

**The White General N. S. Timanovskiy's "Instructions":  
The Peculiarities of Combat Operations in the Current Civil War**

Ruslan Gagkuev  
Svetlana Shilova

From Журнал российских и восточноевропейских исторических исследований (Journal of Russian and East European Historical Studies) №4 (11), 2017

### **Outline**

This is the first publication of the instructions on "The Peculiarities of Combat Operations in the Current Civil War" – written in May 1919 at the headquarters of the 7th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of South Russia (AFSR) by Captain of the General Staff K. L. Kapnin under the supervision of Major-General N. S. Timanovskiy, and deposited in the Russian State Military Archives (RGVA). The document contains an assertion of the numerical superiority of the Red Army units over the AFSR regiments, which it claims dictated an exclusively offensive nature for the Whites in their actions against the Reds. The authors of the instruction draw the attention of their subordinates to the key importance of the recruitment and the composition of the AFSR units, with their backbone being the officer cadres and units. Those mobilised, and especially the forcibly enlisted prisoners (former Red Army soldiers), were considered the least reliable element in the division's units. Mutual responsibility was introduced at the instructional level, a brutal repression was regulated and the instruction was given to "force" them to attack, in fact, not to spare them in battle.

### **Keywords**

Russian Civil War; Bolsheviks; White; Armed Forces of South Russia; instruction on the conduct of military operations; Major-General N. S. Timanovskiy; Captain of the General Staff K. L. Kapnin.

**1919** was a decisive year for the outcome of the Russian Civil War.

In 1918 the Reds (the Red Army) and the Whites (who had no common front or organisation but were officially united under a single command) established fully-fledged armed forces, then entered into a decisive confrontation in 1919. As troop numbers grew, both sides devoted considerable attention to measures aimed at improving the combat effectiveness and discipline of their armies.

In July 1918, by order of the People's Commissar for Military Affairs of the RSFSR, L. D. Trotskii, a commission was set up in the All-Russian General Staff to develop regulations, "in accordance with the requirements of the new army structure and modern military technology." In November 1918, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) of the Soviets reviewed and approved the Internal Service Regulations and the Garrison Service Regulations for the Red Army, and then in January 1919 the Red Army Service and Disciplinary Regulations. From March 1919 to the end of 1920. The Chief Regulatory Commission and its sections developed and issued four statutes and seventeen manuals, which played a significant role in improving the combat effectiveness and discipline of the Red Army.

During 1918 and 1919 the White armies also paid considerable attention to the issues of military organisation. The main regulatory documents were the "Infantry Regulations", the "Field Service Regulations", the "Instruction for Infantry Operations in Battle", the "Disciplinary Regulations" and others which had been adopted in the Russian Empire in the 1910s.

In the Armed Forces of South Russia, which was the most important southern front of the Civil War in the second half of 1919, a number of new documents regulating the organisation and recruitment of units appeared. It is indicative that the volunteer initiative in the formation of regiments and detachments, inherent in the Volunteer Army and the AFSR in 1918-1919, due to the lack of regulations adequate to the time and spirit of the Civil War, led to the creation of unique instructions on the conduct of combat

operations. One of the most striking examples of such “manuals” was the instruction “The Peculiarities of Combat Operations in the Current Civil War”, which was not arranged by the higher commanders, but fully met the different features of the Civil War and the “spirit” of the volunteer units of the AFSR.

The published document was drawn up in May 1919 at the headquarters of the 7th Infantry Division under the leadership of one of the most famous and authoritative volunteer commanders, Major-General N. S. Timanovskiy. He was a member of the inner circle of the legendary White commander Lieutenant-General S. L. Markov. The direct author of the manual was Captain of the General Staff K. L. Kapnin. Having been in the Volunteer Army since the summer of 1918, he naturally had by that time, in addition to his authority among the officers, great experience of combat operations in the Civil War. Combined with that was an understanding of the specifics of the composition of the Red Army and AFSR units, their weaknesses and strengths.

The participation of Timanovskiy and Kapnin in the drafting of the document led to the appearance of the instructions, which concentrated all the “volunteer” experience of 1918 and the first half of 1919, which had allowed the units of the Volunteer Army to successfully conduct combat operations against the Red Army. The document asserts the numerical superiority of the RKKA units over the AFSR regiments, which was supposed to dictate an exclusively offensive nature in the White actions. As the battles of the autumn of 1919 showed, the ability of even the best units of the AFSR to conduct a successful defence was very limited, due to both their small numbers and their make-up.

