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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

9 February 1979

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : John N. McMahon
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : WARSAW PACT JOURNAL: Committing the Second Echelon (Reserve) of an Army to Battle in an Offensive Operation

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on articles from a SECRET Soviet publication called Information Collection of the Headquarters and the Technical Committee of the Combined Armed Forces. This article sets forth concisely and comprehensively the purposes of committing an army's second echelon and its tasks; describes, analyzes, and evaluates the methods of committing it, dwelling on actions in mountainous forested terrain, and also outlines the basic requirements for the commitment. The author downplays the effect of enemy nuclear strikes. This journal is published by Warsaw Pact Headquarters in Moscow, and it consists of articles by Warsaw Pact officers. This article appeared in Issue No. 12, which was published in 1976.

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

Codeword

for John N. McMahon

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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SUBJECT

WARSAW PACT JOURNAL: Committing the Second Echelon (Reserve)
of an Army to Battle in an Offensive Operation

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Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article from a SECRET Soviet publication called Information Collection of the Headquarters and the Technical Committee of the Combined Armed Forces. This journal is published by Warsaw Pact Headquarters in Moscow, and it consists of articles by Warsaw Pact officers. This article was written by Colonel G. Grozev, deputy chief of staff of an army of the Bulgarian People's Army. This article sets forth concisely and comprehensively the purposes of committing an army's second echelon and its tasks, describes, analyzes, and evaluates the methods of committing it, dwelling on actions in mountainous forested terrain, and also outlines the basic requirements for the commitment. It details the matters the army commander must consider and prescribe upon committing his second echelon, discusses the movement forward to the line of commitment, the support to be rendered, and the role of nuclear weapons. The author downplays the effect of enemy nuclear strikes. This article appeared in Issue No. 12, which was published in 1976.

End of Summary

Comment:

The names of authors are given in Russian transliteration.

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Committing the Second Echelon (Reserve) of an
Army to Battle in an Offensive Operation

by

Colonel G. GROZEV
Deputy chief of staff of an army
of the Bulgarian People's Army

The commitment to battle of an army's second echelon (reserve) is the most demanding and decisive point during combat actions; on it depends to a considerable degree the achievement of the final aim of the operation.

In an offensive operation the second echelon of a combined-arms army usually consists of one or two combined-arms or tank large units which, as the operation is initiated, are disposed in a dispersed and concealed manner and are in constant readiness to accomplish previously assigned or suddenly arising tasks.

The second echelon (reserve) of an army is committed to battle in conformity with the concept of the operation, as a rule in order to exploit the first echelon's success on the axis of the main attack. Sometimes, under certain conditions of the situation, it is committed to develop the offensive on a new axis if this furthers the more rapid accomplishment of the purposes of the operation. The second echelon can also be used to rout operational reserves, pursue the enemy, destroy airborne and amphibious landing forces, seize important operational-tactical lines and areas, and also accomplish other tasks.

Its commitment to battle is made on those axes which ensure: rapid development of the offensive into the depth, breakout into the flanks or rear of the enemy's main grouping, completion of his rout, capture of important areas and objectives, and achievement of the aims of the operation in a short period of time.

Usually the second echelon is committed to battle to accomplish the army's follow-up task. We cannot rule out that at times this decision will be taken while the immediate task is

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being accomplished, when first-echelon large units are not able to accomplish it by themselves or have suffered heavy losses from enemy nuclear strikes and have to be replaced. Under conditions of mountainous forested terrain when fortifications are present it is possible that individual large units will be used to complete the breakthrough of enemy fortified areas.

