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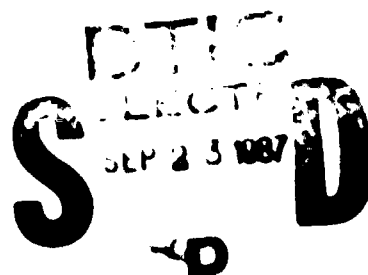
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19. execute it. Second, in a retrograde operation, gaining command and control over the forces involved is the first major problem of the commander. Third, retrograde operations may have significant political implications. Fourth, the civilian population may have great impact on retrograde operations. Finally, fire support assets need to be prioritized to the units conducting a retrograde. None of these lessons were found in any current doctrine. FM 100-5 Operations is the best source of retrograde doctrine but is not specific enough. It is recommended that an operational level manual be written with a specific section devoted to retrograde doctrine. Also, a better understanding of retrograde operations would occur if they were part of wargaming in the American military school system.

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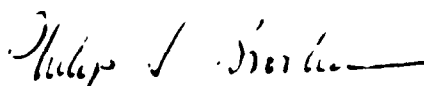
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ABSTRACT

Retrograde at the Operational Level of War. By Major Bruce A. Brant. USA. 53 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the doctrine of retrograde operations. Specifically, it answers the question: does current doctrine provide sufficient guidance for retrograde operations at the operational level of war? To answer the question the historical examples of the Germans' Ardennes-Alsace Offensive of 1944 and the Chinese Communist Offensive of 1950 are analyzed. A comparison is made between the major operational problems found in each example and the published doctrine of that era. The evolution of retrograde doctrine after each conflict is also examined to observe if any changes occurred that were influenced by the previous experience. Current doctrine is compared to past doctrine as well as the problems encountered in the two examples. A conclusion is then made as to the adequacy of established retrograde doctrine.

Five operational retrograde lessons were found in the historical examples. First, the operational commander must plan for retrograde and have a realistic criteria of when to execute it. Second, in a retrograde operation, gaining command and control over the forces involved is the first major problem of the commander. Third, retrograde operations may have significant political implications. Fourth, the civilian population may have great impact on retrograde operations. Finally, fire support assets need to be prioritized to the units conducting a retrograde. None of these lessons were found in any current doctrine. FM 100-5 Operations is the best source of retrograde doctrine but is not specific enough. It is recommended that an operational level manual be written with a specific section devoted to retrograde doctrine. Also, a better understanding of retrograde operations would occur if they were part of wargaming in the American military school system.



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Introduction

Military doctrine is used by nations as an expression of how they will fight major conflicts, battles, and campaigns. Derived from this doctrine should be the tactics, force design, logistical structure, equipment and training needed to support it. Doctrine is developed from theories and principles gained through experience and influenced by developments in technology, war gaming, exercises, changes in mission, new threats, and several other variables. It must be definitive enough to guide operations while remaining versatile enough to accommodate rapid and unforeseen changes. Finally, the doctrine must be uniform, understood throughout the force structure if it is to be of any use.¹ If doctrine is inadequate, misinterpreted, or not used, the force may not be effective.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the doctrine of retrograde operations. Specifically, it will answer the question: does current doctrine provide sufficient guidance for retrograde operations at the operational level? This question is critically important because if our leaders and staffs are not prepared for this type of operation through large scale exercises, which seldom occur, then they must rely on clear, cogent, well defined doctrine. If there is inadequate doctrine in this area, it must be corrected as soon as possible or the Army may have to suffer the consequences.

The methodology used for this monograph includes the examination of two historical case studies followed by an analysis of the results found in the studies and finally a

comparison of the studies with current doctrine. The historical case studies are the examination of the retrograde operations at the operational level during the Germans' Ardennes-Alsace Offensive of 1944 followed by the Chinese Communist Offensive of 1950. The major retrograde problem areas are analyzed to determine if the published doctrine of the era in which each major engagement took place was sufficient. The evolution of retrograde doctrine of each conflict is examined to observe if any changes occurred that were influenced by the previous experience. Current doctrine is compared to past doctrine as well as the problems encountered in the two examples. Finally, a conclusion is made as to the adequacy of established retrograde doctrine.

Baron De Jomini said, "Retreats are certainly the most difficult operations in war."² Clausewitz added, "When a battle is lost, the strength of the army is broken--its moral even more than its physical strength. A second battle without the help of new and favorable factors would mean outright defeat, perhaps even absolute destruction."³ Both authors wrote their thoughts on retreat after observing the effects of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in which the Grand Army disintegrated from an effective strength of approximately 95,000 to less than 10,000.⁴ Because of the increases in speed, size of the battlefield, and lethality, retrograde operations today are even more complex and may be just as decisive as when Napoleon was trying to fight his way back to France from Moscow.

Current doctrine defines retrograde as, "a movement to the

rear or away from the enemy." The purpose of a retrograde operation is to preserve forces, gain time to establish a new defense, or create initiative by setting the terms of battle. The operational commander tries to prevent friendly forces from being placed in an unfavorable situation while moving additional combat power to positions that take advantage of giving up space for time or weakening a zone to mass forces elsewhere. The commander can then return to shaping the battlefield to conform to the successful attainment of the overall objective.

Current doctrine specifies three types of retrograde operations: delays, withdrawals and retirements. Delays are conducted when there is insufficient combat power in sector successfully to defend or attack against the threat in the zone of operations. They may also be used to draw the enemy into conditions that facilitate a successful counterattack. Withdrawals are used to move units out of the immediate combat zone by disengaging with the enemy. The forces can then be relocated in a new area to provide additional mass to a sector, to rest or reconstitute the unit, or to adjust the position of the unit's defense. Retirements are movements to the rear by forces not in contact with the enemy. These units can then be used for any of the reasons already mentioned.*

Very little doctrine has been developed for operational level retrograde. This is odd considering the complexity of executing such an operation. In a war with the Warsaw Pact, it may also be the initial operation NATO must accomplish before gaining the initiative. The operational commander, because of

the size of the sector and amount of forces involved, has to control the simultaneous execution of offensive, defensive, and retrograde missions to ensure the safety of the force and the future placement of combat power to be able to strike at the decisive moment and place.

This paper focuses on what doctrine the commander is given by which to execute a retrograde. In each historical example the operational commanders had established doctrine as an aid in their decision making process. Was it enough or could it have been better?

