

Heroic chronicles of defense of Donetsk airport. Wnter 2014-2015.

Defense of the Donetsk airport deserves special attention during the antiterrorist operation on the territory of Donetsk and Lugansk regions and is important for the further development of military art in general and tactical level of military actions. Which are used by military units and divisions to perform tactical (operational-tactical) combat tasks within the operation of the grouping of troops or on their own.

The article presents combat examples that convincingly show that fighting will be successful for a commander who has high morale and combat qualities, he thoroughly relates to a comprehensive assessment of the situation and the prediction of its development, wisely carries out planning measures and manages the division.

Key words: anti-terrorist operation, illicit armed forces, Donetsk airport, terminal, militants.

Problem statement and its relevance. Based on the analysis of official sources, memories of direct participants in events and other sources, the authors reveal the role of ordinary soldiers in the struggle for Ukraine's independence. The urgency of the article is due to the fact that the Russian Federation has not abandoned its intentions and continues to stir up armed conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Resist this aggression can only motivated, well-trained and brought up in the heroic actions of soldiers.

Analysis of previous researches and publications. Researches of the combat experience in the Russian-Ukrainian Hybrid War on the page of history, as the defense of the Donetsk airport in the national historical science, raised the issue [1, 8, 9, 12], but was not yet sufficiently highlighted. In the writings of domestic researchers, the defense of Donetsk airport is reflected in the collective work «BP 242. History of courage, fraternity and self-sacrifice», where the stories of defenders of the Donetsk airport were collected. The book is about 242 days of fighting at Donetsk airport is evidence of «cyborgs», stories of volunteers and journalists, comments by military experts and analysts from Ukraine, Russia, the USA and Canada. In the work of Kalinska O., Kryshchuk O. and others it's a memory of all who gave their lives and those who survived the battles. The book presents the chronology of military actions. In the work of Sergio Marco, «The Chronicle of the Hybrid War» describes real events, reconstruction, in which the author honestly describes the most important episodes of this unfinished war. Extraordinary attention deserves Sergiy Loika's book

«Airport». This is a novel about real events, real facts. The author managed to convey the realities of the war with «good brother-neighbor». To write this, it was necessary to live there by yourself.

Purpose of the article is to reveal a general picture of the defense of the Donetsk airport by the Armed Forces of Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter company and the highlight of certain episodes of the military actions that took place around it.

Defense of International airport «Donetsk» named after Sergey Prokofiev occupies a special place in the Russian-Ukrainian Hybrid War. The airfield in Stalino (now Donetsk) was built on the blood. Its construction began in 1933 (during the Holodomor in Ukraine)¹.

Donetsk airport was renewed to host Euro-2012. The expenses reached 7 billion hryvnias. During the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship 2012, in May 2012, nobody thought that in two years the airport would become a true citadel².

A persistent and bloody struggle during the defense of the Donetsk airport, which lasted for 242 days, has become a symbol of war and invincibility of Ukrainian fighters.

After capturing of the illegal armed formations of Sloviansk, a detached division of the 3rd separate special-purpose regiment (3 units of the PL) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter the Armed Forces of Ukraine) was sent to the Donetsk airport, which was located in the old terminal. On the night of May 25-26, several KAMAZ car fighters arrived at the airport at the Vostok battalion, commanded by Alexander Khodakovsky, a former security officer of Ukraine, commander of the Alpha division.

O. Khodakovsky's intention was as follows: using personal acquaintance with the head of the airport security, take control of the main terminal and oust the special detachments of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In order to control the airport, the forces of the Vostok battalion were not enough, therefore on 25th of May, O. Khodakovsky took under his command a detachment of Russian «volunteers» (about 120 militants) who arrived in Donetsk from the training camp of the Rostov region.

Militants entered the new terminal, which contained passengers and airport staff. Special forces did not interfere them from preventing civilians. The militants opened a warning fire so that civilians could left the airport³.

¹ The battle for the Donetsk airport - myths and reality. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://argumentua.com/stati/bitva-za-donetskii-aeroport-mify-i-realnost>.

² 242 days of defense [PHOTO AND VIDEO CHRONICLE OF ANTISTOYAN]. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://rivne1.tv/news/77139-donetskiy-aeroport-242-dni-oboroni-foto-i-video-khronika-protystoyan>.

³ The battle for the Donetsk airport - myths and reality. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://argumentua.com/stati/bitva-za-donetskii-aeroport-mify-i-realnost>.