The method of committing the army's second echelon (reserve) to battle is usually determined by the conditions of the situation, in particular by the condition and actions of the first echelon, the condition of the enemy and the nature of his actions, the situation in the zone of the offensive, the terrain, and the commander's concept. //

As a rule the second echelon (reserve) is committed from the march or, under conditions of rugged mountainous forested terrain, from close contact. In this case the army's second echelon can be committed to battle on one of the flanks of the army, in a gap formed between first-echelon large units, in the spaces between the adjacent flanks of two adjoining divisions, in the zone of one of these, or on axes that are covered weakly by the enemy. The choice of method will depend greatly on the specific situation on the second echelon's axis of commitment and on the assigned tasks. Obviously, the first three methods will be employed most often because they provide the most favorable conditions for the deployment and commitment of second-echelon large units; they exclude superfluous regroupings during an operation and the intermingling of the battle formations of first- and second-echelon units and subunits. However, this does not rule out the employment of other methods.

In a meeting engagement, and to deliver an attack against the flank or rear of approaching enemy reserves, it is most advisable to commit the second echelon to battle from one of the army's flanks. In mountainous forested terrain the inadequate capacity of the individual axes and the limited network of roads are particularly noticeable and most often lead to the employment of precisely this method.

During combat actions in those cases where large gaps or open areas develop between the advancing first-echelon large units, it is most expedient to commit the second echelon in the intervals between them.

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The commitment of an army's second echelon (reserve) can be done along the adjacent flanks of two first-echelon large units and sometimes by leapfrogging through the battle formations of first-echelon large units. We believe that this method can be employed most successfully when the first-echelon divisions are engaged in combat on a wide front and the passage of the second echelon through their battle formations will preclude the intermingling of personnel and combat equipment. However, this method is fraught with the danger of heavy losses from enemy weapons of mass destruction.

We believe that in those cases when the second echelon is made up of two or more large units, it can be committed to battle simultaneously or in succession and most often on a single axis, or much more rarely, on two axes.

The first variant is advantageous if the enemy has succeeded in deploying his reserves and in establishing equality with or superiority over our forces and we do not have a sufficient number of conventional means of destruction or nuclear weapons to change the balance of forces in our favor. This method has positive and negative aspects.

We can categorize as positive aspects the capabilities of providing for the following: a powerful initial strike; a decisive superiority in forces and means over the enemy on the axis of commitment; an increased rate of advance; and the establishment of conditions enabling the rout of the enemy grouping. A substantial shortcoming, especially under conditions of mountainous forested terrain, is the fact that in a limited area a great number of troops may be concentrated and these may become a target to be struck by enemy nuclear weapons.

In our view the other variant, of committing second-echelon large units in succession, is feasible in those cases where, as a result of nuclear strikes, the enemy's main forces have suffered considerable losses and his approaching reserves have been deprived of the capability of entering battle in an organized manner as well as under conditions where the terrain is characterized by a poorly developed network of roads and therefore it is impossible to deploy and commit to battle two or more divisions at the same time.

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The successive commitment to battle of the second echelon has some positive aspects, which can be reduced to the following: an adequate number of routes can be allocated to the large units; the troops are not concentrated in a relatively limited area and hence the enemy is deprived of advantageous targets against which to deliver strikes by weapons of mass destruction; forces of the higher level of command have greater opportunities of providing the commitment with reliable fire, engineer, and air defense support. A shortcoming is the fact that the enemy can carry out maneuvers with his reserves and second echelons and change the balance of forces in his favor on the axis of main attack of a committed large unit, which can cause a reduction in the rate of advance or even halt the offensive for a certain interval of time.

The commitment of large units on two axes that are isolated from each other but run parallel to each other, although less acceptable, makes it possible to select and use the best routes and is often employed when negotiating water obstacles, defiles, passes, etc. This method precludes a large concentration of troops in the same area; it facilitates the deployment and commitment of large units in the gaps between first-echelon large units and units; makes it difficult for the enemy to determine the axis of the main attack; and compels him to split up air strikes, artillery fire, and reserves.

The brief analysis we have made and the comparison of the different variants in committing a second echelon (reserve) to battle enable us to arrive at the conclusion that it is most advantageous to commit the second echelon (reserve) on the axis of the army's main attack simultaneously, without excluding the fact that under certain conditions it may be feasible to commit second-echelon large units to battle in succession on the same axis or on two axes.

