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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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27 July 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Capture of Islands by Airborne and Amphibious 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 discusses the principles of capturing islands, which the authors view as a joint operation involving all branches of service in support of amphibious and airborne landings. Nuclear preparation is said to have brought about a dramatic contrast with World War II operations of this nature. Special landing craft, including submarines, are identified as essential for amphibious operations, and several water crossings by Soviet line units using organic equipment are cited. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (68) 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.

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W. E. Colby
Deputy Director for Operations

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): The Airborne-Amphibious Landing Operation to Capture Islands

SOURCE Documentary

Summary

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (68) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought." The authors of this article are Colonel I. Snezhkov and Lieutenant Colonel A. Klyuyev. The article discusses the principles of capturing islands, which the authors view as a joint operation involving all branches of service in support of amphibious and airborne landings. Nuclear preparation is said to have brought about a dramatic contrast with World War II operations of this nature. Special landing craft, including submarines, are identified as essential for amphibious operations, and several water crossings by Soviet line units using organic equipment are cited.

End of Summary

[redacted] Comment:

There is no information in available reference materials which can be firmly associated with the authors. Military Thought has been published by the USSR Ministry of Defense in three versions in the past--TOP SECRET, SECRET, and RESTRICTED. There is no information as to whether or not the TOP SECRET version continues to be published. The SECRET version is published three times annually and is distributed down to the level of division commander.

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The Airborne-Amphibious Landing Operation to Capture Islands

by
Colonel I. Snezhkov and
Lieutenant Colonel A. Klyuyev

In a world war between two powerful coalitions, the struggle for islands becomes very critical, since their control is a necessary prerequisite for achieving the ultimate objective of the war.

And it is no accident that the military command of the armies of the United States and Great Britain uses a great many islands to be sure of having convenient springboards for attacking the Soviet Union and the other countries of the socialist camp. At the present time, the aggressive military blocs already have significant forces on islands in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In the Pacific area alone, they have created many air and naval bases and airfields and have established command organs and powerful systems of radionavigation and radio control. The NATO command also ascribes great importance to the defense of islands in the Baltic, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas and in the Sea of Marmora. Many islands in these areas have been turned into large infantry, air, or naval bases, and missile bases are being created on some of them (Crete and others).

The command of the aggressive imperialist blocs is also devoting much attention to training troops in the defense of islands against landings. Between 1948 and 1960, troops of the armies of the United States and Great Britain participated in more than fifty training exercises for the defense of various islands located in the Norwegian, North, Baltic, Mediterranean, Japan, and other seas.

Depending on the number of islands to be captured, on their size, and on their importance in regard to operations, and depending on the quantity of forces and means participating in the military actions, these actions may take the form of a landing operation.

Modern landing operations spread over enormous stretches of seas and oceans. Their main objective will obviously be to destroy enemy armed forces on another continent and completely capture their territory. However, a landing operation to capture islands is not an end in itself but constitutes part of a much larger landing operation or its intermediate stage. In this connection,

the holding of captured islands by ground forces will in all probability also be of short duration.

When nuclear weapons are used, military actions for the capture and defense of islands will change sharply in content. If in the past the complete destruction of enemy garrisons and the prevention of enemy use of islands was achieved by a single method, by the landing and actions of landing forces, at present this mission may be carried out by mounting nuclear strikes on the islands and contaminating the area with radioactivity. Thus, the defense of islands will obviously consist not so much of repulsing enemy landings and deploying ground forces on the islands, but mainly of making long-range and short-range approaches to islands with forces of strategic and tactical aircraft, rocket troops, and the navy.

In speaking of landing operations in this context, we have in mind their conduct with the aim of capturing, first, relatively large islands which represent the focal points of island groups; second, islands controlling straits, against which it is disadvantageous to both sides to mount nuclear strikes for economic, political, or military considerations; and third, islands which can be used as springboards (bases) for subsequent landing operations, taking into account here that not all of the many islands in the seas and oceans can be subjected to nuclear strikes by both sides.

Participation by all branches of the armed forces must be considered the basic feature of a modern landing operation for the capture of islands. We cannot count on the success of an operation if it is to be conducted, let us say, by the navy alone or only by ground forces in coordination with aviation. Carrying out the tasks of a landing operation is possible only through the combined efforts of ground and airborne forces, the navy, aviation, rocket troops, and air defense troops.