In the current situation, the command of the antiterrorist operation (hereinafter ATO) decided to conduct an operation to exempt the Donetsk airport. The terrorists were issued an ultimatum demanding to liberate the airport until 13.00 on 26th of May. During this operation, for the first time since the beginning of the ATO, aircraft of tactical aviation and helicopters of the Army Aviation were used for the first time.

Due to the refusal of the militants to fulfill the requirements that were mentioned in the ultimatum, the detachment of the 3rd special-purpose regiment was reinforced by airborne landing forces: 93 military personnels from the 95th airmobile brigade (hereinafter AM bde), 8 Special purpose regiment, 140 separate special-purpose centers, 99 controls, three reconnaissance pilots of the intelligence center, as well as a group from the main intelligence department and the division of internal troops «Jaguar».

For the support of the landing action, an aircraft-helicopter group was hit by targets in the vicinity of the new terminal, as well as by illegal armed groups (further NZF) who tried to get into the rear of the landing. As a result of such actions, several dozen militants were destroyed and the territory of the airport was gradually released from the NZF⁴. This was the first assault on the Donetsk airport.

After the battle that took place on 26th of May, 2014, no significant clashes took place at the airport in the summer. In the summer, the detachment of the 93rd mechanized brigade (hereinafter the Mech bde) headed by Lieutenant Cyril Nezdrya (callous Assistant Professor) arrived at the strengthening of the Special Forces.

The importance of retention of the airport "Donetsk" was determined by a number of factors. The main ones were:

first, in case of capturing, he could become a transshipment base for the supply of arms, ammunition and military equipment to the conflict zone by air for Russian Federation. Therefore, it would be unnecessary to cross the land section of the state border of Ukraine and thus justify the international community;

Secondly, since September 2014, the airport has turned into an advanced position of our troops on the entire Donetsk area and its maintenance did not allow the enemy to enter the operational space and seize new territories and vice versa for the troops of the antiterrorist operation, it was a certain beachhead for further active actions including and for the capture of Donetsk⁵;

Third, in the event of withdrawal forces anti-terrorist operation from the airport, there would be a real threat of capturing inhabited settlement Avdiivka, further loss of the coke plant and the

⁴ Serge Marko The Chronicle of the Hybrid War. - K: Alterpress, 2016. - P. 131-132.

⁵ Oksana Kovalenko. Airport. Unknown details of the most tragic ATO special operation. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://www.pravda.com.ua>.: <http://www.pravda.com.ua>.

transformation of the city of Mariupol into the city of the unemployed, which in turn would create a strong social tension in the city.

These and other factors explain the numerous attempts of illegal armed units, supported by special forces of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, at any cost to seize it ⁶.

Practically from the May 2014, when airport was released from separatists, the units of the antiterrorist operation that carried out its defense did not have tactical and fire interactions with the main forces of the antiterrorist operation - that means that these units fulfilled the task, remaining in fact surrounded. In order to expand the control areas to the forces of the antiterrorist operation, first of all, it was necessary to inflict a fiery defeat on militants who had their bases and fire points in residential neighborhoods of Donetsk and its suburbs, which could lead to significant losses among the civilian population.

Moreover, to carry out such actions it was necessary to have the reserves of the forces and tools, which that at that time the leadership of the anti-terrorist operation did not have. During the airport's defense, our units used defensive positions as terminals, technical lodgings and communications. In fact, it was not possible to equip fire positions, as required by the military charters, to equip antitank ditches in a ground consisting of building debris, under the constant enemy's fire influence.

The units of the ATO forces kept the old and new terminals at the airport. The reference point of the Ukrainian forces was the inhabited settlement Pisky. Through this locality, defenders of the airport to provide with supplies and ammunition, as well as rotation of military personnel. There, the artillery was also deployed for the fire support of the units who defended the Donetsk airport. Pro-Russian forces attacked the airport from the adjoining Kyiv district of Donetsk, from the territory of the monastery from the south and inhabited settlement Spartacus from the east⁷.

Despite certain achievements of Ukraine, which were harmonized in the Minsk agreements: Protocol - Agreements on a temporary armistice in the East Ukrainian War, concluded on 5th of September, 2014. The aim is to put at risk the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine⁸.

Following the basic provisions enshrined in the agreements, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other military formations and law enforcement agencies made scheduled withdrawal of artillery systems of caliber more than 100 mm at definite distances and continued the implementation of the peace plan for a bilateral ceasefire. The main efforts of the military units and units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the area of the anti-terrorist operation, at that time, focused on stabilizing the situation in the controlled territories, regrouping forces and means, replenishing stocks of

⁶ Same.

⁷ Fights for the Donetsk airport. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fighting_Donetsk_Airport.

