

MECHANIZED INFANTRY BRIGADE IN RETROGRADE OPERATIONS

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Abstract: *The experience of post-war military conflicts has highlighted the fact that even in modern warfare there will be frequent situations in which forces of different values will reach the position of withdrawing as a result of previous unfavorable actions. Consistent with the new demands of conflict, we will highlight the fact that this concept has been interpreted over time, and obviously, retrograde is always forgotten and always learned by each generation.*

Keywords: *operations, defense, military capabilities, mechanized brigade.*

Introduction

"If the enemy is strong and I am weak, I withdraw for the time being and avoid any employment - this until the competence of the generals and the efficiency of the troops will be equal again.¹". Universal military historiography records many examples of retrograde from the battlefield, some successful, others resulting in heavy casualties and war material, or even total defeat.

With the admission within the North Atlantic Alliance, Romania's security guarantees have increased exponentially, enjoying today, perhaps, the strongest security environment in modern history. Romania has the protection of NATO, being able to call on its most powerful instrument, namely the activation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which provides that *"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them, ..., it will be considered an attack on all and, consequently, I agree ... to take immediately ... any action it deems necessary, including the use of armed force ..."*². As can be seen from the text of the Treaty, we deduce that a key condition for the activation of Article 5 is the recognition by all signatory states of the existence of an armed attack. At the time of 1949, when NATO was established, Article 5 was intended to be a guarantor of the security of

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¹ Tzu, Sun, *The Art of War*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1998, p. 15

² Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm, accessed 24.10.2021

the signatory states against aggression that could be easily proved by evidence of the deployment of forces and the use of kinetic systems. Given the principle of decisional consensus within the Alliance, the difficulty of discovering and especially attributing aggression in the context of the current hybrid war, a possible aggressor on the territorial integrity of Romania will mask its indications of preparation for a ground operation, so that the intervention of the Alliance should be late, fulfilling at least its strategic objective of proving the inefficiency of the Alliance to protect its territory.

In this context, the conditions for adopting the retrograde result from the analysis of a possible scenario of armed aggression on the Romanian territory, until the activation of art. 5 of the Washington Treaty. Given that, at least in the early stages, the aggressor will have the initiative, the combat actions must be prepared and carried out in such a way that a possible failure of the first operations does not irreparably expose the bulk of the forces and allow it to regroup or retreat. other alignments or in other areas.

Defining the concept of the retrograde operation

What role does the mechanized brigade play in the paradigm of retrograde operation? Although retreat, as a combat action, is found in all combat textbooks starting with the battalion echelon, we consider that the mechanized brigade is the basic echelon for understanding the multidisciplinary nature of the retreat. Due to the existence of most maneuvering, combat support, and logistical support capabilities, the brigade echelon, more precisely the mechanized brigade, is the structure that can efficiently carry out the retrograde operation.

From the study of Romanian and foreign literature, we deduced that retrograde is a complex action, which should not be performed at random, but in an organized and planned manner, when the situation is compromised, and the continuation of the fight is possible only with the risk of defeat. Retrograde should be adopted when this would lead to the highest possible degree of efficiency in the use of one's forces. Also, the retrograde can be willed or imposed, it is executed only with the approval or at the order of the higher echelon, therefore it is necessary to know in advance how to perform this operation.

As a definition, which we can advance, *"retrograde is a combat procedure that is applied mainly in the defensive operation and limited in the offensive operation, which is adopted temporarily, deliberately or under pressure, to remove their forces from under the blows of the enemy, his deception or the disguise of a future action"*³.

Place and role of the retrograde operation

Assuming that the strategic surprise was achieved, we consider that the ground and/or maritime offensive will have a limited objective in the sense that the potential aggressor is not interested in conquering the entire national territory, but only to create the necessary conditions to initiate dialogue with NATO. to achieve strategic objectives at regional or even global level. Thus, we can assume that the opponent's pressure will be overwhelming, wanting to achieve, in the shortest time, the proposed objectives, hoping that the Alliance fails to react or organize and provide an adequate response.