The Ardennes-Alsace Offensive - 1944-45

"It is the nature of things that a retreat should be continued until the balance of power is reestablished-whether by means of reinforcements or the cover of strong fortresses or major natural obstacles or the overextension of the enemy."? Clausewitz

On 16 December, 1944, at 0530 hours, the last great German offensive of World War II started with the firing of over 2,000 artillery pieces.⁶ The operation was an excellent example of mobile armored forces with an initial local superiority attempting to break through into the rear of the enemy's main forces. The emphasis of the operation was speed and concentrated combat power enhanced by operational surprise. The conditions may be similar to what might be found during an attack on NATO by the Warsaw Pact.

Strategic Situation

By the Fall of 1944 the Western Alliance had brought their armies almost to the borders of Germany. In the east the Soviet

forces were in East Prussia threatening Budapest and Vienna.

After the breakout from the Normandy bridgehead in July, American and British forces rapidly pushed into Holland, France, and Belgium and were closing on the western borders of Germany. Although the Soviet forces were far stronger in numerical terms, it was the Anglo-American advance that Hitler regarded as the more dangerous as it posed a direct threat to the Ruhr industrial area. Hitler regarded the western Allies as a softer target. He considered that the infliction of further heavy losses on their forces, especially in the case of the British who were tired after five years of war, was likely to be of greater value than any damage his troops could inflict on the less sensitive Soviet government. A major factor in his reasoning was that the size of force Germany was able to muster for an offensive had, at this stage in the war, little chance of achieving a decisive victory in the east where some 550 enemy divisions were deployed; whereas the western Allies' overall total of 96 divisions was more manageable.

The main objective of the offensive was the destruction of the 25-30 Allied divisions north of the Ardennes region. This was to be carried out in three phases. First, create a penetration through the Ardennes seizing bridgeheads across the Meuse River between Liege and Namur. Second, continue the attack toward Antwerp. Finally, having cut the Allied supply lines east of the thrust, the main German force would attack eastwards supported by other attacks from the far side of the pocket crushing the Allied forces caught in the pocket. Hitler

hoped that if he succeeded the will of the Western Allies' to continue the struggle would be weakened to the point where they might negotiate a settlement. The achievement of this goal rested upon the attainment of two related tactical objectives: the cutting of the Allied northern supply lines and seizure of their major forward supply base at Antwerp and the destruction of the forces trapped inside the pocket.⁹

To support Hitler's plan, three armies were massed in the Ardennes without significant observation by the Allies. The Sixth Panzer Army was in the north with the mission of the main thrust to Antwerp. It consisted of two panzer corps and an infantry corps for a total of nine divisions. South of Sixth Panzer Army was Fifth Panzer Army with the mission of supporting Sixth Army's thrust by protecting its left flank. It consisted of two panzer corps and an infantry corps. It also had an army reserve for a total of eight divisions in Fifth Panzer Army. On its southern flank was Seventh Army whose mission was to establish blocking positions in the south along the river Semois thus protecting the southern boundary of the German penetration. Seventh Army had three infantry corps and a reserve for a total of nine divisions.¹⁰

The Allied front in Western Europe stretched from the Vosges Mountains to the sea north of Antwerp. Along this 500 mile front were three army groups of almost 70 divisions. On the southeastern flank was General Jacob L. Devers' Sixth Army Group containing the Seventh U.S. Army and the First French Army. To the north, from the Saar to the Roer, was General Omar

N. Bradley's Twelfth Army Group consisting of the Ninth, First and Third American Armies. On the far northern flank was placed Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's 21st Army Group made up of the First Canadian Army and the Second British Army.

The main German attack was to take place in the First Army sector. This unit, commanded by LTG. Courtney H. Hodges, held about 120 miles of front from Aachen to Luxembourg with LTG. George S. Patton's Third Army on its southern flank and LTG. William H. Simpson's Ninth Army to its north. Three corps were in line under Hodges in December, 1944: VII Corps in the north, pushing toward the Roer; V Corps in the center, driving toward the dams that controlled the level of the Roer; and VIII Corps in the south. The VIII Corps, commanded by LTG Middleton, was deliberately spread very thin with only four divisions to hold about 85 miles of front. The bulk of U.S. strength had been concentrated to the north and south of the Ardennes to support the main efforts then planned while the Ardennes sector, with its difficult terrain and limited road network, was considered a quiet rest area and was held by new outfits and divisions being rested and reconstituted.¹¹

The Battle

On the morning of the 16th, Hodge's First Army was continuing to attack toward the Roer dams but so far had engaged only four divisions. South of the Ardennes, Patton's Third Army was concentrating for an attack against the Saar which was to start on the 19th. Bradley had a meeting with Eisenhower at

or the Corps commanders even though they had direct communications.

Eisenhower and Bradley agreed on a course of action. First, they wanted to hold the shoulders of the penetration, particularly the Monschau area on the north and the Bastogne area on the south, while preventing penetration across the Meuse or in the Liege-Namur area. Finally, they intended to counterattack with the Third Army from the south followed by an attack from the north with forces under Montgomery. There was no mention of a retrograde plan.

The first enemy main thrust was along the Elze road in the Ardennes between the I and VIII Corps being held by the 99th, 1st, and 116th Infantry Divisions along with the 14 Cavalry Regiment. South of this, the 28th and 4th Infantry Divisions with elements of the 9th Armored Division were also hard hit. Several units were bypassed, surrounded, and eventually surrendered or were destroyed. However, many units executed a dogged defense and delaying actions while they moved to the rear. Eventually, units were forced back to the

positions under the threat of annihilation. Strongly, they were redeployed to the important road network intersections such as St. Vith and Bastogne. Elements were soon released to the rear where the 101st Airborne Corps under Lt. Matthew Ridgway. The 101st Airborne, with added armor units, moved to Bastogne while the 82nd Airborne went further north. Eisenhower ordered the 1st Airborne Division, newly arrived from England, to assemble in the Herve area to protect against an attack across the Meuse. The

17th Airborne Division was also ordered over from England to help the 11th secure along the Meuse south of Givet. Eisenhower also ordered additional infantry units that were scheduled to arrive on the continent later to leave immediately so he could reconstitute a reserve.¹³

On the 17th, a critical battle was continuing over the control of the Elsenborn ridge which was the northern shoulder of the penetration. The 2nd and 99th Infantry Divisions were able to throw the Germans off their time schedule and force the Sixth Panzer Army commander to commit follow-on forces sooner than desired. Elsewhere, St. Vith was being reinforced but the area between it and Wiltz was a no man's land of isolated American units trying to escape or delay the German thrust.

