

Chapter 3

Division Deliberate River Crossing

GENERAL

A division deliberate river crossing is an operation conducted as part of an offensive operation. Its intent is to quickly cross a water obstacle and rapidly seize the final objective. It is an audacious attack that is planned and meticulously coordinated with all concerned elements. The deliberate river crossing requires thorough reconnaissance and extensive evaluation of all intelligence. It requires detailed planning and preparation, centralized control, and extensive rehearsals. A deliberate river crossing is costly in terms of manpower, equipment, and time. It is generally conducted against a well-organized defense when a hasty river crossing is not possible or when one has failed. This type of river crossing requires the sudden, violent concentration of combat power on a narrow front, capitalizing on the element of surprise. This chapter describes division deliberate river crossing operations. It will discuss in detail the phases, echelons, organizations, and command and control of this complex operation.

PLANNING THE PHASES

An offensive deliberate river crossing operation has four phases. They are distinct phases for planning, but there is no pause between them in execution.

Phase I: Advance to the river. The first phase is the deliberate attack to seize and secure the near shore of a water obstacle.

Phase II: Assault across the river. The second phase involves units assaulting across a water obstacle to secure a lodgement on the far shore, eliminating direct fire on the crossing sites.

Phase III: Advance from the exit bank. The third phase is the attack to seize and secure exit-bank and intermediate objectives that eliminate direct and observed-indirect fire into the crossing area.

Phase IV: Secure the bridgehead line. The final phase involves units that seize and secure bridgehead objectives to protect the bridgehead against counterattack. This gains additional time and space for buildup of forces for the attack out of the bridgehead.

These phases are followed immediately by an attack out of the bridgehead to defeat the threat forces at subsequent or final objectives. *Figure 3-1, page 3-2,*

relates the crossing phases to the objectives described in this chapter.

THE RIVER CROSSING

The following section describes the deliberate river crossing operation from division and brigade perspectives. It details the actions required in deep, close, and rear operations by phase (see *Figure 3-2, page 3-3*).

A division is normally the smallest organization that can conduct a deliberate river crossing operation. It is usually an implied task in a larger mission given by corps. The river crossing is not the objective but is part of the scheme of maneuver and overall offensive action against the enemy. The threat will normally use the river as a tactical obstacle system to slow and gain positional advantage against the division's advance. The intent of the division is to maintain its momentum through the crossing.

Mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available (METT-T) dictate the force allocation required during each phase of the operation. Aside from the normal planning, detailed march tables are required for the rapid passage of units through the crossing area into the bridgehead. Detailed plans are disseminated before the execution to ensure uninterrupted operation. River crossing operations restrict movement to four to six routes. This requires disciplined and controlled movement to ensure that combat power builds in the bridgehead faster than the threat's ability to react.

An integral part of a river crossing operation is the deception plan. Corps will plan, resource, and control all of the requirements to execute a believable deception so that the threat does not know where the division will conduct the deliberate river crossing operation.

To conduct a deliberate river crossing, a division requires augmentation from corps. Corps must provide bridge companies in direct support to the division for the river crossing operation in addition to other combat engineers required to operate assault boats, provide command and control, and so forth. A corps engineer group commonly supports a deliberate river crossing operation and can remain in place after the division continues the attack to subsequent corps objectives. The engineer group should include one corps combat engineer battalion and two assault bridge companies for each lead brigade. Additionally, corps normally

