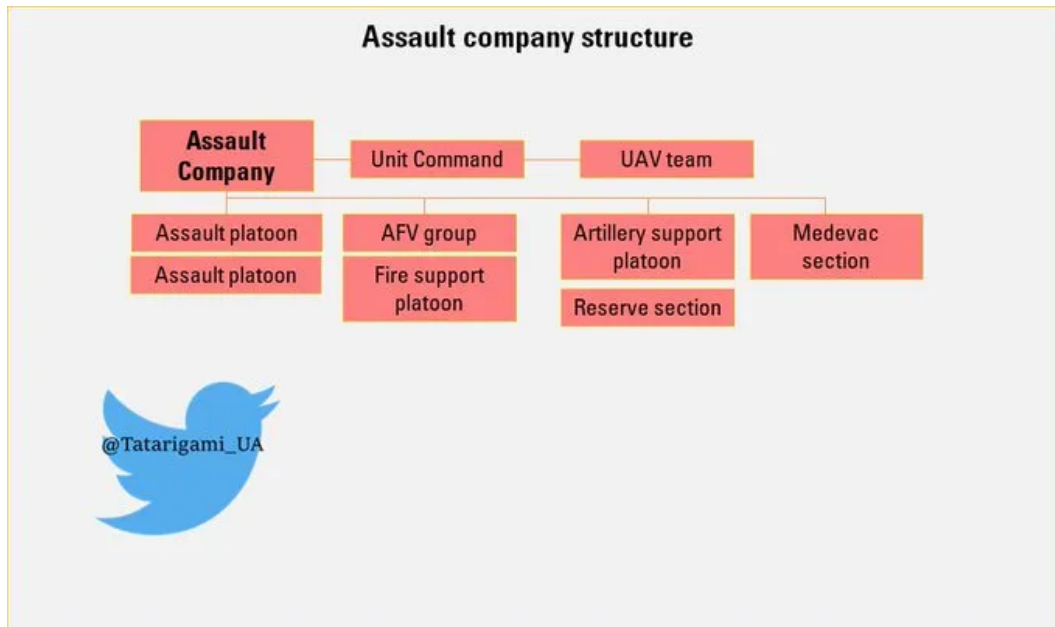
4/16 Assault unit armament: - Three T-72 tanks - Two Zu-23, and 3 MANPADS - 12 man-portable flamethrowers - Six SPGs (2S9), - Six Towed artillery guns (D30) - Two AGS-17 - Two Kord HMGs, - Two ATGMs - Two sniper pairs. - BREM-L



We can see this composition very heavily privileges a type of medium to close range, shock force assets. For instance, Russia's [RPOs](#) have become a much-feared bread and butter for assaulting forces (particularly Wagner) in this war. In numerous interviews, AFU troops express their fear of this Russian thermobaric grenade launcher. In fact, [this American Navy Seal was liquidated](#) in Bakhmut by one of them not too long ago.

The mass amounts of 2S9 Nonas likewise is fine-tuned towards trench and treeline assaults. This is a mobile 120mm mortar, most-often used by Russian VDV paratroopers. It's particularly effective for assaults in one main way that distinguishes it from the larger, more powerful Russian artillery mainstays like the 2S19 Msta-S, etc.—and that is mobility. The fact that it was created with VDV in mind, makes it not only air-droppable (and amphibious), but more importantly, light and fast, which means it can keep up with a fast-moving assault detachment and change positions on the fly as needed.

The main unit of the assault detachment is an assault company consisting of a command unit, a UAV team, assault platoons, an artillery support platoon, a tank group, a reserve section, artillery support platoons, medevac section.