A certain percentage of our generals and officers doubt the possibility of landing a relatively large amphibious landing force under modern conditions. It is suggested that the missions of a landing operation must be carried out only by airborne landing forces in coordination with rocket troops, aviation, and naval forces. Amphibious landings are impossible, it is explained, because the enemy, with nuclear weapons at his disposal, is capable of striking hard against the troops at their embarkation

points, while they are in transit, and in their landing areas; thus, he can disrupt such a landing operation with relative ease.

Such misgivings can be recognized as valid only in regard to the methods and means of landings used during the last war. At that time, as is known, it took a long time to prepare a landing operation, and the landing forces were transported in slow transports with little maneuverability and in ships of primarily civil designation (schooners, barges, launches, trawlers, etc.). Much time was lost in loading troops and equipment (eighteen to twenty-nine hours for one division); in most cases the landing also included the transfer of the landing force from the transports to light landing craft; and the landing forces, in hard-fought combat with enemy garrisons, then gained control of one island as a beginning and subsequently extended their efforts to the capture of other islands. This led to a fragmentation of forces, heavy losses, and sometimes to the failure of the entire operation. If we are oriented toward these landing means and methods, there can of course be no question of success in a landing operation.

The probable nature of a future war, and with due consideration to the experience of the last war, brings to the forefront the highly important task of creating special landing ships which satisfy all modern requirements. Landing craft must be fast (with a speed of at least thirty to thirty-five knots), sufficiently stable (seaworthy), and at the same time of small enough draft to be able to land personnel and equipment at shallow depths. There will obviously also be a need for extensive use of specially equipped submarines as landing craft.

With such landing craft, loading (embarkation) and landing will not be bound to ports and convenient harbors as was the case in the past. Troops can be landed rapidly, with surprise, and in areas least expected by the enemy. There will also be a sharp reduction in the time required for loading (embarkation) and a sharp increase in the rate of landing.

In a future war, surprise and massive nuclear strikes against enemy forces and means defending islands will also create favorable circumstances for the extensive use of airborne landings. Our armed forces have excellent military-transport aircraft in the AN-8 and AN-12. In addition, aircraft of the civil fleet can be used successfully for airlifting troops.

Airborne landing forces, possessing high operational mobility and using the element of surprise, will obviously be the first troops able to directly exploit the results of nuclear strikes, gain control of important objectives on the islands, and later assist the amphibious landing force during its landing and combat actions to capture and hold islands.

Under certain circumstances, an airborne landing force will also conduct independent combat actions to capture islands; this is especially possible in the initial period of a war. We must remark here, however, that airborne landings also have several negative aspects which limit the scale of their use. First, airborne landings on islands in an ocean are possible only under certain specific weather conditions; second, capabilities are limited for dropping large amounts of heavy equipment and vehicles by parachute and even by air-landing methods; and third, airborne landing units and large units have relatively little mobility on land and for the present do not have adequate firepower. Accordingly, even if an airborne landing force can capture an island after nuclear strikes, holding it with their own forces will be considerably more difficult.

We cannot fail to take account, as well, of the large requirements for military-transport aircraft to airlift troops. In order to airlift a whole motorized rifle division at the same time, without heavy equipment and with a reduced amount of vehicle transport (all in one trip), up to 580 AN-8 aircraft and 250 AN-12 aircraft, i.e., ten to eleven military-transport divisions, will be required, as is known. This also makes it more difficult to carry out the capture of islands in any landing operation using only airborne landing forces.

From the foregoing we see that the best possibility for capturing a large island or a number of islands is by means of a combined airborne-amphibious landing operation in which the first echelon will comprise airborne landing forces while the main forces will be amphibious landing forces. Depending on its objectives, such an operation may be conducted by forces of a front or by a combined-arms army in coordination with strategic rocket troops, the navy, long-range aviation, the Air Defense Troops of the Country, and airborne landing troops.

A decisive role in such a landing operation must be played by strategic rocket troops who, by delivering the initial nuclear

strike, create overall favorable conditions for the operation by attacking the enemy missile means, aircraft, and navy at their bases, as well as his large control points and groupings of ground and airborne landing forces concentrated on the mainland and on the islands themselves. For direct support of a landing operation, it is necessary to strike those enemy nuclear/missile means, aircraft, naval forces, and ground forces which can be used first of all for the defense of key islands and for combat with our amphibious and airborne landing forces participating in the landing operation.