We would also wish to emphasize that the army commander determines the second echelon's task during the time that the operation is being prepared. In so doing, he indicates the axis of commitment and the probable routes for movement forward, the [phase] lines and the times they are to be crossed, and also the axis for the exploitation of success, the procedure for the support of the commitment, and other matters. However,

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immediately before committing the second echelon, the army commander can refine his decision on the commitment and on the procedure for the actions of the second-echelon large units. In so doing, he indicates: the reinforcement means, the line and time of commitment; the axis of advance and the immediate and subsequent tasks; which enemy is to be destroyed and in cooperation with whom, and when and which area (line) is to be captured; the targets and time for delivery of nuclear strikes by army means; the number and yield of the nuclear warheads being launched; the tasks of adjacent forces and the boundaries between them; the areas and time for the landing (drop) of airborne and amphibious landing forces, the procedure for cooperation with them; the measures for all-round support; the location of the command post and its axis of relocation,

Special attention is also paid to organizing cooperation between the first and second echelons. To this end the army commander usually makes precise the following basic matters:

- the actions of rocket troops and aviation against the targets to be struck, the yields and types of nuclear bursts, and the time for their delivery;
- the lines (areas) which must be captured by the first-echelon large units and the procedure for supporting the commitment of the second echelon;
- the deployment lines of the army's antitank reserve and mobile obstacle detachment to safeguard the flanks of the large units to be committed;
- the actions of the second echelon while moving forward to the line of commitment, paying special attention to the timely passage of the movement control phase lines;
- the procedure for eliminating the aftereffects of enemy nuclear (fire) strikes against the large units and the methods of restoring combat effectiveness and of negotiating demolitions and contaminated sectors on the forward movement routes;
- the deployment lines of the second-echelon large units;
- the sequence and time of deployment into approach march formation and into battle formation, the safety lines and assault lines;
- the actions of aviation, rocket troops, and artillery to support the approach and commitment of the second echelon;
- the actions of the second echelon and airborne landing forces for the timely exploitation of the results of nuclear

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weapons strikes so as to rapidly rout the enemy and develop the army's offensive;

- the actions of aviation, rocket troops, airborne landing forces, and forward detachments to interdict the approach of the enemy's reserves and ensure they are destroyed in detail;
- the measures to secure the exposed flanks and boundaries.

For the movement forward of one division to the line of commitment to battle usually not less than two to three routes are allocated. In so doing, the separation between them must be such that the enemy is unable to strike simultaneously with a medium yield nuclear warhead the columns moving along the parallel routes. To provide for the deployment into battle formation of a division the number of routes is increased calculating on one to two for each first-echelon battalion. The restoration of the road sections destroyed by enemy nuclear strikes, the clearing of obstructions, and the construction of bypasses on roads are carried out by the allocated engineer units as well as by the movement support detachments of the second-echelon large units and units.

The army commander, as a rule, directs the movement forward and deployment of the second-echelon (reserve) large units from the forward command post, paying special attention to the timeliness with which measures supporting the commitment are carried out. For these purposes, it will be common practice to concentrate beforehand on the line of commitment the artillery participating in the preparatory fire, including the second echelon's artillery, a portion of the antiaircraft artillery of the first-echelon large units and of the army, and also engineer units and movement support means.

In this case, the amount of artillery required for the artillery preparation of the assault is determined on the basis of the artillery on hand and the strength of the opposing enemy grouping so as to ensure the simultaneous destruction of the targets that are capable of affecting the attacking troops as they move up and deploy into the approach march and battle formations.

Second-echelon large units move forward to the line of commitment in columns of regiments by the shortest routes. Artillery usually proceeds at the head of a column, and in case a

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meeting engagement is initiated, it can participate in preparatory fire.

With a view to reducing the time for the movement forward of the large units to the line of deployment and to provide them with the best protection against enemy nuclear strikes, it is necessary to avoid prolonged movement in approach march formations. The deployment of the troops must be carried out as near as possible to the enemy, in the meantime keeping a safe distance away from the ground zeros of our own nuclear strikes. *

In determining the safety lines it is necessary to take account of the distance between the approaching columns of the second echelon and the troops supporting the commitment to battle.