From the point of view of its forces, the operation of defending the national territory must have among its obvious objectives that of creating the conditions for the effective intervention of NATO forces. Therefore, the adoption of at least a temporary retrograde is a natural option for any commander of a large unit. Studying how the retreat took place in the past and analyzing the specialized literature, two peculiarities of its execution are brought to the attention: the retreat by fighting and the retreat with the breaking of the fight.

In the first case (figure 1), the units and large units that retained their fighting capability, but withdrew as a result of the overall situation created in that direction, put up a successive, limited resistance on several alignments from depth, to cause as much damage as possible to the enemy, of the continuous paper, you would reduce the pace and finally, you would stop the offensive on a strong and well-prepared natural alignment. Therefore, in this case, the main purpose of the retreat through combat is to produce as many losses as possible to the enemy, reduce the pace of the

³ Irinel Apostolescu, Dissertation on: *Considerations on the preparation and conduct of the mechanized brigade during the execution of the retrograde*, Publishing House of the National Defense University "Carol I", 2011, p. 14.

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offensive, balance and change the balance of forces, to create favorable conditions for the offensive, and destruction of the enemy.

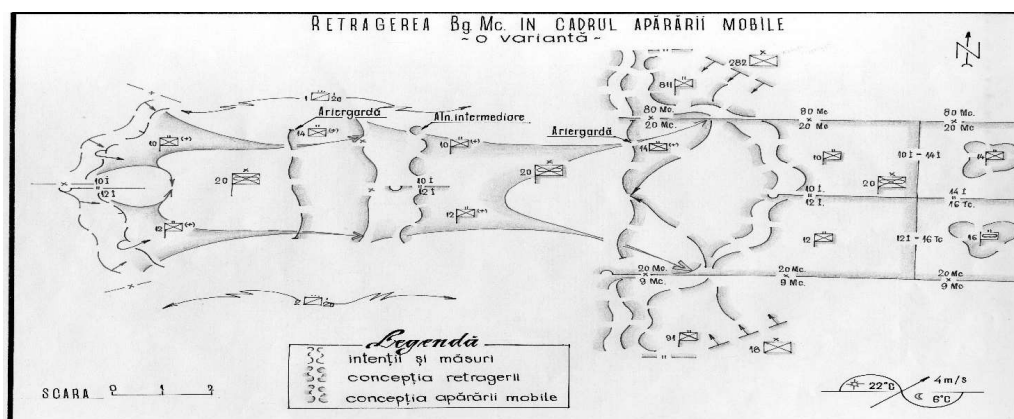


Figure 1. Example of conducting the retrograde operations by the mechanized brigade when structural participants they kept their fighting capacity (source: Irinel Apostolescu, *Dissertation on: Considerations on the preparation and conduct of mechanized brigade actions during the execution of the retreat*, National Defense University Publishing House "Carol I", 2011)

In the second case (figure 2), the units or large units, as a rule, did not retain their fighting ability or were put in a difficult situation, in which case the continuation of the fight was only possible with the risk of a total defeat. As a result, they had to break up the fight independently or under the cover of other forces and retreat deep, in a favorable alignment to continue the fight. In this case, the retreat ensured the evasion of the main forces from under enemy blows, the freedom of maneuver to regroup them in-depth, and the occupation of the defense alignment in an organized manner. In this situation, the main purpose of the retreat was to remove the main forces from enemy fire and move them backward, either to put them for the defense to move to a new alignment or to fulfill a new mission or to restore the ability to the fight.

