

### **STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL THINKING BETWEEN THE WARS**

Although the Russians failed to institutionalize the lessons of Grozny during the war, they made a genuine effort to study its successes and failures once it was over. Most Russian analysts highlighted three key failures, one of them unique to Grozny and the other two generally applicable to the Chechen war as a whole. The first failure was that Russian forces had not effectively “blockaded” or sealed the city of Grozny prior to attack. The second failure was the poor coordination between the forces in theater, particularly the MVD and MoD. Air-ground coordination was also deficient. The third failure, discussed at length in the years after the war, was the loss of “the information war” for public opinion.

Russian planners listened to their analysts and took steps to improve coordination in the years after the war. Recognizing that problems in Chechnya were indicative of forcewide deficiencies, they developed training exercises to prepare officers and soldiers to fight within a range of force mixes and a unified command structure. Motorized rifle battalion and company officers stressed the use of artillery in their training.<sup>1</sup> The government granted increased authority to the military district, giving it command over all forces in its area, including MVD troops and Border Guards. “Groupings” of forces from various “power” ministries (the Russian term for all ministries with

---

<sup>1</sup>Aleksandr Bugai, Oleg Budula, and Viktor Shershenev, “So each would know his maneuver” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, May 4, 2000.

troops and weapons, including the MoD, MVD, FSB, Border Guards, etc.) exercised together, generally with MVD commanders assigned senior leadership roles.

The failure to seal off Grozny and other urban areas was a failure of execution rather than planning. Russian forces had intended to completely seal off the city, but failed for a number of reasons. Prior to their attack on Grozny, the Russians did not realize that small dismounted guerrilla squads presented an entirely different challenge than did the mechanized forces that Soviet encirclement norms were geared to. Encircling Grozny called for a large number of forces to cover the dozens of roads into the city. The Russians lacked the forces and the intelligence reports to carry this out prior to the New Year's Eve attack. Poor coordination between Russian forces contributed to the problem, as did a lack of individual initiative among small-unit leaders.<sup>2</sup>

The information war was a very different problem. Newly independent Russia's military forces had no experience with public opinion or press relations, as the Chechen war showed. They made little effort to restrict the movement of journalists in the area, so representatives of Russian and foreign newspapers, journals, and television stations had open access to the battlefield throughout the conflict. Reporters and stringers were even present on the front lines. Russian officials failed to counter their stories of a bedraggled army losing a war. Moreover, while rebel representatives eagerly granted interviews and took reporters behind their lines, Russian government and MoD officials did not. The Russian public saw the pictures on television and read the reports in the press and its support, never high to begin with, disappeared entirely as casualties mounted. Parents feared for their sons' lives, and mothers started making their way to Chechnya to take their boys home. This drew additional coverage and made the Russian military look even worse. Many in the military, and some politicians, blamed the media for the decline in public support, believing that a more "responsible" or "patriotic" press would have focused on the successes, not the failures, of the Chechnya operation. Moreover, they blamed the lack of public support for what they saw as a premature end to the war. They believed that

---

<sup>2</sup>Thanks to Lester Grau for his comments on this issue.

public opinion had frightened the government off and that had the war gone on, Russia would eventually have attained victory. In their view, the media was responsible for Russia's military withdrawal from its breakaway republic.<sup>3</sup>

But was it media coverage that alienated the Russian citizenry from this war? The conflict had never been very popular to begin with. Even the military's initial response was ambivalent. Many in the armed forces saw the war as militarily unjustifiable political adventurism. A total of 540 generals, officers, and NCOs resigned rather than serve in the 1994–1996 Chechen war.<sup>4</sup> It was only after heavy fighting and casualties, followed by a settlement that was negotiated with little input from the military, that veterans of the conflict began to assert that they had been betrayed.

If these three failures were what most Russian analysts saw as the root of their defeat, there were individuals both there and in the West who dug a bit deeper. These studies looked more specifically at how the Russians had fought, asking what had happened to the once mighty Red Army. It was clear that Russia's problems were more fundamental than force coordination. Rather, they were rooted in an overall low quality of troop training and competence. Even experienced troops had lacked specialized training for mountain and urban fighting—the primary terrains that the Russians faced in Chechnya. This was compounded by the last-minute formation of ad hoc groups that went to war with soldiers not knowing their comrades' names, much less feeling any real unit cohesion. Even the equipment failures that were blamed for many of Russia's woes were often a result of misuse. Existing equipment, such as mine flails, was simply not deployed in Chechnya. Similarly, reactive armor was available but not mounted on tanks that initially entered Grozny. The T-80U proved maneuverable, fast, capable of rapid fire, and invulnerable to direct fire, but it fell victim to projectiles fired from above. The older T-72 was more survivable. While the conference showed that some problems could be solved with equipment or operations modifications (e.g., replacing the T-80U gas turbine with a diesel engine and altering ammunition storage practices for armored vehi-

---

<sup>3</sup>See Novichkov et al.; Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

<sup>4</sup>Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

cles), Grozny clearly showed that most equipment failures were a result of poor training. This was a problem endemic to an underfunded conscript army and could not be corrected quickly or cheaply. Planners realized this, and they made a conscious decision to focus on a few key fixes rather than try to address every concern. Among these were force training for mountain combat, coordination between disparate forces, and the creation of a small number of permanent units manned at an 80 percent readiness level in peacetime. This last, it was hoped, would ensure the availability of capable, full-strength forces when needed.<sup>5</sup>

There were also smaller-scale efforts to fix specific problems, such as the disappearance of some key specialties from the Russian forces. In the summer of 1999, for instance, an army directive formed a sniper training facility and manned it by competitive selection. World champion marksmen were recruited to teach small classes (the first class totaled 12 officers and soldiers) to prepare snipers for a range of operating environments.<sup>6</sup>

## PREPARATION AND PLANNING FOR ROUND TWO

Russian efforts to change as a result of the Chechnya experience are a classic example of generals and politicians preparing to fight the last war. In this case, however, they were justified in doing so, since a rematch was coming. Key Russian military leaders like Anatoliy Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff, were determined that this time, the fight would end in a Russian victory. Kvashnin made significant changes in Russia's exercises and planning to gear the force for "local war."<sup>7</sup> Few doubted that he was preparing the force for another Chechen war.

Despite the withdrawal from Chechnya, Russia maintained a significant force in the Northern Caucasus. These units specifically trained for a conflict that looked a great deal like the one that had just ended. Training and exercises were designed to support large-scale counter-

---

<sup>5</sup>"Russian Military Assesses Errors of Chechnya Campaign"; Michael Orr, "Second Time Lucky," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 8, 2000.

<sup>6</sup>Litovkin.

<sup>7</sup>Orr.

insurgency operations. An exercise in late July 1998 spanned the territories of Dagestan, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Kabardin Balkaria, and Stavropol. MVD commanders directed some 15,000 soldiers from the MoD air, ground, and naval forces, and MVD, Border Guard, FSB, Ministry of Emergency Situations, and other forces. The exercise scenario outlined simultaneous mass attacks by “bandit” groups coupled with individual terrorist actions. A key exercise goal was cooperation and coordination among the disparate Russian forces carrying out a broad range of missions: hostage rescue, emergency response to industrial catastrophe, urban defense, attacking individual buildings, anti-terrorist actions, and more.<sup>8</sup>

Force restructurings, Kvashin’s efforts, and well-publicized exercises belied the continued decline of Russia’s military. Even as special courses honed specific skills, the average soldier or officer was getting less training. Officers complained that tank and BMP drivers and mechanics were poorly prepared, partly due to a lack of adequate training facilities.<sup>9</sup> Poor compliance with conscription and a lack of interest in military service led to a lack of warm bodies to fill what uniforms there were. The conscripts who reported were often poorly educated and medically unqualified. Junior officers did not stay in the service long enough to reach field-grade rank. Beginning in 1996, MoD and MVD academies began graduating students early to fill the depleted junior officer ranks.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Valentina Lezvina, “Exercises in the Caucasus” (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, July 31, 1998, FBIS-UMA-98-217; Oleg Vladykin, “Dress rehearsal for war in Caucasus” (in Russian), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, August 6, 1998, p. 3, summarized in *Izvestia Press Digest*, August 6, 1998; “Northern Caucasus—region of military exercises” (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, July 24, 1998; Vladimir Kostrov, “Russia is making a show of force in North Caucasus” (in Russian), *Russkiy Telegraf*, July 29, 1998, p. 2, as reported by *Izvestia Press Digest*, July 29, 1998; “Major command-staff exercises underway in northern Caucasus” (in Russian), *Novosti*, Ostankino television, July 28, 1998, as reported by *East European Press Service*; “Military exercises in the northern Caucasus concluded” (in Russian), *Vesti* (Russian television), July 31, 1998, as reported by *East European Press Service*.

<sup>9</sup>Oleg Falichev, “Officers’ gathering” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, February 22, 2000.

<sup>10</sup>Vladimir Gutnov, “Soldiers ask to stay in Chechnya” (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Internet edition, No. 6 (179), February 18, 2000; Mukhin, “Every other youth has had no schooling” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 61 (2123), Internet edition, April 5, 2000.

Despite the efforts to prepare the military to do better in a rematch with the Chechen resistance, training for urban combat was still neglected. Initial planning for the summer 1998 exercises included urban scenarios. Those were, however, eliminated in later planning, ostensibly to avoid disturbing the local population. Even the hostage-rescue scenario that remained in the exercise did not focus on engaging enemy forces in a built-up area. Instead, troops practiced for a fight in the mountains. According to one lieutenant, a recent graduate of the Leningrad Military District Academy, only a few short hours of his education had been spent on preparing for urban combat by familiarizing him and his fellow young officers with small-unit tactics and reconnaissance techniques in an urban environment.<sup>11</sup> Even sniper training at the new training center focused on combat in the mountains and open plains.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of an urban training focus was not a mistake. Rather, it reflected another conclusion military leaders had drawn from the first war in Chechnya. The blood their troops had shed in Grozny convinced Russian planners that the best approach to urban combat was to avoid it altogether. Soldiers and officers should prepare to prevent an urban fight, not to win it. Therefore, training for urban combat was deemed a waste of time and money.

Chechen incursions into Dagestan in August and September 1999 marked the beginning of the path to a second Chechen war. Public opinion against the Chechens was then further galvanized by a series of apartment bombings in Russia that same fall. While no one took responsibility for the bombings, unidentified “Chechens” were widely blamed. Initial Russian military actions in Dagestan were generally a fairly low-key effort, for although there was some fighting in and near the towns of Tando, Rakata, and Ziberhali in Dagestan and a handful of Russian attacks on fortified enemy positions, the overall focus of their mission was mining and demining, not close combat.<sup>13</sup> In stark contrast to the problems they had met on their way to Chechnya in 1994, Russian troops faced little or no resistance

---

<sup>11</sup>Falichev, “Officers’ gathering.”

<sup>12</sup>Litovkin.

<sup>13</sup>Aleksandr Krasnikov, “Sappers tested in ‘hot spot’ (in Russian), *Armeiskii Sbornik*, January 2000.

from the local inhabitants: the Dagestanis proved reluctant to join the Chechens in revolt. Moreover, unlike in 1994, the Russians took a measured and careful approach, slowly and deliberately moving through Dagestan rather than marching immediately on the Chechen capital.

After a few weeks of MVD-led operations in Dagestan, forces began to move into Chechnya itself. Here, too, they faced no significant resistance in the towns and villages of the north. Even as they moved further east, many village elders were willing to vouch for the absence of rebels in their towns to keep the troops moving along. The Russians, eager to avoid armed conflict in semi-urban areas, were willing to accept these assurances. On those few occasions when they encountered resistance, troops sealed off the town in question and bombarded it with artillery until it surrendered. Then they cleared the area, checking documents and confiscating whatever weapons they found. Finally, they turned the town over to MVD troops who set up permanent posts.<sup>14</sup> The imperfections of this approach were not lost on some of those participating. *Spetsnaz* personnel pointed out that village elders' promises of loyalty might mean little, as rebels could easily hide among the civilian population of a town by day and attack Russians at night.<sup>15</sup> But as all seemed to be going well, the Russian forces kept moving toward Grozny.

