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Summary

This article is a discussion of an exercise which took place in September 1966. The exercise involved movement of an air army and its commitment to defense of ground forces deployment. It provides little information on actual events of the exercise, but identifies problem areas and makes recommendations both for improving such exercises and for improving activities of an air army.

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**OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PARTICIPATION OF THE OPERATIONAL AIR
FORCE SUPPLY SERVICE IN THE "JESIENNE NIEBO" (AUTUMN SKY")
EXERCISE**

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1. A comprehensive operational-tactical exercise of the operational air force was conducted by the Chief of the General Staff in September 1966 with the participation of the ground forces. The exercise involved live firing and bombing at training ranges.

2. Training problems were resolved in two basic stages, namely:

--First stage--planning the movement (przegrupowanie) of an air army to a staging area and its participation, together with OPK (National Air Defense) forces, in repelling initial and subsequent enemy air attacks;

--Second stage--air force protection of the ground forces' deployment in the staging area, and the organization, planning, and conduct of combat operations in support of an offensive operation of a Front.

3. Elements of supply service contingents (jednostka) of the operational air force also participated in the exercise in support of combat operations of the air force.

4. It must be said that the exercise produced unusually valuable material and permitted the drawing of many practical conclusions concerning the organization of future exercises, the organizational structure of the operational air force supply service, the command of an air army (AL) supply service, the personnel training of air-technical contingents, the organization of communications, the equipment of the air force, etc. Moreover, the exercise permitted certain generalizations concerning requirements in regard to the work at individual command levels as well as the activities of air-technical and other contingents.

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5. Because of the wide range of problems which appeared in the conducted exercise, this article will be limited only to discussion of problems which to us appear to be most characteristic and important.

6. The organization of the exercise was undoubtedly a difficult and complicated undertaking, because almost all services and different types of contingents took active part in it. Previous organized exercises only offered the opportunity to achieve almost exclusively training goals but not to test real practical capabilities. The staffing of supply service positions in exercises often was formal. Hence, previous organized exercises were conducted without great difficulties because the support of airfield mobility and combat operations was adapted to emergent situations, and unrealistic capabilities were adopted and subordinated to demands of line commanders. The recent exercise in which contingents participated at their effective strength was not fictitious. Consequently, it was possible to see many things in a realistic light.

7. One of the problems checked, among others, was the alert readiness of supply service contingents. This problem included many elements connected with combat alert, formation of supply vanguards and automotive echelons, achievement of readiness for moving out the vanguards, support of combat operations of air units, etc. In our opinion, however, a full picture was not reached in that regard, because air and air-technical contingents as well as particular staffs knew the exact time of the start of the exercise and prepared everything in advance. The moment the umpires arrived, contingents were already prepared for the exercise: the personnel had their equipment in readiness, and the cadre was constantly present in subunits and services awaiting the alert signal.

8. Moreover, practically everywhere first echelons (supply vanguards) were formed in advance and placed in readiness for departure. The basic materiel and equipment were also loaded in advance on motor vehicles. The disabled motor vehicles were replaced by those of contingents not participating in the exercise.

9. It seems that in exercises of this type it is better to direct the umpires to all air formations (zwiazek) and

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contingents at the same time and to deliver at a definite time the rules of the exercise and to check the contingents' preparations for movement as well as the material-technical support of combat operations.

10. A basic requirement for proper deployment of forces and equipment of an air army is efficient operation of the alert system. The system which was applied during the AL exercise did not fully assure this postulate; the alert signal reached some tactical formations with considerable delay because it was given consecutively to tactical formations rather than simultaneously to all contingents.

11. Activities connected with the departure of commands and staffs to field command posts should follow immediately after an alert is sounded. The movement of fighter and attack fighter aviation to reserve airfields should take place without hindering their capabilities for operating in the OPK system.

12. In connection with the transition of the command and staff of the participating air army to the field command system, part of the staff was already transferred to the field command post before the alert was sounded, that is, at the time when a decision was being formulated on movement to staging areas. As a result, there was a lack of officers to prepare exhaustive data for decision-making by the commander of the air army. It seems that during a period of threat the main portion of the officers of the air army command and staff should in fact be located at the peacetime command post (SD); moreover, only a small number of needed officers should be at the field command post (PSD) to supervise the setting up of the PSD and to receive information on the developing situation as well as on the status of air army forces and equipment.

