

CHAPTER 11

RETROGRADE MOVEMENTS

GENERAL

■ 696. A retrograde movement is any movement of a command to the rear, or away from the enemy. It may be forced by the enemy or may be made voluntarily. It may be classified as a withdrawal from action, a delaying action, or a retirement.

■ 697. Retrograde movements are made to accomplish one or more of the following purposes:

- a. To disengage from battle.
- b. To avoid battle in a disadvantageous situation.
- c. To draw the enemy into a situation unfavorable to him.
- d. To gain time without fighting a decisive engagement.
- e. To conform to the movement of other troops.
- f. To permit the employment of a portion of the command elsewhere.

■ 698. Retrograde movements in the face of the enemy are difficult maneuvers and require constant control and supervision by all leaders. Mechanized forces and combat aviation have increased the difficulties in executing these maneuvers and the necessity of organizing and occupying rear positions prior to the retrograde movement. (See par. 665.) Prompt reorganization of units, careful attention to the feeding and care of the men, and the presence of higher commanders well forward, will tend to counteract the detrimental effects of this type of action.

■ 699. *Demolitions, obstructions, and contaminations* are used to the maximum in all retrograde movements in order to delay hostile pursuit, to assist in flank protection, and to destroy materials and resources that may have to be abandoned. Plans for this work must be prepared well in advance.

■ 700. *Combat aviation* is employed against hostile observation aviation and to delay the hostile follow-up or pursuit by harassing and interdicting hostile forces at critical local-

ities. Its action must be coordinated with that of flank and rear guards.

■ 701. In retrograde movements, maximum advantage must be taken of available motor transportation to expedite the rapid movement to the rear of units which have withdrawn from action. Security forces should consist of highly mobile units.

■ 702. A hostile force, strong in mechanized and motorized units and combat aviation, may be expected to follow up or to pursue any retrograde movement relentlessly both by day and by night. (See also par. 665.) This necessitates continuous ground and aerial reconnaissance to both flanks and rear, rapid movement under cover of darkness, strong anti-aircraft defense, and continuous all-around antimechanized defense particularly on exposed flanks. Close support by combat aviation is essential. Mobile reserves, particularly mechanized and antitank units, are held out in order to counteract wide and rapid movements to our flanks and rear, or penetration through our front, and to counter any attacks by troops transported by air.

WITHDRAWAL FROM ACTION

■ 703. A *withdrawal* from action is the operation of breaking off combat with a hostile force. The general purpose of the operation is to regain or preserve freedom of action.

■ 704. A *daylight withdrawal* usually involves such heavy losses and so great a degree of disorganization that it is preferable for large units to hold out at all costs until night-fall and effect the withdrawal under the cover of darkness. As a rule, only rearward echelons can be withdrawn successfully by day. Small mobile forces may execute daylight withdrawals.

■ 705. The heavier the previous fighting and the closer the engagement with the enemy, the more difficult will be the withdrawal.

■ 706. A withdrawal is facilitated by concealment of dispositions and movements, by bad weather, by rapidity of movement, by the careful preparation of plans, and by counterattacks.

Successful counterattacks often create conditions most

favorable to the withdrawal. Because of their mobility and fire power, combat aviation and mechanized units are especially suited to support counterattacks.

■ 707. The commander who orders a withdrawal designates a *rearward position* on which the troops will prepare for a renewal of resistance or under the protection of which the troops may be assembled for further retrograde movement. The rearward position is selected at such distance that the enemy will be compelled to regroup his forces, displace his artillery, and renew his preparations for attack. The commander usually determines the location of the position from the map. He then issues the necessary orders for reconnaissance of the position and routes thereto.

The commander makes special provision for holding the road centers that control the lines of communication to the rear, and the features of the terrain that afford extended observation over the areas in rear of the battle front.