It is noteworthy that the document was drafted and approved in May 1919, shortly before Lieutenant-General A. I. Denikin signed the “Moscow” directive of 20 July (3 July) 1919, which marked the beginning of the AFSR’s “drive on Moscow”. The units of the 1st Army Corps of the Volunteer Army, who were at the forefront of the AFSR offensive, despite their ignorance of this document, which was approved only for the 7th Infantry Division, nevertheless still followed it. On the one hand, the command staff of the AFSR was prompted to do so by their own “volunteer” experiences of the past months of the war. On the other hand, the 1st Infantry Division (later the Markov Infantry Division) was headed by Timanovskiy from June 1919, and Kapnin became the Chief of Staff of the Kornilov Shock Division (which played a key role in the White attack on Moscow in September 1919).

In addition to the attention to military aspects, the authors of the instruction constantly draw the attention of their subordinates to the key importance of the recruitment and the composition of the AFSR units. The document pays great deal of attention to the role of officers and the importance of their units for victory in the fighting. The Instruction clearly shows the major role of officers, both in manning the White armies of South Russia, and in their successes achieved in 1918-1919. Timanovskiy and Kapnin repeatedly – in relation to different units – repeat that officers are, “the backbone and the last reserve of the company commander, which is why the officers’ platoon should be committed very prudently”. The authors give directly opposite instructions with regard to those mobilised, and especially former Red Army, as the least reliable element in the units of their division – actually introducing a mutual guarantee system by pointing out that, “not only [the deserters’ and defectors’] families will be severely punished for their flight to the Bolsheviki, but a corresponding number of people from among their comrades will be shot.”

The original of the document is kept in the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA). The text is a typewritten copy, signed by Timanovskiy and Kapnin. The document contains minimal editing, which was taken into account during preparation for publication. In the publication of the text, obvious errors and misprints were corrected, abbreviations are explained, and selections in the text made by the authors were retained. The drawings were made by the authors of the publication on the basis of the original typescript. The date of approval of the document is given in the Julian calendar (the so-called “old style”), which was in force in 1918-1920 in the White controlled territories in south Russia.

Commander of the 7th Infantry Division

Major-General Timanovskiy

24 May 1919

Ust'-Ocheretinskiy<sup>1</sup> settlement

## Instructions

### The Peculiarities of Combat Operations in the Current Civil War

#### I. General instructions

Leaving in full force the instructions in the Field Regulations, these instructions give only some additional information, arising from the particular circumstances of the current war.

The best way to achieve the goal in war, i.e. victory, is offensive action, forcing the enemy to do what we want, not the other way round.

In a civil war, offensive actions are of outstanding importance, especially when the enemy now has a huge numerical advantage in forces.

The tried and tested regiments of the Volunteer Army have never worried about the enemy, and this is the key to their success. Battles of Volunteer units in which the enemy outnumber them 5 or 10 times are common, and the division's units must be prepared for this. The numerical superiority of the enemy makes it necessary for our units to occupy fronts far exceeding the stated norms. Under these conditions it is only possible to beat the enemy by attacking, otherwise we will be crushed by numbers. The audacity of the offensive gives moral superiority over the Bolsheviks, nullifying their constant numerical superiority.

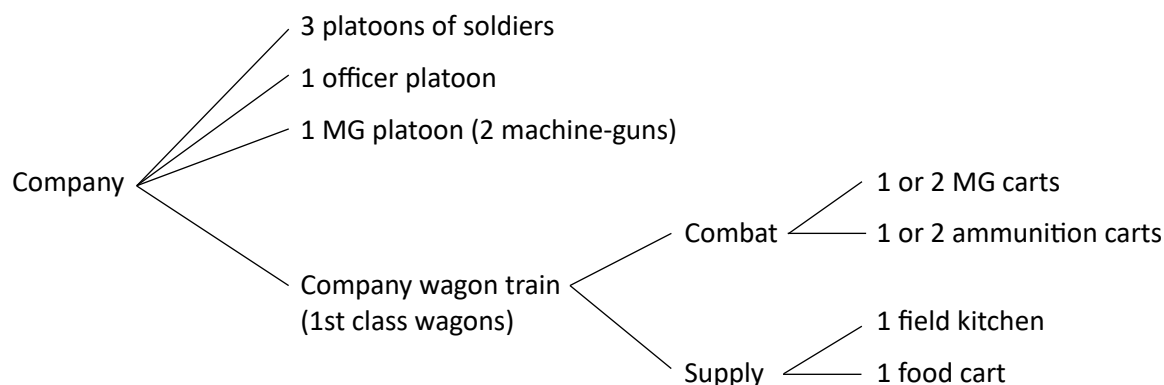
It must never be forgotten that in a civil war the enemy can come from any direction. Hence the necessity of complete vigilance and the importance of the watch service. Enemy movements may very often be in our rear: the importance of this should not be overestimated, and unit commanders must resolutely and decisively suppress any panic arising in such cases. If necessary, shooting without trial on the spot.

In view of the unreliability of mobilised men and former Red Army soldiers arriving as reinforcements, it is necessary to write down their addresses immediately on their arrival, warning them that not only their families will be severely punished if they flee to the Bolsheviks, but also that a corresponding number of their comrades will be shot.

