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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

9 November 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : John N. McMahon
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Actions of
a Tank Army in the Offensive Operation of
a Front in the Initial Period of War

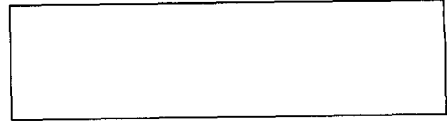
1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article, in critically reviewing a General Staff Academy monograph on the same topic, discusses the place, role, purposes, and tasks of the tank army in a front offensive, stressing the usual rapid advance and deep penetration, pointing out that meeting engagements are the most likely types of action in which it will engage. It also discusses the width and depth of offensive actions, rate of advance, and strength of the tank army, the number of routes it needs in its movement to the border, and recommends that the army be not more than a night's march away from its area of commitment when war begins. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) 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

JN
John N. McMahon

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

DATE OF INFO. Late 1963

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DATE 9 November 1978

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Actions of a Tank Army in the Offensive Operation of a Front in the Initial Period of War

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article, written by Colonel N. Makarov, in critically reviewing a General Staff Academy monograph on the same topic, discusses the place, role, purposes, and tasks of the tank army in a front offensive, stressing the usual rapid advance and deep penetration, pointing out that meeting engagements are the most likely types of action in which it will engage. It also discusses the width and depth of offensive actions, rate of advance, and strength of the tank army, the number of routes it needs in its movement to the border, and recommends that the army be not more than a night's march away from its area of commitment when war begins.

End of Summary

[REDACTED] 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.

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~~WARNING NOTICE SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AND METHODS INVOLVED~~

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The Actions of a Tank Army in the Offensive
Operation of a Front in the Initial Period of War*

by
Colonel N. MAKAROV

The matters of preparing and conducting the first offensive operations of the initial period of war have been extensively researched over recent years in dissertations. However, it should be noted that in most cases the defended dissertations were not published but remained in typewritten form in the holdings of the libraries of military academies and other scientific research institutions. This did not afford the opportunity of making them accessible to a wide group of readers.

This is why the publication by the Military Academy of the General Staff of monographs written for candidates' dissertations deserves approval. Extensive acquaintance with them will enable us to exchange opinions about the matters touched upon, enrich the knowledge of military theory of officers, generals, and admirals, and help them resolve the pressing problems of improving the combat and operational training of our Armed Forces.

The author of the monograph under review, based on the generalized experience of large-scale command-staff exercises and war games as well as on an analysis of the development of the means of armed combat and the organizational structure of troops, both our own and those of the probable enemy, examines a wide range of topics, namely: the conditions surrounding the occurrence of the first offensive operation of a front; the role and place of a tank army in an operation; the purpose, tasks, and scope of the operation; the combat strength and capabilities of a tank army; the principles for the employment of rocket troops, nuclear and chemical weapons, aviation, airborne landing forces, and air defense forces; and also the matters of organizing and conducting the first offensive operation of a tank army in the initial period of war.

* General-Mayor of Tank Troops M. S. PISKUNOV, The Actions of a Tank Army in the Offensive Operation of a Front in the Initial Period of War, Publication of the Military Academy of the General Staff, 1962, 109 pages, plus seven diagrams.

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We shall make some comments about individual matters set forth in the work.

In researching the principles of a tank army's operation in a front's first offensive operation, the author has not shown the enormous impact made on its purpose and content by the nuclear strikes to be delivered with strategic means in the zone of the front or on its flanks. There is no doubt that these strikes, as a rule, will precede the beginning of the front operation and play a decisive role in achieving its purpose and, consequently, also the purpose of the first offensive operation of the tank army.

Speaking of the place of a tank army in a front operation, the author writes: "Depending on the location, conditions of deployment, and terrain, a tank army can be used in the front's first or second echelon. If the army is located in a border military district (group of forces), then, as a rule, it will be used in the front's first echelon, and more rarely in the second" (page 10).

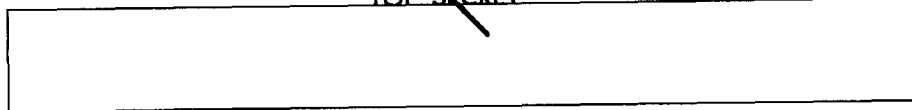
Thus, the basic criterion determining the place of the tank army in the operational disposition of the front is the distance it is located away from the national border (line of demarcation). Such an approach to the solution of the question is not entirely correct.