It is advisable to neutralize some islands, most often the small ones, which do not require nuclear strikes or capture by our landing forces, with chemical and radioactive substances, in order to deprive the enemy of their use. In individual cases, it is possible to accomplish this by delivering surface nuclear strikes against several comparatively close islands.

Within the limits of their range, rocket units of a front (army) will participate in the battle to gain fire superiority in the area of the operation by striking nuclear/missile means and troop groupings of the enemy on islands to be captured.

As regards the tactical missiles of motorized rifle and tank divisions, they will not, in our view, have to be used by all large units during a landing operation; they will most often be used after the capture of islands for delivering nuclear strikes mainly against enemy naval targets.

Long-range aviation can also promote the success of a landing operation by delivering nuclear strikes, attacking enemy naval forces while they are crossing the sea (ocean), isolating islands, routing counter-landings, and conducting long-range reconnaissance.

Front aviation must be brought in to conduct reconnaissance, to deliver strikes mainly against moving enemy targets, to engage in combat with enemy nuclear means on islands, and to provide direct support to the landing.

The navy is called upon to play an important role in landing operations. In coordination with strategic rocket troops and with long-range aviation, it will participate in gaining fire superiority over the enemy in a given naval theater of military operations. In

our view, the navy should carry out the following basic missions in coordination with forces of the front (army) in direct support of a landing operation:

- neutralize enemy means of anti-landing defense;

- attack enemy communications in order to isolate islands, contain and destroy his naval forces, and directly protect our own landing detachments;

- transport troops of a front (army) serving as landing forces;

- provide covering fire for the landing of these forces and for troop combat actions on the islands, and provide protection against strikes from the sea and air.

Ground forces serving as landing forces are called upon, in accord with the plan for the landing operation, to rout the enemy on islands, occupy the islands, and organize a strong defense. When there is extensive use of nuclear weapons, the objectives of the operation may be successfully achieved with considerably fewer ground forces than were required in the past.

It must be taken into account that there should obviously not be any extensive use of nuclear weapons on the islands to be captured and held by ground forces of a front (army). Accordingly, in addition to the use of nuclear weapons against enemy targets outside the islands (but in support of the landing operation), there must be wide use of their conventional strike weapons by the ground forces themselves and by aviation and the navy.

In our opinion, the possibility for crossings by combined-arms large units and units in self-propelled landing-crossing means must be considered a characteristic feature of modern landing operations for the capture of islands in coastal and straits areas.

Naturally we do not have any combat experience in the use of these means, since they have been developed in the postwar period. However, the forces of the Soviet Army have amassed considerable training experience in forcing wide water obstacles in organic crossing means. Let us cite some examples.

Several years ago in the North Caucasus Military District, an experimental training exercise was conducted in which a landing

detachment composed of a motorized rifle division carried out an actual crossing of the Gulf of Taganrog (thirty-two kilometers wide) in organic self-propelled landing-crossing means: amphibious tanks, motor vehicles, tracked armored transports, and towed launches. With a wind force reaching three balls, the detachment covered this distance in four hours and fifteen minutes. During exercises in the Baltic Military District, an experimental tank battalion of thirty tanks crossed the Irbenskiy Strait under its own power with rough seas of three to four balls.

During exercises in the Odessa Military District a tank landing force successfully crossed the Kerch Strait; and during exercises in the Transcaucasus Military District, such a force completed a crossing of eighty kilometers in ten hours under its own power, partly at night.

These examples confirm the conclusion that landing-crossing means of motorized rifle and tank divisions can be used successfully in conducting landing operations to capture islands. The use of organic landing-crossing means by troops assures surprise in landings, sharply increases the pace of disembarkation, and reduces personnel and equipment losses in comparison with what losses would be if landing craft were used. In addition, this method of landing makes possible the rapid transfer of combat actions from the mainland to islands or from one group of islands to another. Finally, if, in landing an amphibious landing force, landing craft are prevented by navigational conditions from making a close approach to the islands, organic troop crossing means may be used for transferring personnel and weapons from the landing craft to the shore. Landing craft must be specially equipped in order to be able to launch landing means rapidly and directly from the landing craft into the water.