⁸ Minsk Arrangements (agreements). [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minsk_agreements.

ammunition and other material resources, restoring the combat capability of troops in certain areas, improving the engineering equipment of the base camps, checkpoints and strong points.

At the same time, the illegal armed formations of the puppet pseudo-republic of the Donetsk People's Republic (further DNR) and the puppet pseudo-republic of the Luhansk People's Republic (hereinafter LNR), supported by the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the Russian Federation), constantly violated the Minsk agreements and set themselves the objective of seizing new territories inclusive to the administrative boundaries of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Following the signing of the Minsk Agreements in September 2014, pro-Russian militants provoked an escalation of the confrontation for the Donetsk airport. Despite numerous attempts to dismount the airport, the object was under the control of the Armed Forces divisions of Ukraine.

According to the military order of the ATO headquarters for the mission of defense of the Donetsk airport, was used a mobile reserve No. 1 from the 1st battalion 79 AMbde (personnel - 50 people, BTR-80 - 6 units). In order to strengthen the mobile reserve defended by the Donetsk airport, a mortar battery (hereinafter minbatr) was allocated from the order of 79 AMbde for the fire support of the action of mobile reserve No. 1 from the fire positions in the inhabited settlement Pesky and deployed command-and-observation post (COP) of the 1st airmobile battalion (later am bn) 79 AMbde in the area of the inhabited settlement Tonenky. The fire support of the units that were defending the airport was also carried out by the 1st Howitzer battery (hereinafter the SPG bty) of the howitzer division (henceforth, the SPG bn) from the fire positions in the area of the np Orlovki⁹.

The commander of the 1st Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) 79 AMbde, taking into consideration the current situation, the area, infrastructure of the facility and decided to defend the airport with sustainable maintenance of the buildings of the new and old terminal and the control tower with the support of minbatr from the area east of the inhabited settlement Pesky and means of defeating the senior boss. Divisions management commander 1 BTG 79 AMbde carried out a command-and-observation post battalion stationed in the inhabited settlement Tonenky and in Pesky were located a tank unit for suppressing fire points and reflecting tank attack by the enemy.

From the precincts of inhabited settlement Pesky to the new terminal are about 2 km away, and from the surveyed - 3 km. It was insignificant distance. But the way from the specified settlements was controlled by militants. But from Pesky of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which carried out the defense of the airport, could be supported by fire tanks¹⁰.

⁹ Fights for the Donetsk airport. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boj_Donetsk_Airport.

¹⁰ Yuri Butusov. The battle for the Donetsk airport. What happened, causes and results. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://censor.net.ua/resonance/321167/bitva_za_donetskiyi_aeroport_cho_proizoshlo_prichiny_i_rezultaty.

On October 12, 2014, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko said in a allocution on the implementation of the Peace Plan and the strengthening of defense capabilities: «Our brave warriors are heroically holding the defense of the Donetsk airport, which has already become a symbol of courage and heroism. With impressive bravery and courage. The Ukrainian cyborgs were named the enemies of these heroes. It is necessary to mark their heroic deed in the chronicles of Ukrainian military glory in golden letters. The state will appreciate their courage»¹¹.

But according to the Ukrainian journalist, the chief editor of the site «Tsensor.Net» Yu. Butusov, the Minsk agreements provoked the escalation of the confrontation, as the airport fell into the zone of withdrawal of Ukrainian troops, while for the terrorist gangs, the combat capture of the airport is important as a demonstration of political victory¹².

The main efforts of the enemy were focused on the shelling and assaulting operations of the Donetsk airport buildings. The shelling of various types of weapon from the airport buildings, in which ATO divisions were located, almost stopped. NZF «Sparta», «Somalia», «Vostok» participated in the assault operations¹³. The inconsistency of their actions sometimes led to the fire in their units. So, on 25th of October 2014, terrorists began firing each other, from artillery systems and tanks, and only then attacked the airport.

One of the important and complicated measures during the defense of the Donetsk airport was the replacement of personnel, replenishment of ammunition and food supplies. For this purpose, the headquarters of 1 AMbn worked out measures for the preparation and immediate replacement of the personnel, which was located in the premises of the airport. For the commander of the unit who went to the airport, the headquarters in advance developed a set of documents (maps, diagrams, determined target numbers, route of referencing, control signals).

The units planned to execute the combat task at the airport, worked out all issues of interaction on the layout of the area, played tactical episodes for the moving forward to the airport, the unloading of material and technical means, the order of personnel change and the evacuation of damaged equipment. At the same time, in order to prevent the leakage of information, servicemen of other detachments and divisions, volunteers and correspondents were not allowed in the area of concentration of np Pesky.