By the 18th, with the help of ULTRA, the size and objectives of the German offense could be determined. If Eisenhower could concentrate enough units at the critical points before the Germans reached the Meuse, he could contain the offense and set up the opportunity to cut off and destroy three German armies.

The most important meeting of the campaign occurred on the 17th at Bradley's main headquarters in Verdun. Besides Bradley, the participants included Eisenhower, Patton, Devers, Strong, Tedder, a representative from Montgomery, and several staff officers. The purpose of the meeting was to decide on a course of action for the remainder of the operation.

By the time of the meeting the Germans had been able to punch a deep bulge in the American lines. First Army was barely

able to contain the attack, had suffered a significant number of casualties, and had several large units cutoff. Eisenhower had two choices: conduct a general delaying action toward the Meuse which would buy time to bring in additional forces or to risk an immediate attack from the south using Patton's Third Army. The offensive minded generals all agreed to try the attack. Patton was already planning the move and said he could attack with three divisions on the 22nd. Three divisions were not enough but it was assumed that Middleton's corps would be transferred from Hodges to Patton which would give Patton over six divisions. They did not know that Middleton's 106th Division was by this time all but destroyed.

Eisenhower approved the attack which was to be conducted under Bradley's close supervision. Not believing Patton could move so soon, Eisenhower set the day of the attack for the 23rd or 24th. The next day it was learned that Middleton's Corps was so badly hurt that it could not help in an offensive action. To make up for the losses units from Eddy's XII Corps and Walker's XX Corps were assigned to Patton. Also, Devers moved Haislip's XV Corps northeast to occupy most of the old Third Army front.¹⁴

By the 20th Ridgway had the 101st at Bastogne and the 82d around Werbomont to help at St. Vith. He was also given the 7th Armored Division and the 30th Infantry Division from Ninth Army. On the northern shoulder, Hodges positioned the 1st, 2nd and 9th Infantry Divisions to support the 99th.¹⁵

A very important decision was made by Eisenhower on the

20th. He split command over the battle area in half by giving Montgomery responsibility for the northern portion of the bulge while allowing Bradley to control the southern half. This was done for several reasons. First, Bradley's headquarters was south of the bulge at Luxembourg City. He refused to move it although it was cutoff from his northern forces. He could easily have lost control over much of his force. Second, Eisenhower needed reserves to hold the Meuse and possibly to be committed to action. The only forces available were from Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Involving Montgomery would therefore ensure a large reserve force for Eisenhower. Finally, Eisenhower wanted Bradley to concentrate on the counterattack of the Third Army from the south.

The decision to give command of the northern shoulder to Montgomery and adding to his command the Fifth and Ninth U.S. Armies was one of the most controversial of the War. It was compounded by Montgomery's different tactical philosophy from the Americans.¹⁶

Montgomery's first inclination was to "tidy up" the battlefield. He suggested a withdrawal from the action at Butgenbach and a retirement of the northern shoulder to straighten out the lines between Monschau and Malmedy. This was contrary to what Hodges wanted. American commanders were not used to losing the initiative and retreating. Hodges felt that a retrograde would broaden the German bulge and negate the sacrifices of the divisions on the northern shoulder.¹⁷ Although Montgomery allowed Hodges flexibility in moving his

forces, his intent was clear. He did not want any more units wasted by being cut off and he wanted a cohesive defense.

The American Ninth Army in the north was ordered to extend its flank to take over some of the First Army's front, as Devers had done south of the Third Army sector. Montgomery also ordered LTG J. Lawton Collins, VII Corps commander, to be prepared to counterattack south as soon as the northern shoulder was out of danger and the German offense could be slowed or stopped.

By the 23rd the northern shoulder defense had stopped and turned the Germans. But the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies were now driving toward the west. St. Vith and Bastogne were all but surrounded.

The defenders of St. Vith, short of food and ammunition, mauled for six days of fighting by elements of eight German divisions, were at great risk of being overrun. Montgomery sent a message to MG R.W. Hasbrouck, commanding the 7th Armored Division and its attached units, ordering a withdrawal before they were totally cutoff and annihilated.¹⁰

This decision, like many of Montgomery's, was regarded by many American generals as premature or unnecessary. But as retired General Bruce C. Clarke, who commanded Combat Command B of the 7th Armored Division at St. Vith remembered, "If it hadn't been for Montgomery, The First U.S. Army and especially the troops in the St. Vith salient, would have ended up in a debacle that would have gone down in history."

About the matter, Montgomery wrote, "I instructed Hodes

to inform Ridgway (the corps commander) that I had cancelled his order (to hold St. Vith) and to tell him that I was not prepared to lose a very good American division because of the sentimental value of a few square miles of ground: men's lives being of more value to me than ground which is of no value. His (Ridgway) philosophy was that American troops never withdraw."¹⁹

In the south Patton had begun his attack to relieve Bastogne. Montgomery's XXXth Corps was also now in position to cover all crossing sites to the Meuse.

On the 24th things began to get better for the Allies. The weather cleared and with it came the powerful American Air Force. Montgomery continued to withdraw forces before they were overrun to ensure a cohesive defense. He also tried to provide Collins with forces for a counterattack.

From the 24th to the 26th the initiative of the battle shifted to the Allies. LTG Collins began a counterattack that defeated the 2nd Panzer Division and all but halted the German drive in the northern sector of the salient. On the 25th Third Army troops were able to break through and relieve the pressure on encircled Bastogne. This was the turning point of the German offensive in the Ardennes. Although the fighting continued in the salient for several weeks, the Allies had regained the initiative.²⁰

On December 28 Hitler admitted failure in an address to his generals. However he felt that while the Americans were oriented on the Ardennes and because they had to thin their forces out along the front to reinforce the First Army, a new

offensive of eight divisions could make significant gains in the Alsace region.²¹

By the time this new offensive began, Eisenhower had learned several important lessons. Intelligence had already determined that an attack was likely in Alsace. The Allies were not going to be surprised again. Because of high casualties and the confusion on the battlefield that the Ardennes had created, the new German attack was to be fought differently. At his daily staff conference on December 26th, Eisenhower decided that Sixth Army Group, which covered the Alsace region, would withdraw from the Saar and Rhine Rivers back to the Vosges Mountains, thereby shortening the line and freeing two or three divisions. Devers received a directive from SHAEF telling him to pass to defensive positions along the Vosges and not to become decisively engaged.²²

