

## Chapter 7

# RETROGRADE OPERATIONS

A retrograde operation is an organized movement to the rear away from the enemy. The force executes retrogrades to accomplish one or more of the following:

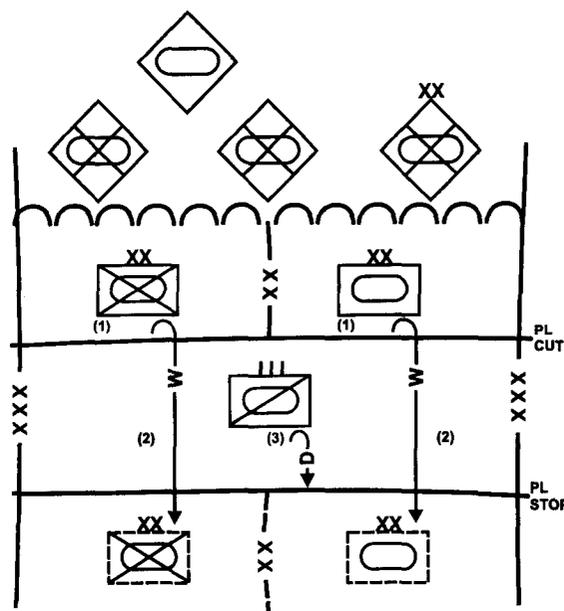
- To disengage from combat.
- To avoid combat under undesirable conditions.
- To draw the enemy into an unfavorable situation.
- To gain time without fighting a decisive engagement.
- To place friendly forces in a more favorable position.
- To permit the use of a portion of the force elsewhere.

The corps may be required to conduct retrograde operations in combination, sequentially, or subsequent to an offensive or defensive mission. A retrograde may be forced or voluntary. In either event, the higher commander must approve it. There are three types of retrograde operations:

1. Delay, where the unit gives up space to gain time.
2. Withdrawal, where all or part of a deployed force voluntarily disengages from the enemy to free itself for a new mission.
3. Retirement, where a force not in contact with the enemy conducts movement to the rear.

Corps retrogrades normally involve more than one of these three types. A combination of these types usually is necessary, either simultaneously by adjacent units or by one developing into the other. For instance, a withdrawal from action may precede a retirement, or a force executing a delaying action may cover a retirement (Figure 7-1).

As in other operations, the commander's concept of operations and intent drive planning for retrograde operations. Each type of retrograde operation has unique planning considerations, but considerations common to all retrograde operations are risk, the need for synchronization, and rear operations.



### NOTES:

1. Withdrawal. The mechanized and armored divisions defend forward of PL Cut until the ACR is in place to their rear. They then withdraw to PL Cut where the battle is handed over to the ACR.
2. Retirement. Having broken contact with the enemy, the heavy divisions retire to the rear of PL Stop.
3. Delay. The ACR delays the enemy between PL Cut and PL Stop to provide time for the heavy division to reestablish the defense.

**Figure 7-1. An example of a retrograde operation**

The nature of retrograde operations involves an inherent risk of degrading the command's morale. Historical review of unsuccessful retrograde operations indicates that, in many cases, retrogrades turned into routs. This was a result not of enemy tactical operations, but because the command

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developed a defeatist attitude. Commanders at every level can minimize this risk by—

- Thorough planning, efficient control, and aggressive leadership at all levels.
- Maintaining an aggressive attitude throughout the command,
- Orienting the entire command on the purpose of the operation.

Ensuring a constant flow of information from all units.

The complexity and fluidity of retrograde operations and the absolute need to synchronize the entire corps operation dictates the need for detailed, centralized planning and coordination with decentralized execution. To ensure success, units must integrate tactical deception into all aspects of the retrograde. Rear operations planning considerations are also similar for each type of retrograde operation.