#### **CHECHNYA BETWEEN THE TWO BATTLES FOR GROZNY: FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT AND TACTICS**

According to Russian sources, the Chechen resistance was no less prepared in 1999 than it had been in 1994. According to one Russian report, Chechen leaders established a network of training centers employing some 100 foreign instructors as well as experienced Chechen fighters. One such camp was run by Khattab, an Islamic revolutionary originally from Saudi Arabia or Jordan (sources differ) who had emerged as a key Chechen commander in the first war.

---

<sup>14</sup>Andrei Korbut, "The Kremlin and the armed forces are learning their lessons" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 37 (2009), Internet edition, February 29, 2000.

<sup>15</sup>Oleg Kusov, "Mood of Russian *Spetsnaz* officers in Chechnya," *Liberty Live*, Radio Liberty, January 12, 2000, <http://www.svoboda.org/archive/crisis/caucasus/0100/ll.011200-2.shtml>.

Camps had different specialties: the Alos Abudzhafar camp focused on partisan tactics and marksmanship; the Yakub camp specialized in heavy weapons; the Abubakar camp taught diversionary and terrorist tactics; and the Davlat camp taught psychological and ideological warfare. Other reports suggested that the Said ibn Abu Vakas camp in Chechnya had ties with Pakistan-based Dzhamaat Isalami (a religious-political organization whose military arm is Hizb-ul'-Mujeheddin and which also reportedly funneled money from Pakistan to the Chechen rebels) and the IIK (the Caucasian Islamic Institute, a religious/Arabic-language school with Afghan and Arab professors that is allegedly an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood). Russian and foreign sources alleged that these camps were financed by money from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Qatar, and Jordan (perhaps unofficially) and that they hosted students from extremist organizations in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt, and Malaysia, as well as Palestinians from Israel.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Chechen field commander Salman Raduyev reportedly ran another specialized training camp called Kavkaz.<sup>17</sup>

The Russian press reported that Usama Bin Laden supported the Chechen rebels by sending mercenaries from Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere to fight in Chechnya.<sup>18</sup> Pakistani groups, including Hizb-ul'-Mujeheddin and Kharakat-ul'-Mujeheddin, Al' Badr, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Sepakhe Sakhaba Pakistan, the International Islamic Front, and Usama Bin Laden's Al' Qaida also reportedly trained and provided soldiers.<sup>19</sup> According to press reports, the Taliban in Afghanistan also sent men to fight alongside the

---

<sup>16</sup>Guria Morlinskaya, "Hot spot: Dagestan-99. Failed eden" (in Russian), *Armeiskii Sbornik*, October 1999; "Terror for export," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, July 7, 2000 (the article is a synopsis of a longer piece published by Vinod Anand in the June 2000 issue of the New Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses' monthly journal *Strategic Analysis*). All names of camps are transliterated from the Russian.

<sup>17</sup>Vadim Solovyov, "Federal forces' complacency does not promote the chances for a quick end to the campaign" (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, Internet edition, No. 9 (182), March 17, 2000.

<sup>18</sup>Andrey Viktorov, "The further south, the hotter" (in Russian), *Segodnya*, December 15, 1999, Internet edition, <http://www.segodnya.ru>.

<sup>19</sup>"Terror for export."

Chechens.<sup>20</sup> It is even possible that Iraq sent specialists to help prepare defenses and build fortifications in Karabahi-Chabanmahi (in the Buynaksk region of Dagestan).<sup>21</sup>

As the clashes between Russian and Chechen forces in Dagestan's Botlikh region in fall 1999 demonstrated, the rebels were ready to fight, including in built-up areas. In rural terrain they camouflaged cave entrances with rocks, cobblestones, and anything else that came to hand to create shelters from artillery and air strikes. In towns and villages they used lower floors and basements of buildings as fighting positions. The rudimentary mines they laid around their battle positions convinced Russian specialists that they were professionally trained in mining operations.<sup>22</sup>

According to a purported Chechen guerrilla's diary published in the Russian press, Chechen actions in Dagestan were carefully planned and led by Shamil Basaev himself. Basaev divided the area into three sectors: west of Botlikh, the town of Andi, and the Gagatli area. From a total force of 5,000 men, he assigned a specific unit to each sector. Shamil Basaev commanded the main or central group, Shervani Basaev led the northern group, and Bagautdin was in charge of the southern group. Each group was subdivided into "battalions" of 50–70 people, "companies" of 15–20, and "platoons" of 5–7.<sup>23</sup>

## THE RUSSIANS BACK IN GROZNY

The Russian approach to Grozny in 1999 was significantly different from that of 1994. The most obvious change was the long siege of the city accompanied by bombing and heavy artillery, which echoed the approach to towns in northern Chechnya that had put up resis-

<sup>20</sup>"Talibs sent reinforcements to Chechen guerrillas," *Lenta.ru*, February 1, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/02/01/taliban/>.

<sup>21</sup>Krasnikov.

<sup>22</sup>Krasnikov.

<sup>23</sup>Aleksandr Kirilenko, "Guerrilla's diary," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 12 (185), Internet edition, April 7, 2000.

tance.<sup>24</sup> At the time, a number of Russian and Western specialists suggested that this approach, particularly the aerial attacks, emulated NATO air operations over Serbia and Kosovo during Operation Allied Force in 1999.<sup>25</sup> Although several Russian military officers made this argument, it is an unlikely explanation for Russian tactics. True, the two actions shared a belief that air operations could coerce enemy submission and limit the need for ground action. However, this belief was not original to either NATO or the 1990s.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Russian artillery bombardments of Grozny looked far more like the use of artillery in Russia's World War II campaigns than like a NATO air war. It is therefore more plausible that the Russians were not modeling their operations on NATO's, but rather employing an approach from their own history.<sup>27</sup>

Having reached Grozny in mid-October, the Russians settled in for several months, the bombing and artillery strikes lasting well into December. During this time troops secured key facilities in the suburbs and skirmished with rebel forces there. The Chechens, for their part, disguised themselves in Russian uniforms for night raids on Russian positions. Some of these attacks were videotaped, presumably for use as propaganda. A senior command shift from the MVD to the Ministry of Defense raised expectations that the encirclement of Grozny was a prelude to an assault on the city, but Russian military and political leaders repeatedly emphasized that they had no plans to "storm" Grozny.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>"Circle around the Chechen capital is nearly closed" (in Russian), *Novosti*, Radio Station Mayak, November 2, 1999, 1500 broadcast; Maksim Stepenin, "Grozny has been divided" (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, October 27, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>See Sergei Romanenko, "Whose example is Russia taking?" (in Russian), *Moskovskiye Novosti*, October 5, 1999.

<sup>26</sup>See Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Airpower and Coercion in War*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996. Pape questions the efficacy of air power as a coercive instrument.

<sup>27</sup>E-mail exchange with BG John Reppert (ret.), December 10, 1999; Celestan.

<sup>28</sup>Mikhail Ragimov, "Grozny will be taken piece by piece" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Internet edition, No. 198, October 22, 1999; Marcus Warren, "Grozny Will Be an Easy Victory, Say Russians," *London Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1999; Aleksandr Shaburkin, "On the approaches to Grozny" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Internet edition, November 17, 1999.

This did not, however, mean that they planned to stay out of it entirely. Russian forces probably began to enter Grozny in significant numbers in mid-December, first conducting reconnaissance-by-fire missions to determine the strength of resistance. One such action in mid-December was widely reported in the Western media as the beginning of a Russian attack on the city. Reuters correspondent Maria Eismont reported burning tanks in the streets of Grozny and over 100 Russian personnel killed. Russian officials, however, denied that they had troops in the vicinity. An independent military news agency had an alternative view, that this was a reconnaissance mission gone wrong—with far fewer killed than Eismont's estimate.<sup>29</sup> This seems the most likely explanation. A full attack on the city would have involved a larger force, as well as probably some immediate follow-on action.

But if the mid-December action proved a false alarm, it was clear that something was brewing as Russian authorities called on civilians to leave the city and promised safe corridors for their departure.<sup>30</sup> Russian motorized rifle troops faced intense enemy mortar fire as they fought to capture the airport in the Khankala suburb.<sup>31</sup> Despite government disavowals, by December 23 it was clear that a full-scale attack on Grozny was under way.<sup>32</sup>

According to official reports, the Russian attack relied heavily on a loyalist Chechen militia led by Bislan Gantamirov. Gantamirov, a

---

<sup>29</sup>“Grozny in the trenches” (in Russian), *SPB Vedomosti*, October 22, 1999; Viktorov, “The further south, the hotter”; “Grozny: there was no attack, was there a reconnaissance raid?” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 16, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/16/grozny>; Maksim Stepenin, “Grozny under informational attack” (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, December 17, 1999; Il'ya Maksakov, “For the first time, military actions in Chechnya diverged from political plans” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 17, 1999; “Russian military denied reports of artillery attack on Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 22, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/22/grozny>; “Federal troops have parried at northern airport in Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 20, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/20/grozny>.

<sup>30</sup>Petra Prokhozskova, “Heavy fighting in Grozny” (in Russian), *Novaya Gazeta*, December 20, 1999.

<sup>31</sup>Aslan Ramazonov and Maksim Stepenin, “Pre-New Year's storming” (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, December 15, 1999; Pavel Gerasimov, “On the approaches to Grozny” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 21, 1999, Internet edition, [www.redstar.ru](http://www.redstar.ru).

<sup>32</sup>In fact, Russian officials never did admit to a “storm” of Grozny in 1999–2000.

former mayor of Grozny who had been convicted of embezzling and imprisoned in Russia, had led counter-revolutionary troops in an effort to recapture Grozny for Russia in October 1994. He had been released and pardoned to try again in 1999. Gantamirov's backers predicted victory within a week and were repeatedly credited in public statements with seizing areas and facilities in Grozny throughout December and early January. In addition to Gantamirov's militia, Russia's assault force of 4,000–5,000 men in the city proper (out of a 100,000-man deployment to Chechnya) consisted of two MVD brigades, an army regiment with associated tank, artillery, and air assets, and *Spetsnaz* components. It also included snipers, sappers, and NBC troops. The Russians estimated enemy strength in the city at about 2,000–2,500 men with a variety of weaponry at their disposal, including armored and mechanized vehicles, *Grad* rocket launchers, 152mm howitzers, 120mm mortars, and a handful of air defense missiles.<sup>33</sup>

Before entering Berlin 50 years ago, Russian forces had carried out a detailed study of every city block. No such effort was undertaken in advance of the attack on Grozny in 1999.<sup>34</sup> But planning was more detailed and preparations more advanced than they had been in 1994. Russian planners divided the city into 15 sectors. Their intent was to carry out reconnaissance in each one, followed by artillery and aviation attacks on identified resistance strongpoints, equipment, and other targets. Then, supported by mortar and sniper fire, sappers would create corridors for Russian special forces and Gantamirov's militia, who would advance toward the city center and take control of key areas. The end result would be a "spiderweb" of Russian control spanning the entire territory of the city. Within this spiderweb, motorized rifle troops organized into attack groups

---

<sup>33</sup>"Operation rather than storm" (in Russian), *Izvestiya*, December 23, 1999; "Federal forces in Chechnya command: fighting for Grozny will continue no less than 10 days" (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 25, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/25/grozny/sroki.htm>; "Has a new storm of Grozny begun?" (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 23, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/23/grozny>; "The operation to cleanse Grozny has long since begun" (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 23, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/23/grozny>; Aleksandr Sinitzin, "In Mozdok they drink to life," *Vesti.ru*, January 27, 2000, <http://vesti.ru/daynews/2000/01.27/15chechnya/>; Yuriy Zainashev, "'Souls' and RPGs" (in Russian), *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, January 28, 2000.