There were two routes for moving to the airport. In September-October, they took the route No. 1, later - No. 2. In the case of an enemy's disclosure of a subdivision that was pushed to the

¹¹ The state will appreciate the courage of the Ukrainian cyborgs who defended the airport in Donetsk - P.Poroshenko. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from:

¹² Terminal and terminators: how long will the Donetsk airport be protected? [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <https://dt.ua/internal/terminal-i-terminatori-yak-dovgo-zahischatimut-doneckiy-aeroport-.html>.

¹³ The battle for the Donetsk airport is myths and reality. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://argumentua.com/stati/bitva-za-donetskii-aeroport-mify-i-realnost>.

airport, and the opening of the fire on it by the enemy, the artillery who was supporting the paratroopers opens the fire for predefined purposes¹⁴.

Submissions to the airport were usually carried out at dawn (05.00-06.00) or at dusk (18.00-19.00) at three armoured landing vehicles, based on the new, old terminals and control tower. The escort was carried out under cover of three tanks. Convoy usually started after a long fire fight or during «intervals» between battles¹⁵.

Corrected fire artillery correctioners from the control tower of the airport, as well as with video cameras, whose images were displayed on COP 1 AM-para bn ¹⁶.

At the end of October, the events around Donetsk airport were aggravated. The enemy exposed the substitution system at the airport, arranged an ambush on the column that was moving to the airport. As a result, two armoured landing vehicles were damaged. These events made it necessary to immediately change the route of nomination and to review the procedure when replacing units in the airport buildings.

The further strengthening of the confrontation at the Donetsk airport led to the closure by militants of the northern part of the Kyiv region of Donetsk to block all approaches to the airport.

Subdivisions 1 BTG 79 AMbde from the middle of October were reinforced by the tactical group (hereinafter RTGr) 95 AM bde ¹⁷, during a certain time they were defending the Donetsk airport. This made it possible to keep an important object and to drag out significant enemy forces from other directions¹⁸.

On November 29, illegal armed formations with the support of the Russian Special Forces captured the old terminal. But divisions of ATO forces at night dislodged the enemy from the terminal. In the future it was impossible to defend the old terminal. Hold the terminal meant losing people. The units of the ATO forces turned to their positions. Ukrainian sappers blew up the terminal, but they did not succeed completely. Therefore, according to the decision of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Viktor Muzenko, the artillery battery of the 203-mm artillery units «Pion» destroyed a building that was completely unenforceable for defense with fifty shots¹⁹.

¹⁴ BP 242. History of courage, brotherhood and self-sacrifice. - Kharkiv: Book Club "Family Leisure Club", 2016. - P. 132.

¹⁵ Terminal and terminators: how long will the Donetsk airport be protected? [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <https://dt.ua/internal/terminal-i-terminatori-yak-dovgo-zahischatimut-doneckiy-aeroport-.html>.

¹⁶ Yuri Butusov. The battle for the Donetsk airport. What happened, causes and results. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://censor.net.ua/resonance/321167/bitva_za_donetskiyi_aeroport_cho_proizoshlo_prichiny_i_rezultaty.

¹⁷ BP 242. History of courage, brotherhood and self-sacrifice. - Kharkiv: Book Club "Club of Family Leisure", 2016. - P. 153, 311.

¹⁸ Serge Marko The Chronicle of the Hybrid War. - K: Alterpress, 2016. - P. 138-139.

¹⁹ Serge Marko The Chronicle of the Hybrid War. - K: Alterpress, 2016. - P. 140-141.

Because of the lack of forces and assets, ATO units were forced to leave the buildings near the new terminal, such as: the hotel, the old terminal and the new terminal became advanced.

During the period of defensive battles in October-November 2014, the enemy's losses amounted to 350 fighters, two tanks, up to twelve guns and mortars, seven rocket fire systems.

The loss of units 1 BTG 79 AMbde in October-November 2014 as a result of battles was as follows: irreversible - 16 servicemen; wounded (contusions) of varying severity - 94 servicemen²⁰.

To carry out attacks from suburban settlements of Donetsk (Vesele, Spartak) was more convenient for pro-Russian mercenaries than from the settlements of Peski and Oпитne. The enemy's observation points were located in high-rise buildings and, being covered with green plantations among private buildings, could easily escape the attack.

The prohibition on opening of the fire was used by separatists in their favor. Due to this, they were able to get close to the airport, to set up additional checkpoints, to improve existing fortifications, and to arrange new ones in threatening directions. Meanwhile, militants built their fortifications on the outskirts of residential neighborhoods, neglecting the safety of their inhabitants.