13. The exercise revealed that it is possible to avoid a surprise attack and, at the same time, conduct combat operations with attack fighter aviation in the OPK system. However, this is only possible provided that a suitable number of reserve airfields and sections of major highways and roads are in readiness and have suitable service personnel and equipment, especially for maintenance and communications.

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14. In our opinion, the organizational structure of the supply service of the air army--the organization and planning division (oddzial) as well as the supply units (oddzial) and branches (wydzial)--made it difficult for the supply service to operate effectively at this level and extended the process of planning and formulating decisions in support of combat operations, because of duality in solving problems of rear service support of the AL--on the one hand, via the organizational and planning division (oddzial), and, on the other hand, via individual supply service chiefs. Furthermore, at present, the preparation of data for decision by an air army commander and the planning of material support is too time consuming because traditional methods are applied.

15. It seems that in their current organizational arrangement, supply branches of air divisions do not fulfill, in every sense of the word, the role of a command and control organ of divisional rear services; they are rather an element for relaying decisions and directives of the AL supply chief and his staff to supply battalions, and this only if the division staff will assure communications.

16. The chief of the supply branch of an air division actually cannot fully command the divisional rear services (supply battalions) because he does not have the opportunity to organize the rear support of the division due to the lack of a material-technical base at this level. In addition, doubts arise concerning the competency of the chief of the supply branch with relation to supply battalions included in the composition of air regiments, because he is not deputy division commander for supply matters, but only chief of the supply branch.

17. In accordance with AL guidelines, supply battalions were divided into two echelons, each of about 80 motor vehicles (not counting trailers). It seems that in this case initiative in deciding the manner of unit displacement was taken away from commanders of air-technical units. If a solution of this type was to take place during combat operations, the majority of such large echelons would have difficulty in reaching rebasing areas in their entirety.

18. During the entire exercise, only half of the forces and facilities of supply battalions supported combat operations

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of air regiments, never entire battalions, because the battalions were divided into two parts.

19. The lack of organic traffic control subunits hampered the efficient conduct of movement of rear contingents and the achievement of readiness within anticipated time periods in support of combat operations of air contingents in pertinent areas and at airfields. The contingents organized traffic control with their own personnel. Frequently situations arose in which several contingents moved simultaneously on the same road and at the same time. Thus, the lack of a central traffic control of columns had a negative effect on the planned course of the march.

20. Depots of air army mobile bases (RBAL) have a minimum amount of organic transport to provide for housekeeping services for the depot and for its movement. Therefore, the transport at the disposal of the AL chief of supply was also used to move the depot. Whenever accomplishing delivery of material supplies to full extent during combat operations--unless an expansion of the transport is provided for--a solution of this type would be impossible, because the transport would be necessary for supplying contingents.

21. During the exercise, individual rear service contingents were only partially expanded in personnel (mainly drivers), automotive and special equipment, and service equipment of reserves or other contingents. With regard to missions actually fulfilled during the exercise, the degree of expansion of strength and equipping of contingents, especially in flight support equipment (for example, fuel, and oxygen distributing equipment), proved to be unsatisfactory in some contingents. Consequently, the time to re-establish the combat readiness of certain air regiments exceeded established operational norms. Moreover, occasional lack of a sufficient amount of fuel transport and heavy transport enabled both echelons of the supply battalion to take with them during the move material supplies only for 1.0 - 2.0 air missions. Since one echelon, which actually supported the combat operations of a regiment, was presumed to take material supplies for 0.75 - 1 air mission, this did not guarantee a full and possibly long period of support to the regiment.

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22. At present, material supplies are delivered to regiments (bz - supply battalions) from the air army level. With reference to this, the AL supply service, in principle, directly controls the operations of supply battalions and other rear organizations, with the exception of the supply branches of the air divisions. Such a situation compels the AL supply chief and his staff to devote attention to many contingents, subunits, and rear organizations, which impedes the operational activity of the AL rear staff and negatively affects the control of the entire supply system.

23. It is known that the equipment of air-technical units includes a large number of various makes and types of motor vehicles of different technical capabilities, and different endurances, weights, speeds, etc. This situation considerably impedes the organization of uniform technical capabilities of columns and the maintenance of suitable operational speeds. Because of such a situation, many vehicles were detached from the column during the march and only rejoined the column during halts and rest periods especially organized for this purpose.