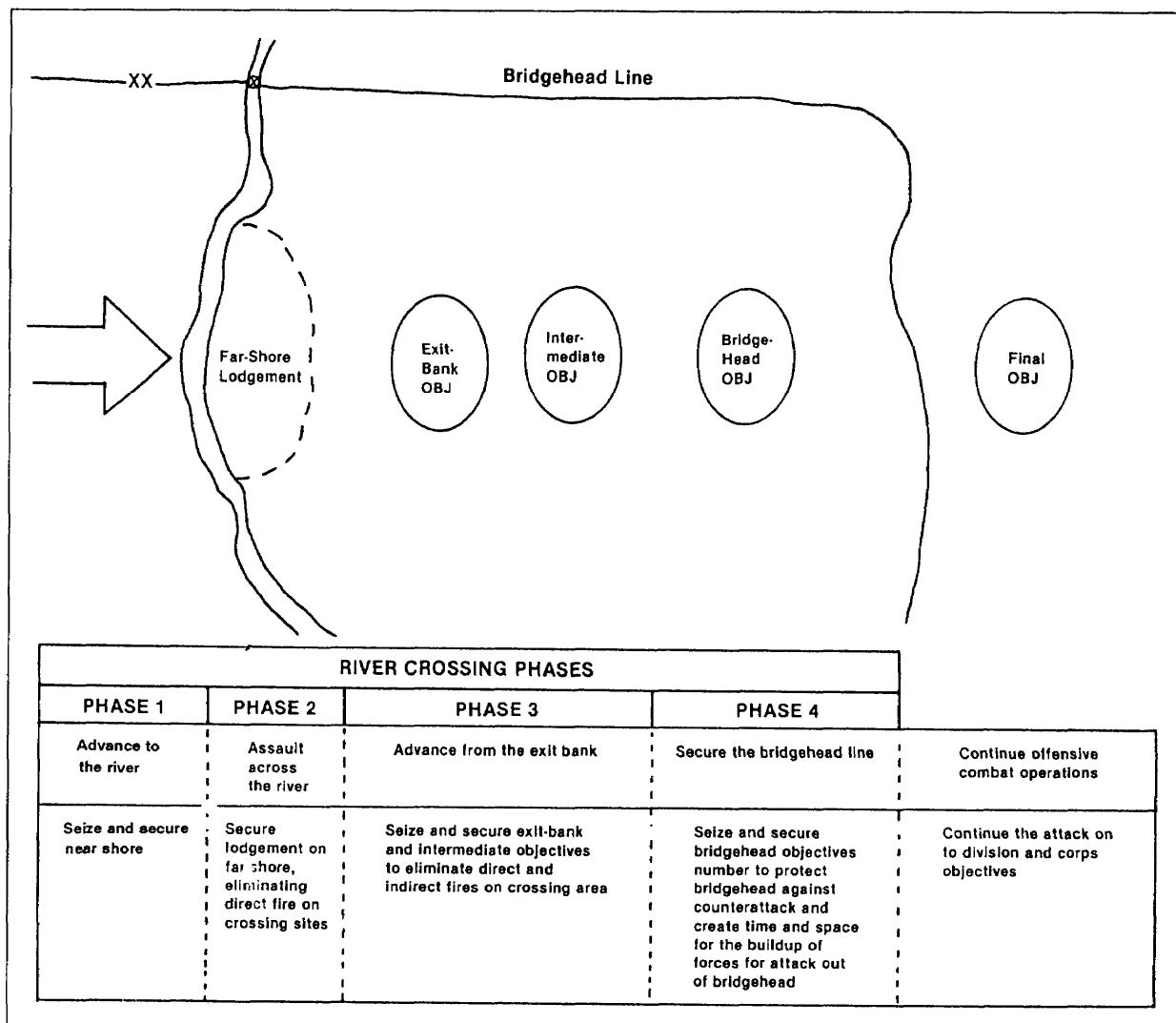


Figure 3-1. Deliberate river crossing

provides a corps MP company to assist the division in regulating the traffic and conducting route security in the crossing area. Corps also allocates additional smoke units to assist the division chemical company in obscuring the river crossing area. Finally, corps will provide short-range air defense (SHORAD) and high to medium air-defense altitude (HIMAD) air-defense artillery (ADA) support to protect the bridgehead from air interdiction.

Advance to the River (Phase I)

Once the division has planned the operation, the first phase is initiated. The division will attack to seize near-shore terrain that includes favorable crossing sites and road networks. Normally, a division will advance with two brigades abreast and a reserve brigade trailing.

The cavalry squadron can provide a forward or flank screen (see *Figure 3-3, page 3-4*). The division tactical command post (DTAC) will control the efforts of the lead brigades. See *FM 71-100*.

Well before the division reaches the river, the cavalry squadron moves ahead of the main body to conduct a reconnaissance of the near shore and predetermined crossing sites. If the tactical situation prohibits the cavalry squadron from moving to reconnoiter the crossing sites, one or both of the lead brigades can conduct the reconnaissance. As the division arrives at the river, the lead brigades establish security on the near shore of the river. The lead brigades develop hasty defensive positions to protect the crossing area and cover the crossing sites with direct and indirect fire.

3-2 Division Deliberate River Crossing

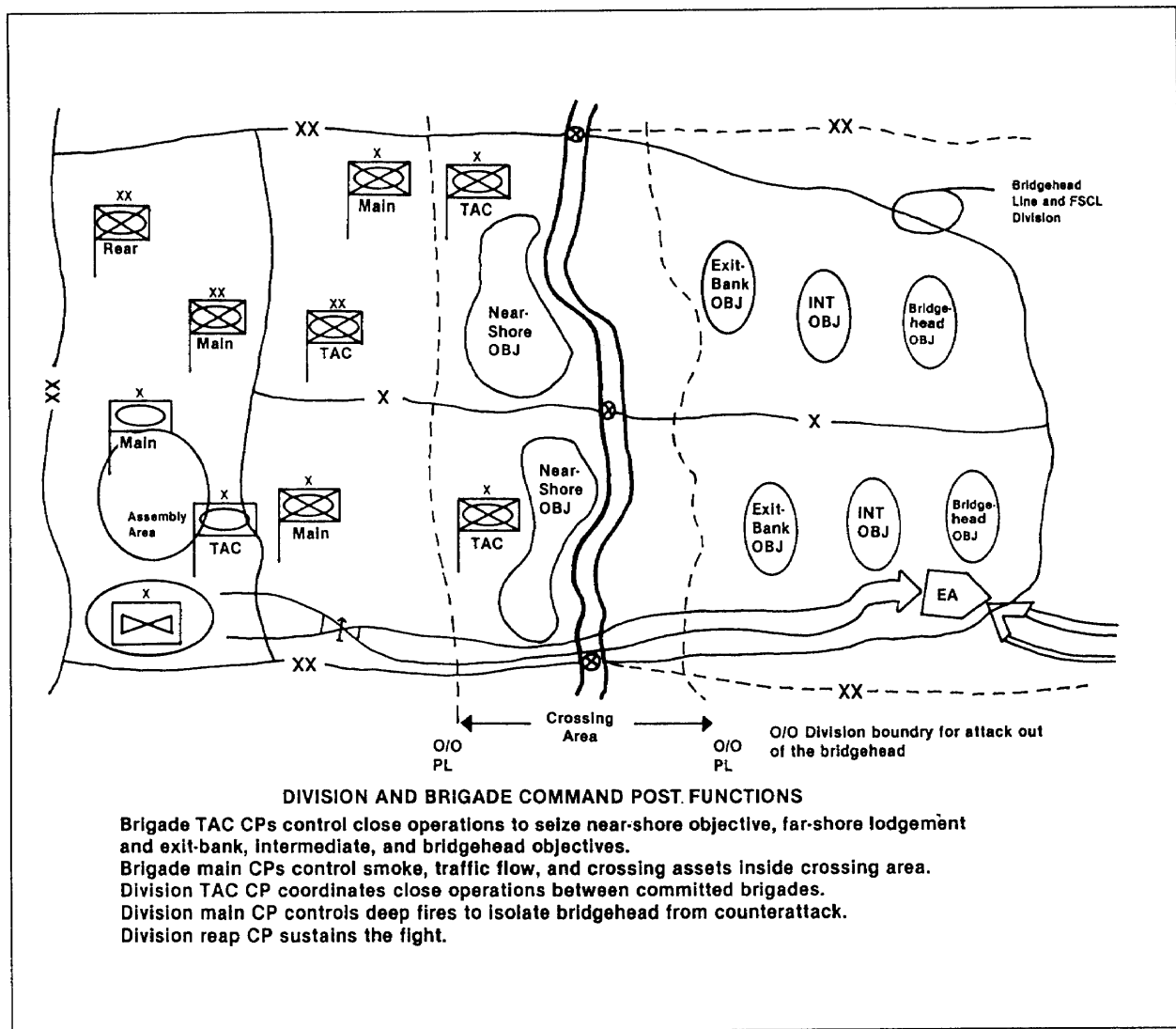


Figure 3-2. Division and brigade command post functions

During the advance to the river, the division main command post (DMAIN) coordinates the counterfires, close air support (CAS), and division aviation brigade support against deep targets. By effectively using these assets, the DMAIN fights the deep battle and isolates the bridgehead.

