

## CHAPTER 6

# RETROGRADE OPERATIONS

Retrograde operations are organized and orderly movements to the rear or away from the enemy. They may occur on the orders of a higher headquarters or be forced by enemy actions. They are classified as delay, withdrawal, or retirement. Retrograde operations allow the division to inflict damage on enemy troops and equipment while maintaining its fighting integrity.

### PURPOSE

Retrograde operations are conducted to improve the overall tactical situation or to prevent a worse situation from occurring. Commanders may call for divisional retrograde operations to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Inflict casualties on an enemy while avoiding decisive combat.
- Gain time and avoid fighting a decisive engagement.
- Reshape the battlefield to maintain contact on the left and right.
- Take advantage of more defensible terrain.
- Permit the employment of the division elsewhere.
- Fight against a numerically superior force.
- Minimize the effects of poor terrain and capitalize on good terrain.
- Mass division forces for a penetration.
- Deceive the enemy into committing his forces.
- Create a salient in the division sector to shape the battlefield.

When moving a force from its present dispositions rearward for use against the enemy in more favorable circumstances, commanders—

- Disengage and move less mobile units and non-essential elements prior to withdrawing the main body.
- Use more mobile units to cover the movement of less mobile units.

- Use minimum essential forces to cover the movement of the main body.
- Provide adequate fire support means to units left in contact.

### PLANNING FACTORS

Commanders consider several factors when planning retrograde operations. They include leadership and morale, reconnaissance, mobility, and battle-field deception.

#### Leadership and Morale

Maintaining the offensive spirit is essential among subordinate leaders and troops during retrograde operations. Movement to the rear may be seen as a defeat or a threat of isolation unless commanders are well forward and ensure that soldiers know the purpose of the operation and their role in the concept of operation.

#### Reconnaissance

Often the commander near the scene of action has the only accurate information during a retrograde operation. Intelligence requirements for the commander increase as forces are echeloned to the rear and as forward combat capabilities are reduced. Intelligence collectors remain well forward to locate enemy attempts to pursue, outflank, and isolate all or a portion of the retrograde force.

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## Mobility

The greater the retrograding force's mobility over an enemy, the greater the chance of a successful operation. Commanders must enhance friendly mobility and degrade enemy mobility. The division's mobility is improved through—

- Conducting key leader reconnaissance of the routes and battle positions.
- Improving existing road networks and controlling traffic flow.
- Executing well-rehearsed unit movement SOPs and battle drills.
- Positioning air defense artillery and security forces at critical choke points.
- Evacuating civilian refugees or restricting their movements to nondivision-used routes.
- Evacuating casualties, recoverable supplies, and unnecessary stocks early.
- Displacing nonessential command and control and CSS activities early.

The enemy's mobility is degraded through—

- Occupying and controlling terrain or choke points that dominate high-speed avenues of approach.
- Improving natural obstacles with reinforcing obstacles and covering them by fire.
- Employing indirect fire and smoke to degrade the enemy's vision and to slow his rate of advance.
- Conducting spoiling attacks to keep the enemy off balance and to force him to react to another attack.

## Deception

Deception operations are routinely planned to produce surprise from resulting unit moves and dispositions. Deception can cause indecision and delay in the enemy's actions. Units must use to advantage darkness and other limited-visibility conditions as well as exfiltration techniques to cover relocation and evacuation during deception operations. Employing phony minefield and decoy positions, and maintaining normal radio traffic patterns and artillery improve security. Other deception measures are radio listening silence for

disengaging units, feints and demonstrations, and deceptive EW and PSYOP.

