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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

12 September 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated from Other Front Forces

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 presents comments on a 1965 book with the same title prepared by the 7th Tank Army. The first section of the article criticizes the book's treatment of tank army combat capabilities and such specific problems as meeting engagements and assault crossings of water obstacles. Two other sections provide general comments on the value of the book to military science. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (78) for 1966.

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 the [redacted] Codeword [redacted]

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William E. Nelson
Deputy Director for Operations

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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DATE OF
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DATE 12 September 1975

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Combat Actions of a Tank Army
Separated from Other Front Forces

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 2 (78) for 1966 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. This article presents the comments of four authors on a 1965 book with the same title prepared by the 7th Tank Army and edited by General-Mayor of Tank Troops N. I. Batalov. In the first section of the article, General-Mayor of Tank Troops G. Zavizion and Colonel L. Kurkov criticize the book's treatment of tank army combat capabilities and such specific problems as meeting engagements and assault crossings of water obstacles. Colonel General G. Ariko and General-Leytenant P. Stepshin provide, in separate sections, general comments on the value of the book to military science.

End of SummaryHeadquarters Comment:

Colonel General Grigoriy Ivanovich Ariko and General-Leytenant P. V. Stepshin have held the position of Chief of Staff in the Belorussian and North Caucasus Military Districts, respectively. There is no information in available reference materials which can be firmly associated with the other authors. 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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Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated from
Other Front Forces*

by

General-Mayor of Tank Troops G. Zavizion, Colonel L. Kurkov,
Colonel General G. Ariko and General-Leytenant P. Stepshin

A work published under this title was written by the generals and officers of the headquarters of the 7th Tank Army. When a work written by generals and officers from troop units is brought to its logical conclusion -- publication in a mass edition -- this is an important event in the conduct of research in military science. The fact itself is indicative of the broadening of the front of military science work and of its efficacy and usefulness.

The publication of theoretical science works written by authors from troop units attests to the creative growth of our military personnel, who are capable not only of skilfully commanding troops but also of theoretically synthesizing the experience of their combat and operational training and analyzing new, difficult problems.

In the work under review the authors examine a problem which is very important in present-day operations: the conduct of combat actions by a tank army separated from other front forces.

This problem is important because, after the delivery of missile/nuclear strikes, a deep penetration by advancing strike groupings of troops into the enemy disposition, in cooperation with large airborne landing forces, will be required in order to exploit the results of these strikes as quickly as possible and to carry out a rapid offensive into the entire depth of the theater of military operations. This in itself will reduce the capabilities of the enemy to deliver massed missile/nuclear strikes and to unite the efforts of his approaching reserves.

*Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated from Other Front Forces, edited by General-Mayor of Tank Troops N.I. Batalov, Military Publishing House, 1965, 104 pages and five inserts.

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At the same time, advancing ground forces groupings of our troops must complete the destruction of opposing enemy forces, seize and hold territory, and conduct other combat actions not connected with the separation and the offensive in the depth of the enemy disposition.

Tasks varying in content and methods of fulfilment can be accomplished by ground forces large units and formations which differ in composition and function. The authors indicate quite correctly that it is primarily tank armies that must be used to conduct highly maneuverable and mobile combat actions and to deliver a deep strike to the entire depth of a theater of military operations.

However, a combined-arms army also possesses superior combat qualities and capabilities for accomplishing important combat tasks both in cooperation with front main forces and independently. Moreover, because of its composition, a combined-arms army is more capable of fulfilling the tasks of completing the destruction of an opposing enemy and of seizing territory.

Unfortunately, the book does not devote sufficient attention to analyzing and comparing the content of the tasks and the operating methods of combined-arms and tank armies.

The authors demonstrate the necessity of the delivery of a deep strike by a tank army and, based mainly on its operational-tactical characteristics, they explain the function of a tank army. For example, they state: "The special operational-tactical characteristics of a tank army have predetermined its function and leading role in a modern offensive operation...". And they continue: "...the unique function of a tank army has also resulted in its being assigned an immediate task different from the tasks of combined-arms armies" (Page 6). No explanation or analysis of the tasks and operating methods of combined-arms armies is given in the book.