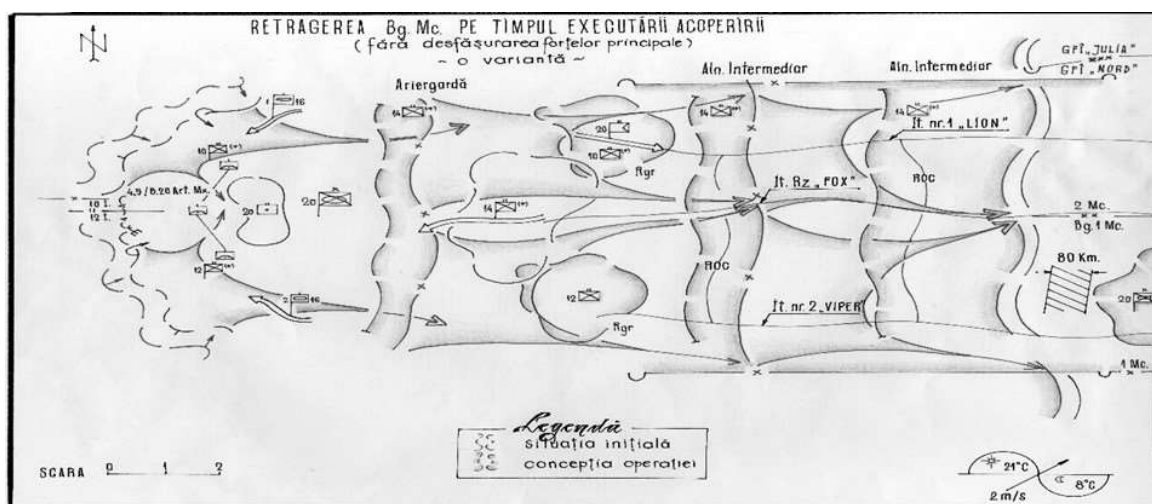


Figure 2. Example of the retrograde of the mechanized brigade when the participating structures they did not keep their fighting ability (source: Irinel Apostolescu, *Dissertation on: Considerations on the preparation and conduct of mechanized brigade action during the execution of the retreat*, National Defense University Publishing House "Carol I", 2011)

Command and control of the retrograde operation

In all retrograde operations, firm control and command over one's maneuvering elements is an essential condition for success. Commanders who conduct retreat operations plan and coordinate modeling operations to increase the likelihood of success. These operations must be aimed at reducing the enemy's fighting power, gaining time for preparing a defensive line-up, or maneuvering the enemy into areas or combat devices that make him vulnerable. As in other types of operations, the spatial factor is extremely important. We believe that the enemy's freedom of movement must be limited as much as possible to slow down his advance, using in this sense artillery fire, but also aviation support.

I believe that the role of the commander in leading the retrograde operation is essential. It can combine different forms of retrograde operations into simultaneous or consecutive actions. For example, the retrograde of one unit may precede the retrograde of another or the delay action performed by one of the forces may cover both operations. The

synchronization of these operations requires detailed planning, continuous coordination, and precise execution.

Theoretical assessments on retrograde

From the point of view of the overall action, the retreat most often covers the aspects of the maneuver of forces and means for moving, simultaneously or successively, the efforts from the front to the depth, with the development of numerous combat actions. The retreat usually begins with the breaking of the fight and the detachment of the enemy and continues with the movement of forces until the established alignment, (the march could be the dominant process of retreat). I emphasize that the movement backward must be very well organized and mastered by the participating structures, executed at the order or with the consent of the commander of the upper echelon, secretly and quickly. The retreat directions will be oriented backward, and the maneuver will be accompanied by the execution of some defensive actions on successive alignments, with genetic arrangements that would favor the defense operation. These actions are carried out either by the forces in contact with the enemy or by the security elements. An important role in the execution of the marching retreat is played by the optimal choice, the moment of setting up the columns and the places of disposition within them of the combat support units (structures), as well as the installation of the safety device. Also, in the realization of the retrograde operation through the process of moving backward (by march), the time available and the organization of the coordination of actions have special importance.⁸

Another procedure for performing the retreat operation, which has the effect of reducing the pace of movement of the enemy, causing losses, and preventing him from performing the parallel pursuit, is the execution of retreat on intermediate alignments with or without the deployment of main forces. This procedure deprives the opponent of the advantage of high mobility.