The division rear command post (DREAR) sustains the division advance. It ensures key classes of supply are pre-positioned forward. Priority is shifted to maintenance of bridge assets and those units supporting the crossing area. See FM 71-3.

The brigade tactical command post (BTAC) controls the fight of the task forces within its brigade. The brigade will travel in a formation that is METT-T driven. The brigade seizes objectives that secure the near shore (see Figure 3-4, page 3-5).

Each brigade main command post (BMAIN) is the crossing area headquarters (CA HQ) responsible for controlling units that provide the crossing means, traffic management, and obscuration. Normally, corps assets are task-organized by division in direct support of the forward brigades to perform these functions. The BMAIN will control these assets. Once the brigade has secured the near shore, MPs and engineers mark routes to the crossing sites; lay out staging, holding, and call-forward areas; and set up engineer regulating points (ERPs) and traffic control posts (TCPs).

Once the near shore is secured, the DTAC becomes the crossing force headquarters responsible for coordinating close operations of the committed brigades within the bridgehead and crossing area. The bridgehead is the area on the far shore required to

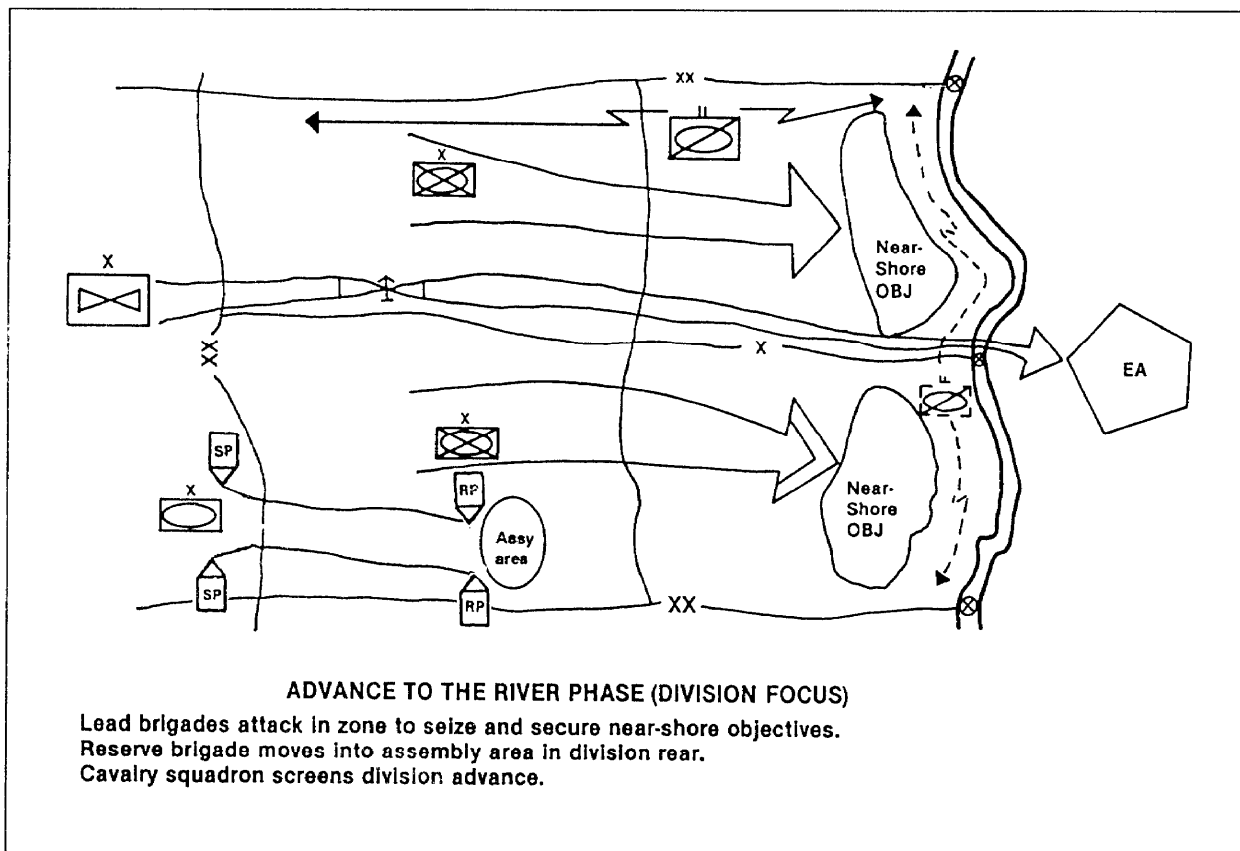


Figure 3-3. Advance to the river phase (division focus)

provide space and time for buildup of combat power to continue offensive combat operations. The crossing area is the area bounded on either side of the river by phase lines in which units move on specified routes and time tables as dictated in the division order.

The DTAC coordinates the efforts of the lead brigades as they prepare to assault across the river.

Assault Across The River (Phase II)

The DMAIN continues to control deep fire assets to isolate the bridgehead. As units advance, deep fires shift to subsequent targets. Division coordinates with corps for SHORAD and HIMAD coverage to protect the bridgehead from enemy air interdiction. Corps will normally provide Patriot and Hawk support. Local air-defense coverage is provided by the division air-defense battalion. Approaches and crossing sites along the river are the highest priority for air defense during the crossing because the river creates lucrative targets at relatively fixed locations that are easily targeted by threat air. Air-defense units occupy positions to engage aircraft with massed fires before the aircraft can reach weapons release points.

The DTAC coordinates the brigades conducting the assault crossing of the river (see Figure 3-5, page 3-6).

The crossing sites are chosen for cover from observation, a good route system, and sufficient space for assembly areas on the near shore. The crossing sites also have defensible terrain on the far shore of the river to provide a secure base for the continuation of the operation.

The DREAR begins to push packages of Class IV and V supplies to support the hasty defense to secure the bridgehead line.