In our opinion, it would be methodologically more correct to begin with a short study of the general nature of present-day operations and the need to fulfil tasks which vary in content and operating methods; then, on the basis of this and also with regard for their diverse combat characteristics and capabilities, to explain the functions of tank and combined-arms armies. Thus, it would have been advisable not to compare their operational-tactical characteristics, but to demonstrate more conclusively the importance in present-day operations of the delivery of deep and rapid strikes by the ground forces. Precisely for this reason it

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is advisable for fronts on the axis of the main strike to be composed of the most mobile and highly maneuverable large units and formations, primarily of tank armies.

In examining the combat capabilities of a tank army to deliver a deep strike, the authors have on the whole correctly analyzed its fire power, maneuverability and mobility, and formed entirely valid conclusions and proposals. But in doing so more attention should have been given to analyzing the capabilities of a tank army to accomplish independent operational, and in a number of cases also operational-strategic, tasks during actions when separated from other front forces. For example, it would have been very useful to determine: for how long and at what distance from the other front forces can a tank army conduct combat actions independently, using only its own forces and means; and what would be the results of the movement by troops of an army to certain operational-strategic areas and installations.

Furthermore, it would have been more appropriate to regard the separation itself not as something that increases gradually, but rather as all-out drives in which, in certain cases, beginning with the first day of an operation a tank army can advance more than 100 kilometers. During the operation this separation sometimes can decrease (when an army is delayed at contaminated zones and other obstacles, or when it conducts meeting battles and engagements), and then increase again.

The separation of the troops of a tank army from other front forces is one method of quickly achieving the goals of an operation. Therefore, this separation is already envisaged in the concept of the front troop commander and is supported by an entire system of measures for its achievement.

The separation is inseparably linked with a high rate of advance, which must always be greater for a tank army than for combined-arms armies.

While making great demands on the headquarters of a front and the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to create the conditions necessary for a tank army to operate when separated from other front forces, at the same time the authors have not fully set forth all of the capabilities of a tank army for conducting rapid and continuous actions in order to deeply penetrate the enemy disposition and to accomplish independent tasks.

Specifically, the book does not mention which enemy grouping a tank army can operate against with its own forces and means and what damage it

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can inflict.

The reinforcement and support means assigned to a tank army for conducting an operation are accepted by the authors without sufficient basis. For the most part they are only taking into consideration the experience of exercises of the 7th Tank Army. In research in military science it is also necessary to make more extensive use of the experience of other large units and formations, and also to produce more detailed calculations and substantiations.

Problems of the conduct of a meeting engagement by a tank army should have been analyzed anew in the book from the standpoint of the meeting engagement being primarily a tank engagement, since, after the reciprocal delivery of missile/nuclear strikes, it is the tank troops who will survive to a large degree and retain their combat effectiveness, and it is they who will play the principal role in meeting battles and engagements on both sides.

It would also have been advisable to examine the various methods of destroying advancing enemy reserves, not limiting these methods to meeting battles and engagements alone. In a number of cases it will be more advantageous for a tank army delivering a deep strike to destroy advancing enemy reserves with missile/nuclear and chemical weapons, to delay their advance and, by utilizing its own maneuvering capabilities, bypass the main enemy groupings after leaving behind the minimum required quantity of forces and means to complete the destruction of the enemy. The primary attention of a tank army must in all cases be directed toward a rapid advance without getting involved in protracted battles against opposing forces.

As for the problems of an assault crossing of water obstacles by the troops of a tank army, it would have been advisable to discuss first of all the destruction of the enemy capable of delaying a tank army on the approaches to a water obstacle or immediately at the obstacle. The continuous development of the offensive on the opposite shore must remain the main goal even during the assault crossing. In this connection, one would have wished a more detailed analysis of the exercise experience which was cited as an example. Without it, the example does not fully support the theoretical conclusions of the authors on the assault crossing of water obstacles from the march.