Devers, with the American mindset of offensive action, stalled. On 1 January Devers visited Eisenhower who again directed prompt withdrawal of VI Corps to main positions in the Vosges. A cable followed directing that, "as to the units east of the main positions (the Vosges), their integrity must not be endangered." Rather than losing forces they were to, "be prepared to accept loss of territory east of Vosges and all its political consequences."²³ Eisenhower had learned one of Montgomery's cardinal principles: the conservation of his strength and the protection of his men from needless casualties to fight another day.²⁴

As a result of the conference with Eisenhower in Paris and

because the German's operation Nordwind had already started. Devers ordered his army commanders, generals de Lattre and Patch, to remain on the defensive. He listed three intermediate positions to which the forces in northern Alsace could fall back. He also directed, at Eisenhower's insistence, that the Alsace plain be covered with only reconnaissance and observation units. This strengthened the area being attacked by the Germans but put Strasbourg at great risk.²⁰

The retrograde of forces committed to the defense of Strasbourg created one of the biggest political problems faced by Eisenhower during WW II. The French opinion was that 100,000 inhabitants of Strasbourg would have to be evacuated. Another 300,000 to 400,000 inhabitants of the area would be subject to possible reprisals by the Germans. French generals de Gaulle and Juin would not permit this to happen. They refused on political and humanitarian grounds rather than military logic to allow the Germans to reoccupy French territory. On 2 January General Juin indicated that the French might remove their forces from the Supreme Commander's control if he persisted in his plan to withdraw. On 3 January, General Patch ordered his forces to evacuate Strasbourg. The French military governor of the city, General Schwartz, warned of terrible reprisals the Germans would take against inhabitants of Strasbourg in case of withdrawal and added that he could not undertake any such action without a direct order from the French government.²¹

Eisenhower, under intense pressure from the French, finally rescinded his order. He instructed Devers to withdraw only from

the tip of the salient, to the extreme northeastern corner of France back almost twenty miles to the Moder River. This would create a more cohesive defensive line. He also adjusted the inter-army boundry to give responsibility for defending Strasbourg to the French. Although satisfying the French, the order had little consequence because by the third day of the offense, Seventh Army had almost brought operation Nordwind to a halt. This brought an end to the German winter offensive of 1944-45.²⁷

Analysis

The German winter offensive 1944-45 is an excellent example of why retrograde planning at the operational level is critical. The study shows how the Americans, unfamiliar at this point in the war with major enemy counteroffenses, were unwilling to give ground. On the other hand Montgomery, having North African experience, knew the value of giving ground to save troops, buy time, and create a cohesive defense.

One of the major problems that faced the American operational commanders on 16 December 1944 was whether they should conduct a retrograde. The 1944 FM 100-5 Operations, states that retrograde is used to "avoid battle in a disadvantageous situation...to gain time without fighting a decisive engagement....The general purpose of the operation is to regain or preserve freedom of action of our main forces."²⁸ At least by the 17th it was apparent to all commanders that their units were decisively engaged by an overwhelming force and that they had lost the initiative. They were reacting to the

enemy and had lost their freedom of action. However, there was never a plan for a retrograde by an operational commander.

Just how bad was the situation? As stated earlier, General Bruce C. Clarke felt that only the order by Montgomery, to evacuate St. Vith, although the Army and Corps commanders had previously told him to stay, saved the units fighting there. Mr. Charles B. MacDonald (author of several books on the campaign and a participant in the action) states, "The order of no retrograde movement across the front was a grave error. Several units were overrun and destroyed needlessly." The "hold at all costs" orders came from the operational commanders. When MG. Jones, commander of the 106th Infantry Division, finally talked his corps commander, LTG. Middleton, into allowing his units to fall back, the order was overruled by First Army Headquarters.²⁹ Not only did the operational commanders fail to acknowledge a need to retrograde, Patton and Gerow wanted to continue their planned attacks. It was not until the second day of the offensive that Hodges allowed MG. Gerow, the V Corps commander, to call off his attack.

Not mentioned in the 1944 FM 100-5 Operations nor the 1-41 FM 100-15 Larger Units, but demonstrated during this battle, is another purpose of a planned retrograde which is to reestablish command and control over the forces being attacked. This was one of the major reasons Montgomery wanted a planned withdrawal back to a point where a cohesive defense could be established. Instead of encircled units, mass confusion, and a broken defensive line, he could gain control over the situation and .

secure a strong organized defense. Montgomery would later say about the situation, "There are plenty of American troops available and they merely wanted sorting out."³⁰

Another retrograde problem faced by Eisenhower was the different philosophies of the Allies. Combined operations are not mentioned in the 1944 FM 100-5 or the 1942 FM 100-15. As already stated, American and British views on retrograde were very different. Eisenhower learned a major lesson in the early days of the engagement about retrograde. He was not going to repeat his mistakes further south during the German attack in the Alsace. He ordered Devers to fall back, not risk decisive action and trade space for lives. Unfortunately the land he was giving back to the Germans and the people living there were French. The thought of reprisals against the French caused a great political and military crisis for Eisenhower. It almost split the French from the Alliance. When planning a retrograde the operational commander must be aware of the political pressures and humanitarian risks involved.

It is clear that Eisenhower and the other operational commanders learned several lessons from the German Winter Offensive. First, commanders must be aware of when to order a retrograde. This was stated in both the 1944 FM 100-5 Operations and the 1942 FM 100-15 Larger Units and they should have been aware of it. Also, a retrograde operation gives the commander time to gain command and control of the situation. He can then build a plan to regain the initiative. Finally, a retrograde operation conducted through territory of an allied

nation may not support the commander's plan if he intends to give up that terrain to the enemy. The political consequences may be too great.

After World War II many schools within the U.S. Army began a review of the lessons learned in combat. Their lessons were incorporated into new field manuals. However, in the subject of retrograde doctrine very little changed. When the 1942 FM 100-15 and the 1944 FM 100-5 are compared to the 1950 FM 100-15 and 1949 FM 100-5 it is evident that no new ideas were published. In fact, the paragraphs in the retrograde sections are almost word for word the same.

