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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

16 May 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence  
FROM : William W. Wells  
Deputy Director for Operations  
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Commitment  
of a Front's Second Echelon to an Engagement

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. This article examines the heightened and varied role of the second echelon of a front in present-day offensive operations, as compared to World War II. The authors cite several examples from exercises of the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany to support their contention that the second echelon can be used to repulse enemy counterattacks, to enter combat in a forward zone, or to engage a strong enemy grouping after it has been neutralized by nuclear weapons. The second echelon can maintain its combat effectiveness by dispersal throughout the front offensive zone and concealment of location and movement to ensure surprise of attack. This article appeared in Issue No. 6 (67) for 1962.

2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

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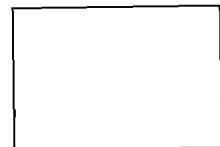
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# Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Commitment of a Front's Second Echelon to an Engagement

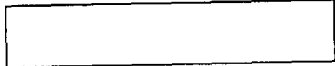
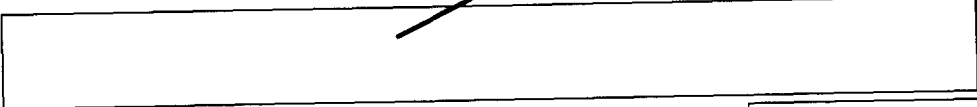
SOURCE Documentary  
Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 6 (67) for 1962 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The authors of this article are Colonel N. Kalayev and Lieutenant Colonel A. Tarasov. This article examines the heightened and varied role of the second echelon of a front in present-day offensive operations, as compared to World War II. The authors cite several examples from exercises of the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany to support their contention that the second echelon can be used to repulse enemy counterattacks, to enter combat in a forward zone, or to engage a strong enemy grouping after it has been neutralized by nuclear weapons. The second echelon can maintain its combat effectiveness by dispersal throughout the front offensive zone and concealment of location and movement to ensure surprise of attack. Also discussed are the distance of the second echelon's concentration area from the line of commitment, the effect of nuclear weapons, the importance of engineer support, air defense, and cooperation. End of Summary

Comment:

After 1962 the SECRET version of Military Thought was published three times annually and was distributed down to the level of division commander. It reportedly ceased publication at the end of 1970.

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The Commitment of a Front's Second Echelon to an Engagement

by  
Colonel N. Kalayev  
and  
Lieutenant Colonel A. Tarasov

We believe that, compared with their role in the operations of the Great Patriotic War, the role of the second echelons in a present-day front offensive operation in the initial period of a war is growing sharply. This is particularly true of the main theaters of military operations, for example, the Western Theater of Military Operations.

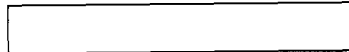
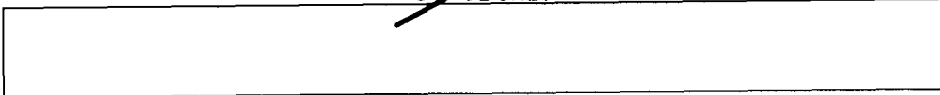
The range of tasks carried out by the troops allocated to the second echelon has broadened considerably. In addition to being employed to carry out the main task, which is to develop an offensive on the main axis and to defeat enemy counterattack groupings and approaching reserves, the second echelon will also be employed, as is known, to partially or completely replace large units and units of the first echelon, to destroy enemy airborne landing forces and isolated groupings (if it is not possible to employ reserve divisions of the front or nearby troops for this purpose), and to carry out other tasks suddenly arising in an operation.

Let us examine several particular features of this problem that, in our opinion, have come to light as the result of generalizing the experience gained from the exercises of recent years.

The nature of an initial front offensive operation in the Western Theater of Military Operations, where the enemy possesses a large number of nuclear means and is able with powerful strikes to weaken front troops considerably, necessitates having at the very outset of the operation a strong second echelon and overall front reserves.

Just as under present-day conditions, a situation can change quickly and abruptly as a result of the employment of means of mass destruction by the belligerents, so the need to commit second echelons to an engagement can arise unexpectedly at any stage of an operation -- at the start and while it is in progress. Here it must be noted that the opinion expressed at times in our military literature, for example, in the circles of the Military Academy of the General Staff, that a second echelon of a front





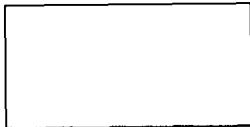
will be formed mainly during the operation from among arriving forces, in our view, cannot be considered valid.