Terrain management becomes critical during retrogrades. The corps must identify successive rear boundaries for committed maneuver units. To clearly identify the area of responsibility for a corps in retrograde, coordination between combat zone and communications zone (COMMZ) commanders is essential. Higher commanders must resolve, and make known to the affected commanders, problems concerning the responsibility for the protection, relocation, evacuation, and destruction (less medical) of CSS facilities and other installations, including identifying who has authority to direct such action.

The discussion of terrain management issues drives corps rear security operations. Not only must the corps clearly define who is responsible for the security of units, especially CSS units, it must also coordinate with the COMMZ commander to clearly identify who is responsible for corps units conducting the retrograde once they enter the COMMZ.

Sustainment of retrograde operations poses several challenges. Planning must balance the requirement to sustain subordinate maneuver forces with the requirement for early displacement of corps sustainment facilities. This would both free terrain for operational use by maneuver forces and support the continuing conduct of the retrograde. Again, the corps must coordinate with the COMMZ

commander to clearly identify sustainment relationships once corps units enter the COMMZ.

The prioritization of movement C<sup>2</sup>, as well as the means of movement, are key to movement planning. Within the context of the commander's concept of operations and intent, the corps must prioritize—

- What is to be moved (for example, light infantry troops versus sustainment stocks).
- The limited ground and air movement means available to the corps.
- The routes over which movements are to take place.

Complicating this most complex requirement is the necessity for the corps to coordinate all corps movements with the COMMZ commander and to request additional movement support and movement priorities within the COMMZ.

## DELAY

The corps conducts delay operations—

- To gain time when insufficient forces are available to attack or to defend.
- When the defensive plan calls for drawing the attacker into an unfavorable situation.
- To gain time to establish or reestablish a defense.
- To cover a defending or withdrawing unit.
- To protect a friendly unit's flank.
- To participate in an economy of force or deception effort.

Delay actions may facilitate a retirement by—

- Covering the deployment, movement, retirement, or withdrawal of friendly forces.
- Harassing, exhausting, weakening, and delaying enemy forces.
- Exposing enemy weaknesses.
- Shaping the enemy penetration.
- Drawing the enemy into a trap.
- Avoiding undesirable combat.
- Conforming to movement of other friendly forces.

A delaying force must—

- Destroy as much of the enemy force as possible.
- Cause the enemy to repeatedly deploy.
- Maintain contact with the enemy but avoid being decisively engaged.
- Maintain operational coherence.
- Preserve the force.
- Seize the initiative when possible.
- Deceive the enemy as to the real nature of the overall operation.

The tactical scheme of the delay is to force the enemy to deploy repeatedly against successive friendly battle positions. Elements of the delaying force attack and defend to trade space for time.

Delays are generally part of security force operations or economy of force roles. Commanders plan and conduct them much the same as a defense, but they are far more difficult. The delaying force must repeatedly fight the enemy, disengage, reposition, and resume the fight.

When the corps conducts a delay, the commander's intent prescribes the conditions by which the corps will trade space for time. Normally, corps elements, typically cavalry units, conduct a delay.

There are two types of delay. Delay in sector requires a unit to slow and defeat as much of the enemy force as possible without sacrificing tactical integrity. Delay forward of a specified line for a specified time or event entails greater risk. The unit must prevent the enemy from reaching a specified line for a specified time or event, regardless of cost. The concept of operations must clearly identify any restrictions.

Deception is important. The delaying force must keep the enemy in doubt as long as possible concerning the location of the successive delaying positions.

## WITHDRAWAL

A withdrawal is a planned operation in which a force in contact disengages from an enemy force. Units conduct withdrawals when it is necessary—

- To move away from the enemy to reposition forces on more favorable terrain.

- To conserve resources for future operations.
- To gain time.
- To avoid combat under unfavorable conditions.

All or part of a corps may move to the rear to shorten LOCs or to compensate for the removal or loss of subordinate units. A corps withdrawal combines all types of combat operations. To effect the withdrawal, some divisions may defend, others may delay, and still others may attack.