24. The maintenance of continuity of command met with serious difficulties. Breaks of 20 hours or less were encountered in the command of rear contingents, because radio and telegraphic communications were not organized in the supply service. The AL supply chief is required to assume direct command of twenty or less rear elements at the same time (two mobile bases, two or three automotive transport contingents, three division supply branches, several air-technical units, and other servicing subunits and organizations). During the exercise, the rear staff periodically had to assume direct command of echelons of air-technical units because of a lack of communications with their commanders.

25. The command at the supply branch level of the division was seriously handicapped because of the incorrect organizational "disposition" of supply branches and the lack of communications equipment in this service. The issuance of commands, instructions, and directives lasted too long and required numerous repetitions. The commanders of air-technical units had difficulties in commanding echelons which were located at different airfields and at considerable distances, ranging up to several hundred kilometers.

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26. In order to streamline the command of air army rear services, it seems appropriate to assign a separate communications network and channels for the needs of the entire operational air force supply service. The AL supply chief would then have at his disposal an organic or attached signal subunit. Moreover, supply branches of air divisions should be assured suitable equipment for organizing radio and wire communications with superiors and subordinates.

27. In our opinion, supply battalions should be independent of flight command battalions (dywizjon dowodzenia lotami) regarding the organization of radio and wire communications at the airfield; they should be issued a suitable amount of radio and wire communications equipment, which would assure command of subunits at the airfield and during the march of columns. This means that the current method of organizing wire communications at airfields after the arrival of air-technical units does not pass the test. Flight command battalions having signal companies are not included in the organizational structure of supply battalions but are subordinate to regiment commanders. Their main mission is to organize, on first priority basis, communications for regiments and, only after that, for supply battalions. Therefore, by the time the supply battalion receives any communications, sometimes several, and even a dozen or more hours pass following its arrival at the new airfield.

28. An unquestionable improvement in work under field conditions would be the introduction of staff cars for commanders to the table of organization of air-technical units. This would assure the rapid transfer of the staff from place to place whenever necessary, without the need of setting up a tent. Also, it would assure the more rapid establishment of communications. Furthermore, the air army supply chief and chiefs of air division supply branches should be guaranteed the opportunity to use helicopters and liaison aircraft.

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29. In order to streamline the work of the rear services of the operational air force and to increase their effectiveness, research studies should be undertaken on the subject of introducing to the operational air force an intermediate element--with a full material-technical base--between the air army and air-technical units, in the form of brigades, for example. This problem could also possibly be solved in the following manner: during wartime, each tactical formation would be assigned an air army mobile base (RBAL) or an RBAL unit, the composition of which would depend on the missions of the given tactical formation.

30. The current organizational structure of supply battalions also requires analysis and examination. Inasmuch as an air regiment can be supported by practically half of a supply battalion during combat operations, the inference arises that the strength of supply battalions can be reduced and reserve air-technical units can be created from the gained surplus. The battalions would then base their operations on the total of forces and equipment possessed by them. Whereas organizationally and administratively they would have to be independent, operationally they would be subordinate to the commander of the air regiment. This requires flexibility and assurance of mobility of air contingents as well as effectiveness of operation of the material-technical base.

31. In view of emerging prospects for applying automation to the command process, it is necessary during exercises to check the possibilities and appropriateness of changing staffs of AL rear services from the present organizational structure of divisions and branches of individual services to a functional organization.

32. In order to create suitable conditions for organizing effective defense and protection of the RBAL, a security subunit should be introduced into its table of organization. As is known, the base has to move several times. The allocation of army transport for this purpose, with the simultaneous fulfillment of delivery of material supplies, seems hardly practical. The base should be independent in this respect.

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33. More exact decisions are also needed with regard to the matter of troop services and supplies (intendencki) support. In peacetime, the operational air force is supported in that regard by the respective military districts. For wartime, it seems appropriate to organize depots for troop services and supplies and an adequate support apparatus in the air army.

34. Also needed are analysis, theoretical development, and practical testing of the problem of eventual takeover of command of AL rear services by one of the air division supply branches, on the assumption that the AL rear command post has been destroyed or neutralized for a certain period of time.

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