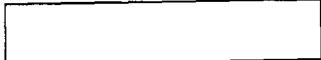
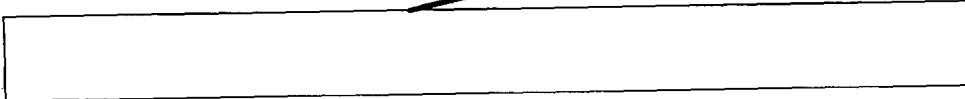
The necessity and possibility of having a second echelon at the start of an operation is confirmed by the experience of the command-staff exercises held in the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany. At these exercises, the troops suffered serious losses as a result of the employment by the sides of a large number of nuclear warheads in the initial nuclear strike. Many large units received high doses of radiation and were rendered combat ineffective.

In anticipation of a similar situation, at the October 1961 exercise, there was allocated beforehand to the front's second echelon a combined-arms army made up of a missile brigade, two motorized rifle divisions, and a tank division. This army had the task of moving up in the zone of the two armies (a tank army and a combined-arms army) of the first echelon in readiness to enter the engagement on the second day of the operation, broaden the success of the armies that were operating up forward, make an assault crossing of a large water obstacle, and develop the offensive. At the same time, the army was to plan on delivering a flank attack on a southern axis. It was planned to subsequently assign the second echelon of the front one more army that was freed after the enemy was destroyed in Berlin.

The allocation of a second echelon of the above-mentioned composition helped in successfully repulsing a counterattack that the enemy delivered on the second day of the operation with the forces of six fresh divisions, with the employment of more than 40 nuclear warheads against a front main grouping that had driven its way forward. Thus, the counterattack was thwarted by the massed employment of nuclear weapons. However, it must be noted that in the process of moving forward and in the course of the engagement, the large units of the front's second echelon were subjected to massed enemy nuclear strikes and suffered great losses in men and equipment. Consequently, on the night preceding the fourth day of the operation, the above-mentioned army was again moved to the front's second echelon.

The example cited and an analysis of the actions of the front's second echelons in other exercises allow the conclusion to be drawn that instances of the commitment of second echelons to an engagement are more frequent than in past wars.



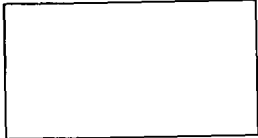


The commitment of a front's second echelon to an engagement is an exceptionally important front-level measure. The second echelon can be introduced into the gaps between the operating armies, on the flanks, and also in the zone of one or two armies of the front's first echelon. Regardless of the fact that the front's second echelon may be committed to an engagement under the most diverse situational conditions and with various tasks, its actions must still be planned rather precisely beforehand.

In our view, the commitment of a second echelon to an engagement in the zone of one or two armies operating up forward presents the greatest difficulty. Here we would like to draw attention to just one circumstance that we believe is important. First-echelon armies have a coordinated communications system and organized materiel and technical support of their troops. Therefore, it is more desirable that divisions being committed to the engagement from an army in the second echelon of the front be resubordinated to the army operating in the first echelon. This results in the swift commitment of the second echelon to the engagement, all-round support of its actions, and more efficient control of the troops being committed. In this case, the field headquarters of the army that is being committed to an engagement will be in the reserve. Examples of this were not infrequent during the Great Patriotic War; under present-day conditions, the existence of reserve army headquarters will take on even greater importance.

In a future war, even a minor delay in the commitment of a second echelon to an engagement will afford an enemy possessing a high degree of maneuverability greater opportunities to bring up his reserves, prepare massed nuclear strikes, organize a defense on new lines or undertake strong counterattacks and thus change the situation in his favor. Therefore, of extreme importance is the timely refinement of the task assigned earlier to the second echelon or the assignment of a new task, as well as the redirecting of the second echelon to a different axis if it becomes necessary.

The delivery of an attack by a front's second echelon is possible not only against weak and vulnerable sectors in an enemy operational disposition that permit the execution of a rapid maneuver for a breakout to the flanks and rear of his main grouping, but also against strong groupings subjected to appropriate preliminary neutralization by nuclear means. A more rapid routing of this grouping is ensured by nuclear weapons and by joint efforts of the first and second echelons of the front.



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However, it must be kept distinctly in mind that because of the considerable importance of the commitment of the second echelon of a front and army to an engagement, the enemy will naturally give it his constant and unremitting attention. The moment the front second-echelon troops are detected, the enemy will employ all possible measures to inflict losses on them and to disrupt their commitment to the engagement. The experience of the Great Patriotic War tells us this.

Therefore, the struggle for the survivability of the front's second echelon is of exceptional importance and is one of the most vital responsibilities of the commanders and staffs of the front and army.