<sup>34</sup>Falichev, "Officers' gathering."

(“storm” detachments) of 30–50 men would, with air and artillery support, attack remaining enemy forces. Russian planners believed that their spiderweb would significantly limit the mobility of rebel forces, making them vulnerable to the “storm” detachments and artillery fire. Afterwards, “clearing” forces such as the Chechen loyalist militia would move into the area.<sup>35</sup>

The Russian “storm” detachments were geared to maximize mobility and flexibility. Within each detachment, groups of three men armed with an RPG, an automatic rifle, and a sniper rifle provided the core element. They were supported by two additional soldiers armed with automatic weapons. Other components of the “storm” group were armed with the *Shmel* RPO-A flamethrowers that had proved so effective five years before and in Afghanistan. Artillery and aviation forward observers, sappers, and reconnaissance personnel rounded out the detachment.<sup>36</sup>

Forces moved forward slowly and carefully in the first days of fighting. Tanks brought into the city were there to follow and support the storm detachments rather than to lead.<sup>37</sup> Armored vehicles moved through the city surrounded by the dismounted infantry of the attack group. The vehicles could thus effectively engage enemy snipers and automatic riflemen in the buildings that the attack troops could not reach, while being protected by the infantry who would keep the enemy from coming close enough to the armor to destroy it. Many sniper teams deployed, with the better-trained *Spetsnaz* snipers supporting the “snipers” of the motorized rifle troops, who were still basically marksmen equipped with SVD rifles.<sup>38</sup> Minister of Defense Igor’ Sergeev focused public attention on his desire to keep casualties down: “Our predominant criteria remain the same—to

---

<sup>35</sup>“Operation rather than storm”; “Federal forces in Chechnya command: fighting for Grozny will continue no less than 10 days”; “Has a new storm of Grozny begun?”; “The operation to cleanse Grozny has long since begun”; Sinitzin; “Grozny trapped in ‘spiderweb’” (in Russian), *Biznes & Baltia*, December 27, 1999.

<sup>36</sup>Andrei Mironov, “Russian forces in Chechnya using ‘vacuum explosion’ devices and thus violating international law” (in Russian), Radio Liberty, Liberty Live, March 18, 2000, <http://www.svoboda.org/archive/crisis/caucasus/0300/11.031800-2.shtml>; Orr; Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

<sup>37</sup>Giulietto Cieza, “In such wars there can be no victory” (in Russian), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, No. 7, Internet edition, February 17, 2000, <http://www.og.ru/mat/rep1.shtml>.

<sup>38</sup>Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

fulfill our tasks with minimal losses among the forces.”<sup>39</sup> Forces were under orders to avoid close combat insofar as possible. To help them do so, artillery strikes preceded deliberate infantry movement into any given area.<sup>40</sup> First, ground troops probed deep enough to draw Chechen fire and thus expose the enemy’s firing positions. The troops would then retreat to safety, calling in artillery or air strikes to destroy the enemy.<sup>41</sup> BMPs mounting AGS-17 automatic grenade launchers evacuated the wounded after a fight. If needed, they could simultaneously provide fire support.<sup>42</sup> The guiding concept seemed to be that firepower could limit the exposure of soldiers to close combat and thus save military lives, albeit at a cost to infrastructure and noncombatants.<sup>43</sup>

As the year drew to a close, the Russian military reported that they had broken through the first line of rebel defenses around the city perimeter. According to early reports, the forces made good initial progress toward the center of the city, advancing from three directions (northwest, west, and east).<sup>44</sup> Regular MVD troops were accompanied by SOBR and OMON units (MVD special forces with riot control and anti-terrorist training). Their mission was to clean up the remnants of enemy resistance.<sup>45</sup> Soon, Russian sources reported that MVD troops moving from the west had taken control of the Staropromislovsk region and part of the Zavod region.<sup>46</sup> Gan-tamirov’s forces appeared to be rapidly approaching the city center.

<sup>39</sup>“Minister of Defense Igor’ Sergeev believes that everything in Chechnya is going according to plan,” *Lenta.ru*, May 1, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/05/grozny/sergeev.htm>.

<sup>40</sup>Anton Maksimov, “Street fighters” (in Russian), *Ogonyok*, Internet edition, February 2000, <http://www.ropnet.ru/ogonyok/win/200060/60-10-11.html>.

<sup>41</sup>Mayerbek Nunayev and Richard C. Paddock, “Rebels in Chechnya Are Defending City in Ruins,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 2000, p. 1; Andrey Viktorov, “Crawling storm” (in Russian), *Segodnya*, December 28, 1999.

<sup>42</sup>Maksimov, “Street fighters.”

<sup>43</sup> Andrei Serenko, “Rokhlin division taking losses in Chechnya” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Internet edition, No. 21 (2083), February 5, 2000.

<sup>44</sup>“Staropromislovsk section of Grozny captured by federal forces” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 31, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/31/grozny/>.

<sup>45</sup>Zainashev; Aleksandr Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style” (in Russian), *Itogi*, February 1, 2000.

<sup>46</sup>Zainashev.

By the end of December, official sources reported that the Old Sunzha region was largely under federal control as well, as was the main bridge over the Sunzha River. Russian forces were moving toward the Rodina Sovkhoz (state farm) and had reached the canning factory. According to late December press reports, all this was accomplished with no direct confrontations with enemy forces. Air power got some of the credit, with 53 sorties reportedly destroying 15 enemy strongpoints.<sup>47</sup>

These positive reports soon proved overly optimistic. The ease of victory had been overstated. As official forecasts of how much longer the capture of the city would take escalated from days to weeks, the fight for Grozny turned brutal. The rebel approach was similar to that of 1994–1996 and relied heavily on ambushes. Again, Russian tank columns were allowed to move down a street, only to be trapped and attacked. To the Russians' credit, the rebels were less successful with this tactic this time around. Russian sources report that only a single tank was destroyed in Grozny in 1999–2000.<sup>48</sup> More consistent use of reactive armor, along with dismounted infantry escort of armored vehicles, were no doubt responsible.<sup>49</sup> But if they had limited success destroying tanks, the rebels were still able to slow their enemy down significantly and force them into the close combat that the Russians sought to avoid. As fighting began in earnest, Russian forces were lucky if they advanced 100 meters per day. Moreover, Gantamirov's forces complained that they received little support from federal troops, who refused to come to their assistance when they were under enemy fire. Fratricide was again a problem for both the Chechen loyalists and the small armored groups that provided support for them. Furthermore, the resistance was once again more numerous and better-prepared than expected. Despite Russian claims of high enemy casualties, the guerrillas seemed only to grow in number (official estimates started at 2,000 and rose steadily to 3,000 by late January). There were strong indications that the complete encirclement of the city announced in De-

---

<sup>47</sup>Petr Sukhanov, "There will be no frontal confrontations" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 30, 1999.

<sup>48</sup>Andrei Mikhailov, "They learned how to utilize tanks" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 94 (2156), Internet edition, May 25, 2000.

<sup>49</sup>Prokhazkova; Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

ember was in fact quite porous, as the guerrillas seemed to have little difficulty reinforcing and bringing in supplies.<sup>50</sup> Whatever spiderweb had been planned, actual fighting was positional and costly: house-to-house and block-by-block. Territory captured one day was lost the next.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, it soon became apparent that the Russians were not, as they had hoped, shrinking the Chechen area of control as they advanced. Instead the rebels refused to be trapped and repeatedly recaptured areas, often behind Russian lines. Russian casualties continued to mount as small groups of Russian forces found that they were the ones surrounded.<sup>52</sup> Much of January's fighting was focused on Russian efforts to take control of the central Minutka Square, the canning plant, the bridge over the Sunzha River, and the Staropromislovsk region, all of which seemed to change hands on a daily basis if not more often.<sup>53</sup>

The fighting for Minutka Square was particularly bloody. Both sides sought to gain control of the “strategic heights”: the taller five- and nine-story buildings ringing the square. One report from late January described a Russian unit splitting into three groups to seize three such buildings. The first (assault) group comprised the fastest, most mobile soldiers and was armed with light automatic weapons. The second (covering) group provided covering fire with heavier weaponry such as RPG-7s and machine guns. The third (support) group, which included a mortar battery, also supplied ammunition to the other two. The unit's initial effort was repulsed by fire from

<sup>50</sup>“Forces didn't manage to skip through Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 27, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/1999/12/27/grozny>; “Federal forces have recalculated the number of fighters in Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 20, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/2000/01/20/grozny.count.htm>; Zainashev; “Most important that we not be shot in the back” (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, January 25, 2000.

<sup>51</sup>“Gantamirov's forces have reached center of Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 27, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/1999/12/27/grozny>; “Gantamirov's forces have taken Staropromislov section of Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 27, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/1999/12/27/grozny>.

<sup>52</sup>Andrey Matyash, “Storm of Grozny has failed” (in Russian), *Gazeta.ru*, January 6, 2000, [http://www.gazeta.ru/grozny\\_nostorm.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/grozny_nostorm.shtml).

<sup>53</sup>*ITAR-TASS*, January 7, 2000; *ITAR-TASS*, January 10, 2000; “Russian forces have captured several points in Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 18, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/2000/01/18/grozny>; “Federal forces have captured Minutka Square in Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 20, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojn/2000/01/20/grozny/>; Anatoliy Stasovskiy, “Bandits blockaded in center of Grozny” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 20, 2000, p. 1; Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

enemy grenade launchers and AGS-17s. Then, under cover of smokescreens, soldiers moved forward by running from one sheltering structure to another. With the help of the mortar battery, they first captured a nine-story building and then two shorter ones. Holding them proved more difficult. The taller building was soon lost to an enemy counterattack. In one of the others, the 15 Russian soldiers who had held it realized that rebel troops remained in the basement. They were ambushed when they tried to capture the rebels by pursuing them into an underground tunnel.<sup>54</sup>

The intensity of fighting and uncertainty of Russian control of “captured” areas made resupply a problem. Some reports indicated that occasionally materials made it through to the forces at night (this seems somewhat difficult to credit, as night movement was not the Russians’ forte).<sup>55</sup> Russian hopes to minimize casualties by overwhelming artillery fire faltered. Instead, Russian commanders found themselves relying increasingly on snipers, which in turn made the taller buildings even more valuable. The tallest building in Grozny, a 12-story structure 500 meters from Minutka Square, became a key objective that neither side could capture. Instead, both Russian and rebel snipers took up positions in the building, from where they could hit a significant proportion of central Grozny.<sup>56</sup>

## **EVOLVING RUSSIAN APPROACHES TO URBAN COMBAT: CHANGES SINCE 1994–1995**

### **Casualties and Morale**

Despite their best efforts, the Russians could not keep casualties down as they had hoped. While official data does not break casualties down into those incurred during the fight for the capital and those who fell elsewhere, a rough estimate suggests at least 600 killed in Argun, Shali, and Grozny combined between the end of December

---

<sup>54</sup>Oleg Falichev, “Heavy fighting for Minutka” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, February 2, 2000.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Vasily Zhuchkov, “War of snipers” (in Russian), *Vremya Moscow News*, January 31, 2000.