The Chinese Offensive November 1950-January, 1951

On 15 September 1950 the amphibious landing at Inchon Korea was initiated by General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief United Nations Command. The purpose of the landing was to relieve enemy pressure on the Eighth Army, commanded by LTG Walter H. Walker, in the Fusan perimeter and to seize the offensive initiative from the North Koreans. The landing of U.S. X Corps, commanded by MG Edward M. Almond and the simultaneous breakout of the Fusan perimeter by the Eighth Army, were successful. By the middle of September, X Corps and Eighth had linked up and were driving the North Korean Army north of the 38th parallel.

The strategic offensive continued successfully. Republic of Korea (ROK) forces pushed across the 38th parallel into North

Korea on 1 October and were joined by the Eighth Army on 9 October. By 20 October the North Korean capital of Pyongyang was captured and U.S. X Corps had redeployed from Inchon to link up with ROK forces at Wonson.

MacArthur's intention was to advance up the entire front of the North Korean peninsula with X Corps along the east coast and Eighth Army on the west to create a sweeping envelopment. X Corps would move north to the Yalu River and then turn west to drive remaining enemy forces into the Eighth Army.³¹

A unique command and control arrangement was instituted because of the wide front and the mountainous terrain in the central region of the peninsula. Each operational force acted independently because they were unable to provide mutual support. Their overall control and coordination was directed by MacArthur in Tokyo. Also, Almond's corps was the size of an army. He commanded the U.S. First Marine Division, the Third and Seventh Divisions and the I ROK Corps consisting of the Third and Capital Divisions. The Eighth Army had nine divisions in three corps, the U.S. I and IX and the ROK II.³²

While United Nations forces pushed through North Korea, China began threatening intervention. Although two significant combat actions took place with Chinese forces on 1 November, MacArthur believed that Chinese Communist forces were not deployed in large numbers and that Peking would not enter the conflict unless Manchuria was invaded. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency was of the same opinion. Although Chinese forces were present MacArthur considered that to suspend the

advance would be a ... North Korea ... decided ... time ... Capital Division as far as ... Division on the ...

The Eighth Army advance began ... against ... second day ... held ... Division and the ... able to state ... to disengage ... strong ... approximately ... North ... North ...

When the ... three ... Division ... the ...

of Hungnam. From 12 to 24 December the corps engaged in a succession of withdrawals from its front. Heavy bombardment from naval ships and Marine and Naval air strikes assisted materially in the success of the land evacuation. The First Marine Division cleared Hungnam on 14 December and, as the remainder of the X Corps troops embarked, the beachhead contracted progressively. The Third and Seventh Infantry Divisions defended the beachhead initially, then the Third Division was left alone supported by Naval gunfire, the Third Division Artillery, and Naval, Marine, and Air Force planes which helped prevent the formation of enemy concentrations while the forces embarked gradually.

By December 24 the evacuation of what had once been a 25,000 square mile segment of liberated territory was completed. Approximately 105,00 troops, 17,500 vehicles, 350,000 tons of cargo, and 98,000 Korean civilians had been evacuated from Hungnam and once again the enemy was in control of all Korea north of a line that ran generally along the 38th parallel.³⁴

By decisive retrograde operations by the forces of MacArthur, Walker, and Almond, destruction of the U.N. forces and probable loss of South Korea was averted. But the Communist offensive was not over. While Eighth Army built their defenses north of Seoul, X Corps landed at Fusan and came under Walker's control as the army reserve.

On 23 December the Eighth Army's command and control capability was severely impaired by the loss of LTG Walker in an automobile accident. He was replaced on the 26th by LTG Matthew

B. Ridgway. On his way to Korea Ridgway was briefed in Tokyo by MacArthur. He was given complete control of Eighth Army while MacArthur retained overall command of ground, sea, and air operations.³⁷

Ridgway's first priority was to establish a cohesive defense for the next blow of the offensive that he knew would come as soon as the Communist forces could build a supportive logistical base. Ridgway found an Eighth Army that was very disorganized. Several divisions were at only two thirds or less of their fighting strength in weapons and personnel. The First Marine Division had just arrived in the Masan area and the 3rd and 7th Divisions were still being moved by sea.³⁸

Ridgway did a lot in the short time remaining prior to the Communist attack. He added depth to the defensive positions by using native labor to build strongpoints north and south of the Han River. X Corps started assembling at Fusan and rapidly moved north to the battle area. Ridgway added another important part to the defense when he prepared plans for retrograde operations which were "thoroughly coordinated between the several corps, particularly the I and IX Corps in the critical area."³⁹ Ridgway explained, "I had known that if the Chinese came in strength we could not hold for long. Our job, therefore, was to fight a stubborn delaying action: to kill as many of them as we could, and then under pressure to break off action quickly, and fall back swiftly across the Han to a new defensive line that had been prepared, fifteen miles to the south."⁴⁰

On 1 January 1951 the Communist forces continued their offensive with attacks by 400,000 Chinese soldiers and 100,000 reconstituted troops of the North Korean Army. Although Ridgway committed his reserve, X Corps, the U.N. forces were pushed back. On 3 January, Ridgway gave the order to withdraw south of the Han and once again to evacuate Seoul.

The retrograde movement to the new defensive line was a major accomplishment. Over 100,000 U.N. troops with their equipment were north of the Han River. While the Eighth Army fought a delaying action, a mass refugee problem occurred because over a million people were trying to get across the bridges on the Han before the Communists entered Seoul. As units moved to the bridges and traffic dangerously backed up, Ridgway gave the order to halt all but military forces from crossing the bridges. Refugees, now in a panic state, attempted to cross the Han on the ice. Ridgway observed the operation with mixed emotions. "A great part of our Eighth Army had been saved. As bitterly as I regretted the necessity for withdrawal, I took comfort from this fact."⁴¹

Stubborn resistance by the Eighth Army, plus the Far East Air Force's close air support and interdiction of Communist lines of communications, slowly halted the momentum of the attack. By 15 January, the U.N. position stabilized some 50 miles south of the 38th parallel, from Pyongtaek on the west coast to Samchok on the east.