In our opinion, a tank army's greater resistance to nuclear strikes, its superior maneuverability, and ability to exploit more quickly and effectively than other armies the results of nuclear strikes and to shift relatively fast the efforts of advancing front troops to the operational depth, speak for the fact that the front commander must make sure that the tank army, as the main striking force of the front, is in the first echelon of its operational disposition. Consequently, even in peacetime conditions it must be positioned (located) at a distance from the national border (line of demarcation) that is in conformity with this requirement.

For these same purposes, it is necessary that the tank army, by the beginning of combat actions, be brought into an area that is approximately no more than one night's march away from the enemy. This will make it possible to assign deeper tasks to it

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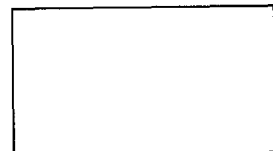
on the first day of the operation. But if, due to the positioning factors, it is impossible to have the tank army nearby at the beginning of combat actions, it will hardly be possible to use it in the first offensive operation as a component of the given front.

The author did not altogether accurately define the purpose of the tank army's first offensive operation. "The purpose of the tank army's first operation," he says, "can be the defeat of ground forces groupings, the capture of the main missile bases, nuclear weapons, and industrial areas; and the deep penetration, immediately following the massed strikes of nuclear and other mass destruction weapons, into the enemy rear to disrupt mobilization measures, disrupt the work of the rear, and seize especially important installations and areas on enemy territory whose capture will have a decisive impact on the speed with which the purpose of the front offensive operation is achieved" (page 16).

It appears to us that this definition expresses not the purpose of the operation, but rather the possible tasks which the tank army will accomplish during the operation.

The purpose of the tank army's offensive operation, in our opinion, may be: to rapidly exploit the results of nuclear strikes to complete the defeat of the enemy's main grouping of ground forces and destroy his nuclear means on the axis of the front's main attack, and also to seize and hold, until the approach of the front's remaining forces, those important installations or areas whose capture will achieve the purpose of the front operation.

Hence, the tasks of the tank army will consist in rapidly transferring its efforts to a greater depth taking it out of contact with the combined-arms armies, in completing the defeat of the enemy's operational and strategic reserves, in destroying his nuclear attack means, in frustrating the mobilization measures and disorganizing the control and work of the rear, and also in capturing important installations that ensure the achievement of the purpose of the front operation. In connection with this, the immediate and subsequent tasks of the tank army will often coincide in depth (but not in scope) with the immediate and subsequent tasks of the front.



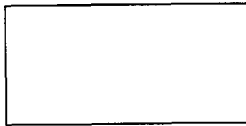


If the immediate and subsequent tasks of the tank army and front coincide, then in this case it is required that its tasks be delimited more precisely from the tasks to be accomplished by the remaining forces and means of the front so as not to create the impression that it alone, as it were, is to accomplish the tasks in the entire front zone of combat actions. Therefore, on page 17, where the immediate and subsequent tasks of the tank army are shown, the author should have noted that they will be accomplished by the army mainly within the confines of its zone or axis of combat actions. At the same time it should have been emphasized that in most cases it will accomplish its tasks in cooperation with rocket troops, aviation, airborne landing forces, and also with separate large units, especially tank units, and sometimes even an entire combined-arms army, which are moving forward on its flanks or behind it.

Here it is appropriate to mention, as the author correctly affirms, that the tank army will most frequently form part of the main grouping of advancing front troops and operate on the main axis to accomplish the most important tasks, which must be fulfilled dependably and most rapidly (page 9).

However, in the greater part of his work the author, as it were, excludes the tank army from the complement of the front's main forces. He writes, for instance, "The enemy will strive to defeat the tank army before the approach of the main forces of the front" (page 9), or, "it ... may be separated from the main forces of the front" (page 24). The tank army is a constituent part of the main forces of the front; therefore, all its actions should be discussed, not as actions in isolation from or until the approach of the main forces, but as actions in isolation from the remaining (other) forces of the front.