Analyzing the two procedures, we find that they have specific ways of execution. Thus, in the retrograde operation, the method of a delay from

⁸ Marius-Gill Ivănescu, *Bachelor's thesis*, "Carol I" National Defense University Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 42.

successive positions (figure 3) or the method of a delay from intermediate positions (figure 4) can be used⁹. These methods may change depending on the situation and may be used by the delaying force separately or in combination.

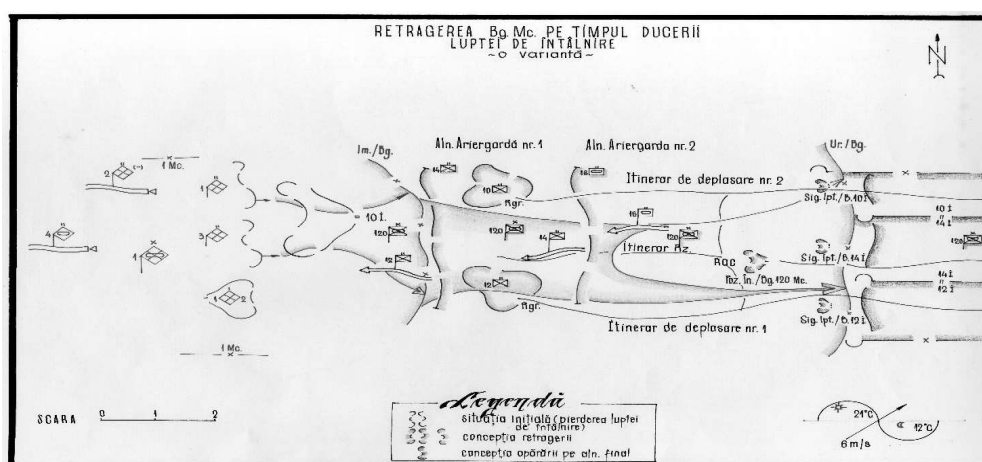


Figure 3. Example of the retrograde of the mechanized brigade when the participating structures use the method of delay from successive positions (source: Irinel Apostolescu, *Dissertation on: Considerations on the preparation and conduct of mechanized brigade during the execution of the retrograde*, Publishing House of the National Defense University "Carol I", 2011

⁹ Irinel Apostolescu, Dissertation with the topic: *Considerations regarding the preparation and development of the mechanized brigade action during the execution of the retreat*, "Carol I" National Defense University Publishing House, 2011, p. 23.

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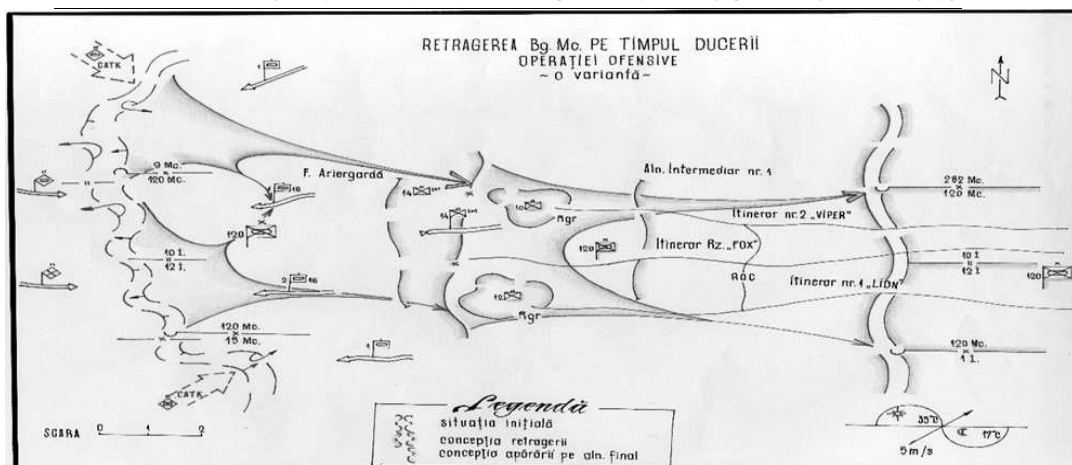


