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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

19 April 1978

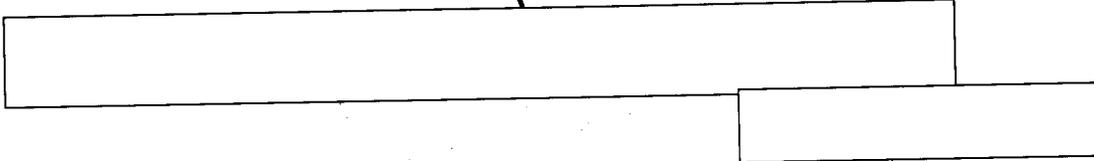
MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : John N. McMahon
Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Organization of
Control of Operational Airborne Landing
Forces in the Initial Period of a War

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 is a critique of a previous article proposing a scheme for organizing control of operational airborne landing forces in the zone of a front under which the commander of the airborne forces relinquishes his control after the landing to the commander of the front. The author of the present article contends that the entire organization of the employment of an operational airborne landing force and the cooperation with the advancing troops must be carried out by the commander of the front and his staff, who are in a position to have more complete data concerning the situation. Here, the role of the commander and staff of the airborne troops will consist only in rendering practical on-the-spot assistance to unit and subunit commanders. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (69) for 1963.

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

John N. McMahon

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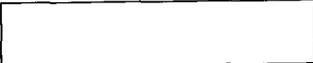




Intelligence Information Special Report

Page 3 of 9 Pages

COUNTRY USSR



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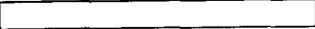
MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Organization of Control of Operational Airborne Landing Forces in the Initial Period of a War

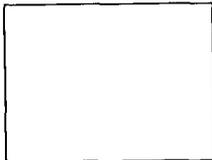
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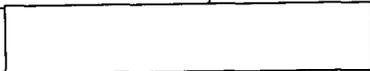
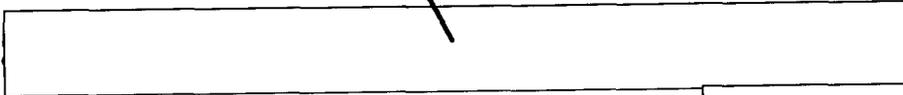
Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 2 (69) for 1963 of the ~~SECRET~~ USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is Colonel P. Sagaydak. This article is a critique of a previous article proposing a scheme for organizing control of operational airborne landing forces in the zone of a front under which the commander of the airborne forces relinquishes his control after the landing to the commander of the front. The author of the present article contends that the entire organization of the employment of an operational airborne landing force and the cooperation with the advancing troops must be carried out by the commander of the front and his staff, who are in a position to have more complete data concerning the situation. Here, the role of the commander and staff of the airborne troops will consist only in rendering practical on-the-spot assistance to unit and subunit commanders. End of Summary

Comment:

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.  The article to which it refers was disseminated as 





Organization of Control of Operational Airborne Landing
Forces in the Initial Period of a War

by

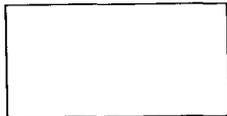
Colonel P. SAGAYDAK

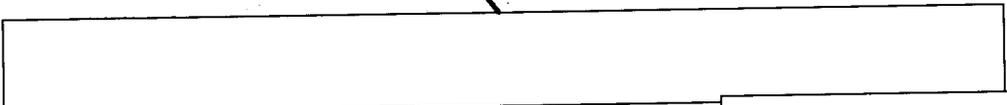
The article by General-Mayor P. PAVLENKO and Colonel V. BULATNIKOV on the given theme* is timely. In it a number of important principles are set forth. However, some of them, in our opinion, are controversial or not sufficiently founded.

It is known that in the recent past the successful employment of an airborne landing was influenced, among other conditions, by the distance of the enemy's reserves from the landing site of the airborne troops. This limited the capabilities of the landing forces and restricted the initiative of the commanders in selecting the site for the airborne landing. At the present time, thanks to missile/nuclear weapons, airborne landing forces can be dropped in almost any area located close to the target of operations, which facilitates the fulfilment of combat tasks. The increased capabilities of military transport aviation permit the airborne landing forces to be employed directly from the deep rear, and at considerable distances from the front line. All of this makes increased demands on the airborne landing forces for readiness for an airborne landing, especially in the initial period of a war.