The reader cannot be satisfied with the author's research into the width of the tank army's offensive zone, the depth of its operation, and the daily rates of advance. True, the numerical norms cited by him for the width of the offensive zone of 100 to 120 kilometers, depth of an operation of 800 to 1,000 kilometers, and rates of advance of up to 100 kilometers per day do not depart from existing views. However, in this work it is not enough to cite numbers; it would have been important to answer the question of why these specific norms and not others are advisable and to show the method of calculating them.



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For instance, the average speed of up to 100 kilometers per day can be based on the fact that tank large units and units, in order to have approximately equal daily combat effectiveness during the course of the whole operation, must conduct combat actions for not more than 10 to 12 hours with a movement speed of eight to ten kilometers per hour. The remaining time has to be afforded to them to prepare the tanks for the next day's battle and for the personnel to rest.

One can hardly agree with the author's definition of the combat strength of a tank army. He writes: "To increase the fire power, striking force, speeds and depth of the offensive, and have more successful fulfilment of tasks and achievement of the purpose of the first offensive operation, it is advisable for the tank army to have a combat strength of four to five medium tank divisions, and of five tank divisions on an especially important axis" (page 19). He further suggests increasing the strength of the army missile brigade, the missile battalion of the divisions, and also the number and strength of other units of the army.

However, not every numerical increase may be advantageous. The experience of the last war and of the postwar exercises that have been conducted shows that one of the primary differences between the existing tank army and others consists in its limited size and, thanks to this, its high maneuverability. Therefore, the author's suggestions to increase the combat strength of the tank army is dubious. As a matter of fact, these suggestions contradict the modern laws of development of organizational forms, especially of combined-arms large units and formations, which, as is well known, are going in the direction of making them smaller, not of enlarging them. Reduction of the combat strength of combined-arms formations and large units is dictated above all by the fact that nuclear means are now the main and decisive means of achieving the aims of a battle and operation. Therefore, it is not clear why the author, along with increasing the missile/nuclear weapons subordinate to the army and found in divisions, considers it necessary at the same time to increase the number of tank large units in the army.

One cannot agree with the author's assertion that the combat capabilities of a tank army can be sharply increased by destroying enemy groupings with nuclear weapons of the front and

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sometimes also of the Supreme High Command on the army's axis of actions (page 18). We believe that the combat capabilities of any formation, including a tank army, must be made up of the combat capabilities of the units and large units that belong to it organically or are temporarily attached for the period of the fulfilment of the assigned combat tasks. The combat means of a superior commander or of other formations that are used on the tank army's axis of actions do not increase its combat capabilities, but only sharply reduce the time required to fulfil the assigned tasks.

In examining the views of our probable enemies on the conduct of operations in the initial period of war in the Central European Theater of Military Operations, the author shows the existing grouping of all of the enemy's forces and means in this theater, and he cites some statistical material characterizing the combat and numerical strength of enemy troops. Much space is devoted to the defense actions of the enemy ground forces located in this theater.

It seems to us that more attention should have been given to the physical-geographic characteristics of the theater within the boundaries of those operational axes on which a tank army may most likely operate, to the possible enemy groupings against which it will have to conduct combat, and also to the tasks and methods of performing them on each specific axis. As for the numerical data on the combat and numerical strength of the enemy, they are of little use, because they become outdated and lose their value relatively quickly.

Nor can it be considered correct to show mainly the defensive actions of the enemy, since it is well known that the NATO command gives much attention to the organization and conduct of offensive operations on a most varied scale.

The author has examined completely enough the basic measures constituting the organization of an operation and shown the importance of carrying them out beforehand according to a plan worked out in peacetime. The reader will find in the work useful recommendations on the use of missile/nuclear means, on bringing troops to full combat readiness for immediate combat actions, on the work procedure of a tank army commander when making his decision for the operation, on the operational disposition of the



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army, on planning the operation, organizing cooperation, controlling troops, and also on matters of support of the operation.

A shortcoming in the treatment of the matters indicated above, in our opinion, is the fact that the author has not paid attention to the importance and necessity, during the organization of the first operation, of quickly establishing a grouping of rocket troops, which now constitute the basis of the operational disposition.