The BTACs control their own respective assault crossing elements, which are normally dismounted infantry task forces. A corps combat engineer company, operating RB15 rubber assault boats (from the corps bridge companies), transports the dismounted task forces to the far shore. The assaulting dismounted task forces cross the river and secure a lodgement for the reinforcing armor vehicles. The dismounted assault forces are supported by the tanks and infantry fighting vehicles from their task force and by other combat units in attack-by-fire positions (see Figure 3-6, page 3-7). Heavy rafts are prepared to transport tanks and infantry fighting vehicles to the far shore for reinforcement of the dismounted infantry, and armored combat earthmovers (ACEs)/dozers are transported to

3-4 Division Deliberate River Crossing

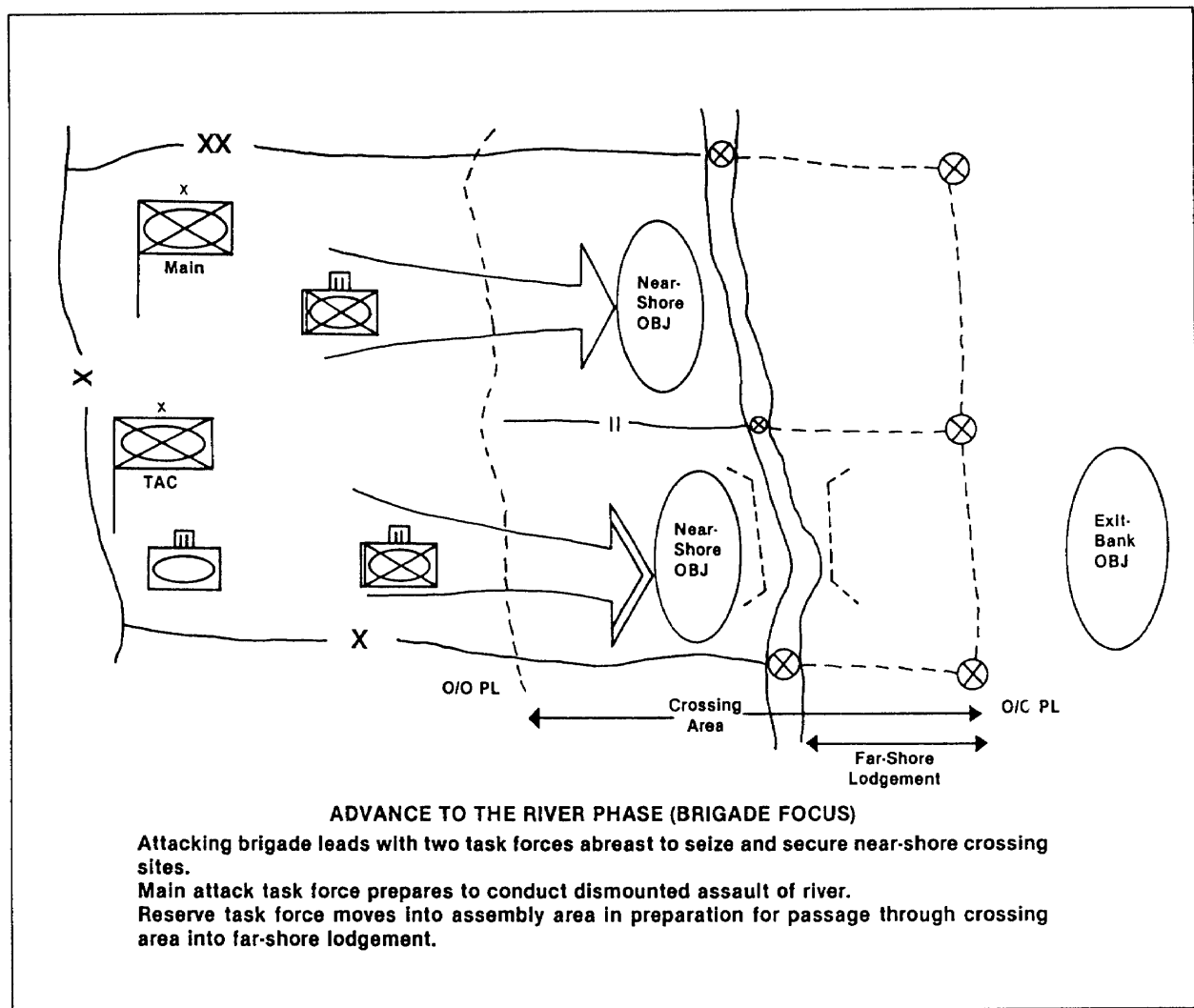


Figure 3-4. Advance to the river phase (brigade focus)

prepare the far-shore exit sites. Rapid reinforcement of dismounted assault troops with armored vehicles may be so critical based upon METT-T that it justifies the use of any expedient method to get the first few armored vehicles across. This includes winching, towing, or pushing the first ones across normally unsuitable places while engineers improve entry and exit points for the rest.

Each BMAIN controls smoke to obscure crossing sites on the river. When employed, the smoke blanket covers several kilometers of the river and river approaches to conceal the actual crossing locations. The CA HQ uses smoke generators, smoke pots, and smoke munitions from division and corps. The BMAIN controls the use of MP and corps engineer units to establish near-shore waiting areas, to mark routes to the crossing sites, and to begin to construct heavy rafts and/or bridges.

The assault crossing of the river can also be an air-assault operation. The intent of this phase is to rapidly place combat power on the far shore to eliminate the threat's direct fire onto the crossing sites and secure terrain for attack positions. Brigades will normally plan phase lines and fire-support coordination lines (FSCLs) for the assaulting dismounted task forces. These lines establish a limit of advance that encompasses the lodgement area. Threat fire into the crossing area will probably continue; however, each crossing site within the crossing area must be isolated from direct fire to enable the construction and operation of rafts. These rafts will then be used to transport armor vehicles for rapid reinforcement of the dismounted infantry task force. Within the crossing area, secured attack positions allow units to form into combat formations before continuing the attack (see Figure 3-7, page 3-8).