■ 708. In a daylight withdrawal, in addition to the rearward position, the commander selects a suitable covering position and details, from any available reserves, a mobile *covering force* strong in fire power to occupy it and *cover the withdrawal of the troops engaged*. Artillery, engineers, anti-aircraft automatic weapons, antitank weapons, and chemical troops are attached to the covering force.

■ 709. The mission of the covering force is to stop, restrict, or divert the advance of the enemy in order to permit the main body of our troops to disengage, assemble, and move to the rear. The successful accomplishment of this mission depends largely on the composition and location of the covering force and on the efficient execution of a systematic plan of artillery and machine-gun defensive fires. Often the mission can be best accomplished by counterattack.

■ 710. The *position* of the *covering force* in a daylight withdrawal is selected so that it will cover the routes of withdrawal and the assembly position of the main body. Under certain conditions, the occupation of a flank position may be advisable in order to force the enemy to execute a time-consuming maneuver.

When its mission is accomplished, the covering force withdraws to the rearward position.

■ 711. In his order for the withdrawal the commander indicates the rear position, assigns zones or routes of withdrawal to the units of the command, prescribes the strength and conduct of the covering forces, fixes the hour and the priority of withdrawal of units, orders the establishment of essential signal communication, and takes the necessary steps to clear the routes for the movement of troops. Prompt starting of trains to the new areas, evacuation of the wounded, removal or destruction of supplies, energetic measures for the maintenance of traffic control, construction of necessary bridges, and preparations for the execution of demolitions on the routes of withdrawal are of importance. Adequate measures are taken to insure secrecy and for antiaircraft and antimechanized defense. Measures are instituted to regulate or silence radio communication.

The new command post is designated early and preparations are made for establishing a landing field nearby. (See FM 101-5.)

■ 712. It is best usually to withdraw the least heavily engaged units first. When the terrain is favorable and the security of the command permits it, all subordinate units may be withdrawn simultaneously. However, it usually is necessary to move certain units ahead of others in order to avoid congestion and to insure a smooth execution of the movement. This procedure also gives greater security to the command because the units remaining temporarily in place cover the withdrawal of those first to move. In some situations, counterattack may make it possible to withdraw first those units which are hardest pressed, or which are exposed to the most dangerous threats. However, when necessary to protect the command as a whole, these hard-pressed units must stay to the last. It is better to run the risk of losing certain units than to jeopardize the whole command.

■ 713. The zone of action for the withdrawal should provide the best and most direct routes to the rear position. The movement of subordinate units is coordinated by assigning to them zones of action or definite routes. Generally, zones of action are assigned to the main combat units, especially if they may have to fight while moving back. Routes generally are assigned to trains and to those units which move to the rear under control of the higher command; such units may

include artillery, tanks, and reserves. The zones of action or routes so assigned should usually extend to the rear position. If the rear position is distant, the zones or routes should be indicated back to a distance of 1 day's march.

■ 714. At *night* the *withdrawal* of the greater part of the forces engaged commences shortly after nightfall. Small detachments are left in immediate contact with the enemy. These detachments, formed from troops nearest the enemy, should be well-supplied with automatic weapons, ammunition, and pyrotechnics. In view of the broad front upon which they are deployed, a single covering force commander ordinarily cannot maintain effective control. The superior commander, therefore, provides artillery support, coordinates the action of the elements holding the various sectors, indicates the time of their withdrawal, and prescribes their action in case of hostile attack. They may be directed to withdraw either at a prescribed hour or upon order.

■ 715. The detachments left in contact with the enemy at night, screen the withdrawal by simulating normal activity. By firing from different positions, reconnaissance of combat patrols, and sending up pyrotechnics, they endeavor to create the impression of normally held lines.

Whenever practicable, the foot elements of these detachments should be furnished motor transportation for movement to the rear. Motor transportation is especially desirable when the distance of the retrograde movement is great.

■ 716. Whether the rearward position is organized for defense or is the area in which the command will be assembled for further retrograde movement, the commander makes provision for a covering force in front of this position. The mission of this covering force is to cover the withdrawal of the detachments left in close contact with the enemy and of the artillery supporting these detachments. It has the further mission of protecting the assembly of the main body for further retrograde movement or to serve as an initial outpost if the rearward position is to be defended.

