

The basis of the Soviet Mission Order can be traced back to the First World War in Germany. The German military saw a need to provide for a more flexible battle field command structure. What they developed is known as *Auftragstaktik*. The literal translation is “order tactics,” however the name itself is a little misleading. This is not about tactics at all- *Auftragstaktik* it is a methodology used to pass orders to subordinate units and give those commanders the guidance needed to complete those orders.

To understand the fundamental changes that *Auftragstaktik* brought to the German military, it is important to understand the older style of command in use when *Auftragstaktik* was implemented. In the prevailing method of the time, a commander issued orders in excruciating detail to his subordinates. Subordinates had little or no leeway in accomplishing their mission. Additionally, the intent of the mission was barely explained (or not explained at all) to subordinate officers, and line troops knew nearly nothing of the reasons for doing what they were doing. When an officer was killed in combat, his unit found itself adrift, with no guidance and no understanding of what they needed to do. It was not considered important, or even desirable, for subordinates to understand the full extent of what was going on- from an operational security perspective and even for reasons of discipline.

In contrast, this “new-fangled” idea of *Auftragstaktik* stressed the individual initiative of subordinate officers in accomplishing the intent of the mission. Furthermore, line troops were told more about what the mission was and why it was being undertaken. In short, *Auftragstaktik* said that a subordinate leader had not only the right but literally the duty to completely disobey a direct order if in doing so he was faithfully attempting to complete his mission within the scope of the orders he was given.

This was a bold and revolutionary idea, but several key elements must exist within an organization to make *Auftragstaktik* work. Subordinate leaders need to understand their *commander's intent*. That is, they must thoroughly understand the desired result of the mission. They must understand the mission's purpose- the key tasks that must be carried out. Most importantly, they must be given a clear mental picture of the mission's desired end state. Finally, leaders must be trained to think and act independently within the constraints of their commander's intent.

Another important concept in a force utilizing *Auftragstaktik* is *commander's presence*. A subordinate officer needs to understand how his commander thinks and acts in various situations. Is he a cautious thinker or is he a bold attacker? Using the direction provided by commander's intent and the guidance provided by the mental image formed by the commander's presence, the subordinate soldier was empowered to think and act independently on the battlefield as needed to complete his mission.

In the First World War, the Germans' new doctrine yielded immediate and tangible results. Units ordered to attack a point in support of a larger action had the leeway to simply bypass a minor point of resistance instead of bleeding themselves dry attacking machine gun nests that had no direct bearing on the action at hand. When units pierced Allied lines and were in a position to exploit their success, they no longer stopped and waited for orders, but instead took further action. When ordered to defend, units no longer allowed themselves to be surrounded and taken piecemeal, and instead took action to remain a cohesive fighting force. In short, Auftragstaktik worked, and it was showing on the battlefield. Obviously, Auftragstaktik came too late to make a decisive difference to the German Army, but it certainly was remembered.

The concepts of Auftragstaktik were incorporated into the Red Army during the inter-war years. In the 1920s and 1930s there was a large exchange of military, political and industrial ideas between Germany and the Soviet Union. This was a revival of Peter the Great's desire to integrate Russia more closely into the rest of Europe. In this exchange, German military officers attended Soviet schools and Soviet officers attended German schools. This provided for a sharing of ideas that improved both nations' militaries.

Let's take a look Auftragstaktik in historical practice within the Red Army.

In 1941 the friendly exchange between Germany and the Soviet Union ended when the German Army invaded the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. Like every army hit by the German Army during the early stages of the Second World War, the Red Army was wholly outclassed and suffered horrific losses. Entire units were smashed by the blitzkrieg. This did not mean, however, that resistance was smashed. By using decentralized command methodology dictated by Auftragstaktik, small unit commanders in the Soviet Army were able to act on the commander's intent provided to them. Unlike the previous armies that the Germans attacked, the Russians were not completely paralyzed without orders from higher. This caused the German Army to divert resources away from their primary objectives to deal with these pockets of resistance, and laid the groundwork for the partisan units that would harass the Germans until they were driven out of Russia several years later. This is an example of how Auftragstaktik methodology can help when a unit is faced with *catastrophic failure*. Because subordinate commanders are aware of their commander's presence and intent, they are able to continue to meet the intent of the mission even when all variables have turned against them.