1999 and early January 2000.<sup>57</sup> The true numbers are probably much higher. The 506th Motor Rifle Regiment from the Privolzhsk region lost nearly a fourth of its personnel as it fought through the outer ring of Chechen defenses in the city. This unit was subsequently replaced by the First Regiment, which continued the fight into Grozny and lost over 30 men doing so, a third of them officers. In fact, nearly half of the battalion's officer corps was killed or injured in street battles.<sup>58</sup> Other units suffered similar casualties. Each MVD company that first entered the city in December was 50 men strong. By the end of January many had shrunk to 20–25 men, reflecting casualties of 50 percent over the month of fighting.<sup>59</sup> SOBR and OMON troops took lower casualties, perhaps because these specialized forces were made up entirely of professionals rather than draftees. Furthermore, these units had experience with actions in built-up areas, if not with combat of this sort.<sup>60</sup>

As in 1994–1996, the high casualty rates and the difficult, manpower-intensive fight took their toll on morale. At the end of December, a reporter in Mozdok wrote that Grozny troop rotations were one week long—soldiers simply could not take any more than that. Other sources, however, reported that soldiers stayed in the city for a month at a time. Furthermore, there were numerous tales of Russian forces trading ammunition to the enemy in exchange for narcotics. They would leave the “payment” at a predetermined location, then return later to pick up the drugs, sometimes getting shot for their efforts. There were even tales of rebels buying weapons directly from Russians and paying off artillery troops not to fire. At the same time, Russian soldiers and airmen were terrified of capture; Chechen maltreatment of prisoners was notorious. Aviators reportedly flew with grenades strapped to their bodies to make sure they would not be captured alive.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup>Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

<sup>58</sup>Vladislav Shurigin, “City of shadows” (in Russian), *APN*, February 29, 2000, [www.apn.ru/documents/2000/02/29/20000229190917.htm](http://www.apn.ru/documents/2000/02/29/20000229190917.htm).

<sup>59</sup>Zainashev.

<sup>60</sup>Zainashev; Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

<sup>61</sup>Sinitzin; Bakhtiyar Ahmedakhanov, “Soldiers bargaining with own death” (in Russian), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, February 17, 2000, Internet edition, [www.og.ru/mat/rep2.shtml](http://www.og.ru/mat/rep2.shtml); Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

One major difference between this battle and the one five years before, however, was that despite cases of theft and drug abuse, most troops seemed to believe they were fighting for the good of their country. More frequent rotations and improved supply, at least in the earlier days of the battle, also contributed to better morale. The arrival of reinforcements during fighting helped as well. By mid-January 2000 a large part of the 100,000-man Northern Caucasus force, particularly its ground component, was deployed in or near Grozny.<sup>62</sup>

### **Force Coordination**

Improvements in coordination between different forces are a partial success story. A single command and control system was a clear improvement. Friendly fire casualties were lower than in 1994–1995. Air operations were better synchronized with those on the ground. On the other hand, serious problems remained between MVD and MoD units and between Russian troops and Chechen loyalist militias. Some communications systems were still incompatible. MVD commanders still lacked experience using air, armor, and artillery assets. These problems were compounded by distrust among the various groups. Moreover, even with a single commander at the top, there were too many generals contributing to the confusion. Veterans reported fratricide from Russian artillery and aviation. A paratroop major who had lost 40 of his men told a journalist that “You can’t even seize a building before our own howitzers start shooting at you. The pilots—those, it seems to me, have never hit a target yet.”<sup>63</sup> But even with all of these problems, most commanders reported a much better level of coordination than in 1994–1995. If the difficulties were largely the same, the impact was smaller. Training had made a difference.

### **Communications**

Communications also improved somewhat over the five-year interval. Improvements could largely be attributed to the deploy-

---

<sup>62</sup>Golz, “Front to the rear” (in Russian), *Itogi*, January 18, 2000.

<sup>63</sup>Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

ment of advanced equipment, as well as better training. Special electronic warfare (EW) units were established and included in joint force groupings and subdivisions of the various forces throughout the Caucasian theater. Their primary mission was to seek out Chechen communication networks so that they could be neutralized, either physically or by jamming. Whereas in 1994–1995 the Russians were limited to a relatively narrow bandwidth, this time Russia's electronic warriors were able to operate on more frequencies. Improvements in training and equipment made it far easier for them to track the source of enemy transmissions. Outside the city, in the plains and mountains, experimental Arbalet-M radio-locational systems were deployed to pinpoint enemy locations. Arabic and Chechen interpreters were used, although there may have been shortages of these specialized personnel. Unfortunately, modern equipment often was not deployed in sufficient numbers. For instance, a helicopter-mounted EW system was deployed on only one aircraft. And if some units were trained on communications equipment, others were not. As they had five years before, Russian troops repeatedly rendered their advanced technology meaningless by communicating in the open. This enabled the rebels to evade their assaults and to ambush them.<sup>64</sup>

Still, overall communications improved. There were even reports of battlefield successes attributed to effective use of communications. On December 31, Colonel Evgeniy Kukarin, commander of MVD forces "East," developed and implemented EW operation "New Year." Russian troops transmitted false information over the radio to convince the rebels that an attack from the east was imminent. When the rebels reinforced in the direction of the expected attack, Kukarin's forces ambushed them, killing about 20 and wounding some 50 rebels. Kukarin was decorated as a Hero of Russia.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup>Vadim Koval', "Road to Gudermes" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, February 17, 1999; Vasili Gumenniy and Vladimir Matyash, "War in the airwaves," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, April 5, 2000.

<sup>65</sup>Vasiliy Panchenkov, "And battle becomes art" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, April 14, 2000.

## Aviation

During the first Chechen war, reliance on flat-trajectory weapons for the bulk of the fighting resulted in heavy casualties. The alternative was to shift to high-trajectory weapons and air strikes. But the effectiveness of air and artillery varied. However brilliantly they were utilized, they were successful only insofar as they could actually destroy enemy forces. The rebel use of underground structures in the towns and cities made this particularly difficult.

Few reports from the front differentiated between air operations over cities and urban areas and those in the rest of the Chechen theater. In the war as a whole, air-ground coordination generally appeared quite effective. This was despite poor weather and smoke and fog from oil fires and fighting that sometimes precluded the effective use of combat aircraft.<sup>66</sup> Fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft were responsible for a lot of fire support. One source even suggests that they were responsible for some 80 percent of fire missions during the war, with artillery taking on another 15–17 percent, although this seems extremely high.<sup>67</sup> Certainly Russian pilots spent more time in the air than they were used to. On January 27, Russian forces reported 100 jet and helicopter sorties over Grozny and the southern mountains in a 24-hour period.<sup>68</sup> According to a report the following day, that number included flights by Su-24 and Su-25 ground-attack aircraft and Mi-24 helicopters.<sup>69</sup> While sortie rates were not always that high, rates of 25–60 sorties per day were normal.<sup>70</sup> By the middle of February, some 8,000 sorties had been flown by fixed-wing attack aircraft alone, primarily Su-24Ms and Su-25s. While these numbers are not significant by Western standards, shortages of fuel and

---

<sup>66</sup>Associated Press, “Russian Troops Renew Ground Attack,” *International Herald-Tribune*, January 5, 2000. Evegni Pyatunin, “Masha the sniper promises to aim only for the kneecaps” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 15 (2077) January 28, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.ng.ru>.

<sup>67</sup>Andrei Korbut, “The Kremlin and the armed forces are learning their lessons.”

<sup>68</sup>Associated Press, “Snipers Keep Russians Out of Grozny,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2000.

<sup>69</sup>Bakhtiyar Ahmedakhanov, “Victory looks ever more distinct” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 15 (2077), Internet edition, January 28, 2000, <http://www.ng.ru>.

<sup>70</sup>Sergei Babichev, “Fighters will be gotten to even in deep holes” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, January 12, 2000.

supplies had significantly limited Russian aviators' flight hours for years. Reconnaissance aircraft, including Su-24MRs, Su-25s, MiG-25RBs, An-30Bs, and A-50s, were widely used. An-26 and Il-20 aircraft supported communications and transmitted commands. Tu-22M3 long-range bombers, however, were reportedly not used, ostensibly for fear of collateral damage (although the general Russian attitude toward collateral damage casts doubt on this explanation).<sup>71</sup> Of the helicopters, the Mi-24s saw considerable service, as did search and rescue Mi-8s.<sup>72</sup> Helicopters assumed much of the transport burden, ferrying motorized rifle troops as well as paratroopers to battle in the mountains and mountain towns.<sup>73</sup>

The air forces permanently deployed in the area belonged to the Fourth Air Army of the Air and Air Defense Forces. They were joined by air regiments from the Moscow Region Air and Air Defense Forces and one Central Air Force regiment. The “good news” story, as reported by air force sources, is that accuracy improved significantly from the first war, and command and control was similarly more effective. Commanders made better use of reconnaissance, and information sharing between forces and commanders increased. Air commanders had increased authority, and some reportedly refused to carry out attacks because of the risk to civilians in the area. According to aviators, fratricide did occur early in operations in Dagestan when forces were under MVD control. It was largely eliminated following the shift to MoD command. Furthermore, according to both the chief of the air forces and the commander of the Joint Aviation Group, every attack was carefully documented as a “good,” or justified, strike (although some ground personnel might have disagreed with these assessments).<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Sergei Sokut, “On veteran aircraft” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 37 (2009), Internet edition, February 29, 2000.

<sup>72</sup>“Two federal helicopters shot down, one crew killed,” *Lenta.ru*, December 14, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/14/helicopters/fall.htm>; “On the first day of the new year, 200 rebels destroyed,” *Lenta.ru*, January 2, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/02/fighting>.

<sup>73</sup>Nabi Nabiyev, “Infantry gets wings” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 15, 2000.

<sup>74</sup>Sokut.

Aircraft and weaponry differed little from the first war. As already noted, the Su-24M remained the only widely deployed night- and foul weather-capable combat aircraft. During daylight and fair weather, it was supplemented primarily by the Su-25. The all-weather Su-25T was combat tested, and it successfully fired Kh-25ML rockets to destroy small objects such as satellite communications stations and an enemy An-2 aircraft on the ground. None of the other all-weather and night-capable fixed-wing aircraft under development in Russia were deployed to Chechnya, and there is no evidence that the GLONASS geolocational system was used at all.<sup>75</sup>

As in 1994–1996, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) proved useful. The *Stroi-P* system, including 10 *Pchela-1T* UAVs and two ground mobile control points, deployed. The *Pchela-1T*s could function up to 60 kilometers from their base. A successor *Pchela* system had been developed but was not deployed to Chechnya.<sup>76</sup>

Air-ground munitions consisted predominantly of free-fall bombs and rockets. While weapons up to 1,500 kilograms were reportedly used along with fuel-air explosives in the mountains, there were no credible reports of the use of either in Grozny. Ground fuel-air weapons such as the RPO-A *Shmel* were certainly used, however, and some experts believe that the TOS-1 Buratino, a heavy 30-barrel system mounted on a T-72 chassis (the big brother to the *Shmel*) was also employed in Grozny.<sup>77</sup> Precision weapons such as the KAB-500 and some air-ground missiles were employed, as well as heavy KAB-1500 L and KAB-1500 TK bombs with laser and TV sights, but not to a large extent—no more than in the 1994–1996 conflict.<sup>78</sup>

A final note on fixed-wing aircraft: the Russian air force suffered from a lack of qualified personnel no less than the ground forces. This was particularly true for technical specialties. Due to the lack of key technical officers, such personnel were not rotated throughout much of the fighting (as pilots were). It was not until February 2000

---

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Lester W. Grau and Timothy Smith, *A “Crushing” Victory: Fuel-Air Explosives and Grozny 2000*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, <http://call.army.mil/call/fms/fmsopubs/issues/fuelair/fuelair.htm>.

<sup>78</sup>Sokut; Mironov; Orr.

that additional qualified personnel were sent to the Caucasus, raising their deployment to a “wartime” level.<sup>79</sup>

Overall, there were two particularly significant differences between this air operation and that of the first war. One was the increased employment of air assets in general, and the other was improved coordination between aviators and ground personnel. Rotary-wing aircraft especially were far more widely used. They were responsible for almost half of the air power fire missions as well as for surveillance, delivery of personnel, extraction, and supply.<sup>80</sup> For the most part, helicopters were deployed throughout Chechnya as part of air tactical groups that reported to ground force commanders. These groups included two to four Mi-24 attack helicopters and one or two Mi-8 transport helicopters. In theory, their missions were coordinated by air support controllers on the ground, but the lack of trained personnel created problems. Furthermore, aviators complained that there were not enough of them deployed at the battalion level and below. Mi-24 crews often found that they got far better information from their airborne colleagues in the Mi-8s than they did from ground controllers.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to the air tactical group, “free hunts” by attack helicopters were conducted in the early stages of 1999–2000 Chechnya operations, perhaps comprising as much as a third of total sorties. Pairs of Mi-24 helicopters went on individual search-and-destroy missions to seek out enemy facilities and forces including firing positions, armored columns, and supply depots. Mi-24s also escorted Mi-8s on supply missions in the mountains as well as supporting the creation of barriers and zones of destruction along the roads between Itum, Kale, and Shatili. According to regulations, aircrews were required to make every effort to ensure that no civilians were present at the target site before firing.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup>Sokut.