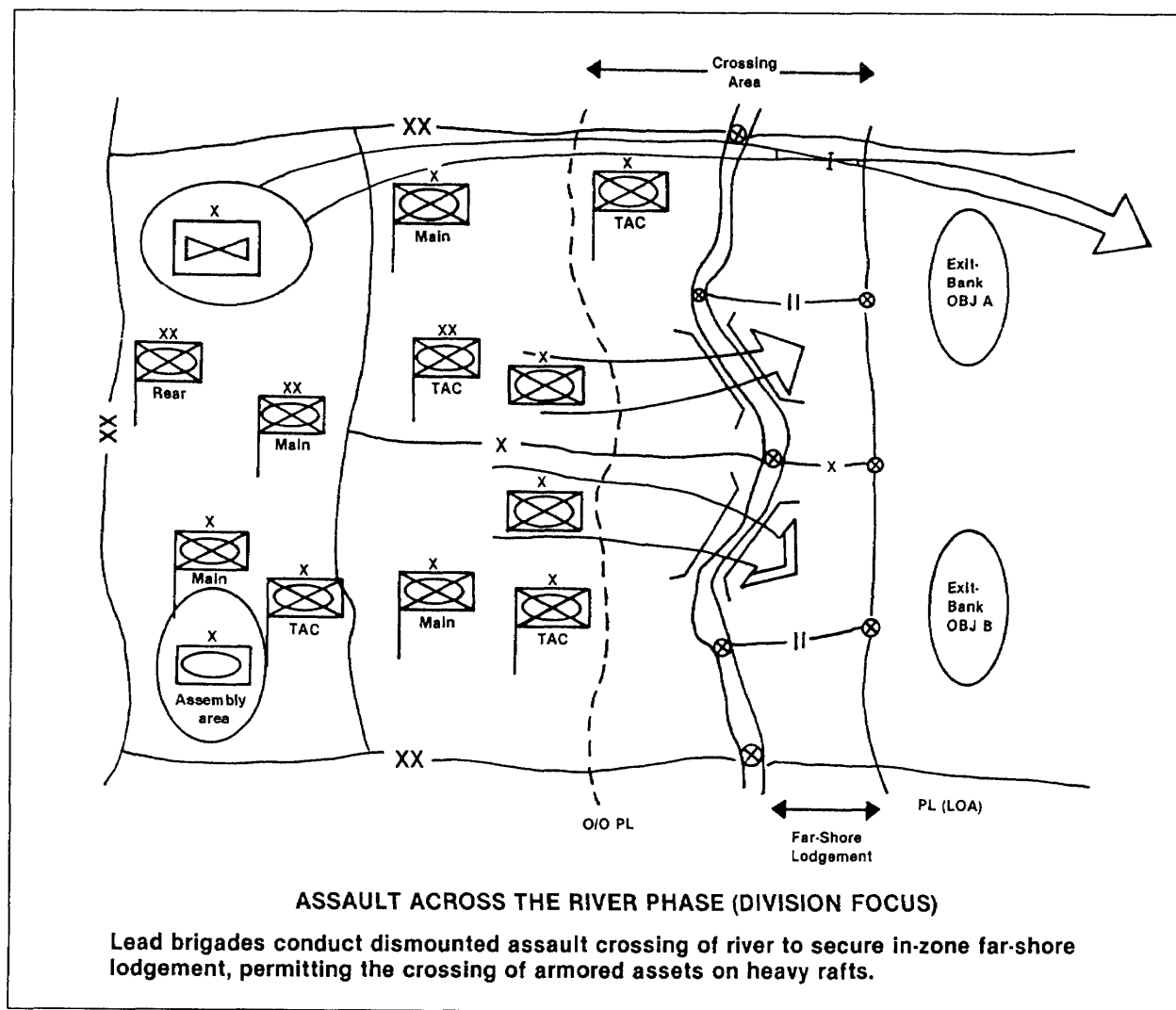


Figure 3-5. Assault across the river (division focus)

Advance from the Exit Bank (Phase III)

The division expands its lodgement on the far shore by attacking to seize and secure exit-bank and intermediate objectives. The intent is to eliminate direct and observed indirect fire from the crossing area (see Figure 3-7, page 3-8).

The division commander selects exit-bank and intermediate objectives based on METT-T. The river splits the attacking force, limiting massed direct fires beyond the exit bank. Therefore, these objectives are usually smaller and not as far from attack positions as initial objectives used in other offensive operations.

Once the exit banks are secured, the division cavalry squadron will cross either by swimming or rafting their cavalry fighting vehicles. They will then conduct normal screening operations for the division as the armored

reinforcements are crossing the river and preparing to advance from the exit bank.

The DTAC controls the coordinated attack of the lead brigades and the cavalry squadron to seize the exit-bank and intermediate objectives.

The DMAIN controls deep fires provided by aviation, artillery, and CAS to block enemy counterattacks into the bridgehead as requested by the DTAC.

The DREAR prepares to push packages of Class III and V that will support the attack out of the bridgehead. They also begin to push Class IV and V supplies for the hasty defense during the last phase of the river crossing operation.

The BMAINS control the movement of their follow-on task forces from staging areas through the crossing areas to the attack positions within the far-shore