Therefore, units of ATO forces gradually began to leave buildings that were close to the inhabited settlement Vesele and to throw additional forces over the airport was impossible²¹.

Despite the announcement from 10 am on December 9, 2014, the complete cessation of fire by illegal armed detachments, with the assistance of regular units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, did not stop the provocations and carried out constant shelling of the positions of the forces of the antiterrorist operation and settlements. Thus, according to official data from December 9, 2014 until January 15, 2015, at least 1052 shelling was carried out on the Ukrainian troops by the militants²².

In the second half of December, a new group of Russian landing troops was thrown into the Donetsk airport area to strengthen the NZF ²³.

At the end of 2014, a significant number of important infrastructure objects (CHP, DWP, rail and road nodes, airfields, etc.), as well as large industrial enterprises, were in the territory controlled by the anti-terrorist operation.

²⁰ Fights for the Donetsk airport. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy_za_Donetsk_Airport.

²¹ Yuri Butusov. The battle for the Donetsk airport. What happened, causes and results. [Electronic resource] – Retrieved from: https://censor.net.ua/resonance/321167/bitva_za_donetskiyi_aeroport_cho_proizoshlo_prichiny_i_rezultaty.

²² General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

²³ Kalininskaya O., Krystop O. and others. Unwarranted War. Unknown facts and chronicles ATO. - Kharkiv: Book Club "Family Leisure Club", 2015. - P. 349.

In order to mislead the head of the anti-terrorist operation with regard to the direction of the main strike, on January 15, 2015, the enemy began an active hostility of the airport. These actions were to force the leadership of the anti-terrorist operation to transfer additional forces and resources from other sectors and districts to "sector B"; to sew our troops to conduct combat operations in another direction and allow the enemy to build up their own groupings in the direction of the main blow - the Debaltseve bridgehead.

The assault on the Donetsk airport began with massive artillery and rocket bombs on the new terminal. Using the results of fire damage, the enemy went on the offensive and was able to block the units of the 81 AM bde of Ukraine, which at that time were in a new terminal, and capture part of the airport's territory. On January 16, all day long persistent, bloody fights for the airport were under way²⁴.

Since January 18, the Ukrainian command has begun an operation to release the surrounding defenders of the airport and to prevent the capture of the new terminal by militants. To accomplish this task were involved divisions of high-ground landing troops; mechanized and tank armies; units of missile troops and artillery, which were part of the 95th, 79th and 81st aeromobile brigades; 25th separate airborne brigade (hereinafter Para bde); 30th and 93rd mechanized brigades; 1 st separate tank brigade (further Tank bde); 169th Training Center of the Land Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; 26th, 55th and 43rd artillery brigades; 15th and 107th rocket regiments. In the seven airfields, there were 18 helicopters of the Army Aviation and 8 planes of assault and bombing aircraft, which unfortunately did not apply due to bad weather conditions (thick fog, visibility less than 100 meters)²⁵.

At 06.55 on 18th January, the ATO forces inflicted fire at enemy targets. Immediately the operation for the release of units 81 AM bde began with the actions of the 2nd mechanized battalion 93 Mech bde in the direction of the Pesky; «Volvo-Center»; Vesele. During the action part of the forces of the battalion went to the area of the «Volvo-Center», but encountering strong resistance from the side of the enemy could not resist at the turning point and was forced to depart and consolidate in the eastern outskirts of the Pesky, thereby taking them under their control.

In another direction - northeast of Donetsk airport, the assault detachment commenced the combined unit of the 95th AM bde, the tank platoon of the 2nd separate tank battalion 1 Tank bde and the 3rd Airborne battalion 25 AM bde. The consolidated unit had the task: to master the np Spartak, disable the Putiliv Bridge, destroy the enemy's checkpoint near the «Putilivska» mine and

²⁴ Kalininskaya O., Krystop O. and others. Unwarranted War. Unknown facts and chronicles ATO. - Kharkiv: Book Club "Family Leisure Club", 2015. - P. 349.

²⁵ General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

take control of the railway bridge on the Avdiivka-Donetsk railway station, which was in the vicinity of the city Avdiivka²⁶.

During this task, the personnel of the tank platoon, which was part of the consolidated division, displayed courage, heroism and devotion to military oath. It is on these actions that future generations of true patriots of Ukraine should be brought up. Therefore, in the actions of this division, let us dwell in more detail.