Analysis

The retrograde operation by the Eighth Army and X Corps was

initially reported by the media as a great military disaster. But later accounts confirmed that the operation was highly successful and that disaster was averted. Despite terrific Chinese pressure, the withdrawal was accomplished according to plan and assured the establishment of a new cohesive line of defense. Many analysts call the operation one of the most successful feats of arms and rate it close to the brilliant Inchon landing. In comparison with losses of forces of similar size under equally fierce combat conditions, the casualties were amazingly light. Of the U.S. divisions initially attacked by the Chinese, only the Second Division had been badly hurt and its 25 percent casualties were hardly comparable with the 50 percent losses of some American units in the Battle of the Bulge.⁴² It is evident from these statistics that, despite undeniable local confusion inevitable in a hasty withdrawal, under the circumstances the operation was creditably performed.

The first major problem encountered at the operational level was to decide if there was a need to retrograde. MacArthur almost waited too long to issue the orders to withdraw. Secretary of State Dean Acheson observed that MacArthur had been "digging a hole without an exit." The U.N. commander urged his field commanders to continue the attack for four days after the first enemy breakthrough, withholding retrograde orders until his center units had lost all fighting cohesion and the enemy was threatening the inside flanks of his divided forces, isolating his eastern units and pushing his western wing into the sea. By then it was obvious that the

Chinese had enough forces to envelop both Eighth Army and X Corps and still have enough fresh troops to retake Seoul.⁴³

On 28 November, during the heaviest fighting, MacArthur summoned Almond and Walker to Tokyo to decide how to control the situation. This meeting resulted in a decision to have Eighth Army withdraw as far as necessary to keep it from being outflanked by Chinese forces, and X Corps withdraw to the Hamhung-Hungnam area. MacArthur announced his decision to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) on 30 November, and then proceeded to assert that the disposition of X Corps threatened the main supply lines of the enemy forces attacking Eighth Army. Initially he was going to order the 3rd Division to attack out of the X Corps area into the flank of the enemy attacking Eighth Army. Walker and Almond were able to talk him out of this course of action because there were no roads over the mountain ridges and the division would be isolated.⁴⁴

The JCS were worried that MacArthur would still try an offensive action with the X Corps. They instructed him by ordering, "the entire region northeast of the waist of Korea (X Corps area) should be ignored except for strategic and tactical considerations relating to the security of your command."⁴⁵ To reinforce the need to move all U.N. forces to defensible terrain rather than continue offensive actions, President Truman sent a message through the JCS to MacArthur stating, "We consider that the preservation of the forces is now the primary consideration. Consolidation of forces into beachheads is concurred."⁴⁶

Another major problem for the operational commander is

gaining command and control of his forces so that a retrograde can be carried out. Once permission has been given and plans have been made for the operation some sort of control must be established before successful execution can be initiated. This was very difficult in Korea for two main reasons. First, the forces were in an offensive posture and had to revert to a cohesive defense prior to starting a retrograde. Second, just moving the forces to a concentrated perimeter was a major accomplishment.

X Corps was extended along a 400 mile front operating in what they thought was the exploitation phase of the offensive. The decision to consolidate the corps in the Hamhung-Hungnam defensive perimeter required extremely rapid execution. In order to complete this concentration it was necessary for I ROK Corps to move 300 miles and the 7th Infantry Division to move 200 miles. There were few roads and the enemy was all around them. The 3rd Infantry Division was spread over nearly 100 miles of front and had to concentrate partially, then move approximately 70 miles to the defense perimeter. The center of the corps defense was the First Marine Division which was the only unit reasonably well concentrated. Another problem that added confusion to the retrograde operation was that MacArthur had initially wanted 3rd Infantry Division to fall back and concentrate at Wonsan as part of the plan to attack in the direction of Eighth Army. Because of the fast moving Chinese forces and lack of LOCs the 3rd Division was unable to concentrate for the counterattack mission. As a result, the

division was ordered, a few days later, to concentrate with the rest of the corps at Hamhung-Hungnam.⁴⁷

The Eighth Army also had problems trying to gain control of its forces to allow for an organized retrograde. It was evident by the 27th that the U.N. forces were cut off into pockets as small as companies with the Eighth Army itself being attacked in all directions. Nor could the command stabilize the situation even long enough to bring its superior firepower into action. Nobody had complete control over the units. An entire ROK division was told to exfiltrate to the American perimeter. Walker deployed his reserve, a 5,000 man Turkish Brigade, into the lines without so much as an American advisor or even a coordination briefing. The confusion caused major problems such as when a ROK unit was withdrawing to a fallback position and ran into the Turkish Brigade which inflicted heavy casualties.⁴⁸

Once control was established by the operational commanders, they were able to build up their perimeters, resupply cutoff units, and bring massive firepower from artillery, air, and naval units to slow down the enemy. All of these actions helped to make the retrograde a success.

Another problem which greatly impaired the retrograde operation was the control of refugees. It was estimated that over three million people from North Korea alone followed in the wake of and amongst the U.N. forces. LTG Almond stated, "The extent of the mass exodus of civilians from their homes as a result of the United Nations withdrawals in the X Corps zone had

not been anticipated. For example, 50,000 people attempted to board the last refugee train leaving Hamhung for Hungnam."

Because the problem took on political and humanitarian implications as well as military considerations, MacArthur had to become personally involved. He authorized Almond to use military shipping to evacuate all civil officials and their families, prominent citizens, and all other loyal civilians for which space was available. This policy resulted in the greatest sea evacuation of civilians under combat conditions in history. Over 98,000 people were evacuated by sea.⁴⁷

After Ridgway took command of all ground forces in Korea, he too found the refugee problem critical. After he conveyed the order to evacuate Seoul, the refugees clogged the roads so badly that he placed a general officer in charge of traffic control. Ridgway once said, "It is the basic responsibility of a field commander to anticipate where a crisis of battle will occur and to be there when it develops." On 3 January, Ridgway was along the bridges crossing the Han personally supervising the refugee problem so he could get his troops pulled back in time to establish a good defensive line.⁴⁸

Controlling the refugees took an enormous amount of assets that could have been used in combat. The refugees in some areas kept military traffic from reaching objectives on time. But the biggest problem the refugees created was allowing the infiltration of Communists forces into rear areas.

Infiltration tactics were employed by the enemy for both espionage and military operations. Throughout the war, enemy

troops mingled with refugees fleeing southward because of the reluctance of U.N. pilots to strafe columns of civilians. Whole enemy divisions were deployed in this manner. The enemy could then ambush retreating columns and set up roadblocks. Badly needed U.N. forces had to be detailed from the front to find and destroy the infiltrating units.⁵¹

It is evident from the major retrograde problems at the operational level that there was no written doctrine to help the commanders. The field manuals contained mostly tactical doctrine. There was no doctrine on how to decide if retrograde should be started or on how to gain control of large units spread over hundreds of miles. Also, there was no doctrine on the magnitude of the refugee problem.