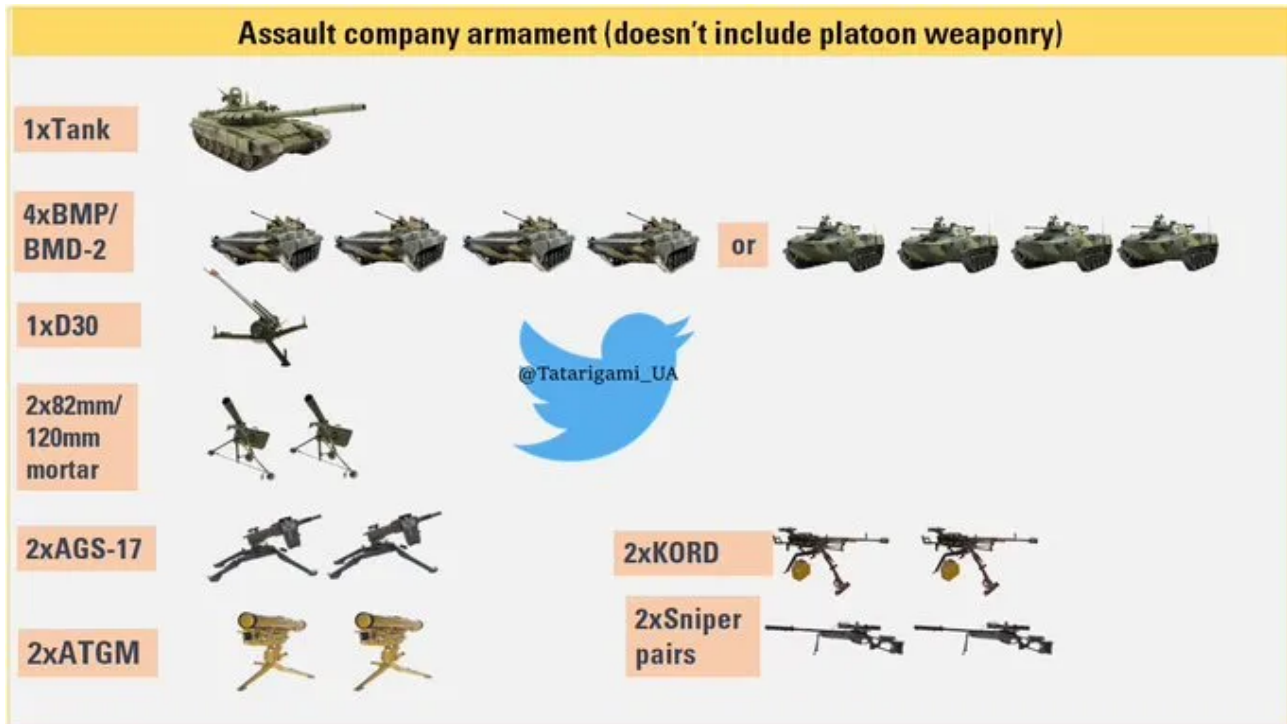


Ok, once again, the structure itself is nothing necessarily out of the ordinary, but the specific designation of ‘assault’ platoons refers to the types of mission-specific weaponry they would be employing, i.e. weapons specifically maximized for destroying and uprooting these pesky tree-line trenches.

What does this mean in practice? Like mentioned above, for instance instead of heavy fire teams with 7.62x54mmr PK machine guns, there will be a heavier Kord 12.7mm group, AGS-17 Flame (auto-grenade launcher), and thermobaric RPG launchers, which are not necessarily standard for normal units. Also, as an example, instead of the regular anti-armor Kornet, they may be armed with the 9M133F-1 thermobaric variant, meant specifically for rooting out infantry from enclosures.

