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3 March 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
FROM : William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The First
Offensive Operation of a Combined-Arms
Army 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 comments on two works dealing with questions of preparing and conducting the first army offensive operation in the initial period of a war. Among the matters discussed are the conditions under which an army may enter an engagement and the timely and efficient movement of troops out of permanent deployment posts with the initiation of a war. The author also stresses the need for early all-round preparation of troops and equipment and their maintenance in constant combat readiness. Procedures for moving troops of an army to the state border and bringing them to combat readiness en route, and questions of developing an offensive, combating enemy reserves and enemy tactical nuclear means and antitank means also are treated. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (78) for 1966. The Russian-language version was disseminated as FIRDB-312/00823-75.

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]

William W. Wells

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The First Offensive Operation of a Combined-Arms Army in the Initial Period of a War

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'. The author of this article is Colonel A. Tonkikh. This article comments on two works dealing with questions of preparing and conducting the first army offensive operation in the initial period of a war. Among the matters discussed are the conditions under which an army may enter an engagement and the timely and efficient movement of troops out of permanent deployment posts with the initiation of a war. The author also stresses the need for early all-round preparation of troops and equipment and their maintenance in constant combat readiness. Procedures for moving troops of an army to the state border and bringing them to combat readiness en route, and questions of developing an offensive, combating enemy reserves and enemy tactical nuclear means and antitank means also are treated.

End of Summary

Comment:

Colonel A. V. Tonkikh was identified as Candidate of Military Sciences. He also wrote "Overcoming Antitank Defense" in Issue No. 2 (84) for 1968 (FIRDB-312/04866-73). 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 Russian-language version of this article was disseminated as FIRDB-312/00823-75.

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The First Offensive Operation of a Combined-Arms Army
in the Initial Period of a War

by
Colonel A. Tonkikh

Equipping modern armies with nuclear weapons has greatly increased the role of surprise. Therefore, working out the questions of the first operations of the initial period of a war takes on exceptional importance.

The works being reviewed are specially devoted to this topic.*

In considering the possible nature of the development of combat actions with the beginning of a war (Chapter 1), General-Mayor Stashek, on the basis of the combat experience of two world wars as well as materials on the exercises of the NATO armed forces and the theoretical views of our probable enemies on the unleashing of military operations under present-day conditions, has set forth the content and the growing significance of the initial period of a war, the conditions of the entry of an army into an engagement, the objectives, tasks, and scope of an offensive operation, and the combat strength of the army and its operational disposition.

The author has managed to set forth consistently the fundamentals of the combat actions of an army in the initial period of a war. This, it appears to us, is precisely what the title of the first chapter should have been.

Among all the matters considered in this chapter, the basic one, in our opinion, is research into the conditions under which an army may enter into an engagement with the beginning of a war. The importance of this matter is explained by the fact that the conditions of the initial period of a war will leave their mark on the subsequent actions of the army during the operation, as well as by the fact that this question has not yet found due theoretical development and treatment in our military publications.

* Stashek, N. I., The First Offensive Operation of a Combined-Arms Army in the Initial Period of a War, published by the M. V. Frunze Military Academy, 1964, 152 pp. Simbirtsev, V. I., An Offensive Operation of a Combined-Arms Army in the Initial Period of a War, published by the Military Artillery Academy, Leningrad, 1965, 129 pp. and 13 inserts.

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Unfortunately, the author has not managed to solve this important problem completely.

In considering the conditions of the entry of an army into an engagement with the beginning of a war, General-Mayor Stashek proceeds on the assumption that either the enemy nuclear attack can be disrupted or he will succeed in delivering nuclear strikes against the troops of our army in their permanent deployment posts (p. 33). In our opinion, one should speak not of disrupting, but of taking the necessary countermeasures to reduce the effectiveness of the nuclear attack of the enemy. Such a requirement will be more realistic under present-day conditions. The discussion should be about organizing and conducting uninterrupted, effective reconnaissance of enemy means of mass destruction and about how it is most advisable to utilize the means of destruction available in the army for combating enemy nuclear means in order to maximally reduce their capabilities.