In examining the actions of the troops of a tank army during the delivery of a deep strike, it would have been very useful to indicate the

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various methods of combat against the numerous antitank means of the enemy, particularly antitank guided missiles.

A commendable aspect of the work is that the authors give considerable attention to the control of army troops, to support, and to protection of the troops against weapons of mass destruction. The book convincingly presents the problems of cooperation with airborne forces and aviation and describes party-political work during actions by a tank army separated from other front forces.

It should be stated that on the whole, in spite of certain failings, the work produced by the officers and generals of the 7th Tank Army is a valuable theoretical study, which substantiates one of the most important principles of operational art concerning the actions of a tank army separated from other front forces.

The authors also are to be commended for having made a serious attempt to synthesize the experience of combat and operational training of troops and staffs and also materials from military science conferences held at the field headquarters of the 7th Tank Army and in its large units. Therefore, the proposals put forth also take on practical significance.

* * *

At the present time problems of the organization and conduct of combat actions by a tank army separated from other front forces have still not been worked out with sufficient thoroughness. For the 1966/67 academic year the Minister of Defense assigned the task: "Learn to use tank armies in close cooperation with airborne troops for a rapid advance into the depth in order to seize vital political-administrative centers and military installations." Therefore, the work Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated from Other Front Forces, produced by the headquarters of the 7th Tank Army and prepared for publication by the Military Science Directorate of the General Staff, is of timely importance.

The authors have succeeded in making a fairly complete analysis of the following problems: the function of a tank army in an offensive operation; the operating methods and methods of use of a tank army separated from other front forces; the organization and maintenance of steady cooperation with the rocket troops, airborne landing forces and aviation; and also the problems of supporting combat actions.

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The conclusions and recommendations contained in the work are substantiated by the necessary calculations and experience of staff exercises.

To be sure, the authors did not exhaust all problems connected with the use of a tank army separated from other front forces for rapid actions into the operational depth. However, their work will considerably aid generals and officers in their theoretical training and practical activities.

It should also be noted that the publication of theoretical works written in troop units according to plans for military science work will help in all possible ways to further develop military science thinking among the troops and staffs.

It is advisable to more extensively and actively apply the experience of the Military Science Directorate in publishing similar works, written in troop units, in the course of future military science work.

* * *

We have received and studied with interest the work Combat Actions of a Tank Army Separated From Other Front Forces, written by a collective of authors from the 7th Tank Army and prepared for publication by the Military Science Directorate of the General Staff.

We believe that this form of publishing military science research conducted among the troops is highly desirable. It helps to draw wide circles of generals and officers into serious research in military science; increases their personal interest in research results; and assures the introduction into use in the science of a large quantity of factual material accumulated among the troops, its thorough theoretical interpretation, and the efficiency of transmitting research results to the military reader.

The content of the work corroborates these observations. The book is favorably noteworthy for a wealth of factual material drawn from the experience of combat and operational training, for its originality of presentation of a number of problems arising out of real situations, and for the obvious practical value of certain recommendations.

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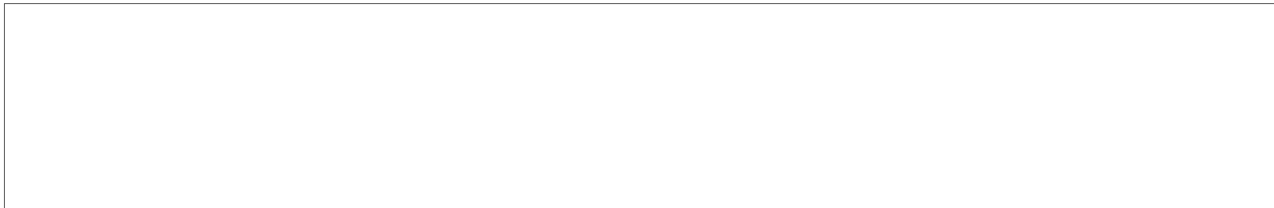


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The publication of works produced in troop units and prepared for publication by the Military Science Directorate, in our opinion, is something we would be well advised to practice in the future.

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