Figure 4. Example of the retrograde of the mechanized brigade when the participating structures use the method of delay from intermediate positions (source: Irinel Apostolescu, *Dissertation on: Considerations on the preparation and development of the mechanized brigade during the execution of the retrograde*, National University Publishing House "Carol I" Defense, 2011)

As we have shown, the retreat is the operation by which the forces in contact with the enemy release themselves to fulfill a new mission. It can be achieved in two ways, namely "retrograde by fighting and retrograde by breaking the fight"¹⁰.

An alternative model of the current military decision-making process

We are all familiar with the military decision-making process or otherwise called the MDMP. Those who have worked in the field of military operations know the strengths, but especially the weaknesses of this process. We all know how time and resource-consuming this is. It is time-consuming because the time by which certain products have to be delivered does not allow the whole process to be completed. At the same time, it is considered unrealistic because it is based on so many uncertainties that it is difficult, if not impossible, to know all the information to choose the optimal solution to

¹⁰ FT-I2, Infantry Battalion combat manual, General Staff of the Land Forces Publishing House, 2015, art. 06291.

solve the tactical problem. Critics also describe it as too dogmatic because the command staff focuses on the process and too little on the quality of its products.

As I pointed out in an article published in the Journal of the Academy of National Security Sciences, I proposed the following six decision-making steps, as will most likely happen when there is a need to adopt the retrograde:

„Step 1 - Operational environment - what exists, has existed and will exist, step 2 - Objectives - how we want to influence the environment/threat/enemy, step 3 - Courses of Action (COA) - including the design of the operation, methods, step 4 - COA analysis - how the COA will influence the operational environment, step 5 - COA evaluation - what value it represents according to the set objectives and step 6 - Decision and execution - communication of the COA to the structures that implement them”¹¹.

This new paradigm of the decision-making process proposed here is the basis of the process, which must be developed and refined to increase its efficiency and make it more precise. I believe that these stages are more friendly to the military system and the military planner, and the most important aspect is that the stages can be developed at the same time.

CONCLUSIONS

It is only natural to consider that at some point in the conduct of a military operation, retrograde is a procedure that will be adopted to meet certain objectives related to either the preservation of forces and means or the gaining of time for Alliance forces. of interventions, or simply to change the balance of forces in a particular area of operation. Regardless of the proposed objectives, the mechanized brigade must be ready to apply the elements of doctrine encountered in combat manuals and to apply quickly and efficiently the command processes to assist the commander in adopting the best solution in planning, organizing, and conducting the operation.

Retrograde, through its constituent elements, is not a simple military action. It requires a lot of coordination, accuracy, and firmness in the act of leadership. These attributes are very difficult to achieve for staff and forces

¹¹ Irinel Apostolescu, *Is it time to change the decision-making process in the Romanian Army ?*, Journal of the Academy of National Security Sciences no. 2/2019, p.64.

that are not trained, that do not know how to adapt to the operational environment, and that in the conditions of modern warfare enjoy a single constant, that it is completely unpredictable and wins the one who manages to -to outperform the opponent in terms of mobility, firepower, but especially the decision-making process.

Knowing the place and role of the structure in the conception of the operation of the upper echelon, the implementation of what is known as *mission command* is another way to ensure decision-making superiority on the battlefield.

I believe that a less elaborate decision is preferable to the lack of a decision, but the implementation of a rapid decision-making process must be the goal of any commander in his relationship with his staff, therefore training the command and finding the most effective way. of the commander-staff symbiosis can be a huge and often frustrating but necessary challenge



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