A few words about the time needed to prepare a large-scale landing operation. It is known that the preparation time for such operations conducted by the Americans and the British during World War II was extremely long. For example, it took eight months to prepare the Sicilian landing operation, a year and a half for the Normandy landing, and more than six months for operations to land troops in North Africa and on the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Also, the preparation of these and other operations took place without any particular interference from the enemy and at a relatively great distance from the front line. In addition, the

operational-strategic situation for the armed forces of the United States and Great Britain was very favorable and did not urgently demand that troops be landed by a certain time.

The picture was completely different regarding the preparation of landing operations by the Soviet Armed Forces during World War II. This preparation took place under conditions of constant combat contact between the two sides and rapidly changing situations; and the preparation areas were not far from the front line and under constant enemy air attack. Despite this, the preparation time of our landing operations was considerably less and, as a rule, did not exceed twenty days. However, even such a time limit must be considered unacceptable in a future war.

A number of landing operations to capture islands may become necessary in the very first days of a war. Therefore, the planning and preparation of landing operations must be conducted while we are still at peace. Before the outbreak of war we must carefully think out and test, in training situations, a system of troop control in landing operations and a system of coordination among the branches of the armed forces and the arms of troops.

In our opinion, the following may be the main tasks, the fulfilment of which must be provided for, in planning a landing operation and in training the troops for it:

- maintaining fire superiority and complete dominance on the sea and in the air by destroying and neutralizing enemy means of mass destruction, his main groupings of air, navy, and ground forces, and his control points;

- embarking troops and loading combat equipment aboard landing means and transporting the landing force by sea and air to the landing areas;

- maintaining achieved superiority, landing (dropping) landing forces, conducting combat actions to capture and hold islands, and preventing the enemy from taking anti-landing measures.

The procedures for carrying out these tasks must be carefully tested in the course of systematic training of troops for landing operations. Meanwhile, it seems to us that this type of training for troops of the maritime military districts still does not

occupy the place it should in operational and combat training; experimental troop landing exercises conducted haphazardly cannot really resolve this important problem.

Planning operations and conducting systematic landing training during peacetime, with due consideration for our actual enemy, will make it possible, first, to provide the troops with practice in actions to capture islands; and second, to shorten the direct preparation time of a landing operation at the start of a war, particularly if there is prior determination of the forces and means which are to participate in it, a designation of their groupings, and a procedure for troop and landing actions, etc.

In our opinion, the following should be provided for in preparing a landing operation:

- the necessary quantity of reconnaissance forces and means (aircraft of long-range, front, and naval aviation; specially allocated surface ships and submarines; radiotechnical means; deep reconnaissance groups; etc.);

- creation of groupings of long-range fire means (front and army rocket large units and units, long-range and front fighter-bomber and bomber aviation, and missile-carrying ships;

- the presence of airborne and naval landing forces, with means for their transport, landing, and direct support, including transport aircraft, naval landing means, ships designated for protection, fighter aircraft, and other air defense means.

The question of how to organize control of the participating forces and means, and coordination among them, occupies an extremely important place in the overall process of preparing and conducting a landing operation.

Some generals and officers, including the authors of separate articles,* consider that overall command of a landing operation should be exercised by the commander of a fleet or the commander of a naval large unit, since the main burden of landing and supporting the forces supposedly rests on the navy. We cannot

*Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought," No. 2 (46), 1959.

agree with this. To a certain extent, this position corresponds to the situation at the time of the last war. Now, however, as we have already noted, a landing operation represents a combination of coordinated combat actions by all branches of the armed forces which must carry out their missions as fully as possible and within the allotted time. In line with this, it seems that the most advisable course is to place the main control and organization of such an operation on the front (army) troop commander; he must direct all of the forces and means participating in the operation, personally and through his combined-arms staff. It is further advisable that he have a deputy for each branch of the armed forces, each deputy with his own staffs (operations groups), and that he be given command of suitable forces from the navy and from large units of long-range and military-transport aviation.

The participation in a landing operation of strategic rocket troops and of Air Defense Troops of the Country takes place on the basis of coordination between these branches of the armed forces and the front (army) within the framework of the missions to be carried out by them in accord with the overall plan of the war and in direct support of the given operation.