Taking into consideration the currently accepted views on the combat utilization of airborne troops, an analysis of the most probable operational and strategic situation at the beginning of a modern war shows that the airborne large units can be employed with great effect following strategic missile/nuclear strikes in the enemy's deep rear. This might be especially advantageous on those separate axes or territories which our troops will require a considerable amount of time to enter. We must assume that the actions of the landing forces under these conditions will become exceptionally active and highly mobile. The use of airborne large units and units as operational landing forces in the zone of the front, in cooperation with its troops, is also possible.

* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", No. 2 (63), 1962.





The authors of the article under review propose a new scheme for the organization of control of operational airborne landing forces being employed in the zone of the front. Under this scheme, control of the landing force is exercised by the commander of airborne troops up until the beginning of the landing, and after the landing force is set down it is resubordinated to the commander of the front. Such a scheme does not facilitate, but hampers and complicates the process of troop preparation and organization of the landing, and especially control during the course of the landing and combat operations. Incidentally, in September 1943 control of the airborne landing force in the region of the Bukrin bridgehead on the Dnepr was carried out according to an analogous scheme. As is known, that landing force was unsuccessful.

Experience in the organization of control of airborne landing forces gained by the staffs of military districts during various exercises of recent years shows that the entire organization of the employment of an operational airborne landing force in the front zone and the cooperation with the advancing troops must be carried out by the commander of the front and his staff. The tactical-technical characteristics of modern aircraft make it possible to initiate an airborne landing in accordance with the concept of the front operation without special redeployment of the airborne troops and without their preliminary concentration in the zone of the front.

From the experience of exercises and analysis of the nature of preparatory measures, it follows that almost all of the preparation of the troops for an airborne landing, and to a significant degree for the combat actions in the enemy's rear, does not depend on the specific combat task and therefore can be conducted in advance.

After the decision has been made by the commander of the front to employ the landing force, and the questions concerning its support have been agreed upon, the commander of the landing force, upon receiving the combat task, can be summoned or a staff officer can be sent to him with a map depicting the decision. For the rapid transmission of orders, automatic electronic equipment and high-speed means of communication already in existence should be used, and in the near future when an automated troop control system has been introduced, it will be possible to issue the task for the landing force and the combat support plan on a display screen and by high-speed printers with the help of a computer. This will require only minutes.



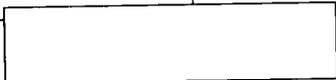
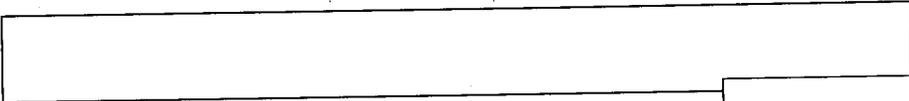
Under modern conditions, when the staffs of the military districts acting on behalf of staffs of fronts and armies have acquired, as the experience of exercises shows, sufficient skills in planning the employment of airborne landing forces, it is not necessary to establish special operations groups at these staffs, drawn from the complement of staff officers of the airborne troops and the military transport aviation, as the authors of the article propose. Given the limited amount of time, the front staff begins planning without waiting for the arrival of these groups.

In connection with the introduction into the military transport aviation of multiseat troop-carrying aircraft which have basically the same tactical-technical characteristics, questions concerning the organization of airborne landings have been significantly simplified. If every large unit and unit has a standard crew for airborne landing operations, then with receipt of data concerning the number of aircraft being allotted, the necessary adjustments can be made in a short time. And this is especially important at the very beginning of a war.

It is desirable to designate the departure area close to the disposition area of the airborne large unit. Concentrating the aircraft near the landing force affords additional time for preparation of the landing force, and also provides camouflage, since even in peacetime exercises the aircraft usually arrive near the disposition area of the airborne troops.

The commander of the front and his staff will undoubtedly have at their disposal more exact and complete data concerning the situation (information about the enemy, about the place and time of delivery of their own nuclear strikes, the forecast of radiation conditions, and others). Therefore, it would be better if they would assign tasks directly to the landing force, and control its actions (as has been done until now in all exercises), and not the commander of the airborne troops located in the departure area.

We believe that the role of the commander and the staff of the airborne troops in preparing the landing force to be employed in the zone of the front, may consist only in rendering practical assistance on the spot to the commanders of units and subunits. An independent command post will not be required for this. It will be sufficient to designate a small group of landing force officers and specialists in various matters. If airborne landing forces are employed simultaneously on several fronts, the commander of the airborne troops will be in a difficult position using the control structure discussed in the article.



Thus, in our view, the way to expedite tasking of a landing force, to shorten the time required for its preparation and to achieve effective control over its combat actions is not by complicating the scheme of control or by discontinuing established methods, but by perfecting those very methods and using all the capabilities of modern technology.