On the morning of January 18, 2015, after the completion of the fighting operations, a tank unit arrives in the area of the base of the «Zenit», one of the platoons was commanded by Lieutenant Zhdan Ivan Vladimirovich. At that time, the reference point «Zenit», or as it was called «Kater» was located near the Donetsk airport, and was one of the key positions between the settlements of Oпитne and Avdiivka. From the «Zenit», the outskirts of Donetsk and its airport were clearly visible, and the base of militants from the positions of anti-terrorist operations units was slightly over a thousand meters.

About 10 hours in the morning of January 18, Lieutenant I. Zhdan, commander of the tank platoon, arrived with the commanders of the tanks to receive a combat mission to the bunker headquarters in which the command post will be deployed. At the command post, together with the commander of «Zenit», he was met by the commander of the high-ground landing forces and the Chief of the General Staff - Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, who was at «Zenit» from January 18 to 26, inclusive, and carried out the general management of the defense of Donetsk airport. He also determined the platoon commander's combat mission. It consisted in the following - the tank unit had to support the actions of the 1 st Battalion 95 AM bde with capture np Spartacus and the exit of units to the Putilivsky Bridge, in the future, to ensure the maintenance of the occupied frontier until the engineering departments will destroy the cities.

This bridge and the Putilovsky interchange was very convenient for Russian mercenaries, the direction of which the «Somali» battalion practically freely moved from Donetsk and attacked the positions of the anti-terrorist operation unit at the new airport terminal, and also fired the convoy and positions in the city Oпитne on the «Zenit» itself²⁷.

For preparation for the fight, only two hours were allocated. This time was enough only to check and refuel the technique, to replenish the stock of ammunition! Detailed planning of the procedure, organization of management and interaction with the units that had to fight with the tankers of time was not enough. In addition, ATO command was virtually no information about the enemy in Spartak, its quantitative and qualitative composition, weapons, location of fire positions,

²⁶ Same.

²⁷ General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

etc. In the future, these factors will play a negative role and will not allow the consolidated unit to perform the tasks in full and to do without losses. In addition, during the preparation of equipment, it turned out that one of five tanks is technically not working and will not be able to participate in hostilities, which significantly reduced the combat capabilities of the unit.

Around 12 hours, an offensive was launched in which four tanks and six BTRs, GAZ-66s from the ZU-23 from the battalion of paratroopers participated ²⁸.

With the beginning of the battle, the tankers were killed directly by the enemy's observation points at the «Budivka» mine. In the future, an advanced checkpoint on the outskirts of Spartacus was destroyed, but the enemy quickly recovered and began to resist. The subversion of the anti-terrorist operation to Spartacus was already carried out under dense mortar fire, and from houses on its outskirts mercenaries opened fire from small arms and grenade launchers. The battle started. The paratroopers opened fire in response to destroy the enemy, but could not advance forward. Tankists instead went to the inhabited settlement Spartacus and a narrow street at speeds went straight to the bridge. Immediately in the most populated area, the enemy could not organize a reflection of the attack. Obviously, It was unexpected such audacious and decisive actions by the units of the antiterrorist operation. Specific attempts by the enemy to stop the advance of tanks with the use of small arms usually did not give results. The grenade launchers that appeared on the way to their movement were destroyed by machine-gun fire from the tanks.

It was about 1 pm, when the anti-terrorist operations tankers were moving rapidly forward, entered to the area of the bridge. From that moment on, events began to unfold rapidly as they climbed and changed every second.

Clarifying the situation that happened at that time, the commander of the tank platoon, Lieutenant I. Zhdan realized that the paratroopers are not around - they could not get through the defense of the gate and continue to fight at the approaches to Spartak. It is the purpose of the fact that the tanks during the battle in the settlement remain uncovered and can become so easy that they will fit during the battle, it had a tactical advantage²⁹. Each house and each window will not be potentially threatening our tanks, in every provocation they could expect prepared ambush. Lieutenant I. Zhdan tried to report the situation and clarify the tasks of the senior commander, to establish cooperation with the divisions of the cover, to call the demolition workers, but radio communication, despite the short distance (about 3.5 km) did not work. There could have been a

²⁸ Same

²⁹ Military status of mechanized and tank armies of the Land Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (part II battalion, company) / Command of the Land Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Kyiv - 2016. C. 85.

hindrance, or features of terrain, or the enemy used special means of electronic warfare to suppress the radio control networks that were used by our troops³⁰.

Understanding all the risks and dangers, considering the importance of the destruction of the bridge, Lieutenant I. Zhdan decided to continue to perform the task. To do this, he clarified the decision and determined to the subordinates that two tanks, his tank and the elderly tank Anatoly Skritsky move forward in the direction of the bridge, and the other two tanks are behind and cover the rear and ways of leaving.