## DELAY

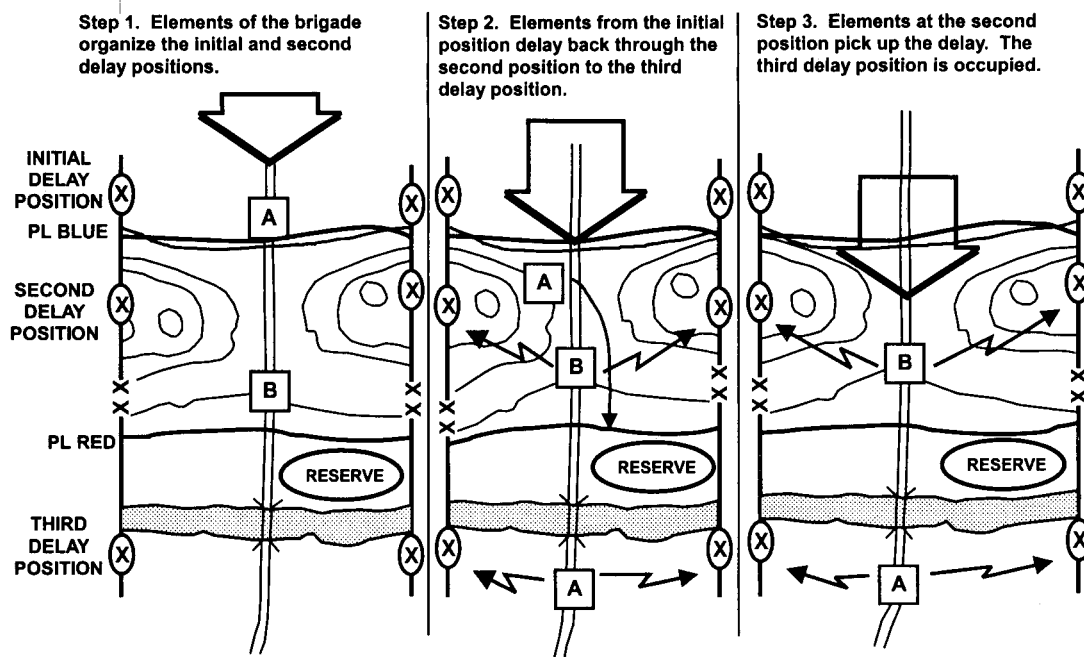
The delay is an operation in which the division, under enemy pressure, trades space for time while inflicting maximum damage on the enemy. Commanders normally conduct delays without becoming decisively engaged. This preserves the force as well as freedom of movement.

The division conducts a delay when the corps or JPC needs time to concentrate or withdraw forces to establish defenses in greater depth, or to economize forces in an area. The division may execute the delay—

- As a covering force for a main body that is defending or withdrawing.
- As an advance guard when encountering superior forces.
- As an economy of force to fix, contain, or slow an enemy attack on a less critical avenue of approach.
- As a deception measure to set up a counterattack.
- To gain time for units to proceed away from the enemy to prepare a subsequent defensive position.

In the delay, destroying the enemy force is secondary to slowing his advance to gain time. The division delays in sector to slow and defeat as much of the enemy as possible without sacrificing the division's tactical integrity. The division may delay forward of a specified line for a specified time or event. This task requires a unit to prevent enemy forces from reaching a given area earlier than a directed time or event, regardless of the cost. Subordinate friendly elements attack, defend, and conduct ambushes, raids, feints, and other actions to destroy as much of the enemy as possible.

The delay is fought much in the same way as the initial defensive covering force battle. Task forces engage the enemy from previously selected positions in depth. This causes the enemy to deploy his forces. Meanwhile, friendly forces move to the next battle position before the enemy can concentrate sufficient combat power. Also, air and ground ambushes are executed to keep the enemy off balance.



**Figure 6-1. Division delay operations**

The key to any delay plan is a simple task organization. Task organizations that can be maintained throughout the battle are most effective. Because of the decentralized control during the battle, changes in task organizations during the delay are difficult. When ordering a delay, the commander specifies—

- The intent of the operation—what must be done.
- Task organization.
- Conduct of the operation—when, where, and how.
- Measures to be used to cover gaps and flanks.
- Control measures.
- The main effort—who.

The division assigns sectors to its maneuver elements along with phase lines or delay positions for control. During the execution of the delay, all or part of the delaying force elements maintains constant contact and pressure with the enemy. The contact and pressure could alternate between several units as the division continues its delaying tactics away from the enemy. (See Figure 6-1.)

In a delay, the division normally retains a small, mobile reserve. The reserve conducts standard reserve missions as well as provides overwatch fire for a withdrawing unit. Reserves counterattack to

limited objectives. In this type of action, the counterattack force normally strikes the enemy's flank to disrupt and delay him. This counterattack is force-oriented and normally does not attempt to secure and hold terrain.

Committed brigades also retain small reserves in a delay. These reserves are used on the same types of missions as the division reserve. The division commander may require subordinate commanders to obtain his permission before committing their reserves.

A delay is more difficult to execute if the initiative is left entirely to the enemy. The division commander seizes the initiative through counterattacks and limited spoiling attacks. When the retention of specified areas is required or when space is limited or time requirements are long, the division may actually defend in parts of the sector.