#### II. Unit organisation

Because of the conditions in which we find ourselves there will always be exceptions, but the following should be a guideline:

a) A company should consist of:

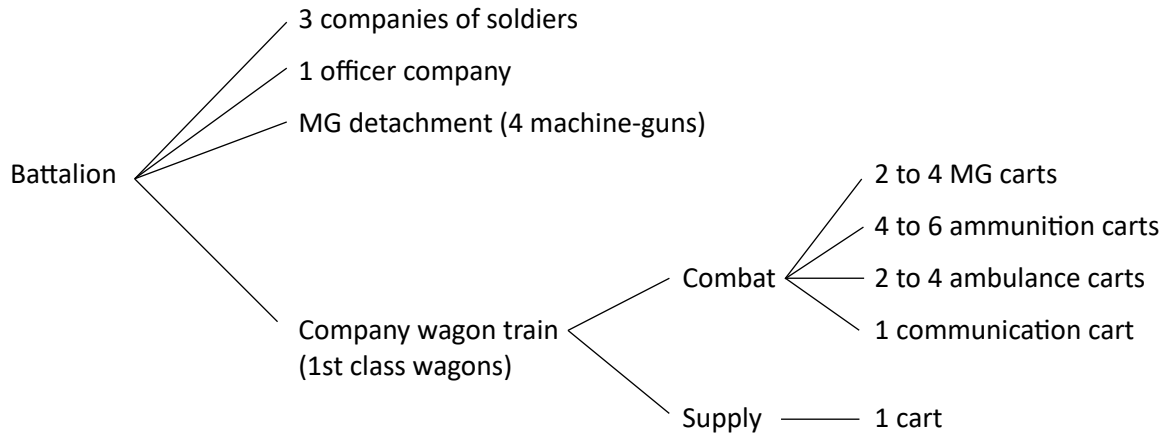


<sup>1</sup> Now Mospyne.

In the soldier platoons it is desirable for officers to occupy all the command positions. The ideal is from senior rank<sup>2</sup> upwards.

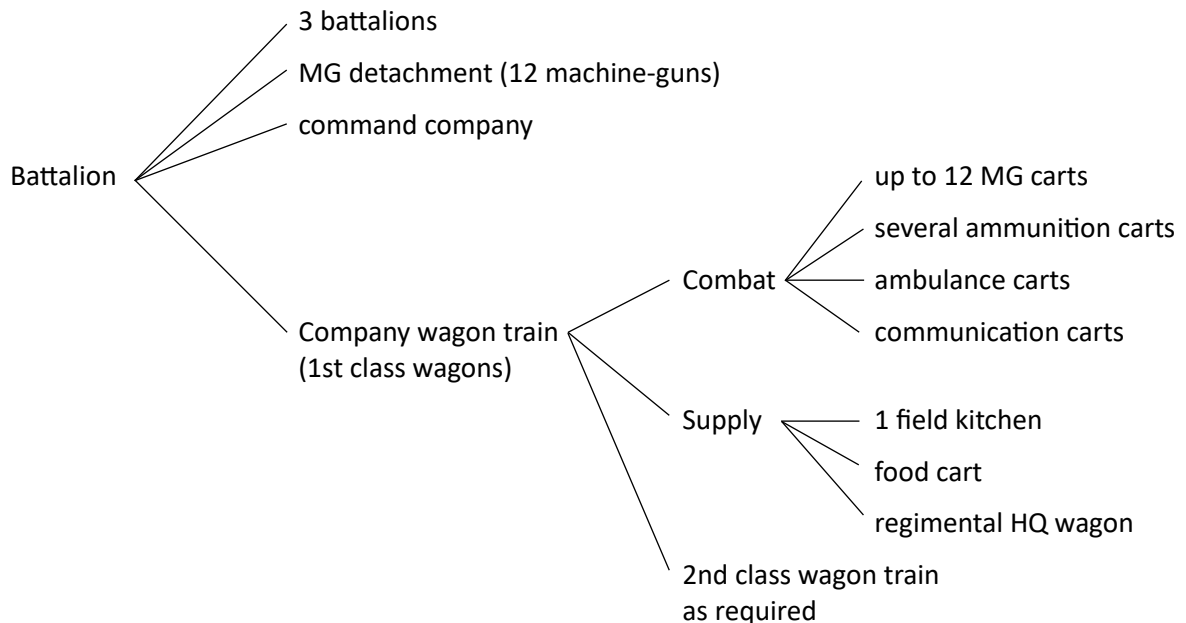
The officer and machine-gun platoons should consist exclusively of reliable men (officers, officer cadets, volunteers<sup>3</sup>). This is the backbone and the last reserve of the company commander, which is why the officer platoon should be deployed very prudently.

b) a battalion should consist of:



The principles of organisation are the same as in a company.

c) a regiment should consist of:



The command company is the regimental commander's support and his last reserve. It should consist of regimental veterans and all surplus officers. It must always be attached to the regimental combat HQ.