■ 717. At night the withdrawal of front line units is executed on a *broad front*. Troops withdraw initially straight to the rear and then move to designated assembly areas where small units are reformed and preparations are made for further rearward movement and assembly into larger units.

■ 718. At night a part of the artillery remains in position to support the elements still in contact. It increases its fire activity to deceive the enemy as to the amount of artillery in action and assists the troops in contact in breaking off combat. Well supplied with ammunition and protected for all-around defense, this artillery sacrifices itself if necessary to insure the withdrawal of the supported elements. The remainder of the artillery is withdrawn to the rearward position, priority in movement being given to the heavier calibers.

■ 719. During withdrawals *antiaircraft artillery* furnishes protection for the assembly areas, the heads of columns, and, particularly, critical localities along the routes of withdrawal.

■ 720. *Cavalry* protects withdrawing troops by reconnaissance, protection of the flanks and delaying action.

■ 721. Continuous reconnaissance is made to facilitate the employment of antitank units to protect withdrawing troops against mechanized attack.

■ 722. *Tanks* are useful in daylight withdrawals, particularly in counterattacks, to assist other ground units in breaking contact with the enemy. When practicable, their action is coordinated with that of *combat aviation*. They are not ordinarily used in night withdrawals.

■ 723. Persistent chemicals may be used to deny or make costly the use of probable approaches. Smoke may be useful in covering the daylight withdrawal of a unit over terrain exposed to enemy fire.

■ 724. In addition to their primary mission of effecting road blocks and demolitions, *engineers* reconnoiter, repair, and mark roads. In certain situations, they reconnoiter and stake out rear positions and furnish guides. They assist the rearward movement of artillery, mechanized, and other units; destroy materials to be abandoned; act as part of a covering force; and constitute an emergency reserve.

RETIREMENT

■ 725. A *retirement* is a retrograde movement in which a force seeks to regain freedom of action, the movement being part of a well-defined plan which has for its purpose the refusal of decisive combat under the existing situation. A retirement may be made in one stage or in several stages,

depending upon the distance involved. When a withdrawal from action precedes the retirement, the actual retirement begins when march columns are formed.

■ 726. Without competent orders to do so a *decision to retire* is justified only when all possibilities of accomplishing the assigned mission have been exhausted and a continuation of the battle will lead either to excessive losses or to a decisive defeat.

No commander is authorized to order a retirement on his own initiative simply because of local misfortune or reverses suffered by an adjacent unit.

■ 727. In retirements following a withdrawal, the most important considerations for a commander are to place *distance, obstacles*, and a *rear guard* between his main body and the enemy and to regain his freedom of action.

Trains are put in march without delay, if necessary under escort, and sent to the rear to a selected bivouac area. During their retirement they establish dumps of ammunition, rations, fuel, and other supplies en route to meet the needs of the retiring troops.

Antiaircraft protection of important defiles on the route of retirement is established.

As fast as troop units arrive in assembly areas, they are formed into small columns and set in motion to the rear.

■ 728. *Road march formations* usually are taken up when the zone of effective hostile light artillery fire is passed. Formations are modified to meet existing conditions of terrain, visibility, intensity of enemy fire, activity of enemy combat aviation, and tactical requirements for control and rapidity of movement.

■ 729. During the initial phase of retirement made from contact, the division generally assigns specific *routes* to the trains, the artillery, and other auxiliary troops, and indicates when the routes will be cleared for the other troops. A *zone of action* usually is assigned to each combat unit comparable to an infantry regiment in size.

■ 730. As the distance from the enemy increases, small columns are consolidated into larger columns constituted as combat teams. During the march to the rear, constant effort is made to increase the distance from the enemy. This will

necessitate *night and forced marches* as well as effective security measures to protect the rear and the flanks and to delay the enemy.