If the division commander cannot successfully delay the enemy and still preserve his force, he must inform the corps or joint force commander. This higher commander then decides to accept less time and preserve the division or to gain the time he needs and risk losing all or part of the division.

## WITHDRAWAL

Withdrawals are planned operations in which a division in contact completely disengages from an enemy force, either to preserve the force or release it for a new mission. Withdrawals are normally free from enemy pressure; however, commanders plan them both with pressure, and without. Commanders should plan deception to deceive the enemy. Deception for the covering force and main body could include multiple routes, additional transportation, route improvement, and movement planning.

Withdrawals under enemy pressure normally are subject to enemy observation and take place at night. Commanders must avoid premature actions that lead the enemy to believe a withdrawal is being contemplated. Elements withdrawing use delaying tactics to fight their way to the rear. The greater the division's mobility, the better it can successfully withdraw. Commanders must anticipate enemy means of interference and effectively employ security forces, attack helicopters, CAS, and air superiority.

A withdrawal under enemy pressure requires close coordination between withdrawing units and the security force. The security force should consist of armored and mechanized infantry augmented by attack helicopters, field artillery, engineers, and air defense artillery.

Under enemy pressure, the less heavily engaged elements of the forward brigades withdraw first. The more heavily engaged units generally withdraw under cover of the division or corps security force and with support provided through available fire support, EW assets, and obstacles. Night moves and obscuration smoke are used to screen movement and to reduce enemy observation and the accuracy of enemy fire. The division's movement and operations are similar to those of a delay on alternate positions. The security forces and disengaged brigades continue to use alternate and successive positions until the entire division breaks contact with the enemy.

When conducting withdrawals not under enemy pressure, the division specifies the planned time of withdrawal. For utmost secrecy and deception, the commander takes advantage of darkness and reduced visibility, commencing the withdrawal as soon as the enemy cannot effectively deliver

observed fires. The division controls the movement of subordinate units through—

- Designating primary and alternate routes.
- Designating priority of movement.
- Enforcing traffic control measures.

In daylight, commanders limit activities that might disclose the intentions to withdraw, such as abnormal or excessive movement of vehicles to the rear. Necessary daylight movements to the rear, including reconnaissance, should be by infiltration.

Units withdrawing without enemy pressure may direct that their covering force stay in contact to prolong the deception by simulating normal activities. Covering forces and rear guards normally remain between the enemy and the main body. After the main body is a safe distance to the rear, the covering force withdraws to intermediate or final positions. These forces should have mobility equal to or greater than that of the enemy. The withdrawing force moves to the rear in the following sequence:

- Elements to reconnoiter and prepare the next position.
- CSS units.
- Artillery not essential to the support of detachments left in contact.
- Division security force.
- Main body.
- Detachments left in contact and direct support artillery for the detachments left in contact.

Units in the forward area execute the withdrawal on a broad front. Units move directly to the rear, form march columns, and proceed to designated tactical assembly areas. These areas are widely dispersed and are occupied for minimum periods.

The detachments left in contact have a limited capability for resistance. They must depend on deception and long-range supporting fires to accomplish their mission. Although the division coordinates their employment, the brigade specifies their time of withdrawal, coordinating the action with adjacent units. The withdrawal of detachments left in contact is initiated in time to permit completion during limited visibility. The success of a withdrawal not under enemy pressure depends on

control, security, and deception. Detailed plans, deception, and simulation of normal radio traffic, fires, and other activities aid control and security. Once in the defended area, the withdrawing force either joins the defense or continues to the rear in a retirement.

## RETIREMENT

A retirement is conducted when units are not in contact with the enemy. Although normally overmatched by other units' security forces, retiring units must use force protection measures against enemy air, ground, and long-range fires while moving rearward.

The division assigns definite objectives or rear positions to each of the major subordinate commands moving with the main body. Movement during darkness or reduced visibility, while preferred, is more difficult. During the initial stage of the retirement, control is decentralized to subordinate commanders. However, as the main body increases the distance between itself and the enemy and as the units rejoin, the division commander resumes centralized control.

Security for the main body is similar to that for a movement to contact. Advance, flank, and rear guards provide security. The rear guard is normally stronger when a withdrawal action precedes a retirement. If enemy contact occurs, the rear guard uses delaying actions to hold the advancing enemy and to prevent interference with the movement of the main body. The commander must plan for enemy interference while retiring. Reconnaissance obtains early information on enemy interference attempts. The retiring force should be positioned to support the higher command's future operational plans.