3-6 Division Deliberate River Crossing

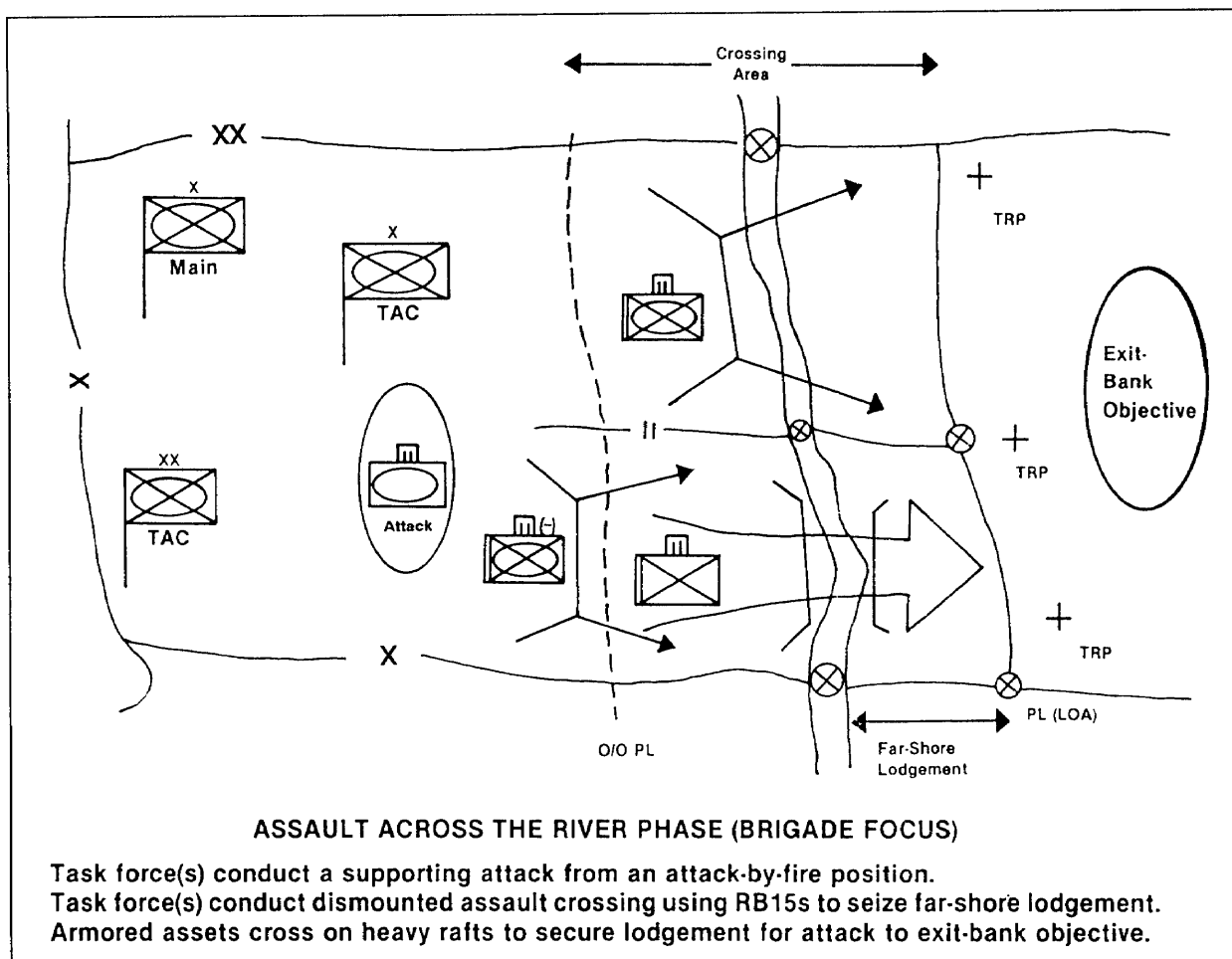


Figure 3-6. Assault across the river (brigade focus)

lodgement. They control the upgrade of crossing sites from assault boats (RB15s) to heavy rafts and/or bridging to ensure that the force buildup can support the advance from the exit bank to intermediate objectives. MPs and corps combat engineers assist movement control through the crossing area.

The crossing areas, bounded by phase lines on the friendly and threat sides of the river, are activated by the BMAIN after the far-shore lodgement is secure. The phase line on the friendly side of the river is usually set 2 to 3 kilometers from the exit bank, out of the range of threat direct-fire weapons. The phase line on the threat side of the river delineates an area large enough for forces to occupy battalion-sized attack positions. During this phase, limited two-way traffic begins to return disabled equipment and casualties.

The BTAC controls the movement out of the attack positions to exit-bank and intermediate objectives. Exit-bank objectives are those positions which when

seized eliminate the threat's ability to use direct-fire weapons on the crossing area. Intermediate objectives are those positions from which the threat can provide observation for indirect-fire weapons. The seizure of these objectives also provides depth to the bridgehead to eliminate bottlenecks. This enables expansion of SHORAD coverage, allowing more time to engage aircraft in air avenues of approach on the far shore (see Figure 3-8, page 3-9).

The task force that conducted the dismounted assault across the river continues to cross armored vehicles and remount dismounts in preparation for support to the main attack.

The brigade commanders establish the order of raft loads based on the division's crossing priorities. Bridge companies run heavy raft sites and begin to construct ribbon bridges. MPs mark routes and control holding areas on the far shore to ensure rapid transit within the crossing area.