The regimental machine-gun team should also be predominantly in the hands of officers and other very reliable, steady men.

<sup>2</sup> This might be a reference for officers to hold from the level of what would be sergeant-major and above.

<sup>3</sup> The original distinguishes two different types of volunteer – those that might have been formally “volunteers” in the old imperial army (Вольноопределяющийся), which had some entry requirements and who might be promoted to officer, and those that had simply turned up to serve in the ranks (солдат-добровольцев).

### III. Unit Management

#### a) Reporting:

Superiors and subordinates, without exception, should inform each other as often as possible about the situation. Reports must always be labelled with the time and place of dispatch.

#### b) Communications:

Because of the enormous distances occupied by units, special attention must be paid to the maintenance of communication between units and headquarters, down to the smallest units. There should be all kinds: telephone, horse and foot. In view of the scarcity of telephone equipment, the regimental heads of communications should make a very careful reconnaissance for permanent telegraph and telephone lines: public, *zemstvo*<sup>4</sup> or private, in order to utilise them for communication. Every commander should always (in battle, on the march, at rest) have at least two men with him for communication, on foot or on horseback.

Everyone should remember that a message must be sent every time a unit reaches a new position.

#### c) Reconnaissance:

In view of the presence of unreliable elements (former Bolsheviks) in the units, reconnaissance should be conducted by the most reliable men and units.

In order to process all the information – obtained from reconnaissance, interviewing prisoners, defectors, or local residents – arriving at the regimental headquarters, and to report all that data to the division HQ in a timely manner, each regiment should have a designated officer in charge of intelligence at its HQ.

Special attention should be paid to the choice of this officer, who is not to combine the duties of the intelligence officer with the command of any unit.

The regimental intelligence officer should act in accordance with the appropriate regulations and carry out all instructions from the head of reconnaissance at brigade (division) headquarters.

### IV. Rest and its Security

#### a) Rest:

In all cases unit commanders should as much as possible seek ways to place men under a roof. To regulate this matter a permanent quartermaster, familiar with the size of the unit and its needs, should be appointed to each unit. Only well-slept and fed soldiers and officers can give their maximum effort, which is so necessary for battle.

Therefore, the first concern of unit commanders, after housing the men, should be to endeavour to feed them as soon as possible.

#### b) Guards:

In view of the reinforcement of units with Bolsheviks and other unreliable elements, the night watch should be posted only from the officer companies, or companies equivalent to them.

Due to the fact that one can never be sure of the loyalty of the local population, the necessity of immediate, close protection should not in doubt to anyone. Each unit, without waiting for any instructions, should place an immediate guard. The headquarters must be guarded by a sentry every day.

When spending the night in a populated area, patrols must be sent by the unit around the area occupied for the purpose of apprehending suspicious people.

The appointment of sentries on duty is required for every resting unit.

When occupying settlements formerly under Bolshevik rule, the unit commanders occupying them must, without asking for any instructions from above, immediately order the local population to surrender all

---

<sup>4</sup> A *zemstvo* was a local district body.

firearms, bladed weapons, and government equipment, as soon as possible (a few hours) under the threat of execution on the spot, without trial, for those whose weapons are later found during a search.

However, in ordering a search, it is necessary to prevent any looting and pillaging. The whole Volunteer Army will be judged by our units.

In every settlement the senior officer present must appoint a commandant for that place.

## **V. Marching and its Protection**

### **a) Marches:**

There should be complete order in a march. Everyone must be in their allotted places. The number of wagons is strictly limited, and they are to be used only by those who are supposed to ride them (drivers) and by people with the special permission of the unit commander (sick, wounded). All the men may be placed on carts, requisitioning them from the population, only in the case of especially long marches and then only by order of the division commander.

Wagons of the 1st Class (combat, economic) follow each unit, i.e. company after company, battalion after battalion, etc. Unless there are special orders, when a unit advances it should immediately be followed by its wagons.

If a battle is anticipated only the 1st Class combat wagons should follow their units; the others, along with the field kitchens, will follow at the tail of the column. The 2nd Class transports always follow at the tail of the entire column.

### **b) Guarding the March:**

Owing to the fact that the units in the current civil war have to operate on wide frontages, their columns are very often at a great distance from each other when marching. The march guard is therefore unable to observe all the roads that might possibly be taken by the enemy. A lateral guard is therefore of particular importance. In order to avoid being taken by surprise from the flank, it is necessary that all marching units send to the sides horse patrols following parallel to the column, at least 1-2 kilometres<sup>5</sup> distance. At the first opportunity a mounted reconnaissance should also be sent on any side roads parallel to our movement.

