

## RECORD OF INTERVIEW

**Subject:** Gen.-Lt. Geli Viktorovich Batenin

**Position:** Gen. Batenin began his career as an artillery officer and transferred in the 1960s to the Strategic Rocket Forces. In the late 1970s and through the mid-1980s, General Batenin worked for Marshal of the Soviet Union Sergei F. Akhromeev in various roles when the latter was chief of the General Staff Main Operations Directorate and then as First Deputy Chief of the General Staff under Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov.

**Date:** Friday, August 6, 1993

**Place:** McLean, VA

**Interviewer:** John G. Hines

**Language:** Russian

**Prepared:** Based on notes

**Q:** Over the past 3 years or so, I have interviewed several senior military people as well as from military industry and the Central Committee.<sup>4</sup> I was able to interview your former chief, Marshal Akhromeev twice and met several times with General Danilevich.

**A:** Danilevich? You know, he wrote the three-volume work for the General Staff on the Strategy of Deep-Operations, or at least he was responsible for the work. He directed the effort, very actively. The book covered everything, the entire picture of possible future war. It began with the anti-space operation [*protivo-kosmicheskaiia operatsiia*] against incoming missiles, the anti-air operation [*protivo-vozdushnaia operatsiia*] against your bombers and then the deep operations against NATO to the full depth of the theater. "Operational-strategic depth" referred to the entire 1,200 km depth of the European theater, to the beaches at the western edge of the continent. The theory of deep operations in Danilevich's work envisioned great depths of military action [*voennye deistviia*] because of the range of weapons, weapons platforms and the speed of movement of the forces. The initial operation was expected to take 5 to 7 days and to carry the counter-offensive 500 km. At that point we expected that we would have lost half of our tanks and that half of the remaining force would have outrun its logistics support. Because so much of the force would be exhausted, early, decisive success over the enemy was very important.

**Q:** What scenarios for the beginning of war were assumed in the book on strategic operations?

**A:** Missile strikes from the U.S. and the initiation of an offensive by NATO. The main objective of initial operations by Soviet Forces and the Warsaw Pact were to break up [*sorvat'*] the NATO offensive throughout the depth of NATO's forces and NATO's rear. Included in the concept of breaking up and stopping NATO's offensive was the

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<sup>4</sup> Central Committee will be either spelled out or abbreviated as CC throughout the interviews.

preemptive destruction of as many launch systems and aircraft as possible as well as associated control systems.

Q: Was the preemption to be with the use of conventional or nuclear weapons?

A: That would depend. We expected NATO to launch nuclear strikes at some point. If we did not detect preparation on the part of NATO to launch nuclear weapons immediately, we would attack launch platforms and storage using conventional weapons. If we detected preparation by NATO to launch nuclear strikes, and we believed we would know when this was happening, we would want to strike NATO's launch and control systems with nuclear strikes of our own. We had confidence in our knowledge of when NATO was preparing for nuclear launch. We would detect mating of warheads to missiles and uploading of nuclear bombs and artillery. We listened to the hourly circuit verification signal on your nuclear release communications systems and believed we would recognize a release order. Under these conditions when we detected NATO actually preparing to launch, we would want to preempt your launch with our own nuclear strikes.

Q: Did the General Staff consider selective use of nuclear weapons [*vyborochnye udary*] under these conditions, especially if it was clear that NATO would be attacking with only a few, say ten, nuclear weapons?

A: This would be very difficult to execute. It would be difficult just to launch on time against NATO preparation even with a strike against all or most of your nuclear capable systems and it is doubtful that we would attempt to restrict the strike under those conditions. More important, Ogarkov was very much opposed to the idea of limited nuclear war [*ogranichennaia iadernaia voina*] in any form because he believed it would benefit NATO.

Q: How?

A: By making nuclear strikes more likely, by making NATO believe that the Soviet Union might fight a limited nuclear war. A limited nuclear war was more likely to occur than an unlimited nuclear war. And Ogarkov believed that, once begun, limited nuclear use would almost certainly escalate to massive use. He tried to maintain, therefore, the posture that in the event of war massive use of nuclear weapons was both undesirable but unavoidable once any nuclear weapons were used. Akhromeev, by the way, was more open to at least considering situations where selected strikes might be made.