The commitment of the second echelon can be preceded by the delivery of massed or grouped nuclear strikes against the enemy; this will create conditions favoring the development of the offensive.

The army missile brigade, together with the missile battalions of the first- and second-echelon large units plus supporting aviation, delivers nuclear strikes against newly discovered nuclear attack means, control posts, tank groupings, and other installations of the enemy. But as concerns the artillery of the first- and second-echelon large units, it supports with a short artillery preparation the commitment of the second echelon. The artillery of the second echelon, in anticipation of a meeting engagement and taking into account its maximum range, deploys successively from the march into battle formation and as the batteries and battalions are ready, opens fire against the enemy's tactical means of nuclear attack, artillery and mortar batteries, and approaching reserves.

Immediately upon the discovery of enemy tactical means of nuclear attack they are destroyed by the artillery of the first-echelon large units.

Engineer troops prepare passages in enemy obstacles and support the deployment and going over to the assault of the second-echelon large units, and at the same time they cover the

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flanks of the second-echelon large units and units with engineer obstacles.

The deployment of second-echelon large units on the line of commitment may be carried out under conditions of massed nuclear strikes and powerful fire actions by the enemy. In the process, entire subunits and even units of the troops being committed may be placed out of action and extensive zones of destruction, fires, and radioactive contamination will arise. Under these conditions, even during the deployment it may become necessary to replace troops who have lost their combat effectiveness and sometimes even to change the axis of forward movement of individual units. But the troops who have retained their combat effectiveness must, without halting, immediately go over to a decisive attack.

The experience of a number of exercises confirms the fact that usually the restoration of the combat effectiveness of second-echelon troops is done with forces and means of organic and attached units and subunits. In so doing, detachments for the elimination of the aftereffects of the use of nuclear weapons are established in the areas of the nuclear strikes.

In committing the second echelon to battle, its cover against enemy means of air attack acquires special importance. The survivability of the large units depends greatly on the reliability of the air defense. To accomplish this task, army radar posts are set up beforehand on the axis of commitment; these ensure detection of the air enemy and provide timely warning to our troops. First-line antiaircraft batteries occupy firing positions at the following distances from the line of commitment: light antiaircraft artillery at one to two kilometers, medium antiaircraft artillery at two to three kilometers.

The spacing between light antiaircraft artillery firing positions may be three to five kilometers and that for medium antiaircraft artillery firing positions may be six to eight kilometers. Fighter aviation, in cooperation with surface-to-air missile units and antiaircraft artillery units, concentrates its efforts on preventing enemy air strikes against the deploying troops.

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So as to rapidly exploit the results of nuclear strikes, the deploying large units immediately go over to the assault and by decisive actions complete the rout of the enemy. Depending on the specific operational situation, the combat actions of the army's second echelon may be in the nature of a meeting engagement, the overcoming of an organized defense, or the pursuit of a retreating enemy.

In all cases, the main efforts of a second echelon upon being committed to battle must be concentrated upon achieving the rapid development of the offensive into the depth, on decisively routing the opposing enemy and his reserves, and on accomplishing the assigned tasks as rapidly as possible. For these purposes it is very important to select the correct methods of action to be taken by the units and subunits, to receive with timeliness reliable data on the enemy, and to take the necessary steps to prevent him from seizing favorable objectives and lines.

The complex and dynamic nature of a modern offensive operation requires that an army commander continuously have a second echelon available and that he constantly reconstitute his reserves. Once having used his second echelon in an engagement, he must take steps to reconstitute it, but if this is not possible, then establish a powerful combined-arms reserve.

These are some of the features in organizing and carrying out the commitment to battle of an army's second echelon (reserve) in an offensive operation. Without a doubt, both the features of the commitment as well as the nature of the actions of a second echelon will depend greatly on the specific situation. In this article we have sought to briefly cast light on the characteristic features of the solution to this problem based on experience accumulated during the operational training of our staffs and troops.

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