In the complete absence of cavalry, mounted side pickets (patrols) from among the orderlies and scouts should be sent: only as a last resort should patrols on foot be used. When encountering the enemy, the units guarding the marching column should not stop, but immediately look to the enemy's flanks to attack it, using bold action, as they are often not very well positioned.

### **c) Movement to Shooting:**

This has assumed exceptional importance in the Civil War. With our forces being much smaller in most cases, it is only by mutual assistance and vigorous offensive actions that a crushing blow can be dealt to the enemy.

If shooting is heard from the area of a neighbouring column, the commander of a marching unit shall immediately (while continuing his main task) send out reconnaissance, then take decisive action based on the result of that. If there is the slightest possibility of hitting the flank or rear of an enemy unit fighting a neighbouring column, it is necessary to support that column to break the enemy.

Of course, this decision must be reported to the directly superior officer.

## **VI. Actions in Combat**

### **a) General instructions:**

The utmost determination, courage, skill, and perseverance are required of all commanders and units.

---

<sup>5</sup> The original uses *versts* throughout, but a *verst* is almost exactly a kilometre.

The desire for offensive action must be the basis of every encounter with the enemy.

If defensive action is required then, having delayed the enemy and put oneself in order and regrouped, it is necessary to return to the offensive with a strike group.

Commanders, starting from the most junior, must remember that for any task a uniform blow spread out across the entire front line does not give good results. It is always necessary, having occupied most of the front with small forces (having strengthened them with machine guns and artillery), to hit the enemy's most sensitive point (e.g. flank, escape route, commanding height, etc.) with all the other forces (a fist).

A breakthrough of the front, and an extremely energetic one at that, under such conditions immediately hits at the morale of the Bolsheviks – in most cases, they will begin to withdraw and against our inactive sections of the line.

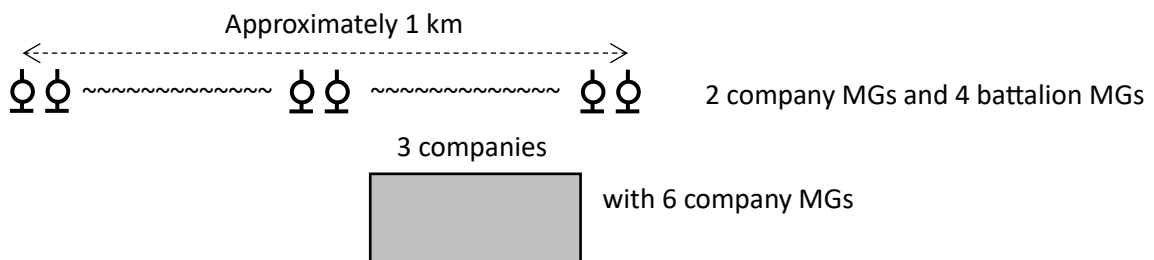
Having knocked back the enemy units, it is necessary to pursue them relentlessly with infantry, cavalry, armoured cars, and armoured trains, trying to cut off their escape path and force them to lay down their arms.

When pursuing the enemy, however, it is necessary to remember that our units should be put in order as soon as possible: all unnecessary units in the first line should be pulled back and formed into columns to form another fist, in case the enemy goes on to the counterattack, and in general to protect from surprises, of any sort.

*Scheme for the implementation of a strike "fist":*

**Example for a battalion of infantry.**

**Sketch 1**

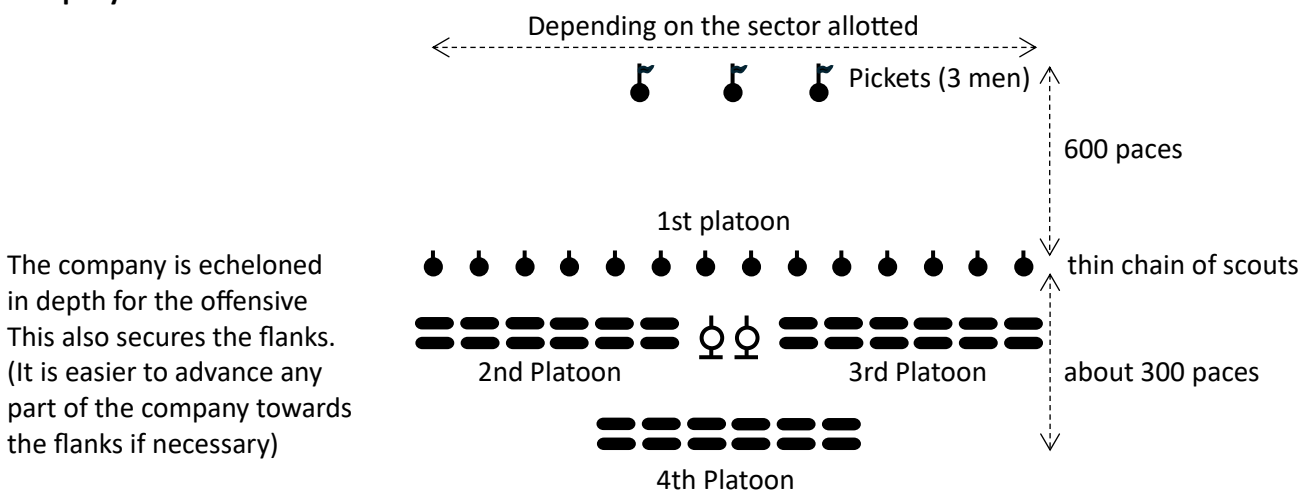


**b) Combat order:**

Example diagrams of the offensive deployments for companies, battalions, and regiments are given below. These battle orders were used by General Timanovskiy during his command of General Markov's Regiment.