Nor can one agree with the author's assertion that under certain conditions the enemy will succeed in delivering a powerful nuclear strike against the troops of an army in their permanent deployment posts, since in this case there is no point in speaking of some kind of subsequent aggressive actions of the army. Here the idea should have been stressed that, under any conditions of the possible unleashing of a war by an aggressor, the large units of the army must promptly leave the permanent deployment posts and either go to concentration areas unknown to the enemy or immediately begin moving up to the area of combat actions and thus avoid the enemy nuclear strikes.

The conditions of the army's entry into the engagement will basically depend on the speed of moving the large units out of permanent deployment posts, bringing the troops to full combat readiness, and moving them promptly and smoothly into the area of combat actions.

Here it should be noted that the time which the troops will have for moving out of permanent deployment posts under a combat alert will be extremely limited, amounting to some tens of minutes and not one and one half to two hours, as the author indicates (p. 30).

It is necessary now to orient troops toward very rigid time periods for alerting and assembling the troops and moving them out of permanent deployment posts under a combat alert.

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Calculations show that to move the troops of an army of a border military district out of permanent deployment posts in a timely manner, large units and units may have no more than 30 minutes from the moment the enemy tactical aviation takes off from airfields. In order to manage in this time, it is necessary to shorten the time limits for carrying out the different measures under a combat alert, for which, as the experience of troops shows, there are realistic possibilities. In particular, it is possible to shorten the time for warning the troops under a combat alert by introducing automated systems for simultaneous warning from the formation down to the individual subunits; speed up the preparation of combat and motor transport equipment by introducing new, more progressive methods of storing equipment, armament, optics, batteries, etc.; shorten the time for loading mobile reserves of materiel by storing them on transport means and increasing the size of the sites for loading materiel from depots; prepare control posts beforehand; constantly and purposefully train personnel in actions to take under a combat alert, etc.

Also unconvincing is the author's suggestion for daily change of the signal for large units and units to turn out upon combat alert (p. 30, emphasis ours -- A. T.). Such a practice can lead to confusion in the system of warning troops, which is fraught with serious consequences.

In considering the special features of preparing the first offensive operation (Chapter 2), the author correctly notes that, as a result of the possible surprise unleashing of war by an aggressor, early all-round preparation of troops for combat actions has acquired exceptional importance. Also justly emphasized is the increased importance of the constant combat readiness of the army's large units for decisive, aggressive combat actions.

Other important features of preparing the first offensive operation are also correctly indicated in the book, including the lack of complete data about the enemy, our troops' lack of combat experience in employing nuclear weapons, as well as the lack of experience in operating under these conditions, the limited access to operational documents, and others.

Another virtue of the second chapter is that in it are indicated all the basic questions of organizing and planning an army offensive operation that are to be considered by the commander before making a decision. Here the author does not simply enumerate these questions, but discusses their nature and the conclusion to which the army commander should come in the process of studying them.

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Attention to early planning of the army offensive operation is quite correctly stressed as one of the most important measures which ensure that the army's large units go over to aggressive combat actions quickly. In the course of researching this question, the author gives valuable recommendations on planning an army operation.

A number of recommendations are also expressed about planning the tasks of the rocket troops of the army, defining tasks for the combined-arms large units, employing airborne landing forces and air defense forces and means in the operation, organizing cooperation, and a number of other matters.

At the same time, some recommendations, in our opinion, are debatable. For instance, in discussing the content of the commander's decision for the offensive operation (p. 50), the author advises allocating nuclear warheads only according to the tasks of the operation, although, in our opinion, it also is possible to allocate them according to the axes of the actions of the army troops, as well as according to the units and large units to be employing them.