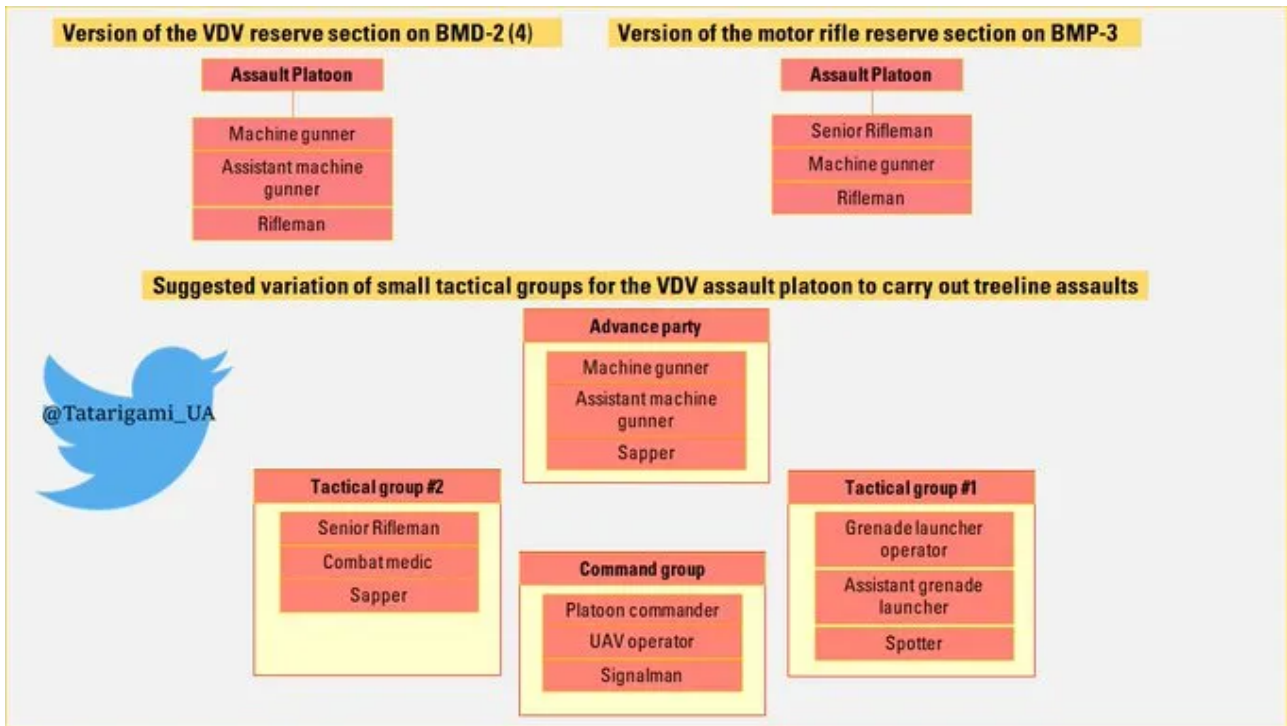
This is seen below:

6/16 Assault company armament: - Four BMP or BMD-2 - One T-72 - Two AGS-17, - Two Kord HMG - Two ATGM - Two sniper pairs - Two mortars - either 82 or 120 mm mortar - One D30 or 2S9



7/16 The primary component of the combat formation is the assault platoon, which may consist of an advance party, safeguard, command group, and fire support platoon strengthened by additional firepower: AGS, mortar, D-30 gun, armored group, and evacuation squad.

8/16 An assault platoon comprises 12-15 members, divided into tactical groups of 3 people, and equipped based on mission requirements. A reserve section can supplement the platoon with additional firepower - machine gunner, assistant machine gunner, riflemen.