The author has successfully resolved the matters of the movement forward, deployment, and going over to the attack by tank army troops, routing of enemy reserves in meeting engagements, pursuit of the enemy, negotiation by tank army troops of zones of radioactive contamination and destruction, and also the assault crossing of water obstacles during an offensive operation.

The author recommends that the movement of tank army troops to the national border (line of demarcation or line of contact of the troops with the enemy) be carried out swiftly and on a wide front along routes previously planned for each large unit, with organized provost and traffic control service on them and with efficient traffic regulation.

Tank army troops will move up primarily by organic means, not only from border areas, but also from the interior of the country, since railroad centers may be destroyed by the enemy. However, as the author correctly notes, when operating railroads are available on the axis of troop movement and when the garrison area is a great distance away from the area of combat actions, it will be possible to ship tanks and other tracked vehicles by rail transport as well as on heavy-duty trailers with powerful fast-moving tractors.

It is recommended that the tank army, for moving up, be assigned five to ten routes (two to four for each first-echelon tank division and one or two for the army's field headquarters and its large units and units, primarily missile ones). The rocket troops are to be brought by a separate central route or following the lead regiments. During the movement of troops it is advisable to designate halt areas along the roads at such

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distances from crossings over water obstacles and through defiles that troops, crossings, and defiles cannot be struck simultaneously by a medium-yield nuclear strike.

The work emphasizes that, under conditions where the tank army is located at a distance from the border (line of demarcation) that exceeds the length of a 24-hour march, it must be moved up in the period of threat, if there is one, toward the axis of impending combat actions. But in case the distance from the border of the permanent garrisoning area or the tank army's concentration area into which it moves upon combat alert does not exceed a day's march, it can swiftly move up to the line of commitment to the engagement directly from these areas and fulfil its combat task.

In our opinion, it is possible for the tank army to develop its operation from the first day at a rapid tempo if at the beginning of combat actions its distance away from the border is within the scope of one night's march.

One cannot but agree with the author's view that the striving of both sides towards aggressive maneuvering offensive actions on separate axes may lead to where, during the offensive operation, the troops of the tank army will frequently conduct meeting battles and engagements. That being the case, the author correctly points out that, for the quickest defeat of the main hostile grouping in a meeting engagement, the tank army commander must, with all types of reconnaissance, discover in good time the strength of this grouping, forestall it in its deployment, seize the initiative, and force the enemy to conduct combat actions under conditions unfavorable to him. During the meeting engagement the tank army will crush those enemy reserves which it encounters on the axis of its actions. The defeat of reserves that have remained off to the side of this axis or in the tank army's rear is assigned to the large units of a combined-arms army.

Also of interest are the matters set forth in the work concerning the crossing of zones of radioactive contamination and the assault crossing (negotiation) of water obstacles by the tank army during the conduct of an operation.

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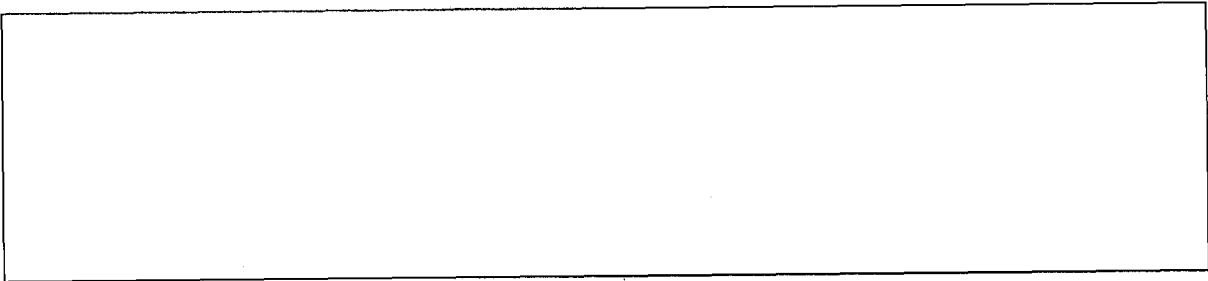
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It is to be regretted that no place was found in the work for the presentation and solution of the important matter of maintaining the constant combat readiness of the tank army's troops during its actions out of contact with the remaining forces of the front. The topics of carrying out extensive air drops of different combat forces and means, and also of supply cargoes, for a tank army should have been examined more fully.



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