## BOS CONSIDERATIONS

### Intelligence

When the division delays, major information collection capabilities, such as GSRs, SIGINT sensors, and countermortar and counterbattery radars, locate well forward. Corps collection systems augment the division's intelligence collection as they displace.

Aggressive electronic warfare (EW) minimizes the effects of enemy EW operations and slows the

enemy's attack coordination or pursuit. In particular, it interrupts enemy fire support coordination. Commanders rely on personal reconnaissance and spot reports from the tactical units for timely information.

### Maneuver

The division cavalry squadron may perform route and area reconnaissance to the rear of the division in preparation for the retrograde operation. In withdrawals without enemy pressure, brigades and other units in contact designate units to be left in contact. This protects the main body's initial movement to the rear and simulates the normal combat posture. Where there is enemy pressure, security forces at all levels cover forward elements that withdraw intact without leaving detachments in contact. This delaying force is task-organized with armor and antiarmor capabilities to delay and inflict casualties on the enemy.

The aviation brigade provides a mobile and lethal guard force to interdict enemy units attempting to attack the division's flanks. The aviation brigade also assists ground maneuver forces to disengage and continue in their retrograde mission.

### Fire Support

During the delay, artillery is located well forward and echeloned in depth. This allows artillery—

- To fire deep into enemy formations and force early deployment.
- To slow and degrade the effectiveness of enemy armored vehicles.
- To suppress and destroy overmatching enemy air defense, weapon systems, and artillery command observation posts.
- To deliver antipersonnel or antiarmor mines to complement and reinforce the effects of obstacles.
- To deliver smoke to cover the movement of displacing maneuver units.
- To mass fires to support the extrication of threatened or isolated units.

Close air support provides the division commander highly responsive fires. CAS aids the

subordinate units in disengaging from the enemy and supports limited objective counterattacks. Aerial interdiction against enemy targets prevents enemy forces from establishing a parallel pursuing force.

### **Mobility and Survivability**

Engineers use obstacles (friendly, enemy, and terrain) and other resources to reduce enemy mobility. Ideally, a battalion-sized force of engineers supports each committed brigade in the delay. Based on time available, engineers—

- Prepare point obstacle targets (road craters, abatis), destroy bridges, and block tunnels. Execution is normally delegated to the maneuver unit having responsibility for the AO.
- Emplace hasty minefield, cut antitank ditches, and emplace other antiarmor obstacles to block enemy high-speed avenues of approach and canalize them into choke points.
- Conduct denial operations against any resources that the enemy can use to sustain his attack.
- Improve routes between battle positions.
- Prepare hasty fighting positions for maneuver units.
- Prepare landing zones and airfields to facilitate rapid retrograde operations.

As units displace to the rear, chemical units may conduct NBC reconnaissance or provide a cover of smoke to conceal troop movement.

### **Air Defense**

The air defense artillery battalion is employed based on the division commander's ADA priorities. Normally, one battery is in direct support to each committed brigade to protect critical division aviation, logistics, or command and control. ADA assets may also be used in a point defense of critical assets throughout the delay sector.

### **Combat Service Support**

DISCOM elements must provide responsive support without interfering with the movement of tactical units. Their planning must reflect the critical nature of retrograde operations. This mandates push resupply with a priority towards fuel and ammunition—using fuel from local resources when possible and pre-positioning ammunition packages near fighting positions. Committed units' forward maintenance support teams (MSTs) repair equipment on-site or collect disabled vehicles for repair or evacuation. DISCOM elements move medical supplies to the rear to prevent capture or abandonment and destroy items of military hardware potentially useful to the enemy. They use battle damage assessment and repair (BDAR) techniques to return disabled equipment to combat.

Supplies moving into the forward areas should be kept to a minimum. This prevents their unnecessary hauling, destruction, or loss. Other DISCOM responsibilities include—

- Evacuating excess supplies and logistics facilities as early as possible.
- Providing the postal system specific mail routing, stop, and start instructions to prevent mail stockpiles and redirection requirements for redeployed units.
- Pre-positioning supplies along withdrawal routes to reduce enemy interference with supply operations, simplify resupply, reduce vehicular clutter, and permit the early withdrawal of supply units.
- Maintaining strength accountability, safety, and casualty reporting of units and individuals.

### **Command and Control**

During the delay, division commanders position themselves where they can best control the operation. Their primary means of communication is secure voice radio. Because radio is vulnerable to EW, commanders may use visual signals, messengers, and wire line communications. The use of communications assets during the delay requires detailed planning because command posts and signal support nodes frequently displace.