<sup>80</sup>Dmitri Sokolov-Mitrich, “Helicopter pilot’s monologue” (in Russian), *Vesti.ru*, February 10, 2000, [www.vesti.ru/pole/2000/02.10/chechnya](http://www.vesti.ru/pole/2000/02.10/chechnya).

<sup>81</sup>Sokut; Vladimir Georgiev, “Role of Army aviation growing” (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 4 (177), Internet edition, February 4, 2000.

<sup>82</sup>Sokut; V. Georgiev.

Both human and equipment problems plagued helicopter forces throughout the conflict. Ground commanders, especially (but not only) those from the MVD, were inexperienced in the use of air assets. Pilots were often forced to stay overly long on station, increasing the risk of shoot-downs. The aircraft were too old and too few. Despite plans to test night-capable Mi-24 and Mi-8 variants in Chechnya, the aircraft that were deployed generally lacked night sights and navigational equipment. Many lacked secure communications. Only five of the helicopters deployed as part of the Northern Caucasus Joint Grouping of Forces had GPS equipment (all five had previously been deployed as part of the UN force in Angola). Lacking sufficient aircraft, pilots flew their annual required hours in three months. One pilot reported logging 200 flight hours in 49 days, compared to a peacetime average of 50 hours annually. Furthermore, a lack of replacement aircraft put additional strains on repair facilities, keeping those in Mozdok running around the clock.<sup>83</sup>

As in the case of fixed-wing aircraft, reports of large-scale testing of new helicopters and weaponry in Chechnya seem largely unsupported. Smart bombs, such as the KAB-1500, were probably used only a handful of times. The promised new model helicopters, Ka-50 Black Sharks, never made it to Chechnya. Two Black Sharks were delivered to Mozdok in November 1999 with the expectation of more to come, but they were pulled out of the Caucasus by March 2000, having only conducted several test flights. They were never committed to combat. The new night-vision-capable Mi-24Ns finally arrived, but only in March 2000 and then in minimal numbers.<sup>84</sup>

## Artillery

Artillery, the so-called God of War, was the basis of Russian combat in both Grozny and Chechnya as a whole in 1999–2000. Artillery was the day and night, all-weather tool for keeping the enemy at a distance and, it was hoped, for protecting Russian soldiers from close combat. Encircled towns were shelled into submission, artillery

---

<sup>83</sup>Sokolov-Mitrich; Cieza; Sokut; Solovyov; V. Georgiev.

<sup>84</sup>“Went to the mountains” (in Russian), *Profil*, No. 10 (182), March 20, 2000, [www.profil.orc.ru/hero.html](http://www.profil.orc.ru/hero.html); “Black Sharks’ frightened the Chechens” (in Russian), *Gazeta.ru*, March 10, 2000, [www.gazeta.ru/print/black\\_shark.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/print/black_shark.shtml).

“prepared” parts of a city or town for ground force entry, and soldiers felt comfortable calling for it whenever they met with resistance. The Russians created a strong artillery group specifically to support combat in Chechnya. Lacking a permanent readiness artillery group, the Russians cobbled this one together from a variety of sources, including artillery elements from the permanent readiness units created between the Chechnya wars. The artillery group included both conventional and rocket artillery battalions. Each ground force company had an artillery or mortar battery attached for direct support, and the Artillery and Rocket Forces commander had additional units under his command for general support. Finally, under the streamlined command and control system, junior officers had more independent authority than in previous Russian/Soviet operations to call for artillery support.<sup>85</sup>

Artillery systems deployed were largely the same as those in 1994–1996. Specifically, 122mm self-propelled howitzers and several types of 152mm self-propelled howitzers were used in Dagestan and Chechnya, as were the *Uragan* and *Grad* rocket systems, 82mm and 120mm mortars, and the *Nona* system (in the mountains). Multiple rocket launchers provided fire support, and the 2S19 self-propelled howitzer *Msta* did fairly well. The *Krasnopol'* precision-guided munition reportedly had consistently high accuracy (as its manufacturer had advertised before the war). Guided missile systems were used widely, and anti-tank guided missiles (PTURs) were able to destroy tanks, enemy strongpoints, and even groups of guerrillas. While officials were not keen to admit the use of surface-to-surface missiles against the rebels, the SS21 *Tochka* and *Tochka-U* systems, as well as the older R-300 SCUDs, were employed.<sup>86</sup> Overall, artillery proved effective, but it failed to protect Russian ground forces from close combat. Moreover, artillery bombardment of cities and towns was not enough to guarantee their pacification.

---

<sup>85</sup>Sokut.

<sup>86</sup>Sokut.

## The Troops

The troops who fought in Grozny in 1999–2000 included the cream of the Russian military. Unfortunately, there was very little cream, and a good bit of skim milk had been added to the mix. Initial Russian reports claimed that almost no conscripts were sent to Chechnya, and to Grozny in particular. This was soon proved false. It is likely that because the battle for Grozny lasted longer than expected, an original intention to send only experienced men onto the urban battlefield simply proved impossible to sustain. Thus, while the personnel mix included more professional soldiers than it had five years before, inexperienced youth with perhaps three months of training still found themselves at the front.<sup>87</sup>

Still, this was significantly better than before. Anecdotal reports consistently reported a higher quality of professional soldier than in the last war.<sup>88</sup> One indicator of the poor level of preparation in 1994–1996 had been the high rate of officers killed in action compared to their men. The rebels were able to take out the leaders and scatter their soldiers fairly easily. This time around, overall casualties were similar, but officers no longer took such disproportionate losses.<sup>89</sup> The fact that the troops were better trained did not mean that other problems disappeared. The brutal hazing for which the Russian armed forces are infamous continued even on the front lines. One young Grozny veteran survived several battles unscathed, only to land in the hospital with a broken jaw bestowed on him by his “comrades.”<sup>90</sup>

Specialized units deployed to reinforce the motorized rifle troops, who constituted the bulk of the Russian force and formed the basis of the attack (“storm”) detachments.<sup>91</sup> *Spetsnaz* and paratroopers (which are separate from the air force and ground forces in Russia),

---

<sup>87</sup>Sergei Krapivin, “War does not have a ‘parade’ face” (in Russian), *Vecherniy Cheliabinsk*, January 28, 2000; Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

<sup>88</sup>Igor Rotar’, “Rebels remain dangerous” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 47 (2109), Internet edition, March 16, 2000.

<sup>89</sup>Serenko; Cieza.

<sup>90</sup>Krapivin.

<sup>91</sup>Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

generally thought of as the most professional of Russia's combatants, were also strongly represented. Many of the more experienced forces, especially the *Spetsnaz*, had also fought in the previous Chechnya war. The Russian naval infantry (marines) also fought in Chechnya, and some of these men served in Grozny. They included both the elite "Polar Bears" of the Northern Fleet, who had developed their own training regime in preparation for battle, and a special "Black Beret" or "Scorpion" battalion assembled from all of Russia's fleets sufficiently in advance to have had the opportunity to train together before the deployment to Chechnya.<sup>92</sup>

"Storm" groups were employed more consistently than in 1994–1995. This time, these units were for the most part created from extant formations such as the permanent readiness groups developed in the interwar period. But last-minute ad hoc formations still occurred. For instance, a number of different platoons might be called upon to contribute individual personnel for a "storm" detachment shortly before a planned attack. The assembly of this force, whether outside the city or within city lines, was often visible to enemy forces, who were able to attack the group with AGS-17s while it was still forming up.<sup>93</sup> One significant difference between the two campaigns was in the allocation of greater responsibility to junior officers in 1999–2000.<sup>94</sup> While this was generally an improvement, inexperienced officers were often unclear in tasking subordinates. The men, in turn, were inadequately trained and had limited knowledge of terrain, and they were further hampered by unreliable communications.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup>Oleg Blozki, Sergey Konstantinov, Mikhail Kliment'ev, "Gathering at Grozny" (in Russian), *Izvestia*, October 22, 1999; Aleksandr Oleynik, "Every third paratrooper is fighting" (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 48 (171), December 10, 1999, Internet edition, [nvo.ng.ru](http://nvo.ng.ru); Kusov; Roman Fomishenko, "'Polar Bears' attack" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 12, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.redstar.ru>; Evgeniy Ustinov, "'Scorpions' go to battle" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 10, 2000.

<sup>93</sup>Vladimir Kirichenko, "And again the battle continues . . . For those wounded in Chechnya, it is the most difficult" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 21, 2000.

<sup>94</sup>Falichev, "Officers' gathering."

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

Lack of training was the bulk of the problem. But if urban combat training generally was insufficient, military leaders made a serious effort to get troops up to speed before sending them into the city. They used the suburbs of Grozny to train the five-man subgroups on how to best use cover and move around the city. The marksmen designated as “snipers” were trained as much as possible, given time constraints, in these same suburban training centers. If the Russians had avoided urban combat training between the wars, hoping that it would not be necessary, they did make real efforts to overcome that shortfall when it became clear they had no choice but to send soldiers to fight in the city.<sup>96</sup>

All of Russia’s troops in Chechnya in 1999–2000, regardless of their service affiliation, were much better supplied than their predecessors. Soldiers had sufficient uniforms and generally received their rations. But Grozny strained supply capabilities. The longer-than-expected stay was a key factor. One commander complained to a journalist that not only was insufficient food reaching his soldiers, but there was nothing to steal from the local populace. But the fact that his troops were receiving even some supplies (cans of stew and barley porridge, according to the commander) was a tremendous improvement over the reports of starvation on the front lines in 1994–1996. Furthermore, the troops were better paid (and sometimes on time). Those in combat received 830–850 rubles daily; officers could get up to 1,000 rubles per day. (The ruble to dollar exchange rate ranged from 26 to 29 rubles to the dollar in December 1999–March 2000.) In fact, soldiers who had completed their required service occasionally chose to stay on longer to earn more money.<sup>97</sup> And while it is unlikely that all soldiers were so well-equipped, some were issued bulletproof vests, tourniquets, and painkillers.<sup>98</sup>

Logistics support in Chechnya illustrated the deficiencies of the Russian military. While supply lines did hold out well into the spring of 2000, it is unlikely that they could have done so had the war retained

---

<sup>96</sup>Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

<sup>97</sup>Serenko; Cieza; Golz, “Blitzkrieg Russian-style.”

<sup>98</sup>Michael R. Gordon, “As Casualties Mount in Chechnya War, Kremlin Worries About the Political Toll,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 2000, p. 1.

its intensity for much longer. The Ministry of Defense was forced to dip into its emergency reserves in order to maintain the forces, and those reserves were down to 30–35 percent by mid-March 2000.<sup>99</sup> Clearly, a decision had been made to ensure that the combatants were supplied, but this was at a significant cost to longer-term readiness and capability.