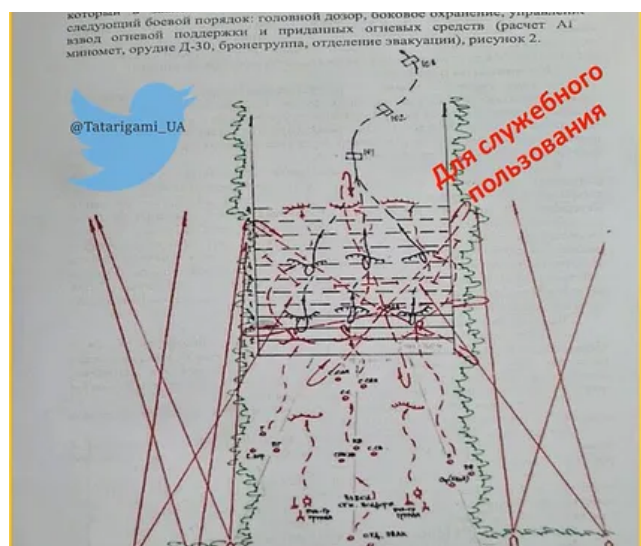
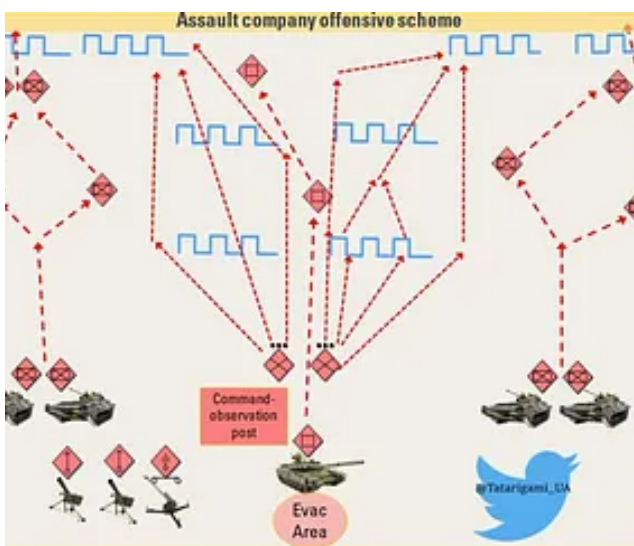


9/16 Main assault provisions:

- The pause between the assault and artillery fire on fortified positions should be no longer than one minute
- Using UAVs for reconnaissance is advised, but it is not recommended to use them for battle monitoring to avoid the loss of the UAV.

10/16

- Occupying abandoned trenches is prohibited because they may have been booby-trapped or could have been prepared as targets for artillery strikes.
- Assaulters cannot evacuate the wounded themselves; they must relay the wounded's coordinates to the evacuation team.



Now here's where it starts getting interesting. Not only do we begin to get into specific tactics, but a revelation is made: this new 'Assault Detachment' purportedly

meant to ‘replace BTG’s’ is not really a new type of unit per se, but rather more of new set of doctrinal fighting tactics designed around the specific task of solving the ‘intractable’ tree-line trench problem which has come to dominate the current mode of conflict.

It turns out, this is more a doctrinal manual on newly evolved tactics—*not* the description of an entirely or revolutionarily new type of fighting formation. But this fact will become more apparent as we continue on.

Firstly, note the interesting correlation to certain things already ascertained by the more erudite of our community: in particular, this past explanation from **imetatronink** :

Here is a brief summation of the Russian tactical approach to the Battle of the Donbass:

Step #1: Advance reconnaissance units (often in force, with dozens or hundreds of drones overhead) to assess the situation; draw fire; relay to commanders raw video and geo-coordinates.

Step #2: With target-correcting drone swarms overhead, relaying real-time strike video, proceed to savage the fortifications with towed and mobile artillery, Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (in gradations of strength and precision), and even horrific **thermobaric munitions** for particularly suitable targets.

Let smoke clear.

Repeat Step #1.

Still something moving there?

Repeat Step #2.

Repeat Step #1.

Dead bodies everywhere?

Step #3: Send in tanks and infantry to mop up.

Move to next series of fortifications.

And so on and so forth ...

11/16 • The platoon commander controls mortar fire. • The platoon/company commander decides on artillery targets, but only the unit commander can provide the air support. • A recommended firing method for the AGS-17 is indirect fire, with a preferred firing range of 600-1700 m

12/16 • During the assault, the armored group can act as a whole or be divided between platoons. The artillery support platoon's mortars are distributed between assault platoons, while the artillery gun reports directly to the commander.

13/16 • During the treeline assault, the platoon should move in a diamond formation • During an assault, it is prohibited for an assault company or platoon to move

through open spaces and they should instead move solely within the treeline.

The above confirms much of the footage we've been seeing recently of Russian tree-line assaults. Recall the countless videos of Russian tanks crawling along the hedge-line and pouring fire onto the AFU trenches, such as [this one](#), and [this one](#), or even [this one](#).

