

FRG TELEVISION REPORTS NEW GDR BORDER CONTROL TACTICS

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[From the feature "ZDF Magazine," with excerpts from the narrative to a film report on construction and control measures along the FRG-GDR border]

[Text] GDR border troops, almost unnoticed by the Western public, are carrying out a strategic and tactical reorientation which will have decisive consequences. The most striking change is that the observation range and the field of fire in the border area is being enlarged.

The metal-grid fence which bears the automatic killing devices is the first requirement for the new tactics in combatting refugees. The second requirement is the installation of advanced battle stations in the immediate proximity of the border. These new stations are partially in the shape of a new type of combat tower and partially as subterranean installations, of which only a guard tower of the common concrete design is visible above groundlevel.

A signal fence has been mounted in the 5-kilometer barrier strip where, viewed from the interior of the GDR, the so-called protective strip begins: mostly 500 meters before the actual border. A patrol which detects the light signal will walk or drive toward the alarm zone. The soldiers of the alarm groups will emerge from the subterranean battle stations. The outpost on the guard tower will closely observe the signal fence and the protective strip. Messengers will drive up and hurry to the border command points to stand by for orders of the operations commander. Lights covering all sectors and sirens will continue to sound the alarm. Their psychological effect alone probably will be sufficient to cause many refugees to turn back immediately. This signal fence with its alarm installations is the third requirement for the new tactics of the GDR border troops. The tactics may be summed up in the short formula: signal before the line, securing along the line, combat in the direction of the friendly side.

Formerly, in the event of an incident the alarm groups had to be brought in over many kilometers from the barracks of the border troops in the rear. In their search and pursuit actions they moved toward the border and quite often shot toward FRG territory. Where the technical requirements already exist, the new tactics take the opposite course; The soldiers of the alarm groups first block off the border out of their battle stations. Searching actions then can be staged toward the interior of the country. The action of securing along the line, in the immediate proximity of the border, is made by officers and first sergeants. Such an alarm mission often lasts for hours, sometimes for several days and nights.

Officer patrols continuously patrol the border and control the alarm outposts. Then, in certain situations, all border guards suddenly go for cover on an order, disappear in the high grass, in ground-observation stations and in bunkers. Furthermore, the soldiers on the guard towers even carry out their observation only through the embrasures below the windows. The border area looks deserted. Shots are fired somewhere in the background. Then everything is quiet again. Some 10 or 12 minutes pass--a light signal appears, then another--presumably the search has been concluded. The border soldiers then leave their observation posts. Some 15 minutes later an ambulance drives away from the border area to the rear.

[Program moderator Fritz Schenk] I think this film has made it clear why the central registration office for the investigation of GDR crimes at Salzgitter reported in early January that fewer acts of violence along the inter-German border were registered in 1977 than in preceding years. After all, ARD [Association of German Radio and Television Services] correspondent Lothar Loewe was expelled from East Berlin because he had said in a commentary that the SED has people shot at like rabbits. This probably has remained true, only so far back from the border that we cannot hear it any longer.