Conclusions

The Ardennes-Alsace Offensive of 1944 and the Communist Chinese Offensive of 1950 illustrate several important lessons for the operational commander in the area of retrograde operations. These lessons will first be summarized and then compared to current doctrinal writings.

1. The operational commander must plan for retrograde and have a realistic criteria of when to execute it.

Asked for the best test of a general, Wellington replied, "To know when to retreat, and how to do it."⁵² American historical experience and past doctrinal writings have paid little attention to retrograde. American commanders have seldomly had to retreat at an operational level. Prior to the Ardennes-Alsace offensive, American commanders had had few major

setbacks. They sliced through France at amazing speed, slowed only by their logistical tether. They wanted to end the war before Christmas 1944. When the Germans attacked there was no talk of a retreat. Eisenhower and his operational commanders, during their initial meeting, only discussed calling off their offenses and the repositioning of units to strengthen the shoulders prior to a massive counterattack. While they were planning, two American divisions were in the process of being eliminated as fighting units. This offensive-mindedness prevailed throughout the battle. When Montgomery took over a portion of the battle, he wanted a retrograde of several of his units to allow for a cohesive line of defense rather than encircled pockets. His philosophy was not accepted by Hodges, Ridgway or other American commanders. But, as has been shown, Americans in the battle believed Montgomery's orders to pull back and consolidate the defensive line saved several units from being overrun. As it was, Eisenhower may have been able to keep at least two divisions intact if he had allowed them to pull back to a better defensive position.

It is evident that Eisenhower decided to fight the Alsace portion of the offensive differently. His orders to Devers to plan several rearward defensive phase lines and to give up territory to preserve the force show a better understanding of retrograde operations. Devers, like the other American commanders, did not accept a philosophy other than "hold at all costs" or attack. He failed to carry out Eisenhower's initial instructions and was brought to SHAEF headquarters to be ordered

by Eisenhower in person. With reluctance Devers pulled his forces back and was able to preserve his forces while the German offensive soon stalled.

Another example of a commander who changed his attitudes on retrograde is Ridgway. During the fight in the Ardennes he was reluctant to follow Montgomery's philosophy of establishing a cohesive defensive line in the rear at a cost of giving up terrain. But by the time Ridgway took command of the ground forces in Korea he had learned the usefulness of retrograde. He planned a detailed retrograde prior to the Chinese attack in January. Although he was going to lose the South Korean capital of Seoul if the U.N. forces retreated, he decided it was better to pull the forces back, allow the Communist drive to stall against a new defensive line, and then regain the initiative by starting a new offensive.

2. In a retrograde operation, gaining command and control over the forces involved is the first major problem of the commander.

During the initial attacks in the Ardennes several operational commanders were unaware of the situation and did not take control of the battle. Eisenhower and Bradley first learned of the attacks almost 12 hours after they occurred. They then waited throughout the night to receive more information. They did not pick up the telephone and call the army or corps commanders even though the lines were intact. The situation was unclear to the operational commanders for several days. This included the posture of their own forces. Many commanders did not leave their headquarters to find out for

themselves what was going on. In Charles MacDonald's research, he found only four division or higher commanders that went to the front in an attempt to clarify their perception of the battle.²³ Bradley's refusal to move his headquarters illustrates the lack of emphasis the commanders had in trying to determine the situation and take control of their forces. On the other hand Montgomery immediately moved down to Hodge's headquarters and sent out his special staff officers to subordinate headquarters to keep him informed of the situation. He also made a point of visiting his subordinate commanders. Once he knew the situation he was able to determine that a retrograde was needed to build a cohesive defense. He was then able to establish communications with all his subordinates either through normal channels or through his staff officers.

Korea offered another example of having difficulty gaining command and control. There were several reasons for this. First, MacArthur was trying to run the war from Japan. Second, the Eighth Army and X Corps were hundreds of miles apart and operating independently. Third, within operational commands, units were widely separated and several had significant terrain barriers between them. Fourth, the Communists were able to infiltrate a large force behind U.N. forces that could cut lines of communications.

Like Eisenhower, MacArthur called his operational commanders to his headquarters to decide on a course of action. Unlike Eisenhower his meeting lasted days instead of hours.

Before a retrograde can take place command and control of

The UN must be established...
...and it is not possible to...
...and it is not possible to...

2. Retrograde operations of the UN forces in 1950.

Giving territory back to the enemy was a...
...decision that the operational commander...
...advise national leaders to have...
...Eisenhower had to balance political...
...the front was...
...funds from the alliance...
...Eisenhower had to balance political...
...considerations.

Ridgway also had to weigh the political...
...North Korean army...
...against trying to defend north of the...
...preserve the front and establish a better...
...capital won out over the political...

Another political question that...
...of allied forces. One of the main...
...to give away command of...
...British.²⁴ These same type of...
...NATO--for example, the...
...retrograde from their positions...
...It was a...
...order was given...

extended to the prisoners of war.

4. The extent of movement of the refugee population was a significant consideration.

Although there is little written about the extent of movement of the refugees, the threat of reprisals on civilians in the Alsace region caused such a French reaction that it forced Eisenhower into a decision that was positive, rather than equivocal. Had the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees caused significant problems to German units who were trying to fight their way back to better defensive positions.

In fact, the extent of movement of the refugees was so great that the operational commanders should be in a bind. The refugees got in the way of retreating forces which impaired their freedom of movement. The refugees used significant resources which could have been used in combat. Using refugees was a major method of infiltration by Communist forces. Additional forces had to be used to hunt down enemy units that were mixed with the refugees. The army also had to provide food, shelter, and medical assistance to the refugees. However, the army had to get them out of the way so the army could fight. The commanders from the front line down all had to deal with the refugee problems.

5. First support assets need to be prioritized to the units performing a relief effort.

In the initial relief effort, the support units were not prioritized. The support units were not prioritized, and the support units were not prioritized.

were used to help the delaying forces keep the enemy from sweeping through them to get to the main force. Additional fire support helped compensate for the lack of manpower in the delaying force. Fire support was used to break contact when the final forces began their retrograde. It was used to slow the progress of pursuing enemy forces. Finally, it was used to open holes in enemy defensive positions to allow cutoff forces to maneuver to the rear.