In the later war years, the Red Army was pushing the German Army back across Eastern Europe and frequently found itself dealing with the oddly similar problem of *catastrophic success* when a major attack would break local resistance and suddenly find large areas of nearly undefended terrain poised before them. In a centralized command with no allowance for initiative at lower command levels, catastrophic success can lead to an army sitting in an exposed

position- ripe for a counterattack, or for the loss of a crucial point in a battle where an enemy weakness can be exploited. By 1944, the Red Army was driving the German Army back to Berlin at an alarming rate. This led to many cases of catastrophic success. In those cases, the ability of subordinate commanders to act upon changing conditions to continue to meet the commander's intent and complete the goals of the mission ultimately helped to lead the Red Army to victory.

How is Auftragstaktik able to help in both cases- catastrophic failure and catastrophic success? Maintaining initiative! The flexibility that this empowering methodology provides to the subordinate commander allows him to act and react at a much faster pace, thereby maintaining the momentum built up through successful actions.

We have learned the history of Soviet Mission Order methodology- now let's take a look at how it is implemented within the Soviet Army.

The initial component of a Soviet order is called the *Warning Order* or WARNO. It is short and simple. The Warning Order serves merely to alert the troops of impending action and delegate tasks directly related to mission planning.

The main component is the *Mission Order* or MISORD- the meat of this methodology. The mission order spells out the mission and its goals. It is designed to premeditate the fight as much as possible. It attempts to eliminate decision points that can cost initiative, or in other words, cause a unit to lose its momentum. The MISORD clearly lays out the course of action that the unit will take and the desired end result. Even with this level of premeditation, Soviet methodology based on Auftragstaktik still offers "boots on the ground" flexibility in order to achieve the mission's clearly stated goals.

The WARNO is constructed only of "Who, What, When, and Where." It is very short and to the point. The "Who" section covers who is tasked with gathering information to support the commander in developing the MISORD. The "What" section covers what the unit is going to do. For instance, a unit may be tasked with a night reconnaissance mission. Next is the "When" portion. This is not when the mission is to be conducted- it simply informs the unit when the MISORD will be issued. The "Where" section is likewise not about the actual mission objective- it only informs the unit of the location where the MISORD will be issued.

The MISORD is broken into five parts – Situation, Concept of Operations, Algorithms, Service & Support, and Communications.

"Situation" is the section in which the world around the unit is discussed. It covers the disposition of friendly and enemy forces in the target area as well as

the overall tactical situation. In this section, a unit learns about what other units will do. It lays out the larger picture that the unit will play a part in.

“Concept of Operations” informs the unit commander of the mission’s details and goals. The commander’s intent is explained in this section. The mission’s purpose, its key tasks (both immediate and subsequent), and the expected end state of the mission are clearly communicated. Echelonment of forces (another key component of Soviet Army doctrine) is also explained in this section.

“Scheme of Maneuver” details how the unit is to move, as well as contingencies in the event of catastrophic success or catastrophic failure. Triggers for enacting these contingencies are discussed so all team members know when to put them into action.

“Algorithms” is an important section for the success of a mission. This includes, at a minimum, meteorological data- sun/moon rise and set times and weather conditions. This information is crucial for proper mission planning. Depending on factors such as weather, expected mission duration, and whether the mission is to occur during day or night, it may be necessary to include food, water, or visibility algorithms. This section helps determine what supplies are needed and what operational conditions the unit are expected to encounter.