■ 731. The actual terrain *objective* toward which a retirement is directed, depends upon the mission of the command and the purpose of the movement. It should be such as to favor the future action of the command. Factors which influence the selection of this objective are the actual and potential strength of the enemy; reinforcements that may become available; the time when the enemy can arrive at critical localities on the route of the retirement; and the extent that terrain and the weather favor hostile movement and interfere with friendly movements.

■ 732. The *formation and number of columns* to be employed during retirement depend principally upon the number of roads available and the hostile interference. It generally is desirable to move the major fractions of a deployed force to the rear simultaneously and abreast of each other. However, a hostile threat to a flank may make it necessary for one fraction to hold in position until the movement of the others is well under way. A restricted road net, or defiles in the zone of movement, may necessitate withdrawals of fractions successively. If a flank is threatened during the retirement, the adoption of an echeloned formation may be appropriate.

■ 733. The retirement order of a small command usually designates the time when each subordinate unit commences its movement. In commands the size of a division or larger, the commander usually designates the time that major portions of the command pass initial points or lines and, when appropriate, the hour that certain lines or assembly areas must be cleared. (See FM 101-5.)

■ 734. Clearing the *routes of march* and organizing an effective *zone of obstacles* to delay the enemy's pursuing columns are of greatest importance.

Engineers are sent back early to reconnoiter and improve the routes of retirement, repair bridges, and prepare obstacles and demolitions to be executed by the rear guard. Pertinent information of the location of obstacles and of the nature of the demolitions and contaminations prepared is furnished to the retiring troops. Measures are taken to prevent their en-

dangering our own troops and to insure their execution at the proper time. Chemical troops with chemical mines may be attached to the engineers for the contamination of obstacles and demolitions.

■ 735. *Traffic* is regulated at critical points to prevent congestion, especially in towns, at bridges, and at other defiles. Strong antiaircraft and antitank protection is established at these critical localities until they are cleared by the main body.

■ 736. Security detachments are provided with sufficient *artillery* to support them in the execution of their missions. The remainder of the artillery is so disposed in the retiring columns as best to protect the main body or support the security detachments.

■ 737. The *antiaircraft artillery* is disposed to protect the most vital points on the routes of the retiring columns. As the retirement progresses, the *antiaircraft artillery* moves rapidly by bounds from area to area, and frequently is given priority on the roads.

■ 738. During a retirement, *cavalry* is employed on security missions, and frequently may constitute or be attached to the rear or flank guards. Reconnaissance, particularly to obtain information of any hostile movement directed toward the flanks, is important and is assigned to the cavalry or to the security detachment controlling the cavalry.

■ 739. *Observation aviation* must keep under observation any hostile forces that are in position to interfere with the retirement, especially on the flanks. It should maintain close liaison with the security detachments. Airplanes usually are placed at the disposal of the artillery with rear guards to observe their long-range fires.

Combat aviation is employed to delay the hostile pursuit. Its action is coordinated with that of the security detachments.

■ 740. *Engineers* accompany or precede the main columns to facilitate their movement. Suitable detachments are attached to rear and flank guards to assist in delaying the enemy. Some engineers may be employed in certain situations to reconnoiter and stake out rear defensive positions.

■ 741. A retirement generally offers opportunities for the use of *chemicals* of all kinds. Smoke may assist security detachments in concealing their movements during successive withdrawals.

■ 742. In retirement orders, present command posts and the next ones to be occupied should be specified. Axes of *signal communication* should be indicated as far to the rear as it is practicable to foresee them.

SECURITY DURING RETIREMENT

■ 743. *All-around security* must be provided. In a short retirement which can be completed in one night, the covering force for the withdrawal usually gives sufficient protection for the movement. (See par. 716.) If the movement continues after daylight, a rear guard normally should be formed to protect the march of the main bodies. Initially this rear guard consists of the troops which covered the assembly of the main body reinforced by contingents of other arms as required by the situation.