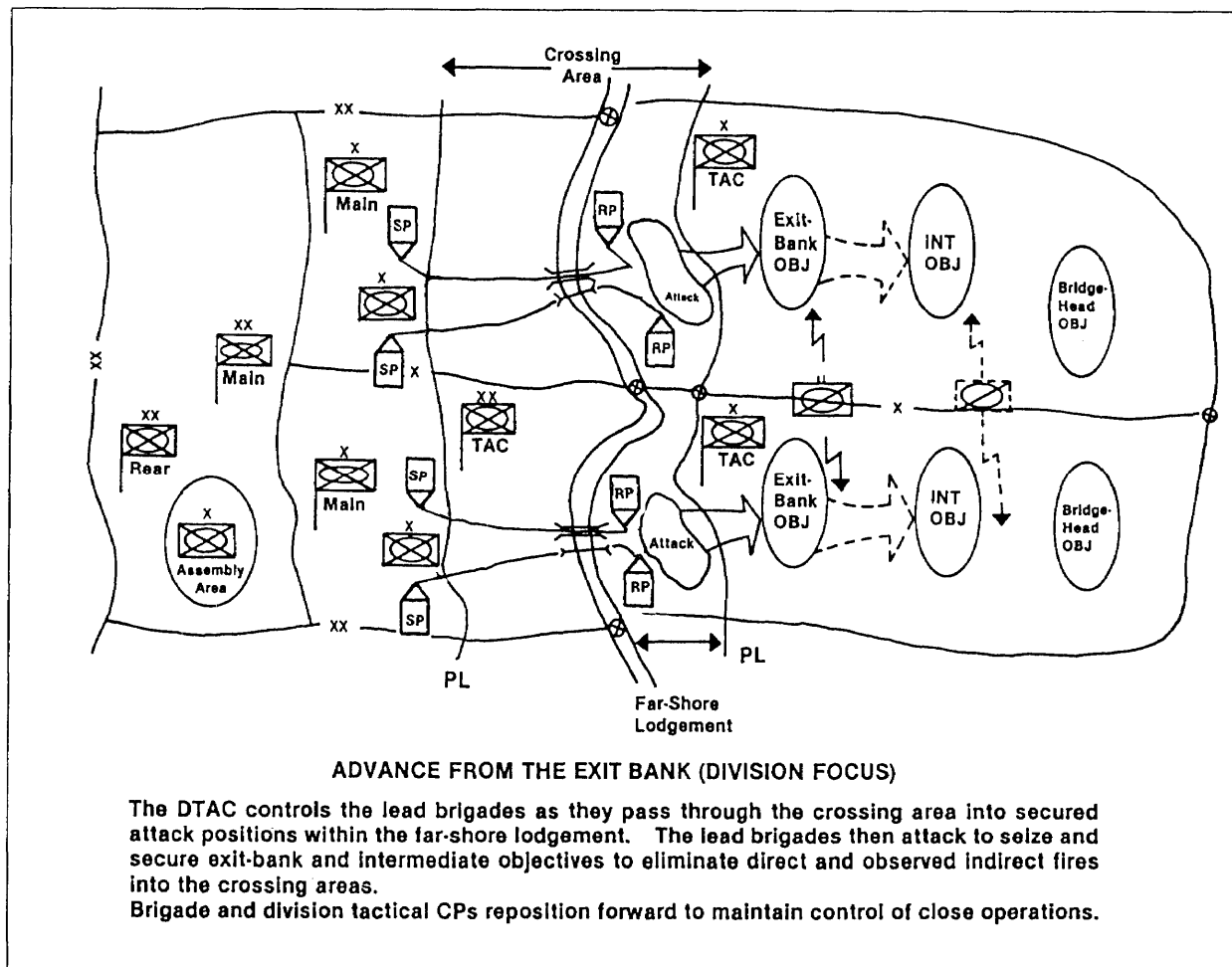


Figure 3-7. Advance from the exit bank (division focus)

Secure the Bridgehead Line (Phase IV)

The bridgehead must be defensible and large enough to accommodate forces that will break out to continue offensive combat operations. The lead brigades attack to seize and secure the final objectives within the bridgehead — the bridgehead objectives — to prevent the threat from successfully counterattacking against forces within the bridgehead. The lead brigades secure the bridgehead line by rapidly building enough combat power to establish a hasty defense in sector. The cavalry squadron conducts a screen mission. The lead brigades maintain continuous far-shore security to prevent bypassed threat elements from infiltrating back to the river and disrupting activities at crossing sites (see Figure 3-9, page 3-10).

The DTAC controls the lead brigades and the cavalry squadron as they secure bridgehead objectives (see Figure 3-9) and prepares to move the reserve brigade or other corps forces (breakout forces) into attack positions within the bridgehead. Once bridgehead

objectives are secured, the lead brigades establish a hasty defense in sector.

The DREAR begins to push forward needed Class III and V supplies in anticipation of the attack out of the bridgehead.

The BMAIN continues to upgrade and monitor the crossing sites and control movement through the crossing area. The far-bank phase line defining the crossing area is moved just past the intermediate objectives (see Figure 3-9) to provide space for breakout forces to assemble in attack positions before the attack out of the bridgehead. MPs mark routes from the exit bank to these attack positions for the breakout force. Once the bridgehead line is secure, the DTAC controls movement of breakout forces through the crossing area to attack positions within the bridgehead. During this phase, specific bridges and/or rafts are designated for full-time return traffic. This ensures that resupply and evacuation of wounded soldiers and disabled equipment occur.

3-8 Division Deliberate River Crossing

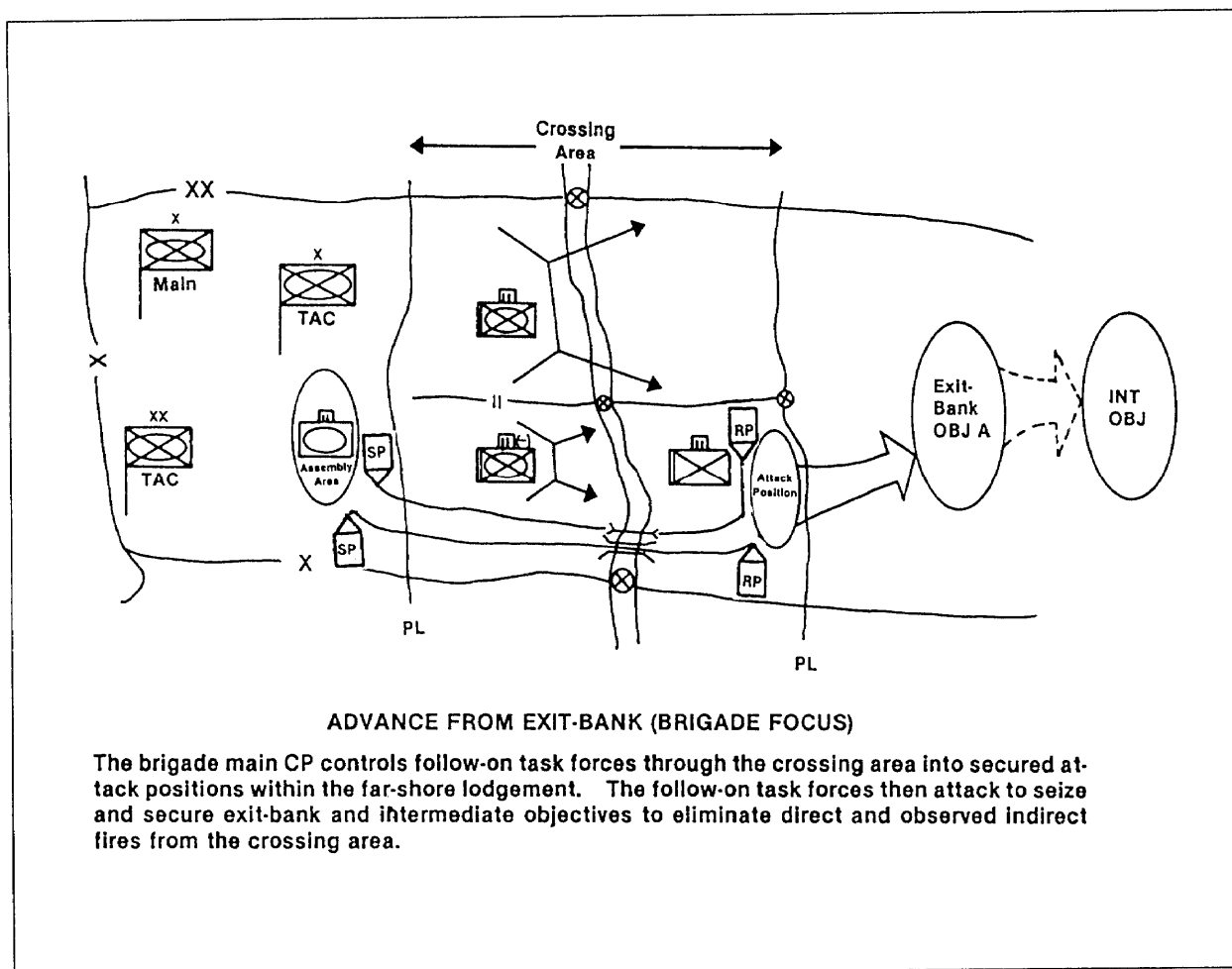


Figure 3-8. Advance from the exit bank (brigade focus)