It seems to us that the concept "protection of troops against weapons of mass destruction" (p. 82) is not quite accurately treated. Only such measures as can lead to the prevention or weakening of the effect of the casualty-producing elements of these weapons on troops should be considered pertinent to the protection of troops against weapons of mass destruction. Camouflaging the troops and having them periodically change their disposition areas cannot make the troops safe from the effect of means of mass destruction; it will only complicate the conditions for detection by the enemy of targets for delivering nuclear strikes.

In examining the conduct of the first offensive operation of a combined-arms army in the initial period of a war (Chapter 3), N. I. Stashek sets forth the basic principles for moving the troops of the army forward to the state border and making an incursion into enemy territory, as well as questions of developing the offensive, combating enemy reserves, having the army make assault crossings of water obstacles, and other tasks.

In analyzing the possibilities of moving an army forward to the state border, the author correctly notes that the transition to aggressive offensive actions will be carried out either from the areas of concentration of its large units under a combat alert or from the permanent deployment posts. However, he has neither considered in detail

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what occasions these different variants, nor examined closely what measures must be taken in order to count on success in either case.

Moving the army forward to the state border from permanent deployment posts will, to a greater degree, ensure concealment of the preparation for combat actions and surprise of the strike against the enemy. But in this case, a number of difficulties will arise in preparing the operation, which the author should have brought out. In particular, this question comes up: how to prepare weapons and combat equipment for battle during the process of moving the troops forward?

Bringing large units and units to full combat readiness during their movement forward to the area of combat actions will take place in those cases where our reconnaissance has ascertained enemy preparation for a nuclear attack. On receiving such data, the troops must immediately move out of permanent deployment posts and begin moving toward the state border in order to opportunely exploit the results of the nuclear strikes of our strategic and operational-tactical means. In this case, the large units will not, as a rule, have a special time to bring themselves to full combat readiness. The preparation of armament and combat equipment for battle will have to be completed during stops, halts, etc. in the process of moving forward to the state border.

— If there is a period of threat, bringing the troops of the army to increased and full combat readiness will be carried out directly in the permanent deployment posts. This is prompted by the need for more concealed preparation of troops for combat actions in order to preclude possible drastic aggravation of the situation in one or another theater of military operations. In this case bringing the troops to increased and full combat readiness will be carried out not by alerting them by a combat alert signal, but rather under the guise of ordinary training periods inside military casernes, by bringing combat equipment and armament to readiness, carrying out technical servicing, etc.

Along with this the basic measures for bringing the large units of the army to full combat readiness should have been examined in detail, since their timely movement forward from permanent deployment posts and subsequent successful actions during the operation depend on this.

In setting forth the questions of developing an offensive during an operation, the author devotes much attention to combating the tactical nuclear means of the enemy. And this is perfectly legitimate, since the success of the operation on the whole will largely depend on the successful



accomplishment of this task. However, in giving this important measure its due, he limits himself for some reason to a mere reference to an experimental exercise (pp. 103, 104), although this example does not illustrate high effectiveness of combating tactical nuclear means within the framework of a battle or operation, but only provides an indication of the results of particular experiments.

Research shows that the main burden of combating the tactical nuclear weapons of the enemy in a modern battle and operation falls to the division. Consequently, the author's example relative to the use of 130-mm guns to hit Honest John launching positions is not altogether suitable, since the division does not have them yet and can by no means always get them for reinforcement. Moreover, this system is very cumbersome and low in mobility and cannot, therefore, be considered an effective fire means for combating tactical nuclear means under conditions of highly mobile combat actions.

As for allocating tanks to combat the tactical nuclear means of the enemy, it should be kept in mind that, as the main striking force of the ground forces, they are called upon to carry out various tasks that correspond to their purpose and combat capabilities. Therefore, the author should have more confidently expressed his comments directed toward searching out new, more effective methods and means of combating the numerous tactical nuclear weapons of the enemy. In particular, in our opinion, he should have said something about the extent to which the existing means of destruction, including nuclear means, with which present-day combined-arms large units are equipped, meet the growing demands for effective combat against the tactical nuclear means of the enemy, and what will be, in the author's opinion, the future ways for increasing the fire power and striking power of our large units.