The high combat effectiveness of troops is maintained by the maximum dispersal of second-echelon large units and units in the front zone, maximum concealment of their movement forward, and suddenness of commitment to the engagement in a sector that would rule out heavy troop concentrations.

However, in spite of all measures taken to maintain the combat effectiveness of troops when committing them to an engagement, the enemy can deliver nuclear strikes against them and a certain part of them will suffer losses. If this occurs, it would not be correct to stop and put the troops in order. It is necessary not to lose time but to continue the offensive with the available forces. To stop in such a situation means to subject all the troops to the danger of complete destruction. As for the troops who have been subjected to a nuclear strike, they should be moved to safe areas and put in order.

The experience of a number of exercises shows that the commitment of second echelons to an engagement is carried out more advantageously on a wide front. The divisions must operate on independent axes, sometimes at a considerable distance from one another.

Of no small significance is the selection of the terrain for the actions of the front's second echelon. The success of actions will depend greatly on how conducive the terrain is to the concealed relocation of second echelons, to their rapid movement forward for commitment to the engagement, and to the full exploitation of all the combat capabilities of the troops in the course of the engagement. The neglect of this important element, which vitally affects the combat activity of the troops, can result in a considerable reduction in the rate of advance and possibly in a failure to fulfil the plan of the operation. Thus, in the June 1959 front command-staff exercise, the execution of the task depended on the

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successful commitment of the front's second echelon to the engagement across a barely accessible mountainous area.

The experience of the exercises shows that the proper organization and conduct of the relocation of the troops of a front's second echelon is extremely important for successful commitment to the engagement. It is desirable to place the second-echelon large units throughout the front offensive zone or in the zone of two armies, at a distance of 100 to 200 kilometers, and sometimes even more, from the troops of the first echelon. This is made necessary primarily by the in-depth disposition of the front's first operational echelon, which, depending on the terrain and the degree of engineer preparation of the theater of military operations, may extend 80 to 100 kilometers and more. The main thing is that from a distance of 100 to 200 kilometers, the second echelon of the front will not be hit by the basic type of enemy operational-tactical missiles (the Corporal type). The organization of a more reliable air defense is possible at this distance.

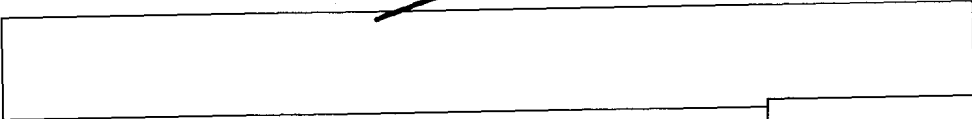
If the troops are positioned still more deeply, then, regardless of how swiftly they move, considerable time will be required to cover the distance and the organization itself of the commitment of the second echelon will be more complicated. Under these conditions it will be out of the question to commit the second echelon to the engagement from the march.

Thus, in view of all that has been said, it is our opinion that the second echelon of a front must be placed no farther than 200 kilometers from the troops of the first echelon. The placement of the 26th Army and the German People's First Army, which formed the front's second echelon in the May 1961 front command-staff exercise, and the placement of the 30th Army in the October 1961 front command-staff exercise can serve as an example of this distance (100 to 200 kilometers). At this distance, eight to ten hours were spent on assigning the task and moving forward and committing the front's second echelon to the engagement.

In order to reduce the time required to assign tasks to the second echelon, it is desirable for the army commander and an operations group of his staff to be at the command post of the front commander by the time the latter makes the decision. After issuing preliminary instructions on the preparation of the army's large units for the movement forward, the commander can fly by aircraft to his own command post and can make a decision during the flight. At the exercises, the instructions of the army commander were transmitted to the divisions by technical communications means and delivered through staff officers who arrived aboard helicopters.







One to 1.5 hours were spent in assigning the tasks to the troops.

The movement of the front's second echelon forward to the line of commitment to the engagement must be carried out as swiftly as possible. When there is an abrupt change in the situation, the tasks are refined for the front's second echelon before it is committed to the engagement. As a rule, this is done when the second echelon is already in the concentration area, immediately before commitment.

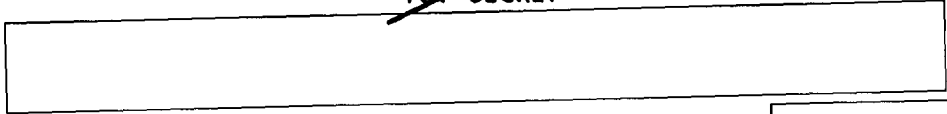
The experience of a number of command-staff exercises shows that the distance of the concentration area of a front's second echelon before it is committed to an engagement depends on the situational conditions and on the tasks that have been assigned to it. The most desirable distance from the line of commitment, in our view, has to be 50 to 80 kilometers. This distance, which is determined by the depth of the battle formations of the first-echelon divisions operating up forward, rules out the possibility of being hit by enemy tactical nuclear weapons and at the same time ensures that the commitment to the engagement from the march will take place in a short space of time. Since this area is intended for refueling, for the technical inspection of equipment (particularly tanks), and for the brief resting of personnel, it can be relatively small -- about the size of the zone of impending actions. The troops in this area will be accommodated in march formations along the routes of movement.