The DMAIN controls the aviation, artillery, and available CAS sorties to screen the flanks and interdict threat counterattacks. Deep operations play a key role in the bridgehead defense by targeting threat formations as they move to counterattack. They also eliminate effective artillery fire within range of the bridgehead and destroy other threat artillery forces moving up to the fight.

The elements of the lead brigades that secure the bridgehead line must control avenues of approach into the bridgehead and be large enough to defeat counterattacks. After the bridgehead is secure, the division commander will commit the breakout force into the bridgehead. The bridgehead needs enough space (20 to 30 kilometers deep) to accommodate both the lead brigades and the breakout force with their combat service support (CSS). The bridgehead line must also be deep enough to employ air-defense

systems against hostile aircraft before they reach weapons release points to attack crossing sites.

CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK

Once the division has secured the bridgehead, the division's river crossing is complete. Crossing-area control will be passed to the DREAR and ultimately to corps. The breakout force must complete its passage before continuation of offensive operations. The lead brigades must reorganize and prepare to follow the breakout force as the division or corps reserve. Security forces from corps must come forward to relieve the lead brigades from their bridgehead security mission.

As the breakout force crosses into attack positions, the DTAC begins to focus on the attack out of the bridgehead. Therefore, the DREAR assumes the role of crossing-force headquarters. This allows the DTAC

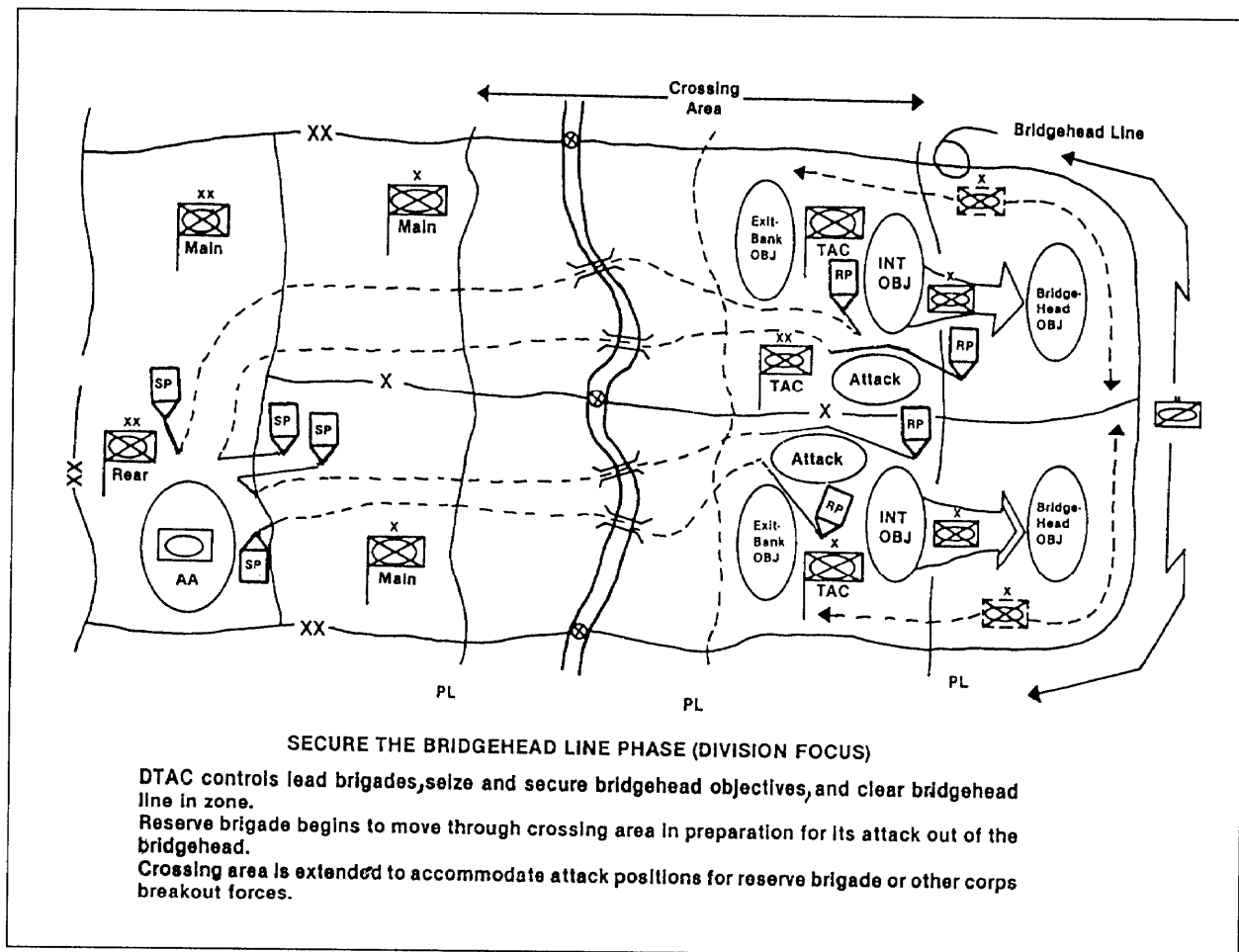


Figure 3-9. Secure the bridgehead line (division focus)

to focus completely on the attack out of the bridgehead, which is usually led by the division cavalry squadron.

The DREAR controls the breakout force movement through the crossing area to the attack positions and two-way traffic facilitating the return of wounded

soldiers and disabled equipment. Corps must provide other forces for bridgehead security before the lead brigades reorganize to resume their mission as the division reserve.

3-10 Division Deliberate River Crossing