That's not to say any of this is absolute confirmation of the validity of these alleged tactics changes, but previously we'd seen tactics such as [this one](#), which consisted of BMP units moving up together toward the hedge under suppression fire, debarking their motor rifle troops right at the tree line, then hauling out (as the BMP's are now of little utility since they can't fire through the screen of their own forces storming the trench).

Furthermore, though not listed in this tactics handbook, it's been known that as they creep along the trench line, Russian tanks fire at the trenches to suppress the AFU troops—which often triggers the psychological flight response, making them curl into balls, or at least stuff themselves back into the dugout. This allows the mechanized troops riding BMP/BMD's to quickly sneak up, dismount, and begin smoking out the trenches without worrying about return fire.

One thing of note, however, is the passage:

“The platoon commander controls mortar fire. • The platoon/company commander decides on artillery targets, but only the unit commander can provide the air support.”

This is very interesting, as it is a direct repudiation of the popular, albeit naive, trope that Russian forces lack trained NCO's, have no bottom-level initiative or authority, are highly 'centralized' in some stark-caricature of Soviet bureaucratic rigidity, that their recon forces subsist on '[Command-Push](#)' rather than '[Recon-Pull](#)' strategy, etc, etc.

But in fact, little by little, corroboration continues to trickle in from this war of something I've said and believed since the beginning—that it's actually the complete opposite: Russian officers have *more* autonomy than their NATO equivalents. There's a wealth of evidence that supports this, but unfortunately would derail this narrow-scoped topic.

The quote about platoon commanders above, confirms that Russian commanders are trustingly delegating the designation of artillery targets down to unit level—this is something even the U.S./NATO doesn't have, not least of which reason being that Western armies don't even have artillery at below the brigade level, at which point you need a Major General or at least a Colonel's permission to even strike a target.

Here, Russia is letting mere *Lieutenants* decide for themselves. This is massive. A type of revolutionary small unit autonomy NATO/U.S. can't even dream of, and has sent ex-U.S. Army [‘experts’ like this one](#) into wildly fevered paroxysms of excuse-making and cognitive-dissonance-inducing rage to try and explain away.

The fact is, it's become obvious that it is now the U.S. and NATO which are the stilted and stultified, rigidly bureaucratic, un-evolving monstrosities they so desperately try to portray Russia as. And Russia is in fact the highly dynamic, battlefield-evolving force built around strong small-unit leadership and NCO initiative that the West feigns to paint *themselves* as. What a wonder!

14/16 The russians are transitioning from larger structures, such as BTGs, to smaller, more agile assault units. However, they still rely heavily on artillery support. It is uncertain if they have enough scarce weapons like 2S9, mortars, AGS, and ammo to equip all units.

Firstly, let's acknowledge the above statement is desperately risible cope. 'Scarce weapons'? Even the fraudulent 'Oryx list' only shows 23 Nona 2S9's as destroyed (which means the real number is even less, because his list is infamously rife with misattribution and outright fraud). Russia officially has ~500 active Nona variants (2S9 and others), and another ~500 in storage. Not to mention new equivalent systems being produced. You can trust Russia has 'enough' of them.

15/16 This decision seems to be influenced by Wagner's advances in the Bakhmut area and the decreased availability of vehicles and weaponry since February 2022. Unlike BTG, assault detachments doesn't seem to have a logistics or MLRS units in their structure.

This is even beyond desperation. First of all, Russia has lost a tiny negligible fraction of their MLRS forces. Once again—even going by the highly inflated Oryx list—he publishes that Russia has lost a total of 178 various MLRS systems, which breaks down into roughly ~100 Grad, ~50 Uragan, and less than 10 Smerch/Tos-1A, etc.

How much MLRS does Russia have? Nearly ~4000 total systems, including ~2300 total Grads (including storage), ~700 Uragans, and ~150 Smerch, as well as a few hundred sundry other systems, and new ones being produced constantly.