■ 744. The *mission of the rear guard* is to protect the main body from surprise, harassment, and attack. By the successful execution of this mission a rear guard covering a retirement enables the main body to avoid accepting battle, and regains for the commander of the force his freedom of action. The strength and composition of a rear guard are such as to permit the execution of its mission without the intervention of the main body. When necessary for the security of the main body, the rear guard sacrifices itself in the execution of its mission.

■ 745. A *rear guard* covering the retirement of a combined force consists principally of infantry strong in automatic weapons, supported by artillery. Units of other arms are added in accordance with the requirements of the situation. Antitank weapons, mechanized units, signal troops, chemical troops, and engineers may be included.

The ability of cavalry to conduct delaying action makes it an important element of a rear guard. When the main body has succeeded in gaining sufficient distance from the enemy, cavalry may constitute the principal element of the rear guard.

■ 746. The *formation* and the *method of operation* of the rear guard are adapted to the situation. Movement to the rear is made by bounds, based on the progress of the main body and the time limit set by the higher commander for holding designated terrain lines. The distance between the rear guard and the main body is determined accordingly. Delays in the retirement of the main body must be expected.

■ 747. When in contact with the enemy, the rear guard distributes its forces in groups over a wide front and opens long range fire with its artillery and other supporting weapons to force the enemy to deploy and thus to delay his advance. Unless the security of the main body requires a stubborn resistance, the rear guard, as far as practicable, avoids close range combat and withdraws successively from position to position as the enemy approaches.

The successive positions of the rear guard are chosen at such distance from each other that the enemy is forced to renew his preparations for attack in front of each of them and that changes of position by the artillery of the rear guard are reduced to a minimum. A rear guard position should favor withdrawal by affording covered routes.

■ 748. When the enemy presses his pursuit closely, greater resistance is offered. Advantage is taken of favorable opportunities to punish overhasty pursuit by counterattack. Attack against the flanks of pursuing columns by mechanized troops or cavalry is an effective means of disorganizing the pursuit. The most favorable time for offering a determined resistance is during the late hours of the day to permit withdrawal of the rear guard under cover of darkness.

■ 749. When the distance from the enemy permits, the rear guard retires in march formation. Its *distribution* corresponds, in general, to that of an advance guard, and in reverse order of march, comprising the reserve, the support, and the rear guard cavalry or motorized detachment. The support provides a rear party and necessary flank patrols.

Because of the direction of march, infantry reconnaissance during the retirement is much more restricted than in case of an advance guard. Chief reliance for the execution of the necessary reconnaissances must be placed upon cavalry, mechanized units, and observation aviation. Mobile troops especially observe and forestall attempts to pass the flanks of the rear guard.

■ 750. When there is likelihood of attack by mobile troops against the heads of the retreating columns, *advance guards* are detailed. They are composed of mobile troops reinforced by antitank and engineer detachments. If there is no threat against the heads of the columns, the principal missions of the advance guard will be to clear routes of march, insure the uninterrupted movement of the main body, and regulate civilian and refugee traffic. For the latter purpose, military police are attached.

■ 751. Flank security is of especial importance during a retirement. When there is danger of an encircling maneuver in pursuit, *flank guards* composed of mobile troops with engineer, antitank, and chemical units attached, are detailed to cover the exposed flank. When opposed by an enemy strong in mechanized and air forces special attention must be paid to the security of the routes of retirement and the area or position to which the troops are retiring. Under such conditions it will normally be necessary to employ forces other than those retiring to occupy and organize the rear position before it is reached by the retiring forces. When conditions permit, the rear position is organized behind strong natural obstacles.

DELAYING ACTION

■ 752. Recourse to *delaying action* ordinarily implies either lack of readiness for battle or hostile superiority of force. Its purpose is to gain time while avoiding decisive action.

Delaying action may be used in the opening phases of battle to gain time for the unified employment of the entire command. It may also be called for in later phases pending completion of preparations for counteroffensive action. *It finds especial application in the operations of covering forces and other security detachments.*

In offensive operations delaying action by a portion of the command to delay the arrival of hostile reinforcements may be of decisive importance.