In completion of the task specification, two T-64BV tanks continued their movement and after a few moments jumped out of the turn, Lieutenant I. Zhdan and senior officer A. Skorytsky practically simultaneously saw the enemy - two Russian tanks were located under the Putilivsky Bridge and were deployed to our tanks by stern. Their crews hurriedly loaded ammunition, preparing to go to the sounds of the battle, which lasted on the approaches and in the most populated point. In addition to the tanks under the bridge, they saw another armored vehicle, trucks and caravans of the enemy. Assessing the situation, our tankers realized that the militants under the bridge equipped the ammunition and was currently engaged in replenishing it.

One of the mercenaries, who loaded the shells, seeing tanks with Ukrainian flags, was just dying with a shell in his hands. The senior, A. Skritsky, asked the gunner: "Do you see the target?" - «Yes». - «Shoot! » At the same time, he opened fire and a tank of Lieutenant I. Zhdan. The enemy's tanks, vehicles, and ammunition began to burn and blow up. A few seconds run , and under the bridge the real hell was raging. The militants of Somalia were not able to resist, and our tanks guided them with a gunfire and gun fire almost immediately. From a powerful blast of hostile equipment and ammunition, the cities collapsed! Thus, two tank crews coped with the task of destroying the bridge and without sappers³¹.

Having convinced that the bridge was almost destroyed, Lieutenant I. Zhdan ordered departure. The tanks of the cover were first departed, followed by a tank of Lieutenant Zhdan and senior commander A. Skritsky. And at that very moment from the alley, from the ambush just Tsk-72 skipped the tank A. Skritsky. The distance is some 50 meters. The cannon of the tank A. Skritsky was still deployed in the direction of the bridge, he only started the movement, so the enemy tanker shot without interruption. Direct impact - and our T-64BV froze to become an ideal target. The crew of Lieutenant I. Zhdana reacted instantly - to make a second shot enemy T-72 did not have time, because the cumulative shot from Ukrainians was fatal for him. We did not have to shoot for the second time, the tank of the enemy was shot down, and his crew remained buried in

³⁰ General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] -Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

³¹ Ivan Rybyanets. Hell for Somalia. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://viysko.com.ua>.

the middle of it. Without time, senior sergeant A. Skrytsky together with a mechanic-driver, a senior soldier Sergei Kushnir and a gunner of the elder soldier Andriy Humenyuk, moved from the dead tank to the tank armor of Lieutenant Zhdan. It was necessary to break through to theirs, so the tank T-64BV at the highest possible speed began to move along the narrow streets of Spartacus in the direction of «Zenit». But on the way back they were already waiting. The enemy captured the situation and was able to adjust the defense, as evidenced by the constant and tight fire of small arms and grenade launchers, which was practiced on virtually all sides. Of course, the most dangerous and hardest of all were the crew of Alexander A. Skorytsky, who were on the armor³².

During the shelling of a senior soldier, Andrei Gumenyuk strode a machine gun, struck him a liver, ripped the kidney. The Sergeant Major pulled the wounded soldier up on the tank tower, and suddenly she began to spin - the gunner wanted to try the enemy's tank, which overtaken the Ukrainians. The mechanic-driver of the tricked tank Sergei Kushnir, who was also on the armor and was injured, could not resist such an unexpected maneuver and fall from the tower. His face and chest flooded with blood. Everyone was sure that he was killed, but the tanker remained alive and captured. Subsequently, separatists drove him in the streets of Donetsk as «cyborg». After Sergei Kushnir fell, the foreman grasped the wounded Andrei Gumenyuk more firmly, given his condition on the move, he made a pain reliever.

During a further breakthrough, another Ukrainian tank was picked up by its commander Bogdan Pantiushenko. After reaching the tank, his tower became unmanageable - it began to move in a circle, clinging to the trees and pillars of the power line. Despite this the tank continued to move and at high speed and went forward. The separatists continued to fire him and hit the caterpillar. In spite of this, Pantiushenko continued to struggle with his crew - in a virtually unmanaged car, they managed to melt the tank of the enemy. From this collision the tank has turned into a ditch. Pantiushenko pulled out of the tank Ivan Lyas, who was unconscious and wounded in the head and Dmitry Kostetsky who was injured by his leg. After that, B. Pantiushenko got a grenade and wanted to blow up the tiled tank, but realized that it would not be time to pull the wounded soldiers away from the tank. For a moment near our tankers there were armed mercenaries, who took them captive. Several months later Sergei Kushnir and Bohdan Pantiushenko succeeded in exchanging prisoners of separatists³³.

Not far from the checkpoint, the enemy picked up another Ukrainian tank, but his crew succeeded in getting to the positions of the anti-terrorist operations divisions intact.