The commander and staff of airborne troops, in our opinion, should control those airborne forces which are landed by decision of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to carry out independent tasks on separate axes where our troops are not advancing or where our troops may arrive later.

In areas where such landing forces operate, the enemy will be neutralized by operational or strategic missiles and by long range aviation in accordance with the General Headquarters plan. In this case the commander and staff of airborne troops will not function as an intermediate control organ but instead will function, figuratively speaking, as the command for the conduct of the airborne landing operation.

With the allocation by the General Headquarters of sufficient means of control, the commander of airborne troops will be able to exercise firm control over not one, but several landing forces. At the same time he will be capable of rendering assistance to large units and units employed by the decisions of the commanders of the fronts, and capable of controlling large units which are in reserve, in the activation stage, etc. In this case there will be no need to deploy the command post of the airborne troop commander in the departure area for the landing of a single large unit. Such a command post should be established in a place from which it is possible to organize continuous communications with and firm control over all airborne troops from the beginning of the war, and also to maintain reliable communications with the General Headquarters. Given reliable communications, the airborne troop commander's short-term travel to the departure area of one or another landing force can be undertaken just to monitor and to render on-the-spot assistance to the commanders of large units.

To conduct an airborne landing and provide materiel support to the landing force it will be necessary during combat to place an appropriate number of military transport aircraft at the disposal of the commander of airborne troops.

In our opinion, airborne landing forces employed by the General Headquarters to accomplish independent major operational or strategic tasks



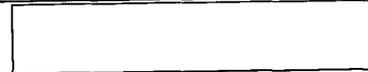
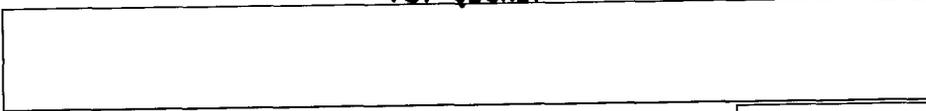
should be controlled by the commander and staff of the airborne troops. The latter will act as a headquarters subordinate to the General Headquarters; they will themselves determine the specific combat tasks of the landing troops, will receive the necessary forces and means to organize comprehensive support, and quite naturally will bear responsibility for the successful use of the airborne landing forces. Control of the actions of a major airborne landing force which has been dropped at a considerable depth must be exercised from the beginning till the end of the operation by the commander of airborne troops, and should only as an exception be transferred to the commander of the front.

Generally, it is now hardly necessary for front troops operating along separate axes to join the airborne landing force in the same territory. On the contrary, it is better to have these elements dispersed, increasing the simultaneous pressure on the enemy through the entire depth of the theater of military operations and reducing the losses resulting from nuclear weapons.

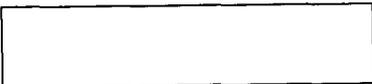
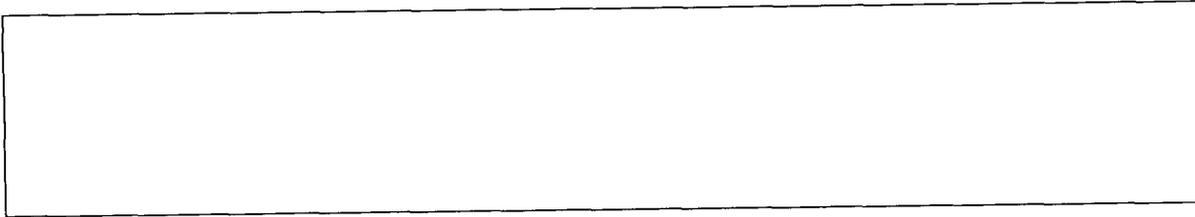
The staff of the airborne troops should already have appropriate control means to support highly effective control of airborne landing forces in an operation. It would be desirable to begin combat coordination of the headquarters of airborne troops, conducting periodic operational exercises and games in the context of the initial period of a war. These exercises could be two-level (headquarters of airborne troops and divisional staffs), or three-level (headquarters of airborne troops, divisional staffs and regimental staffs).

In conclusion one other observation. The rear services of the front at present lack the necessary forces and means to prepare the supplies for a parachute drop. A parachute drop of supplies is extremely necessary, not only for the airborne landing forces. Given the modern scope of operations, the possible destruction of ground transportation routes and the vast zones of radioactive contamination, a huge mass of supplies can be delivered to the troops only by air. In the areas of troop actions more often than not there will be no airfields or landing strips for aircraft. We believe that the inclusion of parachute-dropping equipment in the rear services of the front will not require excessive means. And the training of personnel to package supplies for dropping is not so complex as to impede the solution of this important question.

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Page 9 of 9 Pages



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