Night combat continued to be a problem both in the air (as already discussed) and on the ground. Night-vision equipment was sporadically issued to infantry and tank units. Although there were reports of patrols and individual night actions during the fighting for Grozny, it appears that Russian forces generally stopped fighting and hunkered down when the light faded, occasionally shooting to defend their position but doing little else. During the Grozny fighting, Russian troops usually began combat at dawn, initially advancing without artillery to gain surprise. If they were lucky, they might be able to capture one or two blocks, which they then spent the rest of the day trying to hold on to with artillery and air support. As night fell, available food and supplies were distributed and a night defense began. In mountain towns Russian forces usually just left the area at sundown, returning again the next day for “clearing” operations if there was evidence these were needed. One anecdotal report tells of harassing sniper fire in Grozny: a single armed man fired at a Russian post throughout the night. The Russians waited until well after daybreak to respond. The Chechens, on the other hand, operated effectively in the darkness, attacking isolated Russian soldiers outside their outposts. In the mountains, they entered towns as the Russians left every evening, both groups seeking rest and resupply.<sup>100</sup>

### The Press

If artillery and aviation barrages were not a lesson Russia had taken from Western operations, the handling of the press and, through the press, of public opinion bore some resemblance to U.S. and NATO

---

<sup>99</sup>Solovyov.

<sup>100</sup>Konstantin Rashchepkin, “Komsomolskoye. Ours will capture it!” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 15, 2000; Milrad Fatullayev, “Komsomolskoye after the rebels and the federal troops” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 61 (2123), Internet edition, April 5, 2000; Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

public affairs efforts during the Kosovo conflict. In fact, a government newspaper described the tight control exerted over the media as one of the few truly new aspects of national security doctrine.<sup>101</sup> Whereas in 1994–1996 journalists had enjoyed unimpeded access to the soldiers, the front lines, and especially to the Chechen resistance, in 1999–2000 the Russian government implemented a strict system of accreditation and escorts. At times there was a complete ban on reporters in Grozny or anywhere near Russian military forces.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, while in the previous campaign there had been little effort by the Russians to “spin” the story that emerged from the conflict (in sharp contrast to the effective information campaign of the guerrillas), this time the situation was reversed. Instead of interviews with rebel leaders occupying Russia’s front pages, Russian commanders and soldiers told what was largely a positive story of their success against a “terrorist” enemy. In fact, the Russian refusal to refer to the operation in Chechnya as a war, describing it instead as a “counter-terrorist operation,” was largely accepted by the press. The Russian message was somewhat less clearly transmitted on the Internet, where rebel-controlled and sympathetic Web sites continued to operate.<sup>103</sup> The Russians, while posting regular press releases on line, did not make as extensive a use of this medium.<sup>104</sup>

The Russian leadership had blamed unrestricted media access for the steady decline in public support for the war in 1994–1996. Tales of young Russian soldiers starving, suffering, and dying on the front lines were reported daily in newspapers, and the corroborating images appeared nightly on televisions throughout the Russian Federation and, indeed, the world. This, combined with the lack of a clear explanation for why Russian troops were there in the first place, very likely contributed to public dissatisfaction and increased unwillingness to accept Russian casualties. This “CNN effect” was also a prob-

---

<sup>101</sup>*Izvestiya*, cited by Paul Goble in “A Real Battle on the Virtual Front,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, Vol. 3, No. 199, part 1, October 12, 1999.

<sup>102</sup>Zainashev.

<sup>103</sup>Goble.

<sup>104</sup>Pavel Chernomorskiy, “Second Chechen war on the internet: Total defeat?” (in Russian), *Internet.ru*, February 18, 2000, [http://www.internet.ru/preview\\_a/articles/2000/02/18/1760.html](http://www.internet.ru/preview_a/articles/2000/02/18/1760.html).

able factor in Russia's disinclination to send ground forces into urban combat in late 1999.

Initially, the saturation of the information nets with a pro-Russian message and strict control of journalists' access to the theater seemed to be paying off. The Russian public appeared willing, even eager, to accept the "counter-terrorist operation" as just retribution for the bombings of Russian apartment buildings, the invasion of Dagestan, and Russian failure in the last war. Reports of successful missions, brave soldiers, and low casualties helped foster this attitude and spurred Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, then acting president of Russia and the engineer behind the war machine, to increased popularity. There was even speculation that the entire conflict had been designed as a cynical ploy on Putin's part to secure the presidency in March. There is certainly reason to believe that the many somewhat premature announcements of success in both Grozny and Chechnya as a whole were at least partially driven by a desire to make the acting president and the armed forces appear effective and capable.

But as fighting dragged on from weeks into months and reports of success became less and less credible, the press began to chafe at the constraints imposed on it. The overwhelmingly positive tone of coverage at the start of the conflict slowly shifted to questioning of government reports of military successes and negligible casualty rates. Official accounts were increasingly discredited as individual soldiers and officers, interviewed when they rotated out of battle or as they lay hospitalized with injuries, told of the deaths of their comrades in engagements for which official reports had listed no losses.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, however supportive the Russian people may have been of the operation in theory, they remained broadly unwilling to send their own sons to fight.<sup>106</sup> Despite promises that no soldier without at least six months' experience would be sent to the front lines in Chechnya or elsewhere (another promise belied by reports from the front), even the official figures for the number of citizens failing to

---

<sup>105</sup>Sokolov-Mitrich.

<sup>106</sup>A number of female military personnel served in Chechnya in a wide variety of roles. They were, however, exclusively volunteer contract soldiers and not conscripts, as women are not subject to the draft in Russia.

report for the fall draft doubled between 1998 and 1999—from 19,600 to 38,000.<sup>107</sup> The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, which came to prominence during the war in Afghanistan and spoke out in opposition to the 1994–1996 war, began keeping its own lists of casualties from Chechnya, saying that official government counts could not be trusted. These lists were published in the popular newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

All told, however, the media war probably could not have gone any better for the Russians than it did. The government was fairly effective in controlling media access to the front and maintaining press and public support for the war. The Russian media, like the media in most Western countries, was for the most part willing to accept both government controls and the government's story in the name of national security for as long as that story seemed plausible. The public, too, seemed happy enough at first with the government-released information. Over time, however, the disparities between the official line and the increasingly obvious reality reported by soldiers, and their parents, proved impossible to ignore. Eventually, both the press and the public became more cynical about events in Chechnya. But the propaganda campaign of the early days had done its work. Even as Russians questioned the rosy picture of how the war was going, for the most part they continued to support the operation. How long that attitude can be sustained as this conflict continues remains an open question.

### THE CHECHENS STILL IN GROZNY

As in 1994, rebel forces gearing up to defend Grozny in 1999 had ample time to prepare the city. Their approach was both well thought out and professional in execution. The key to resistance operations in Grozny in 1999 was a network of underground passages. To some extent the Russians knew this and sought to counter it. Russian General-Lieutenant Gennadi Troshev (Joint Force Commander in the Northern Caucasus) stated that prior to the 1999 attack the Russian command studied not only the road system but also the sewer system, parts of which were wide enough (2–3 meters

---

<sup>107</sup>Mukhin, "Every other youth has had no schooling."

in diameter) for people to walk through. According to Troshev, these were mined or destroyed by Russian sappers before the bulk of his forces entered the city.<sup>108</sup> But events proved his assessment premature. Whatever damage Russian explosives had done, enough of the underground network survived to support the rebels consistently, even during heavy bombing and artillery attacks. This “city beneath the city” included facilities constructed in Soviet times for civil defense. Bomb shelters were used by the guerrillas as control points, rest areas, hospitals, and supply depots. Underground structures that were used in 1994–1995 were refurbished and reinforced by the rebels in the intervening years.<sup>109</sup> The Chechen resistance roofed some basements with concrete blocks that they could raise and lower with jacks to protect from Russian artillery strikes.<sup>110</sup> As was common in World War II, the guerrillas broke holes in first-floor and basement walls of adjoining buildings to create passages.<sup>111</sup> Despite Russian claims of a perfect seal around the city, Chechen forces were able to get in and out at several key points, such as the Old Sunzha section. These passages were used to evacuate the wounded and bring in reinforcements, weaponry, and ammunition.<sup>112</sup> As fighting in Grozny continued, Chechen reinforcements from outside the city were further bolstered by local residents joining the battle, some voluntarily and some under rebel coercion.<sup>113</sup>

In April 2000, the Russian military affairs weekly *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (Independent Military Review) published what it characterized as a captured “diary” of a Chechen guerrilla. This document outlines rebel tactics and organization throughout Chechnya, and is therefore also of interest to the analyst of Chechen

<sup>108</sup>Federal forces battle in Grozny sewers” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 28, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/28/troshev/troshev.htm>.

<sup>109</sup>“Fighters have unimpeded access to surrounded Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 25, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/25/grozny/hodyat.htm>; Il'ya Kedrov, “Ministry of Defense has brought Ministry of Internal Affairs to heel” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 13 (2077), January 26, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.ng.ru>; Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

<sup>110</sup>Kulikov.

<sup>111</sup>Nunayev and Paddock; Bugai, Budula, and Shershenev.

<sup>112</sup>Nunayev and Paddock; “Fighters have unimpeded access to surrounded Grozny.”

<sup>113</sup>Viktorov, “Not one step back!”—in Chechen” (in Russian), *Segodnya*, December 29, 2000.

urban operations. Whether the diary is legitimate, a piece of guerrilla disinformation, or a fabrication of journalists or Russian officials, it does appear to accurately describe many aspects of rebel actions. It paints the Chechen rebels as a highly organized force, led by a single commander and his staff, with several field commanders. During wartime, each field commander's force is split into two 500-man groupings, one active and one reserve. Five or six detachments of 100 or more personnel (the numbers don't quite add up) are each further subdivided into three fighting groups: a central, full-readiness group that remains with the commander in the mountains, a 20-man group of reconnaissance, mining, and sniper specialists deployed to a local town or village, and a support group.

Of these three, the central group has no fixed position and remains constantly on the move. Its troops all carry small arms. At the field commander's direction, they carry out raids or attacks and then move on, traveling with two radio transceivers, two pairs of binoculars, two compasses, two maps of the area, and ammunition consisting of 300 7.62mm rounds, 500–600 5.45mm rounds, 4 RPG-18 *Mukhas*, and 1,000 7.62mm PK machine gun rounds. The second group also reports to the commander, but their role is to carry out sabotage and reconnaissance missions in the towns and villages, as well as to engage in overt public affairs work, drumming up support for the resistance (however incommensurate this may seem with the sabotage and reconnaissance tasks). Finally, the support group is made up of friends and allies of the commander. They live in their own homes but remain ready to perform certain tasks at the commander's behest.

According to this diary, all Chechen guerrillas are trained in the use of several weapons including whatever Russian equipment they might capture. Training includes movement and camouflage, first aid, tactics, communications, topography, and demolition. Reconnaissance techniques and procedures are another important component of force training. Standard hand signals are used to communicate soundlessly. The diary describes rebel battle tactics as a "fleas and dogs" approach: the flea bites the dog and leaves.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup>Clearly a rare breed of flea.

Similarly, the guerrilla attacks and immediately moves, so as not to invite counterattack and to avoid artillery or air strikes.

The diary describes a “typical” rebel attack on an enemy post. The attack group is divided in thirds, a central force of RPG, PK, and automatic rifle gunners and two flanking groups. RPG and PK machine gunners take up supporting positions at least 50 meters away from the post. Automatic riflemen secretly approach as closely as possible and an RPG gunner initiates fire, after which the PK and RPG gunners fire steadily. The automatic rifle troops then move closer, then two flanking groups approach to a distance of 15–20 meters as the central force continues firing. The flanking groups provide cover fire as the central group moves closer to the objective. Alternatively, troops armed with automatic weapons can effect a similar advance, one group covering the other.

