Oplan Fulda: A Comprehensive Examination of the Contingency Plan for World War III

The years following World War II were marked by an unprecedented era of nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The advent of nuclear weapons had transformed the very concept of warfare, raising the specter of unimaginable destruction. Against this backdrop, military planners on both sides developed contingency plans for a potential global conflict that would come to be known as World War III.

Among the most detailed and comprehensive of these contingency plans was Oplan Fulda, developed by the United States Army. Oplan Fulda outlined a hypothetical scenario in which the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies would launch a conventional invasion of Western Europe through the Fulda Gap, a strategic corridor between East and West Germany.

The plan, which was first drafted in 1954 and revised numerous times throughout the Cold War, envisioned a massive mobilization of US forces to counter the Soviet advance. It called for the deployment of up to 1 million American troops to Europe, supported by a vast array of air and naval assets.

OPLAN Fulda: World War III by Leo Barron

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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The Fulda Gap, located in central Germany, was a key strategic location for both East and West. Situated between the heavily forested Thuringian Forest to the northeast and the Rhön Mountains to the southwest, it offered a relatively flat and open terrain suitable for large-scale military operations.

Soviet planners believed that a surprise attack through the Fulda Gap would allow them to quickly overrun West Germany and cut off NATO forces from their bases in France and the Low Countries. US planners, on the other hand, recognized the strategic importance of the gap and developed a comprehensive defense plan to counter any potential invasion.

Oplan Fulda was a complex and multifaceted plan that encompassed a wide range of military operations. Its key features included:

- **Early warning and detection systems:** The plan called for the establishment of a comprehensive network of early warning sensors, including radar and ground-based surveillance systems, to monitor for any signs of Soviet mobilization or attack.

- **Rapid deployment of US forces:** The plan outlined a detailed timeline for the deployment of American troops to Europe in the event of war. The first units would be airlifted within hours, followed by a gradual buildup of ground forces over the following weeks and months.

- **Air superiority and interdiction operations:** Oplan Fulda emphasized the critical importance of achieving and maintaining air superiority over the battlefield. US air forces would be tasked with destroying Soviet aircraft and air defenses, as well as interdicting enemy supply lines and reinforcements.

- **Armor and mechanized warfare:** The plan called for the deployment of a large number of armored units, including tanks and armored fighting vehicles, to counter the Soviet armored thrust. US forces would be organized into armored brigades and divisions, tasked with defending key terrain and launching counterattacks.

- **Infantry and support operations:** Infantry and other support units would play a vital role in Oplan Fulda, conducting defensive operations, providing reconnaissance and intelligence, and securing rear areas.

- **Nuclear weapons:** The plan did not explicitly call for the use of nuclear weapons, but it recognized the possibility that they might be used in the event of a prolonged conflict. US forces were trained and equipped to conduct both conventional and nuclear operations.

Oplan Fulda was not without its controversies and criticisms. Some critics argued that the plan was unrealistic, given the overwhelming conventional superiority of the Soviet Union in Europe. Others expressed concerns about the potential for nuclear escalation if the conflict escalated beyond conventional warfare.
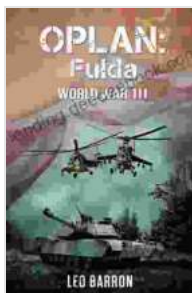
Despite these criticisms, Oplan Fulda remained a key part of US defense planning throughout the Cold War. It served as a blueprint for the deployment and employment of US forces in the event of a major conflict in Europe.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War came to an end and the threat of a large-scale conventional war in Europe receded. Oplan Fulda was gradually phased out as the US military shifted its focus to other threats and contingencies.

However, the legacy of Oplan Fulda continues to this day. The plan demonstrated the importance of contingency planning and military readiness in deterring potential conflicts. It also highlighted the challenges of nuclear deterrence and the need for responsible arms control measures.

Oplan Fulda was a comprehensive and sobering reminder of the potential horrors of nuclear war. It served as a warning to both sides of the Cold War divide about the devastating consequences that could result from a failure to resolve conflicts peacefully.

While the Cold War may be over, the dangers of nuclear escalation remain a real concern in today's world. The legacy of Oplan Fulda is a reminder of the importance of diplomacy, arms control, and the pursuit of peaceful solutions to international disputes.

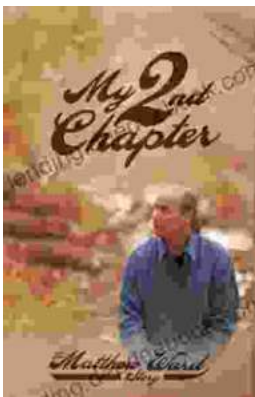### OPLAN Fulda: World War III by Leo Barron

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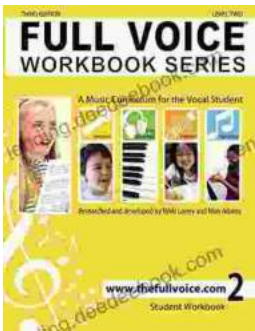|	
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