Q: Where did this grand concept of the strategy of deep operations come from?

A: I believe the SS-20 made it possible, that the SS-20 created the environment in which strategists could think about war on such a large scale. The SS-20 had a very low vulnerability, high accuracy and a great range, not only over all of Europe but over the Middle and Near East and much of the Mediterranean. Under the roof of the SS-20 it was possible to think about deep operations. There was a certain irony in that by 1987, many in the General Staff thought that all of the components necessary for conducting deep operations were in place at last, that we were ready that spring. We conducted games and exercises. At the same time, in December of that year we signed the INF Treaty. Gorbachev had his agenda and the General Staff its agenda. Gorbachev had seen General Danilevich's three-volume book on strategy. He even had a copy but he never read it. He was moving in another direction, eliminating the weapons that were the basis for executing such a strategy.

Q: When did these various elements come together; that is, the capabilities of the SS-20 and the development of the strategy of deep operations?

A: The late 1970s, it began to take shape in the late 1970s. The SS-20 was being deployed and Danilevich and others in his collective were developing concepts.

Q: Ogarkov took over in 1977?

A: Yes, this was important. Ogarkov fostered this kind of thinking, very actively.

Q: Relations between Ogarkov and Ustinov. Marshal Akhromeev wrote in his book, *Through The Eyes of a Marshal and a Diplomat*, that by 1982 relations were so bad that it was difficult for the General Staff to function effectively.

A: Yes, relations by 1982 were extremely strained. A major issue was PVO [*protivo-vozdushnaia oborona*—Air-Defense]. Ogarkov wanted to eliminate the PVO as a service, put the air element in the Air Forces and subordinate ground elements to the Ground Forces. He believed Ground Forces PVO [*PVO sukhoputnykh voisk*] was an effective arrangement that provided reliable air defense of forces under an integrated command. He wanted to broaden that principle. He also believed he could thereby eliminate an entire service headquarters apparatus. Ustinov wanted to retain that old structure.

Q: Was this the only disagreement?

A: No. There were broader differences. Ogarkov believed that the types and numbers of weapons produced should be determined by the military customers [*zakazchiki*] and Ustinov believed that such decisions were the business of the Communist Party,<sup>5</sup> Defense Council, and the Military Industrial Commission (VPK), that is, the industrialists.

Q: Was the General Staff-MoD deadlock as bad as was described by Akhromeev?

A: Absolutely. Things got done, in fact, because Ustinov treated Akhromeev as the *de facto* Chief of Staff. After 1982 he acted, in effect, as the Second Chief of the General Staff rather than as the First Deputy. Ustinov would communicate with Akhromeev rather than with Ogarkov. Akhromeev tried to keep Ogarkov informed, at first, and then told him less and less because it caused more problems than it solved. I was with Akhromeev in his office once when Ogarkov called to ask about some decision he had heard about from another source. It related to a change in organization in the GSFG (Group of Soviet Forces Germany) as I recall. Akhromeev, who was involved in the decision by Ustinov, was very uncomfortable. I heard him confirming the decision and explaining why he had not informed Ogarkov, that he had intended to brief him but other events had intervened, etc. This was a very difficult situation.

Q: There have been various reports, the most well known from former KGB agent Oleg Gordievsky and published openly in England, that there was a period of great tension in the Soviet Government in the early 1980s. Specifically, between about 1981 and 1984, the MoD, KGB, and others, believed that there was a high probability that the U.S. and NATO were preparing to attack the Warsaw Pact and the USSR, including with

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<sup>5</sup> Communist Party of the Soviet Union will be either spelled out or abbreviated as CPSU throughout the interviews.

nuclear weapons. The whole problem of increased threat was identified under the acronym RlāN [*Raketno-ladernoe Napadenie*].<sup>6</sup>

A: Yes. I am very familiar with RlāN. There was a great deal of tension in the General Staff at that time and we worked long hours, longer than usual. I don't recall a period more tense since the Caribbean Crisis in 1962.

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<sup>6</sup> RlāN was an acronym that the Soviets used to describe a special period of tension between 1980 and 1984 when they reported greatly heightened expectations of a nuclear attack from the U.S. See Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), pp. 501-507.