Turning more specifically to combat in built-up areas, the document describes the preparation of the towns and villages of Ishchersk, Goragorsk, Naursk, Alpatovo, and Vinogradnoye as defensive points in anticipation of war with Russia. The diary supports other analyses describing the rebel tactical nucleus of a 3- to 5-man fighting group, armed with some combination of a grenade launcher, a machine gun, one or two assault rifles, and a sniper rifle. A wide range of weapons, including mortars, anti-aircraft guns, KPVT and DShK machine guns, and automatic grenade launchers, are moved from point to point in the backs of civilian vehicles such as the UAZ or Jeep. Snipers generally sought to shoot first at Russian officers and “more active” soldiers. The diary notes the ease with which Russian soldiers are taken hostage, because of the lack of effective Russian base security. It relates how Russian soldiers can be persuaded to reveal sensitive information in exchange for beer or cigarettes.<sup>115</sup>

The diary does not address how rebel actions changed between 1994 and 2000, nor does it discuss the use of “special” weapons or information warfare. But the 1999–2000 war is notable for the increase in reports of “chemical” weapons use. While these accusations came from both sides, those of the Russians were significantly more plenti-

---

<sup>115</sup>Kirilenko.

ful.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Russia sent NBC troops to the area and issued gas masks and other protective equipment to soldiers.<sup>117</sup> Military intelligence sources were quoted as saying that mines, barrels, cisterns, and canisters filled with materials such as chlorine, ammonia, liquid nitrogen, and possibly low-level radioactive waste (reportedly stolen from the Radon medical and research waste disposal facility near Grozny) had been placed at intersections of major streets. The validity of such reports is questionable, however. While fighting in and around Grozny resulted in oil spills and fire at the chemical factory, there is no proof either side used chemical weapons, even crude ones. Certainly the radioactive waste at the depository in question was an unlikely weapon. There is little radiation danger from the waste, which is at a very low level of radioactivity (although it does pose a significant environmental and public health threat if it finds its way into the soil or water). Today, according to most reports, the Radon facility is in an area under Russian control and under reliable guard.<sup>118</sup>

According to Vasili Gumennyi, head of the electronic warfare service of the Northern Caucasus Military Region, the Chechen communications infrastructure improved significantly over five years. While Russian government-regulated communication systems were largely absent, a collection of other systems provided more than sufficient service. The Chechens had an NMT-450 analog cellular network with two base stations, including one in Grozny. This supported communication with other locations in the Russian Federation. An AMPS station in Ingushetia provided a relay, enabling communications over the entire territory of Chechnya. Western- and Asian-made radios (Motorola, Kenwood, ICOM, and others) also provided communications. Chechen communications further included radio-relay

---

<sup>116</sup>“Grozny: both sides accuse each other of chemical attack” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 10, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/10/himoruzhie/>; Sergei Mitrofanov, “Poisoned cloud of chlorine and lies,” *Vesti.ru*, December 10, 1999, <http://www.vesti.ru/daynews/10-12-1999/11-grozny.htm>; “Chechen fighters using chemical weapons,” *Lenta.ru*, January 1, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/2000/01/02/chemical>.

<sup>117</sup>Andrei Korbut, “Chechnya: The ecological threat is growing,” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 176, January 28, 2000, Internet edition, [http://nvo.ng.ru/wars/2000-01-28/2\\_ecohazard.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/wars/2000-01-28/2_ecohazard.html). Blozki, Konstantinov, and Kliment’ev.

<sup>118</sup>“Chlorine charges defused in Chechnya” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, December 24, 1999, <http://lenta.ru/vojna/1999/12/24/hlor/>; Korbut, “Chechnya: the ecological threat is growing.”

communications links, stationary and mobile television transmitters, short-wave radio (perhaps stolen from international organizations such as the Red Cross), “amateur” radio transmitters, and cable lines. Radios communicated in the 136–174, 300–350, and 390–470 Mhz bands, while radio/telephones communicated in the 860–960 Mhz band.<sup>119</sup>

If reports of cellular telephone use by the rebels in 1994–1996 were implausible, there can be little doubt that mobile phones were much in use by 1999–2000. The collapse of the telephone system in the region in the intervening period had left the area with few alternatives. According to Gumennyi, the cellular network allowed each field commander to link with a network of 20–60 individuals, while radio transmitters allowed 60–80 personnel at a time to receive intelligence data. These transmitters were often manned by prewar hobbyists who had cultivated the relevant skills and possessed the equipment to collect and transmit intelligence to support the rebels. Rebels also placed retransmitters in the mountains to extend range. Mobile INMARSAT and Iridium terminals facilitated intercity and international communications (with Egypt, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey) as well as providing Internet links.<sup>120</sup>

Leading field commanders also had television transmitters. Although their equipment was limited to a range of 20–30 kilometers, it was sufficient to transmit within a given commander's territory. Intelligence collection was aided by electronic, acoustic, radiotechnical, and radar equipment. Resistance centers of electronic reconnaissance activity were located in Grozny, Urus-Martan, Shali, Zandak, Dzhugurti, Stari Achhoy, and Shlkovskaya. Specialized Chechen troops intercepted Russian communications and transmitted false information on Russian nets.<sup>121</sup>

These communications improvements were the most significant change to Chechen procedures since the 1994–1996 war. The small combat group remained consistent and effective over time, hand-

---

<sup>119</sup>Gumennyi and Matyash.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*

held radios were still widespread, and the RPG continued to be the weapon of choice.<sup>122</sup> There were reports that the Chechen rebels used anti-aircraft guns against Russian ground forces in the city, as the Russians had done against the Chechens in 1994–1995. But tactics remained largely unchanged. Rebels hid in fortified basements and waited for Russian forces to get close enough to shoot, made use of underground tunnels, and looked for Russian weaknesses.<sup>123</sup> Unconfirmed reports said that rebel forces had acquired RPO-A *Shmel* flamethrowers and used them in Grozny and smaller towns such as Shali.<sup>124</sup>

Rebel air defense capability did not change significantly. One estimate suggests that the rebels began the 1999 fight with 70–100 portable air defense missiles such as the *Igla* (SA-16 “Gimlet”) and used them sparingly. But even if these weapons were used rarely, they did have some effect, taking out the occasional Russian aircraft and limiting how high rotary-wing aviators were willing to fly (most tried to stay beneath 50 feet). As in the first war, Russians and Chechens both reported that the rebels had a handful of Stinger missiles. This is unlikely, as their most likely source for the missiles would have been Afghanistan, where the United States had stopped sending Stingers a decade before.<sup>125</sup> It is therefore generally believed that if the rebels did have any Stinger missiles, they would have been in disrepair and unusable. Other air defense weapons reportedly in the rebel arsenal included the ZSU 23-4 (*Shilka*), ZSU-2, and the *Strela-3* (SA-14 “Gremlin”).<sup>126</sup>

Any discussion of Chechen resistance combat should include mention of the numerous reports of foreigners fighting on the Chechen side. These individuals hailed from a wide range of countries and nationalities, and reports varied on whether they were in Chechnya with or without the sanction of their home governments. Docu-

---

<sup>122</sup>“Staropromislovsk section of Grozny captured by federal forces”; Alice Lagnado, “Rebels ‘Kill 700 Russian Troops,’” *London Times*, January 28, 2000.

<sup>123</sup>“Foreign press on situation in Chechnya” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, January 5, 2000, <http://lenta.ru/vojnai/2000/01/05/grozny/abroad.htm>.

<sup>124</sup>Ahmedakhanov, “Soldiers bargaining with own death”; Krapivin.

<sup>125</sup>Sokut.

<sup>126</sup>Babichev; Ahmedakhanov, “Soldiers bargaining with own death.”

ments purportedly found in Grozny listed such states as Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, and Ivory Coast as sending fighters to Chechnya under the guise of the International Islamic Relief Organization. Other documents listed 41 commanders in “Khatav’s Islamic Company,” including Jordanians, Syrians, and Pakistanis.<sup>127</sup> Two Chinese mercenaries were reportedly captured in Komsomolskoye.<sup>128</sup> While some or all of these reports may well have been Russian disinformation, there is no doubt that foreigners from all over the world came to fight in Chechnya, some for money, some in support of Islamic revolution, and others, particularly those from other former Soviet states, from hatred of Russian rule.

Most colorful were stories of the “White Stockings,” female snipers from the Baltic states, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Russia itself, who hired themselves out to the rebels. Reports from the front said that these women were armed with VSS 9.3mm, SVD 7.62mm, and other sniper rifles. They also reportedly transmitted threats to Russian troops by radio, or promised to kill only the officers and wound the soldiers.<sup>129</sup> Just how many (if any) “White Stockings” actually fought in Grozny is unknown. Some journalists dismissed these stories as nothing but propaganda; others reported cases of actual shootouts with female snipers. Certainly some Russian soldiers believed the stories and spoke of their intense hatred for these “traitors.”

Whatever their outside support, the Chechen rebels proved (in both 1994 and 1999) that they were not, as some had believed, random bands of irregulars. Neither were they, as General Troshev, the second in command of the Combined Force (and acting commander after Kazantsev left the theater), said, “a well-prepared professional army.”<sup>130</sup> Rather, they were a well-prepared, reasonably well-

<sup>127</sup>“Lists of foreign mercenaries fighting in Chechnya found in Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, February 19, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojn/2000/02/19/archives/>.

<sup>128</sup>Viktorov, “Chinese mercenaries fighting with the separatists” (in Russian), *Segodnya*, Internet edition, March 10, 2000, [http://www.segodnya.ru/w3s.nsf/Contents/2000\\_52\\_news\\_text\\_viktorov1.html](http://www.segodnya.ru/w3s.nsf/Contents/2000_52_news_text_viktorov1.html).

<sup>129</sup>Il’ya Skakunov and Arkadiy Yuzhniy, “Bloody dowry of a Chechen Lolita” (in Russian), *Segodnya*, January 13, 2000; Natal’ya Nikulina, “Bullet in the back” (in Russian), *Slovo*, No. 11 (129), Internet edition, February 16, 2000, <http://www.slovo.msk.ru/content.html?id=766&issue=98>.

<sup>130</sup>Rotar’.

equipped guerrilla force defending its own territory. In many ways this proved far more dangerous to a professional army (even one in decline). The key to understanding why is asymmetry. The fundamental differences between the goals of the Russians and those of the rebels created significant advantages for the rebel force, and weakened the Russians. Where the Russians fought to control and hold territory, the rebels fought to make controlling and holding the territory as unpleasant as possible—a very different mission, and one far more difficult both to grasp and to counter. To the Russians, territory captured was territory won. To the rebels, territory lost was a temporary retreat to regroup and attack once again. This asymmetry was exacerbated by the rebels' ability to blend into the local population. Not only could the Russians not tell combatants from non-combatants, they could not tell friendly subdued territory from hostile territory teeming with enemy forces. While the rebels also preyed on weaknesses endemic to the Russian military (such as buying weapons from the soldiers and selling them drugs) their real success was in exploiting the differences between the war the Russians were fighting and their own.

## THE END GAME

The asymmetric nature of the Russo-Chechen conflict helps shed light on the events of early February 2000. After weeks of heavy fighting in Grozny, on the morning of February 2 rebel forces were reported to be fleeing in droves and dying in Russian minefields. Russian officials initially responded with distrust to reports of both rebel withdrawal and deaths and injuries among the guerrilla's leadership. Presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky voiced the general opinion: "If the guerrillas had left Grozny, there wouldn't be such fierce fighting at the cannery, the president's palace, and in the Zavodsky district." Several suggested that it was a Chechen trick or disinformation of some sort. Within days, however, the story changed. Now Russian officials spoke of a well-planned operation orchestrated by the FSB and others, an operation code-named "Wolf Hunt." An FSB agent, it appeared, had offered the beleaguered rebels a way out of Grozny in exchange for \$100,000. Radio transmissions then convinced the guerrillas that Russian forces were moving from the west to the south, and a small group of rebels was allowed to successfully leave the city by the designated path. Then,

when the bulk of the rebel force prepared to follow, they found that the road was mined, that Russian soldiers were everywhere, and that dozens of helicopters were shooting at them from the sky. The Russians claimed that the rebels lost up to 1,700 personnel.<sup>131</sup>

This story raises some questions. True, the rebels incurred significant casualties while leaving Grozny in the first days of February 2000. The wounded included leader Shamil Basaev, who subsequently had his foot amputated as a result of injuries sustained at that time. But there are inconsistencies that make it implausible that these events were entirely orchestrated by Russian forces, that the rebels left because they were losing the battle for the city, or that their losses were as high as the Russians claimed. An early February analysis, published in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* daily on February 5, 2000 (but presumably written before then), cited military experts who predicted that Russian forces would need until at least the end of that month to capture Grozny.<sup>132</sup> The confusion among the Russian leadership, the fact that the Russians were not making significant progress in the days leading up to this “retreat,” the large numbers of rebels who apparently succeeded in fleeing Grozny for the mountains, and finally the estimated 1,000 rebels who remained in the city after this operation further raise questions about the plausibility of the “Wolf Hunt” story. Rebel leaders had long said they would abandon the city at some point. As spring approached, it made sense to shift operations from its ruins to the mountains, where foliage would provide cover and from where the resistance had successfully beaten back the Russians for centuries. This was what they had done five years earlier. The high casualty rates suggest that Russian intelligence had perhaps intercepted rebel withdrawal plans and used that information to persuade a number of Basaev’s forces to buy their way out—into minefields and an ambush. But not

---

<sup>131</sup>Natalia Gorodetskaya, “Grozny Surrendered Via the Internet,” *Defense and Security*, February 4, 2000; Vasilii Zhuchkov, “Unclear Who Is Defending Grozny,” *Vremya Moscow News*, February 3, 2000; Dmitri Nikolaev, “Forces heading to the mountains” (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, February 11, 2000; Oleg Stulov, “Wolf Hunt” (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, February 5, 2000; Vladimir Galaiko, “Commander: Interview with 58th Army Commander and Hero of Russia General Vladimir Shamanov” (in Russian), *Versti*, No. 20, February 22, 2000, p. 2, as cited by *Oborona i Bezopasnost*, February 27, 2000.