**Company**

**Sketch 2**

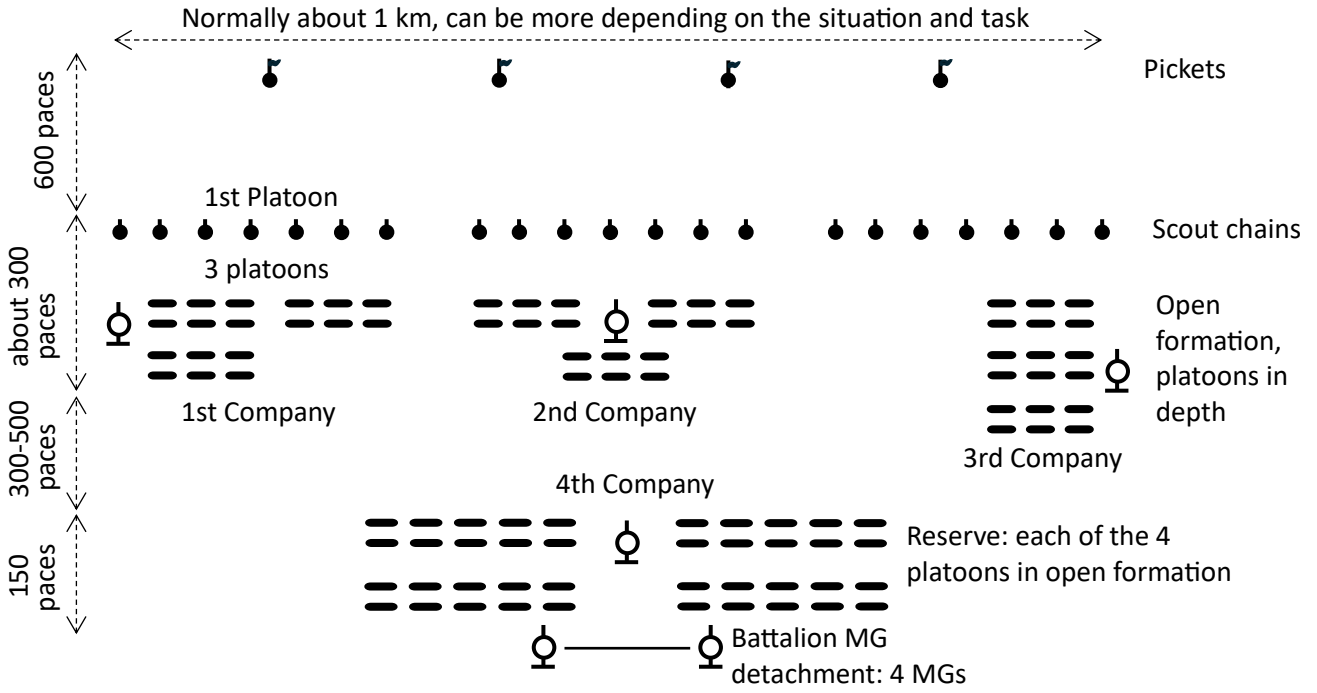


The company is echeloned in depth for the offensive. This also secures the flanks. (It is easier to advance any part of the company towards the flanks if necessary)

The platoons are in two lines. The men are separated by 15 paces from each other, and the lines 15 m apart. The machine guns (2 per company) are between the platoons, or on the flank when that is threatened.