What this means to the operational commander is that he may lose assets needed in other areas. MacArthur used the air force and naval gunfire to keep Communist forces away from Hsinan until it could be evacuated. Future commanders may have to divert air assets, corps artillery units, or even nuclear delivery assets to units performing a retrograde.

Current Doctrine

Most current operational retrograde doctrine is found in FM 100-5 Operations, FM 100-15 (Draft) Corps Operations, and FC 100-16-1 Theater Army, Army Group, and Field Army Operations. All of these manuals have significantly more material on retrograde than their predecessors of the 1940s and 1950s.

The corps manual, written in 1985, is general in nature and stays at a tactical level. It is not specific enough to be of much use to an operational commander. It does not discuss any of the problem areas identified in this paper.

Although FC 100-16-1 does not have much specific doctrine in it nor does it cover the problem areas identified in this paper, it is valuable for three reasons. First, it gives a good

reason for the commander to use a retrograde operation. It states, "The basic purpose of a retrograde is to preserve the integrity of the force for future operations. It delays the enemy, draws him further from his bases of supply, extends his lines of communications, inflicts losses, and diverts combat power."¹¹ Instead of telling what a retrograde operation is, it explains what it can do for the commander. Although written after FC 100-16-1, FM 100-15 Corps Operations does not have this purpose of retrograde in it. Second, the manual makes specific references to operational level units and actions. "Theater retrograde operations are most acceptable when time and space are favorable and initial loss of terrain is compensated for by subsequent territorial gains, destruction of enemy forces and other military or political gains."¹² At least this manual mentions politics as a concern. Finally, the best part of the manual with reference to retrograde is that in the appendices there are examples of different types of operations. One of these is a historical example of a successful retrograde. The example illustrates the principles involved in a retrograde operation far more clearly than just listing them in the text.

By far the best source found that addresses retrograde is the current FM 100-5 Operations. Unlike the corps manual, it explains why a retrograde should occur. It states some of the factors a commander should use when considering a retrograde operation. It gives more specifics than other manuals. Although not in the chapter on retrograde, it has a section about the difficulties of combined operations.

FM 100-5 does not address the problem areas found in this study. As the U.S. Army's capstone manual it should not be as specific as is needed. What needs to be published is a field manual for operational units. All the areas noted in this study should be placed in it either under a retrograde chapter or linked to another chapter such as one discussing political factors or refugees. Historical examples such as those found in the appendix of FC 100-16-1 would greatly aid the understanding of retrograde.

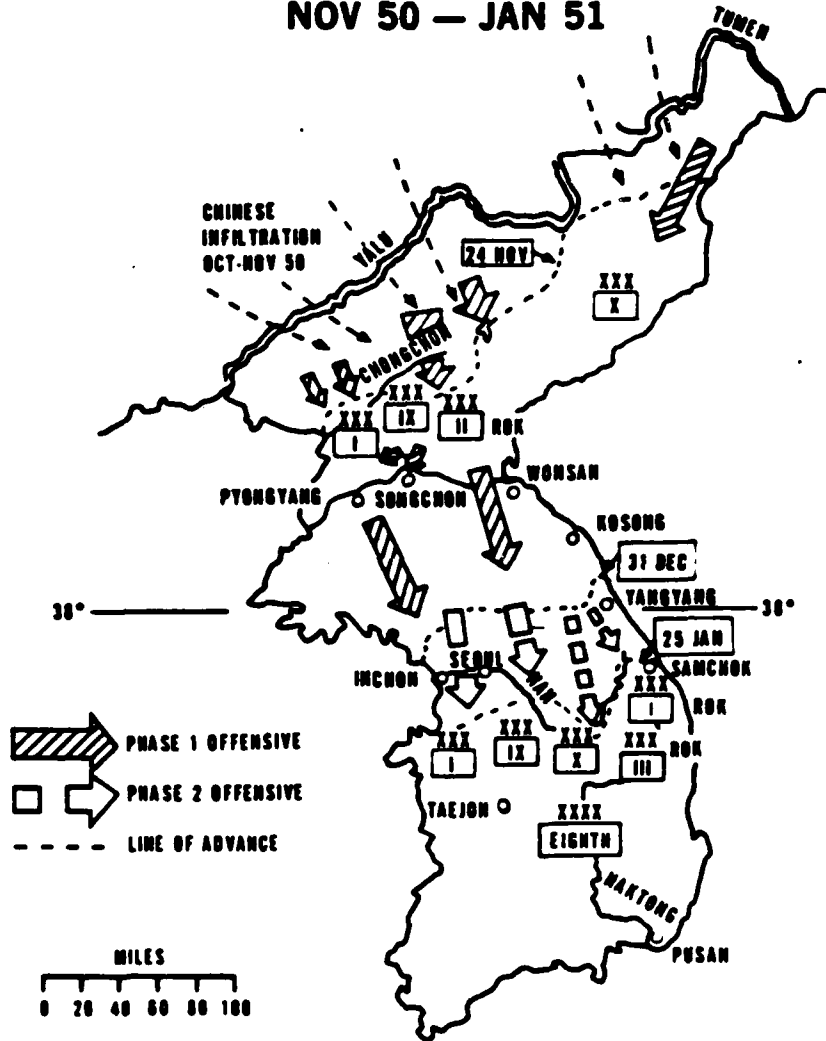
Besides an operational manual a better understanding of retrograde operations would occur if they were part of wargaming in the American military school system. No use of or planning for retrograde operations is presently part of the curriculum at either the Command and General Staff Officers Course or the Advanced Military Studies Program at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Army officers are brought up believing retrograde is just used to get away from a superior force rather than a tool that can be used in both offensive and defensive operations.

Retrograde operations are not fully understood by most of the American army. The problem areas found in this study cannot be found in any manual but should be of great concern to the operational commander. Developing an operational level manual covering the problem areas sighted in this study and including a historical example plus allowing retrograde operations as part of wargaming will greatly aid the understanding of retrograde operations.

MAPS

RETROGRADE BY EIGHTH ARMY

NOV 50 — JAN 51



Source: FC 100-16-1 Theater Army, Army Group and Field Army Operations, p. A-11.

END NOTES

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²⁰MacDonald, A Time for Trumpets, p. 594.

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²²Bowles, p. 17.

²³Fogue, pp. 397-398.

²⁴Fogue, p. 400.

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