We do not, of course, deny that in some cases (for example, in a landing operation to capture the principal island of a group, or a group of islands of strategic significance at a considerable distance from the mainland) the overall control of operations may be given to a specially created combined operations command which must include representatives of all branches of the armed forces and arms of troops. But in such cases the overall control will obviously be exercised either by the front troop commander or by a commander specially designated by the Headquarters (Stavka) of the Supreme High Command.

The experience of World War II showed that if insufficient attention was given to the organization of coordination in preparing a landing operation, this had a negative effect on the fulfilment of tasks, and the landing forces suffered heavy losses not only from enemy weapons but from their own. Thus in the Sicilian landing operation, artillery support ships several times fired on their own airborne landing force, which had landed earlier on the island, and also shot down about thirty of their own aircraft transporting landing forces. At the time of the Normandy landing operation, allied aircraft dropped more than 8000 bombs on their own troops,

inflicting heavy losses. Mistakes of this sort under modern conditions can lead not only to heavy losses but to the failure of the entire operation.

In order to coordinate the efforts of all branches of the armed forces in a landing operation, it is necessary to distribute the tasks clearly among the various participating forces and to establish the methods for carrying them out; to select the most important targets, to outline the order in which they are to be destroyed, and to designate the forces to be used for their destruction; and to establish a well-defined procedure for mutual recognition and exchange of information among the branches of the armed forces and the arms of troops.

During the preparation of an operation, the commander and his staff must coordinate the timing and targets of the actions of rocket means, long-range aviation, and naval forces in their strikes against enemy targets; and the timing of these strikes with the beginning of the landing operation.

There must be very careful coordination of the actions of the forces and means providing cover for the landing troops while they are being airlifted and transported by sea.

A correct understanding by the commanders of the branches of the armed forces and arms of troops of the overall concept and objective of the combat actions, and the methods and time limits for carrying out the missions of the operation; a constant awareness of the situation; a carefully organized system for an exchange of information; the organization of uninterrupted communications with parallel networks and axes; mutual exchange of communications officers; joint preparation by the staffs of a simple but reliable system of mutual recognition; and the use of standardized maps and a system of coding and target designation--all of this is far from a complete listing of the measures necessary to support uninterrupted coordination among the forces and means participating in a landing operation.

One of the characteristics of landing operations by American and British troops in World War II was preliminary artillery and air preparations which were begun long before the start of the actual landing. For example, for seven months befory the Iwo Jima landing began, American land- and carrier-based aircraft made systematic strikes against airfields, shore installations, ships,

and transports at bases and on the islands of Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Taiwan, Kyushu, and others. Preliminary strikes from air and sea, continued for an extended period before the start of the landing, led to significant enemy losses in personnel and equipment and disrupted his anti-landing defenses, his internal communications, and his lines of communication. All of this was in line with the conditions for waging war at that time and, in the final analysis, facilitated the landing.

Under modern conditions, a landing operation must begin with surprise nuclear strikes, delivered by aircraft and by the navy. With such strikes, it is possible in the shortest time to inflict decisive defeat on the enemy, deprive him of the possibility of the massive use of nuclear weapons against our landing forces, and disrupt his command channels, in order to assure a fast pace and short duration for our landing operation to capture islands.

The actions of ground forces must begin immediately after the nuclear strikes. These actions will unfold simultaneously over a large area of a given naval theater of operations and will be conducted by large groupings assigned in advance to the capture of each designated island. During this phase, troop actions must not be allowed to become uncoordinated. They must be united by a single operational plan and must take place under the leadership of a single commander.

It is most important that the landing force be landed quickly on the island from the air or from submarines after the nuclear strikes, and provision must be made for the rapid arrival of amphibious landing forces to the islands designated for capture. Also of great importance is the rapid loading of troops aboard landing means and their rapid debarkation for conducting combat actions on the islands.

In conducting combat operations for the capture of islands, landing forces must not be limited to the capture of separate lines or objectives on the territory of each island. In rapid, decisive, and coordinated actions on various axes, the troops must strive to completely capture all of the designated islands simultaneously, destroying the enemy garrisons.

As the objectives are taken and the enemy destroyed on the islands, the troops of the landing force will organize defenses,

the air forces will quickly rebase a designated portion of their aircraft to captured airfields, and the navy will rebase fleet units to ports and captured bases; all this is in preparation for the next landing operation with the embarkation of troops for other islands or the mainland.

These are our opinions on some of the problems of organizing and conducting landing operations for the capture of islands.