Withdrawing by daylight generally occurs only when a situation requires rapid action to save the command from disaster. Forces under direct enemy fire or observation lack freedom of action and may sustain heavy casualties in a daylight withdrawal.

To maintain secrecy and retain freedom of action, withdrawals should occur during periods of limited visibility or before the enemy closes with the position. Units should use smoke to conceal both day and night withdrawals. Counterattacks may be necessary to obtain this freedom of action.

The corps commander should make the decision for a night withdrawal sufficiently in advance to permit planning, coordination, and time for subordinate units to conduct daylight reconnaissance. Planning begins with preparation of the plan for the next mission. Once the new plan is drawn up, the staff can make plans for the withdrawal, including—

- The location, composition, and mission of corps security forces.
- The organization of the corps for combat.
- Control measures, including routes, traffic control points (TCPs), and phase lines.
- Fire support.
- Combat service support priorities.
- Nominated nuclear targets, when appropriate.
- Deception operations to preserve the force.

Normally, the corps employs a covering force during a withdrawal to preserve the command's integrity. Therefore, should the enemy force the corps to withdraw, the requirement for strong covering forces is likely. The capabilities of armored and mechanized divisions make them most suitable as covering forces. A division reinforced by corps

combat units, FA, ADA, and engineers can also serve as a covering force.

The corps commander prescribes the covering force's mission, composition, and initial location. The covering force may accomplish its mission by delay on successive positions, by delay on alternate positions, or by a combination of the two. It can also attack, defend, feint, or demonstrate.

The main body of the corps disengages and continues its movement rearward. The corps commander then relies on the covering force and organic and supporting reconnaissance to maintain contact with enemy forces. To facilitate coordination of movement, the majority of corps combat and CS units are normally attached to divisions. The corps holds a small reserve. The aviation brigade, when task-organized, is well-suited for this mission.

Early in the withdrawal, units in the forward defense area, except delaying or security elements, disengage from contact with enemy forces. When operating on an extended front, the corps commander frequently attaches corps artillery units to divisions. He may also attach designated corps artillery units to the covering force. Control of these units reverts to corps artillery as soon as practicable.

The corps ADA brigade commander or the regional ADA commander normally hold centralized OPCON of most nondivision ADA. However, the corps commander must ensure that sufficient ADA assets support the covering force.

Corps engineer units have two basic missions during withdrawal. They enhance and maintain mobility of the corps and degrade or counter the enemy's mobility.

The corps' withdrawal plan includes control measures that are necessary to ensure a coordinated operation. The corps establishes lateral boundaries between divisions, phases of the operation, and

indicates the amount of desired delay between positions, using phase lines for control, as appropriate. Combat service support during a withdrawal focuses on fueling, arming, and recovering the force. Prioritization is METT-T dependent and may vary from one unit to another.

Withdrawals require extensive movement control provisions that establish priorities of movement and preclude congestion on routes. Detailed traffic control plans are made at all echelons; their execution is decentralized. In support of its withdrawal, the corps plans and conducts EW, cover and deception operations, and obstacle and denial operations.

## RETIREMENT

Retirement is a retrograde movement in which a force not engaged with the enemy moves to the rear in an organized manner. It is administrative in nature and execution; however, commanders must consider security and develop CONPLANS to deal with enemy capabilities to employ Level I, II, and III threats into the rear area and along the routes. (See Appendix C.)

If the corps is moving to a new area, it may transition into a movement to contact. Task organization of the corps, as it moves along the retirement route, should ease its transition into the next operation.

Some situations might dictate that a corps conduct a tactical move during a retirement (for example, on a nuclear battlefield when the enemy situation is vague). As in all tactical moves, all-round security of the main body is necessary using advance, flank, and rear security forces. Combat service support operations in the retirement increase fuel consumption but decrease ammunition consumption.