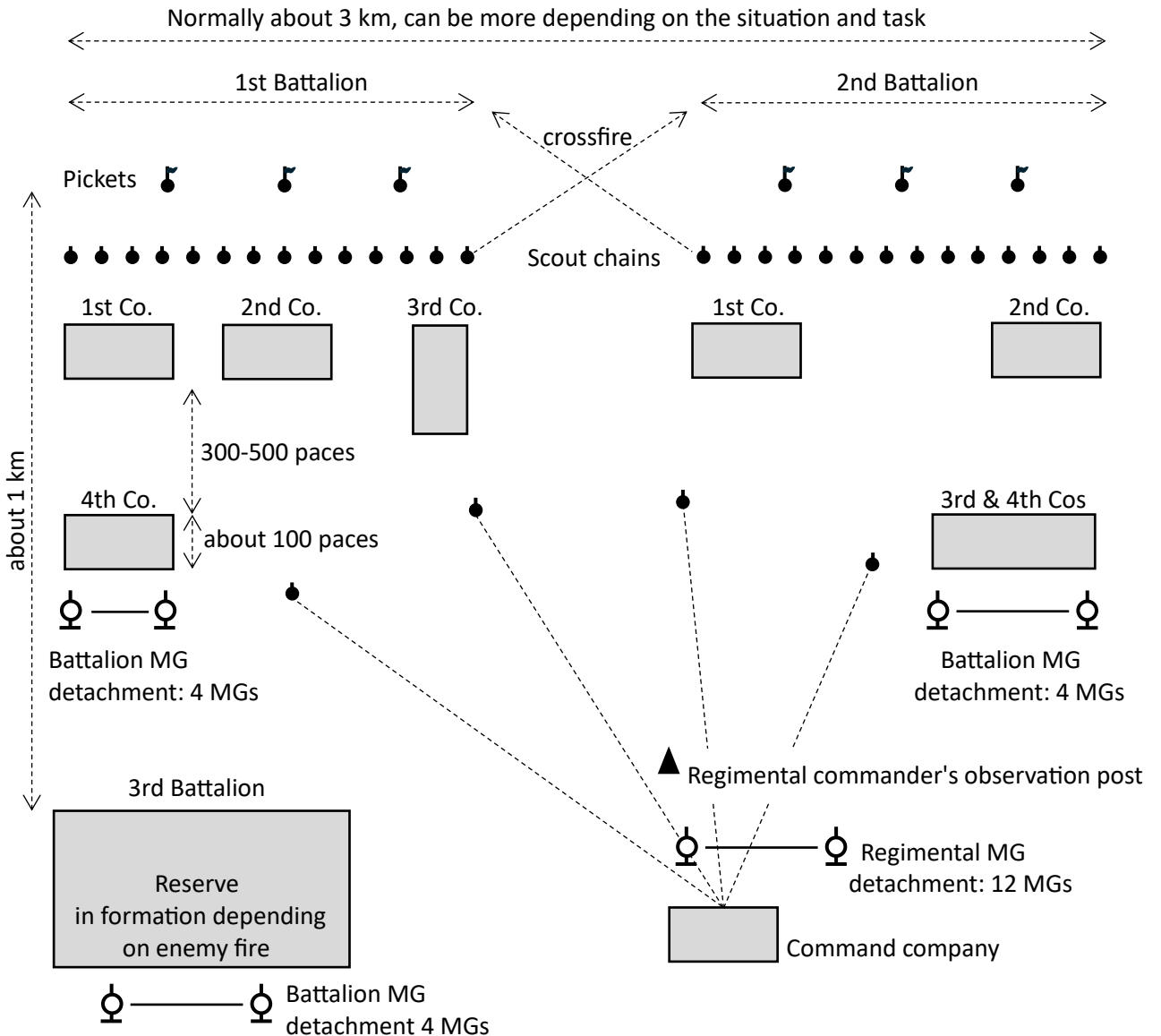
**Battalion**

**Sketch 3**



**Regiment**

**Sketch 4**





Of course, the schemes given are only approximate, and must be adjusted according to the terrain, enemy fire, the allotted mission, etc. For example, altering the number of units in the first line and in the reserve, such as stretching one unit over a wide frontage and concentrating the rest on a short frontage to deliver a crushing blow.

All commanders must keep the most careful watch over their flanks. Regardless of if cavalry have been sent, it is necessary to send forward observation posts (from a company) and pickets (from a battalion or regiment) to the flanks, for timely warning of possible danger from that direction.

### **The Offensive:**

**Infantry:** Once an attack has begun, it should be conducted in the most vigorous manner possible, so as to get as quickly as possible close enough to the enemy to strike. The sooner the unit reaches the enemy, the less time it will be under his fire – usually not distinguished by marksmanship – and the fewer losses it will suffer. An attack should be launched at the same time along the front line, both for the leading thin chain and the following waves. This is achieved either by setting a certain time for the attack or a signal, for example, a high artillery burst.

All commanders should have in reserve, if possible, reliable units (officers) and also machine guns from the battalion and regimental machine-gun detachments, both to support the front line and to coerce unreliable companies.

It is recommended to have at least a few machine guns from the regimental machine-gun detachment on sprung or at least simple light vehicles (*tachankas*) in order to be able to quickly throw them together with their crews at the right moment in the right direction.

Near the regimental commander's combat headquarters, i.e. in the immediate rear of the regiment, he should have at his disposal the command company and at least some of the regimental machine-gun detachment.

The slightest attempt to escape to the rear or to the enemy must be nipped in the bud by shooting the men on the spot without trial, without distinction of rank and seniority of the men fleeing.