Thus, out of the four tanks left for the battle, only one tanker, Lieutenant Ivan Zhdan, was

³² General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] -Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

³³ General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Analysis of combat operations in eastern Ukraine during the 2014-2015 winter campaign. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: <http://www.mil.gov.ua>.

released, four of the twelve tankers were captured, two of whom were soon exchanged for captive separatists, and two others still remained captive.

As a result of the fierce battle, Ukrainian tankers managed to put an end to Putilivsky Bridge, to destroy the ammunition, four enemy tanks and many other equipment for their own lives.

After arriving at the location of his troops the same day, in the evening, the wounded senior officer A. Skritsky personally called the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, thanking him for the manifestations of heroism and courage. Later, for this battle, Lieutenant Ivan Zhdan was awarded the Order of Bogdan Khmelnytsky 3rd Degree. The Order «For Courage» was received by senior officer A. Skritsky and three other troops who participated in that battle³⁴.

Lieutenant I. Zhdan and senior officer A. Skritsky stayed at «Zenit» and took an active part in all subsequent battles for the Donetsk airport. They repeatedly traveled to the runway, causing the fire to "themselves" and fired on the enemy's fire points, thus improving the position of the airport defenders, who, from the last forces, defended the new terminal at the expense of their own lives.

From January 16 to January 22, the fighting was not stopping.

The ATO military forces, realizing that they were not able to retain the terminal in the future, took five traps with an explosive to the runway and carried out an undermining, which prevented its further use for landing by landing aircraft of the Russian Army aircraft.

On January 22, units of the ATO forces left the new terminal and took positions on the reverse side of the runway. Further separatist attacks were unpromising, so the fighting for the Donetsk airport was reduced to shelling with tanks and artillery. And the runway became a line of delineation. Separators went to the terminal. They took their wounded and sick and all living cyborgs³⁵.

According to the Ukrainian independent project «The Book of Memory of the Fallen for Ukraine», which was released in January 2018, the confirmed data on the losses of Ukrainian military personnel for the period of 242 days of the defense of the Donetsk airport is 100 people dead. The project's volunteer Herman Shapovalenko highlighted that the number 100 was not a roundabout but a verified listing. The exact place of death of four fighters could not be established, therefore their names were not included in this list. Another four people in January 2018 were absent from the list - their bodies were not found. Given these factors, the full list of names, according to G. Shapovalenko, may vary slightly depending on what is considered the territory of

³⁴ Decree of the President of Ukraine dated October 5, 2015 № 568/2015 "On the awarding of state awards of Ukraine". Decree of the President of Ukraine dated January 27, 2015 № 32/2015 "On the awarding of state awards of Ukraine".

³⁵ Serge Marko. The Chronicle of the Hybrid War. - K: Alterpress, 2016. - P.143. Loiko S. Airport. New added version. - Kyiv: Bright Star Publishing, 2017. - 363-364.

the DAP, therefore the list may have 99-109 names. The number of wounded is estimated at 440 people, according to media reports³⁶.

Conclusion: The protection of the Donetsk International Airport named after Sergey Prokofiev served as an impetus for the intensification of the influence of the international political community on the settlement of the situation in Ukraine.

The defense of the Donetsk airport, at the initial stage of the antiterrorist operation, did not allow the transfer of air by the troops of the Russian Federation. And it did not make it possible for the Kremlin to realize its plans for implementing the blitzkrieg in the expansion of occupation around Donetsk.

The defenders of the Donetsk airport proved that Ukraine has an Armed Forces that can defend themselves against attacks on the territorial integrity and independence.

The small garrison round-the-clock defended the airport «Donetsk». Pro-Russian mercenaries at times prevailed in manpower and technology, but the defenders stood - «CONCRETE IS NOT ABLE WITHSTAND».

Today it is safe to claim that the Donetsk airport, the defense of which lasted for 242 days, became a true symbol of the courage and heroism of our fighters for all Ukrainian people. Even the enemies acknowledged that only the «Ukrainian cyborgs» could stand in the hell of fighting that lasted around him. Separate pages of his defense, such as the tank battle near the Spartak settlement, should be a vivid example of the loyalty of Ukrainian soldiers to military oath, their unconditional will to victory and dedication. The duty of the entire Ukrainian community to know these feats, and the heroes who committed them at the risk of their own lives. It is on these examples that the Ukrainian army should be built, future generations should be brought up, who will build a free and independent Ukraine.

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³⁶ Fights for the Donetsk airport. [Electronic resource] - Retrieved from: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy__Donetsk_Airport.

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