These pieces of data are then used in conjunction with *Norms* to plan the mission. Norms are known measurements for various tasks within a mission. An example of a Norm a unit commander might utilize is how far a soldier loaded for extended patrol can march overland, at night, in one hour. Once Norms data has been compiled, a unit commander knows how long it should take to complete a given portion of the mission and what equipment his troops require to be successful.

“Service and Support” is largely a response to the output of the algorithm section. It contains information on resupply times, additional assets, if available, and special equipment that will be issued to the unit. For example, this section may indicate how many night vision systems of a specific type will be issued. In addition, this section may contain information on friendly units that may act as a backup or reserve, or units that may be important regarding transportation or passing of friendly lines during execution of the mission.

“Communications” is the final portion of a MISORD. In this section primary communications assets are identified. This may include types and numbers of radios to be used, relay stations available in the area, and assigned frequencies. SOI (if used) is distributed at this time. Additionally, this section describes any visual or sound based signals such as flares, whistles, light signals, or passwords for passage of lines.

A unit commander that has been issued a MISORD possesses the knowledge he requires to prepare his unit for the mission. He may delegate specific tasks to his subordinates, such as special equipment procurement, contacting and coordinating with support units, or gathering additional weather and terrain details. Once any tasks related to the mission have been delegated, the unit commander begins planning his mission.

“But I thought the commander received a MISORD- isn’t the mission already planned?”

To answer this question, it is critical to understand the core concepts of Auftragstaktik. Note that the MISORD includes a wealth of information, but many specific elements are left to the unit commander. The Concept of Operations and Scheme of Maneuver have been explained, but the unit commander must form a detailed plan from the information given to him in the MISORD. For example, the unit commander has been informed of his objective and general route of travel, but it is up to him to plan each leg of his unit’s movement. Additionally, if the unit is to attack a point, the commander must decide how to orchestrate the attack. He may plan to utilize artillery assets. Will he commit his entire force to a frontal assault, or will he split his force into maneuver elements to flank or split the enemy? Contingencies have been outlined in the MISORD, but what specific actions will be taken in the event of catastrophic success or failure? How might a surprise encounter with a mobile enemy force change the plan?

These are some of the questions a unit commander must answer while planning his unit’s mission. It becomes apparent that it is necessary for the commander to delegate certain tasks to subordinates, as discussed earlier- the unit commander’s job is to decide how to accomplish his commander’s goals.

Finally, after the unit commander is finished interpreting the MISORD, he writes a MISORD for his unit. After all, Auftragstaktik requires each part of a unit to possess a clear picture of the mission! Platoon leaders, and even rifle section leaders, must understand *their* commander’s intent. This dissemination of information is a fundamental difference between the Soviet orders system and the older, strictly hierarchical system.

The following example is a typical MISORD issued to troops at East Wind. It demonstrates that the MISORD system works equally well for large formations and small units- the specifics are tailored to the unit, but the MISORD template stays the same.

## **EXAMPLE WARNO**

27 July 1989 1745 (Local)  
7 Rota 5IRB 27<sup>th</sup> Guards MRD  
To: 1<sup>st</sup> Section 7 Rota  
WARNO

1st Section will be conducting a movement to contact mission into enemy territory. MISORD will be issued at 1930 hours in the Mess Hall.

### **EXAMPLE MISORD**

27 July 1989 1900 (Local)  
7 Rota 5IRB 27<sup>th</sup> Guards MRD  
To: 1<sup>st</sup> Section 7 Rota  
MISORD

### **SITUATION**

Increased enemy patrolling activity in our sector has led us to believe that the enemy may be massing a small reserve force across the border from our position. Increased soft skinned vehicular traffic has been observed in addition to patrols by light armored scout cars of the Mk2 Ferret type. We believe the main enemy force to be made up of an American MP Company supported by a British Hussars platoon. Friendly situation is stable. In addition to 5th IRB, the 45<sup>th</sup> Mabuta Guards hold this sector so there is little immediate threat of offensive enemy action.