**Artillery:** the artillery should not as a rule take up concealed positions with distant observation posts. With the current unreliability of telephones and the rapidity of the fighting, unit commanders must require artillerymen to position their batteries as close to the infantry as possible, even if not in hidden, but only camouflaged positions. Observation posts should be as close to the battery as possible, so that in the case of a break in the wire commands can be transmitted by voice through two or three men.

The normal distance of batteries from the advancing infantry is about one kilometre. As the infantry moves forward, the artillery – without waiting for any instructions from above – should move forward in columns (guns, platoons) to support the infantry.

In the current war armoured cars, armoured trains and tanks have become very important. Only artillery fire at the closest ranges, without worrying that the gun is thereby in danger, can be counted on for success when fighting such an enemy, because only at the close ranges does a gun have the required accuracy.

Battery commanders are to maintain at all times the closest possible liaison with their infantry.

When artillery is firing in preparation for an infantry attack, and indeed in general, the artillery should not distribute fire evenly along the entire frontage, but should concentrate its fire on the most important points and targets.

### **Defence and withdrawal:**

**Infantry:** A defence should be based mainly on artillery and machine gun fire, trying to hold as strong an infantry reserve as possible for counter-attacks.

In case of forced withdrawal, machine guns and infantry from the reserve should be brought forward to a designated line and under their cover the units should be withdrawn from the front by rolling back, arranging them behind that line.

**Artillery:** Artillery during defence and withdrawal must occupy its positions in two lines and also withdraw by rolling back, so as to not leave their infantry without artillery support even for a minute.

### **c) Supply of Ammunition:**

A store of ammunition (rifle cartridges and artillery shells) should be set up at Brigade HQ, from which ammunition should be issued only on written requests from units.

Although there is no shortage of rifle ammunition at present, all commanders must require their subordinates to use it sparingly; those responsible for indiscriminate use of ammunition must be immediately brought before a field court.

Each separate unit should have its own ammunition store, from which it can issue ammunition to the battalions only with notes from the battalion commander (in extreme cases, a company commander), because experience in this war has shown that men claiming to seek ammunition without notes are evading the battlefield. Such persons, as stated above, should be shot on the spot without trial.

Battalion commanders should also have their own ammunition reserve following the battalion on wagons, until the last possible opportunity.

### **d) Evacuation of the Wounded:**

Each separate unit must have its own forward dressing station close to the regimental battle headquarters during the battle. The dressing station must be set up on the road the regiment was using, not away from it, as wounded men will always go back along a familiar road and will not look for a dressing station anywhere else.

When fighting along a railway line, division headquarters will order hospital carriages to be brought as close to the front line as possible.

### **e) Carts in battle:**

First Class carts – combat carts (MG, ammunition, ambulances, communications) – must follow their units up to the last possible opportunity.

Supply wagons – kitchens, food stores – should be in the immediate rear of the unit in one place, under the command of one person, in order to keep them in hand at all times.

Second Class transports: Unless there are special instructions from division headquarters, is at the discretion of the individual unit commander.

## **VII. Night actions**

These should be avoided as far as possible in view of the mix of elements that now form our units.

At night in trenches, each company should occupy their area with a thin chain of men, with machine guns, keeping the rest of the company in close proximity to the chain.

## **VIII. Mutual Duties of the Arms**

All branches of the army are obliged to support and help each other. The infantry, however, has the hardest job in battle, which is why all, without exception, must help it to achieve its tasks.



The artillery must prepare the way for the infantry with its fire, without cease, which may require risking taking up open forward positions.

The brilliant actions of the batteries of the 1st Infantry Division under the command of Colonel Mionchinsky, who fell at his post, may serve as an example.

The cavalry must show the greatest activity. In this war there is full scope for manoeuvre. Often a few horsemen with a machine gun, or even without it, galloping into the Bolsheviks' rear, will decide the fate of the battle in our favour.

Mass mounted attacks have again found their place on the battlefield. The cavalry actions of Generals Shkuro and Wrangel are known to everyone.

Armoured trains provide powerful support for the infantry, provided their command staff have courage. The infantry, however, should remember that a train which retires when the enemy's artillery shoots at it is not at all a reason for the infantry to also withdraw.

The train, having moved quickly out of the shelled area, must once more move forward to support its infantry.

Armoured vehicles are expected to be as bold as possible, provided the roads are good.

Tanks have until now only been at our disposal. Their appearance at the front has greatly enhanced our prestige and undermined the spirit and resistance of the enemy.

The possibility of their appearance against us cannot be excluded, of course. In that case, our artillery must show the greatest dedication, as only a direct hit can put a tank out of action.

This was drawn up by the acting Chief of Staff of the 7th Infantry Division on the orders of the commander of the 7th Infantry Division

Captain of the General Staff K. L. Kapnin

26 May 1919

Ust'-Ocheretinsky settlement.