Depending on the time required for commitment and the rate of advance of the troops operating up forward, the front's second echelon may complete several moves before being committed to the engagement. The moves preferably should be carried out in the entire zone of the front; this ensures the speed and concealment of movement and the best protection against weapons of mass destruction, makes it possible to change the axes of attacks and shift efforts from one axis to another, to commit all the forces of the second echelon to the engagement at one time on any axis, and to bypass areas of the terrain that have been contaminated.

The experience of the exercises shows that it is advisable to move the second echelon the 100 to 200 kilometers or less in one to two days. This will make it possible to carry out proper engineer preparation of the concentration areas.

Having an enormous effect on the conditions of the relocation of the second echelon will be enemy employment of missile/nuclear weapons both directly against the troops and against other targets, which may result in extensive zones of radioactive contamination. Negotiating or bypassing



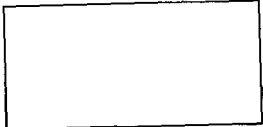


these zones will mean the loss of a great amount of time. Therefore, the front staff, along with information on the position of the first-echelon troops and the enemy, must also systematically report data on the radiation situation to the staff of the army which is in the second echelon of the front. The army, in turn, must take all the necessary measures to bypass or negotiate the zones of radioactive contamination at the opportune time and to restore the combat readiness of the troops that have been subjected to nuclear strikes. In order to protect the troops from the effects of enemy nuclear weapons, the march routes should be planned no closer than five kilometers from one another, and the protective characteristics of the terrain should be exploited to the maximum.

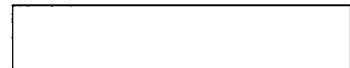
Under the conditions of the Western Theater of Military Operations, which abounds in rivers, canals, and other obstacles, engineer support of the commitment of a second echelon to an engagement acquires great significance. Engineer support includes preparation of march routes, restoration of destroyed bridges across large water obstacles, construction of alternate bridges, pontoon bridge coverage of existing bridge crossings, and engineer preparation of one-day halt areas. These measures are assigned, as a rule, to engineer troops of front subordination, and in some cases, partly to the first-echelon armies in whose zones the front's second echelon is being committed. Nevertheless, in order to carry out a number of tasks that arise during an offensive, the second echelon of the front must be reinforced by engineer troops.

The staff of the front must organize air cover for the front's second echelon while it is moving forward and when it is committed to an engagement. A front's second echelon is covered primarily by its own organic antiaircraft means and by front fighter aviation, as well as by the antiaircraft means of the air defense of the first-echelon armies in whose zone it is being committed. In addition, when crossing large rivers and when deploying, the front's second echelon is covered by front antiaircraft units or missile units that are operating on the given axis or are specially allocated for this purpose.

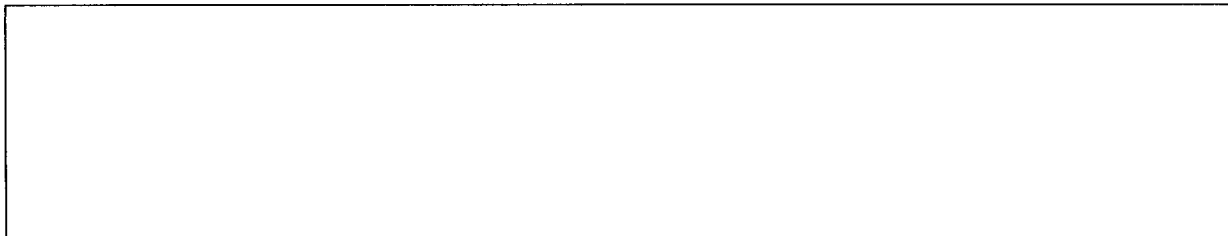
An important task of the front staff is to organize cooperation between the troops of the first and second echelons of the front and the cooperation of the second-echelon troops with the rocket troops and aviation, for the joint destruction of an enemy grouping. This cooperation consists of allocating the efforts of the front's first and second echelons, front missile units, and aviation according to place and time and of combining these efforts in order to achieve the single goal of the operation.



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