So the disingenuous suggestion that 178 total lost (real number much less) out of nearly ~4000 would result in the complete reformation of the 'BTG' as a concept, is *patently absurd*. And I think the authors of such notions know that, but alas, have a 'flock' to feed with morale-boosting nectar, outrageous as it might be.



Credit: @tankdiary

Now let's take a brief look at what Mick Ryan, retired Army Major General of Australia, [has to say about these findings](#).

You can read his thread to get the granular detail, but in summary, he concludes that this does represent a viably successful tactic. *BUT* he still slops on the caricature-esque Russian tropes to come to the conclusion that Russia will not be able to *fully* and effectively maximize these new tactics, owing to the fact that—in his completely compromised and biased view—Russia doesn't have the larger 'operational'

capabilities to *follow-up* on the contact-line breakthroughs that these tactics will generate.

He acknowledges that Russia *will* create breakthroughs with this tactic, but they won't be able to punch in through to the AFU's 'operational rear' and cause larger, additive routs to their forces. So in essence, he believes the AFU will be able to continuously 're-plug' these holes which Russia will not be able to exploit.

Of course, as usual, his positions are premised on a host of misapprehensions and outright erroneous data, such as Russia's over-inflated losses, and things of that nature; not too dissimilar from the original thread's author, who premised his scoffing dismissals on faulty numbers of Russian equipment losses.

However, the Major General makes a few good points, and his thoughts are more clear-headed than that of the others, who are too mired in the agony of Russophobia to analyze things with any shred of impartiality.



Credit: @tankdiary

What can be said about his criticisms are the following things:

1. Russia, at this current phase of the conflict, is not *trying* to use large maneuver warfare to seek the enemy's 'operational rear' (due to lack of committed forces, thus far. If all the new mobiks come into play soon, then that could change). They are utilizing these new tactics only locally for the purpose of dislodging one echelon at a time, which they're doing successfully in most cases. They're not trying to route the entire operational theater with the type of massive WW2-level German maneuvers the stodgy-minded Major General appears conceptually stuck on.

They're using this tactic to break down the AFU's local defenses piecemeal, with very small forces. Normally, against a truly 'peer-level' threat, you could argue that wouldn't work due to the much more resilient and agile ability to re-plug any locally breached gaps by way of powerful C3 coordination, organization, training/ability of forces, and most importantly—actual extant reserve forces positioned for this task.

But the problem is, the AFU in many ways lacks a lot of these things. So such local breaching tactics work on them because their depleted and ragtag forces often don't have the morale or ability to agilely respond in a way a true peer-level opponent would.

Just think back to the dozens of videos—such as [this Bakhmut one in particular](#)—which showcases AFU commanders desperately pleading to round up a group of spent, suicidal soldiers, to go plug an important line that has been breached somewhere at the front nearby. You see, with depleted and devastated forces like this, there's high chance they won't make it to the line in time to 'plug' anything. Thus, Russia's tactics could work just fine as they are without requiring the mandate of massive operational encirclements.

2. Once again he anchors his position on known fallacies: Russian forces are destroyed, equipment is low, etc.—thus they can't possibly make this work. This is all patently false, but of course he wouldn't know it from the echochamber he undoubtedly subsists on.

What I'll give him is that we must wait and see. For now the AFU continues to retain a numerical superiority over Russian forces, as the vast majority of Russian mobilized still haven't been committed to battle. When they *are*, then we can truly see and judge whether Russia will attempt to take this new 'doctrine' (for lack of a better word) to the expected next level of 'operational breakthrough'.



Credit: @tankdiary

By the way—since Mick Ryan repeatedly references WW2 as comparison—some might argue the Germans had numerical inferiority yet used exactly these tactics to full advantage in Barbarossa. But as I've noted in [this previous article](#), the Wehrmacht in fact greatly outnumbered the Soviet forces at the start of the operation, 3.4million to 2.7m—contrary to what most people were taught.

And on top of which, their ability to break through to the rears relied heavily on superior communications abilities (not only discipline, but the actual comms equipment, which didn't exist in Soviet tank forces at this time). In Ukraine's case, the Ukrainian ISR could be considered superior to that of the RF due to the vast nature of the entire West/NATO/Five-Eyes C4ISR potential being utilized against Russia, so the comparison is not quite adequate.