The research conducted by General-Mayor Stashek on the question of developing the offensive suffers from a somewhat one-sided approach. The impression is created that the author considers the achievement of high rates of advance to be dependent solely on the success of combat against enemy means of nuclear attack. Therefore, it is not accidental that such an important question as combating the numerous highly effective antitank means of the enemy, equally dangerous to both tank and motorized rifle units and large units, was not treated in the work being considered. However, calculations of the combat effectiveness of these weapons and the enemy's methods of their combat employment in a battle and operation show that they are capable of reducing the rate of advance of our troops to a significant degree, and in some cases even of disrupting the offensive itself in one sector or another.

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Consequently, the achievement of high rates of advance by troops in a modern battle and operation will depend, if not to the same extent, then nearly so, on how effectively the enemy means of nuclear attack and his deeply echeloned antitank defense are destroyed.

There are also a few other recommendations that give rise to objections. For instance, in the section "Combating Enemy Reserves", the author suggests destroying the reserves during their movement forward to the front (p. 116). It should be noted that this method is applicable only when the enemy passes through a defile or other bottlenecks. It is in this case that the most favorable conditions will be created for delivering nuclear and chemical strikes and air strikes with conventional means against him. And, vice versa, when the terrain in the zone where enemy reserves are moving forward favors the maneuvering and movement forward of troops in dispersed formation -- it is harder to select the enemy's most vulnerable spot and, consequently, achieve destruction of the main forces and means of the reserves that are moving forward.

Nor can we agree with the author's recommendation to hit enemy counterattack groupings during the period of their movement to the line of deployment for an attack (p. 118). If the enemy has still managed to bring forces and means up to the front, then it is advisable to deliver nuclear strikes against this grouping directly on the line of deployment, since in this case the enemy will sustain greater losses than in a strike against his columns.

In the work of General-Mayor Stashek, questions relating to troop actions in zones of destruction and of radioactive and chemical contamination, and to the support of successive assault crossings of a series of water obstacles encountered in the zone of advance of an army, have, unfortunately, not received treatment.

The training textbook drafted by Colonel V. I. Simbirtsev is also devoted to the questions of preparing and conducting an army offensive operation in the initial period of a war. In it are set forth the fundamentals of preparing and conducting an army offensive operation.

The positive side of the work is the author's more detailed analysis of the conditions of the army's going over to the offensive with the beginning of a war, the nature of the operation, and the principles of preparing and conducting it.

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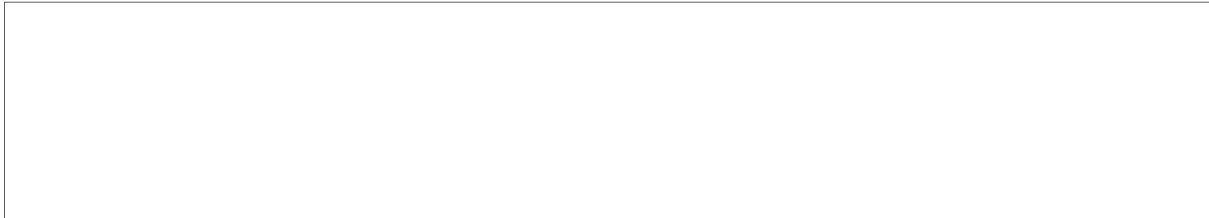


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Given a creative attitude toward the works being reviewed, devoted to one and the same question, the reader will find in them not only valuable recommendations and theoretical bases, but also questions to reflect upon.

In conclusion, let us note that, in spite of certain shortcomings in the above works, their authors have produced, in our opinion, important theoretical generalizations and research. The recommendations suggested by them will unquestionably help give our officers and generals a deeper understanding of the nature and special features of preparing and conducting the first offensive operation of a combined-arms army in the initial period of a war.



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