■ 753. Delay of an advancing enemy may be accomplished by offensive action, by defensive action in one position, by delaying action in successive positions, or by any combination of these methods.

■ 754. Skillful use of *terrain* has a decided influence on all delaying operations. A series of parallel ridges across the lines of hostile advance; unfordable streams, swamps, lakes, and other obstacles on the front and flanks; high ground with good observation and good fields of fire at long range; concealed routes of withdrawal immediately behind delaying positions; and a good road net all favor the execution of delaying action.

■ 755. In situations where the enemy has freedom of maneuver and mobile troops and the flanks of a delaying force are open to hostile attack, the *protection of the flanks and rear* is of vital importance. Since the enemy may succeed in pushing by the flanks or in executing a wider maneuver with mobile forces to strike in rear of an occupied delaying position, the commander must make provision to block or destroy such forces.

Ground and aerial reconnaissance forces must be continuously on the alert to locate such threats to flanks and rear.

■ 756. *Delaying action in successive positions* is based on limited resistance on a position, with the intention of renewing this resistance in successive positions if necessary. The defense on each position must force the enemy to early deployment and to time-consuming preparations for battle. Combat ordinarily is broken off in each position before troops become closely engaged. The situation may, however, require a strong resistance on some position or even a counterattack in order to accomplish the delaying mission.

The delaying measures are continued between positions in order to gain time for organizing resistance on the next position. Because of the retrograde and long range nature of such combat, delaying action is executed most effectively by troops possessing a high degree of mobility and great fire power, especially at longer ranges.

In general, contact is made as far forward as possible and continuous light resistance is offered in order to compel the enemy to employ his whole force and to consume a maximum of time. *No more ground than necessary* is given up. The ability to execute planned withdrawals under conditions that permit orderly movement to the rear must, however, be retained.

■ 757. In open terrain, the important consideration in the selection of a *delaying position* is a good field of fire at long range. Field of fire at close range is of less importance. In close and wooded terrain, observation and field of fire are equally unfavorable for both sides; the defender can, however, make full use of the cover, concealment, and obstacles offered by the terrain, whereas the attacker is restricted in movement and is unable to exploit fully his superiority of means.

The ground in rear of the position should favor a covered withdrawal by screening the troops from hostile view and fire as soon as the position is vacated.

Field fortifications are reduced to the minimum; full use is made of obstacles, demolitions, and chemical interdictions in front and on the flanks of the position and in the areas between successive positions.

■ 758. The *conduct of delaying action* is facilitated in open terrain by selecting successive positions on high ground at such distance apart that the enemy will be forced to displace his artillery in order to attack the next position in rear. In wooded terrain the infantry bears the brunt of combat, and successive positions may be much closer together.

In each position, the main line of resistance should insure facilities for artillery observation and for the delivery of effective long range fire by other supporting weapons. In general, the depth of the zone of resistance is not great. The artillery and the other supporting weapons are located close to the line of resistance.

■ 759. When the enemy has superiority in combat aviation, or mechanized forces, or both, the commander must ordinarily delay on a position until nightfall and then withdraw under cover of darkness to the rear position. Considerable distance between positions enables the commander to utilize fully the hours of darkness for withdrawal. In such situations, selection of positions strongly protected by natural obstacles which facilitate defense on a broad front becomes a primary consideration.

■ 760. In order to coordinate the operations, the combat zone is subdivided into sectors the boundaries of which are extended to the rear to include initially the first two delaying positions, and later the final position in the commander's plan of action. In favorable terrain the width of sectors in delay-

ing action may be taken as about double those suitable for defense.

A tactical unit is assigned to each sector and is given a combat mission. The strength and composition of each unit is determined by the assigned mission, the terrain, the width of the sector, and the nature of the hostile threat. Mutual support between adjacent units is coordinated by the next higher commander.