### **CONCEPT OF OPERATION**

7 Rota will be conducting a shallow offensive push into enemy territory with the intention of seeking out and decisively engaging the enemy's reserve force. 1<sup>st</sup> Section will lead this push by conducting a dismounted movement to contact along phase line RIGA.

The purpose of 1<sup>st</sup> Sections mission is to seek out and decisively engage the enemy.

Mission Start Time: 2230 (Local)

### **Echelonment of Forces:**

First Echelon: 7 Rota 1<sup>st</sup> Section  
Second Echelon: 7 Rota 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sections

### **Immediate Tasks:**

Cross the border, attracting enough attention to draw the enemy's interest and draw the enemy into the fight.

**Subsequent Tasks:**

Maintain contact with the enemy at all costs until follow on forces can be brought to bear.

**End State:**

First Echelon comprised of 1<sup>st</sup> Section engages main enemy force and forces them to commit all assets to engagement. Second Echelon comprised of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sections arrives via motorized transport and moves to flank or cut off retreat of enemy forces. Upon elimination or shattering of enemy forces, all 7 Rota elements are to establish defensive posture and await further orders.

**SCHEME OF MANEUVER**

1<sup>st</sup> Section will dismount and depart on foot from Point PLEASANT on bearing 1650 mil. 1<sup>st</sup> Section will cross the border near the intersection of Hwy 11 and the abandoned railway. 1<sup>st</sup> Section will then advance to contact with main enemy force, currently believed to occupy area surrounding Point BLOWFLY. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sections shall depart 2.5 hours later (0100 28 July) via motorized transport.

**Contingencies:**

In the event that 1<sup>st</sup> Section encounters only light resistance, it should be rapidly eliminated and the mission continued. In the event of encountering a greater force than both the First and Second Echelons should prudently engage, 1<sup>st</sup> Section shall fall back along a route that will screen the Second Echelon from detection. The Second Echelon shall not be used to cover the retreat of the First Echelon.

In the event that 1<sup>st</sup> Section is unable to locate and engage enemy forces by 0430, 1<sup>st</sup> Section will inform 7 Rota HQ of that fact and continue conducting reconnaissance in force to locate enemy forces. Second Echelon will continue to hold position and avoid detection, maintaining posture allowing rapid response upon receiving signal from First Echelon.

**ALGORITHM**

**Meteorological:**

See attached tabular weather tables. Moon is 76% visible disk. Moonrise is at 16:00 hours with moon transit occurring at approximately the time 1<sup>st</sup> Section crosses the border. Vision algorithm shows an unaided vision distance of 22 meters and 1<sup>st</sup> gen starlight vision distance of approximately 44 meters.

**Service and Support:**

1<sup>st</sup> Section shall be transported to embarkation point via one 7 Rota Gaz-69 truck. 1<sup>st</sup> Section shall draw the following from supply: 2 ration packs per man, 3 PN-1 night vision units, 1 1PN58 night vision scope, 1 RPG-, 1 flare gun with 2 green star and 2 red rain flares. No medevac forward of the FEBA will be available. No artillery assets are allotted to 7 Rota.

**Communication:**

7 Rota Command Net: Primary Frequency is 44.300 MHz. Alternate Frequency is 45.800 MHz.

Ratelos shall be issued SOI cards immediately prior to mission jump off.

Upon contacting the main force enemy unit, 1<sup>st</sup> section shall fire ONE RED RAIN FLARE. If 1<sup>st</sup> Section encounters a force that is larger than can be destroyed by First and Second Echelons, they shall fire TWO GREEN STAR FLARES to signal their intent to withdraw.

When passing lines back into friendly territory the challenge shall be DOGMA and the reply shall be HEINZ.

Visual recognition signals:

Challenge: Hold your right hand shoulder high and wave twice.

Response: Hold your left hand shoulder high and wave twice.