Germans broke through hapless lines which could not communicate those breakthroughs back to appropriate units and HQ's in time. AFU on the other hand has total ISR oversight of everything and instantaneous command of various reactive capabilities. The only limitation of which is, as mentioned, the actual

morale/depletion of the involved, on the ground, manpower which may or may not be capable of 'responding' in that sector despite full C4ISR overmatch.

As a last note, late last year, the UK Ministry of Defense also signaled the end of the Russian BTG:



And the always comical ISW issued these words:

*"Russia likely lacks sufficient uncommitted reserves to dramatically increase the scale or intensity of the offensive this winter. **Russian conventional ground forces are generally deploying and fighting in normal doctrinal formations and units rather than in battalion tactical groups or other ad hoc structures.** The observed absence of several critical tank units suggests that the Russian military continues to struggle to replace equipment, especially tanks, lost during previous failed offensive operations."*

In the end, *all* of these dramatic calls are in fact silly and wrong. Despite the tongue-in-cheek title of this article, I do not believe the BTG is 'dead', but rather simply that Russia is adapting new tactics for the very specific constraints and problems facing

them at this one specific phase of the SMO. Once other phases kick off, they may very well revert back to other structures and tactics. Though as mentioned earlier, the BTG was never designed to be the permanent replacement of Russian force-structure but rather more a temporary stopgap measure.

Contrary to what ignorantly mystified Western think-tankers are sputtering, the fielding of new tactics demonstrates strong adaptive capability on Russia's behalf. It means their generals, leaders, and commanders are analyzing, thinking, creatively problem-solving, and evolving—in spite of the West's continued dull-eyed, slack-jawed, and ill-conceived derogations.

With Russia's latest announcements and mandate to vastly expand its armed forces by hundreds of thousands, which includes 475k total *professional* contract ground troops, we could see the end of the BTG era *anyway*, and a return to the classic brigade and divisional structure of the Soviet era.

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31 Comments



ernest nichols Mar 1 Liked by [Simplicius The Thinker](#)

I am a retired US infantry E-5. Your research is incredible. I got out in the 80's, so I am dated. BUT. Even then, there was no lower level decision making. A LT. calling in artillery! Fucking incredible. I spend a lot of time at the VA hospital in Tulsa. Most of the kids are sandbox kids. They talk about how the US chain of command is so intractable that NO decisions can be made.

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Matthew N Davies Writes Matt Davies' OSINT Reports Mar 1

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No sleight on yourself for having pursued this - it's a topic of keen interest with a background of much widespread misunderstanding, at least in the West. However, both source and context for this discussion are highly dubious. I think it is apt here to remember that this is an Infowar, and those parties which do not send theirs into the front itself i.e., NATO+, are especially busy at this virtual "front" of perception management and efforts to tarnish competing brands - in this case the "brand" so targeted being the Russian Army. Given the material's suspect origins and context, the fact that one of the NATO+ generals publicly amplifies such claims around it is, in my view, an example of very cynical and unethical professional misconduct.

This purported "Ukrainian officer" with the smooth idiomatic written English starts with a very loaded premise i.e., "after [Russia's Army] experiencing failures". Really? That assertion is presented as uncontroversial fact, but then combines with beat-up over what appears to be a Russian military doctrinal reference that's been in their system for years (strange the "ukrainian officer" gives no publication date or publishing HQ or training command, author/s etc).

There's nothing in either the structure or its method of flexible mission-oriented kit allocation that is exclusive of the BTG concept per se. True enough, an absence of logistical and MLRS elements would be a conspicuous difference from BTG structures we've seen publicized from the start of SMO in Feb 2022, but it is precisely a feature of BTGs to provide for such modular flexibility to suit mission and environment. Therefore, such alteration would be consistent with a longer mission duration, as expected for assault operations against close, concentrated enemy defenses such as we see on the

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