Decentralization of operations to combat team commanders will be frequent when operating on a broad front. Continuous liaison between adjacent combat teams, and between combat teams and the higher commander, must be maintained.

■ 761. The defense is conducted in each sector by small units holding the natural strong points of the terrain and supporting each other by flanking fire. In close terrain or during periods of low visibility, close contact between adjacent units is maintained by combat patrols. Local reserves protect the flanks of front line defense areas and cover the withdrawal of forward elements.

■ 762. *Artillery* in general support prepares a plan of interdiction fires covering principal hostile avenues of approach and is prepared to engage distant targets. It is employed to reinforce the artillery in direct support in accordance with the requirements of the situation. Special attention will be given to interdiction of hostile movements toward the flanks and rear.

Light artillery will often be attached to the unit it supports.

■ 763. *Engineers* are employed to construct a barrier zone of obstacles and demolitions in front of the first delaying position and in the area between successive positions. Anti-tank units are attached to units covering the hostile avenues of approach. To protect an exposed flank, a mobile flank guard is detailed with engineers and antitank units attached.

■ 764. Chemical troops may be employed to place barriers of persistent chemicals on the front and flanks of each position.

■ 765. The *antiaircraft artillery* is employed primarily to protect the artillery, reserves, and critical defiles in rear from hostile air attack.

■ 766. A mobile *reserve*, reinforced by tanks, artillery, anti-tank units, engineers, and chemical troops is prepared to move rapidly to counter mobile threats.

■ 767. As in the defense of any position, an *outpost*, strong in automatic weapons, is deployed well in front of the delaying position to harass and delay the enemy's advance and to keep him in doubt as to its location. Artillery support for the outpost will be provided by units supporting the delaying position.

■ 768. The greatest importance attaches to keeping the enemy in doubt as long as possible concerning the location of the successive delaying positions and the delaying nature of the operations being conducted.

■ 769. In fighting a delaying action, some troops are disposed on the rear position to cover the *withdrawal* from the positions in front.

■ 770. Timely measures are taken for reconnaissance and for preparation necessary for the occupation of the successive delaying positions in rear.

Provision is made for the establishment of *wire communication* from the higher commander to the sector commanders and to the senior artillery commander. Of especial importance is efficient operation of the artillery wire net in order that the flexibility of artillery fire may be exploited to the maximum. Signal communication to distant or detached units is ordinarily limited to radio and messengers.

The wire systems of subordinate units are limited to essential lines. Full use is made of prearranged visual signals and of mounted and motorcycle messengers.

■ 771. The commander *controls* the operation by prescribing the time of withdrawal and the time by which each successive position is to be occupied. In open terrain, it is often better to make a timely and simultaneous withdrawal from each position. In close terrain or when a command is deployed over a wide front this may be impracticable, and the decision regarding the time of withdrawal is then left to subordinate commanders. The commander exercises control by prescribing a general terrain line to which units eventually will withdraw or in front of which the enemy will be held until a designated hour.

■ 772. Whenever practicable, *withdrawal from a position* is effected under cover of darkness. If protracted resistance is necessary to accomplish this, measures are taken to extend the depth of the zone of resistance and to utilize to the maximum natural obstacles.

■ 773. If the withdrawal must be made in daylight, artillery and other supporting weapons are disposed in depth. *Combat aviation* and *tanks* are employed against those hostile elements which most seriously threaten the success of the operation. A daylight withdrawal may also be facilitated by organizing an *intermediate delaying* (covering) position to be occupied by reserves assigned to cover the withdrawal of troops in front (see par. 708). Subsequent withdrawal of the troops from the intermediate delaying position is in turn covered by other troops on the next delaying position in rear. Retirement may thus be executed by the alternate withdrawal of successive echelons from one delaying position to the next.

The loss of a defended tactical locality to the enemy does not necessarily involve an early withdrawal along the whole front. Adjacent units should take advantage of such situations to punish an impetuous enemy by heavy flanking fire and by local counterattacks whenever conditions are favorable.