<sup>132</sup>Serenko.

all the rebels who left took this route. Significant rebel forces had moved to the mountains, where the next phase of the war unfolded.<sup>133</sup>

Regardless of what happened in the lead-up to that early February 2000 ambush, the battle for Grozny was drawing to a close. Its dynamics changed significantly with the disappearance of a large part of the defensive force. While sporadic firefights continued for weeks, MoD forces began to withdraw, leaving the city largely to MVD and police control.<sup>134</sup>

Russian commanders declared Grozny sealed in mid-February.<sup>135</sup> They set up a dense network of control posts along roads leading into and through town. These varied from sandbags and cement barriers blocking the street to dug-in BTRs joined to deep parapets and trenches, with up to a company of soldiers in place. Their purpose was to monitor traffic into and out of the city and check the documents of those passing through. By mid-February, OMON troops were “clearing” the city quarter by quarter, checking documents, detaining suspicious individuals, and confiscating grenade launchers, grenades, mines, and ammunition.

Methods of identifying enemy personnel had not improved in five years’ time. Russian inspectors continued to inspect men’s bodies for bruises that might be caused by RPG or automatic weapons recoil. Because of the large number of posts, individuals had to submit to such checks repeatedly. But the OMON units that carried out these inspections in Grozny generally did not venture far from their well-protected posts.<sup>136</sup>

With the fight for the city officially over, the Emergency Ministry established soup kitchens and invited journalists to watch hungry

---

<sup>133</sup>Nikolaev.

<sup>134</sup>Mikhail Tolpegin, “This is no plain” (in Russian), *Segodnya*, February 8, 2000.

<sup>135</sup>“Grozny to be closed until April 1” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, February 21, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/02/21/grozny>.

<sup>136</sup>Maksimov, “Road to Grozny” (in Russian), *Ogonyok*, Internet edition, February 2000, <http://www.ropnet.ru/ogonyok/win/200060/60-10-11.html>; “35 sections of Grozny cleaned” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, February 17, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/02/17/grozny/zachistka.htm>; Rotar’.

Grozny residents line up for food. But even with the MVD ostensibly in control, sporadic fighting continued and army forces remained nearby.<sup>137</sup> An attack on an OMON unit near Grozny killed 20 and injured more than 30 men. It illustrated the dubious nature of government control of the area. On March 2, 2000, the OMON column was attacked as it moved through the Pervomaysk area toward the Staropromislovsky quarter of Grozny, just five kilometers outside the city. Believing the area to be safe (the quarter had surrendered without a fight during the battles for Grozny), the OMON forces were armed only with automatic rifles and communicating in the clear. They also had no armored vehicle or helicopter escort. Because they were attacked only about 200 meters from another OMON base, the troops initially thought the sound of gunfire was a welcome from their colleagues.<sup>138</sup>

Such attacks and other sporadic firefights continued well into April 2000, leading some to argue that few rebels had left the city after all, that the enemy had merely gone underground. The city was repeatedly closed to outside traffic, and restrictions on the press continued. Even military personnel were unable to move freely through this “liberated” city, with various restrictions imposed on when and how they could travel.<sup>139</sup>

### URBAN OPERATIONS AFTER GROZNY: KOMSOMOLSKOYE

In 2000, as in 1995, an end to the fighting in Grozny did not mean an end to urban combat in Chechnya. The seemingly efficient path the Russian forces had cut through the towns and villages in the north of this breakaway region came back to haunt them as the war continued. Rebel attacks sprung up from the rear, from towns and areas believed “cleared” of the enemy. The attacks continued throughout the fighting in Grozny and intensified after that city was taken. Vil-

<sup>137</sup>“Went to the mountains.”

<sup>138</sup>“OMON force from near Moscow ambushed near Grozny” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, March 3, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojna/2000/03/03/grozny>; Vadim Rechkalov, “We thought it was a greeting . . .” (in Russian), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, No. 10, Internet edition, March 9, 2000, <http://www.og.ru/mat/sd1.shtml>.

<sup>139</sup>Svetlana Nesterova, “Grozny—closed city” (in Russian), *Gazeta.ru*, April 17, 2000, [http://www.gazeta.ru/grozny\\_closed.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/grozny_closed.shtml).

lages in areas such as Nozhai-Yurtovsk, Veden, and Shalin reportedly remained under rebel control well into the spring of 2000.<sup>140</sup> The lack of confidence in government control of rear areas was reflected in warnings issued to reporters in Gudermes, who were told not to wander off and cautioned to always be accompanied by armed personnel.<sup>141</sup> It soon became clear that many guerrillas had never left their towns and villages as promised, but had merely shown their “civilian” face to Russian forces eager to avoid a fight. Once the Russians moved on, they were vulnerable to attack from the rear. Again and again, they had to return to fight street battles in the very towns they had “captured” without a fight.<sup>142</sup>

Microcosmic replays of the Grozny fighting took place in various towns in Chechnya that spring. Even in the smallest villages, aspects of the urban battlefield were present, as private homes became defensive positions.<sup>143</sup> Probably the bloodiest fighting took place in Komsomolskoye, a small village some 25 kilometers south of Grozny. Russian forces entered the town late on March 6 to contain rebel forces under the command of Ruslan Gelaev. Gelaev had occupied Komsomolskoye the previous day, defeating Russian motorized rifle companies (reinforced by two tanks) on its outskirts. Rebel snipers provided cover for their forces as they entered the town. Even after the Russians sent in an Alpha special forces sniper unit from the Western Grouping, the rebels continued to reinforce and did not back down.<sup>144</sup>

Once Russian forces and rebel forces were both in Komsomolskoye proper, the situation worsened. The estimated 600–1,000 rebels who had initially broken through into the village were bolstered by the local villagers, who had clearly been planning for this fight for some time. Carefully engineered defenses were in place, including a sys-

---

<sup>140</sup>Bahtiyar Ahmedhanov, “Uniform without honor” (in Russian), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, No. 14, Internet edition, April 6, 2000, <http://www.og.ru/mat/rep2.shtml>.

<sup>141</sup>Rotar’.

<sup>142</sup>Golz, “Front to the rear.”

<sup>143</sup>Nabiyev, “Infantry gets wings.”

<sup>144</sup>Liz Fuller, “Pitched Battle Under Way South of Grozny,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, Vol. 4, No. 37, Part I, February 22, 2000; Rashchepkin, “How Komsomolskoye was freed” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, April 16, 2000.

tem of underground structures similar to that in Grozny.<sup>145</sup> The familiar reinforced basements were sometimes supplemented by additional “wells” dug beneath them. Teams of two or three men, armed with RPGs and machine guns, repeatedly emerged from these shelters to attack Russian forces with short-range massed fire, then retreated to their underground bunkers. Russian troops lobbed grenades into basements but generally found that rebels would throw them back before they exploded. Several Russian tanks and BTRs were destroyed, one when an explosive was thrown directly into its open hatch. As in Grozny, tanks were generally used to provide fire support for the MVD forces, sometimes by simply moving down the narrow streets firing continuously. General-Major Grigoriy Fomenko, the commander of the MVD Western Grouping, brought in more armor as the fighting continued. Two tanks and a *Shilka* (ZSU 23-4) self-propelled anti-aircraft gun system were sent to destroy enemy strongpoints in the town. They failed, and the lead tank was destroyed by a rebel RPG.

The Russian approach in Komsomolskoye was, once again, massive artillery and air strikes followed by dismounted forces, predominantly MVD but with some MoD personnel for support. Supporting fire utilized artillery, tanks, surface-to-surface missiles, attack helicopters, and bombers, the latter flying day and night missions. Su-24 bombers and Su-25 ground-attack aircraft, however, were hampered by the proximity of Russian troops to enemy forces. Although reports of the use of the *Buratino* TOS-1 fuel-air system in Grozny were difficult to confirm, it seems clear that this weapon was used in Komsomolskoye. Armored and mechanized vehicles included MoD tanks and MVD BTRs. Dogs were brought in to find mines and assist in searches. As in Grozny, Russian ground forces generally did not move after dark, returning instead to safe positions and barricading themselves in captured houses.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup>Solovyov; Nabiyev, “Their final goal was Urus-Martan” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 20, 2000; Viktorov; Rashchepkin, “How Komsomolskoye was freed.”

<sup>146</sup>Lema Turpalov, “Valerik [river of death] of the end of the 20th century” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 67 (2129), Internet edition, April 13, 2000; Andrei Mironov; Orr, “Hunt for Gelayev results in nothing” (in Russian), *Lenta.ru*, March 16, 2000, <http://www.lenta.ru/vojnal/2000/03/15/baranov/>.

The fighting in Komsomolskoye lasted three weeks, the rebels successfully reinforcing from the mountains throughout that time. Even toward the end, when they controlled only a handful of houses, Chechen forces continued to fight intelligently and capably, constantly shifting position. In the end, the Russians claimed to have killed 500 enemy fighters, but exact tallies were impossible because the guerrillas had been diligent in evacuating their dead and wounded. Civilian casualties were deemed to be few in number, as most of the noncombatant residents had fled. But if the Russians “saved” this town, it was by destroying it. By the time the fighting was over, there was little left.<sup>147</sup>

Komsomolskoye is significant for the same reasons that the Budenovsk and Grozny battles of 1995 and 1996 were significant. While it is clear that the Russian forces in the city of Grozny in 1999–2000 were better prepared than their predecessors, this did not translate into improved urban fighting capability for the Russian armed forces as a whole. A lack of focus on this form of warfare, stemming largely from a continued refusal to accept it as a possibility, had the same effect this time as the last. Once again, Russian soldiers were unprepared for the real dangers and difficulties of attacking a fortified populated area. Once again, the rebels were better prepared, better trained, and more motivated. If little armor was lost in Grozny, the tanks that burned in the little village of Komsomolskoye cast a dark shadow on that accomplishment. That here, as in the larger city, the end result was the almost complete destruction of the village, in part with the powerful fuel-air explosive TOS-1, is significant for both a better understanding of urban combat and our appraisal of Russia’s capabilities.

---

<sup>147</sup>Shaburkin, “Fighting continues in Komsomolskoye” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No. 46 (2108), Internet edition, March 15, 2000; Rashchepkin, “Komsomolskoye. Ours will capture it!” Vasili Fatigarov, “On the ruins of the bandits’ nest” (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, March 21, 2000; Turpalov; Rashchepkin, “How Komsomolskoye was freed.”