Chapter 7

Pursuit

In pursuit you must always stretch possibilities to the limit. Troops having beaten the enemy will want to rest. They must be given as objectives, not those that you think they will reach, but the farthest they could possibly reach.

Field Marshal Viscount Allenby of Meggido, Order to XXI Corps, 1917

A *pursuit* is an offensive operation designed to catch or cut off a hostile force attempting to escape, with the aim of destroying it (JP 1-02). Pursuit operations begin when an enemy force attempts to conduct retrograde operations. At that point, it becomes most vulnerable to the loss of internal cohesion and complete destruction. A pursuit aggressively executed leaves the enemy trapped, unprepared, and unable to defend, faced with the options of surrendering or complete destruction. The rapid shifting of units, continuous day and night movements, hasty attacks, containment of bypassed enemy forces, large numbers of prisoners, and a willingness to forego some synchronization to maintain contact with and pressure on a fleeing enemy characterize this type of offensive operation. Pursuit requires swift maneuver and attacks by forces to strike the enemy's most vulnerable areas. A successful pursuit requires flexible forces, initiative by commanders at all levels, and the maintenance of a high operational tempo during execution.

7-1. The enemy may conduct a retrograde when successful friendly offensive operations have shattered his defense. In addition, the enemy may deliberately conduct a retrograde when—

- He is reacting to a threat of envelopment.
- He is adjusting his battlefield dispositions to meet changing situations.
- He is attempting to draw the friendly force into fire sacks, kill zones, or engagement areas.
- He is planning to employ weapons of mass destruction.

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Therefore, the friendly force must always consider the enemy's actions whenever it sees an opportunity to conduct a pursuit.

7-2. Division is the lowest echelon equipped with the intelligence assets to determine if the enemy is conducting a retrograde under Army of Excellence tables of organization and equipment. When faced with enemy attempts to break contact, lower echelons act to maintain contact until a division or corps commander directs them to initiate a pursuit operation.

7-3. Unlike an exploitation, which may focus on seizing key or decisive terrain instead of the enemy force, the pursuit always focuses on destroying the fleeing enemy force. This is seldom accomplished by directly pushing back the hostile forces on their lines of communication (LOCs). The commander in a pursuit tries to combine direct pressure against the retreating forces with an enveloping or encircling maneuver to place friendly troops across the enemy's lines of retreat. This fixes the enemy in positions where he can be defeated in detail. If it becomes apparent that enemy resistance has broken down entirely and the enemy is fleeing the battlefield, any type of offensive operation can transition to a pursuit.

7-4. Conducting a pursuit is a calculated risk. Once the pursuit begins, the commander maintains contact with the enemy and pursues retreating enemy forces without further orders. The commander maintains the pursuit as long as the enemy appears disorganized and friendly forces continue to advance. Like exploitation, pursuit tests the audacity and endurance of soldiers and leaders. In both operations, the attacker risks becoming disorganized. Extraordinary physical and mental effort is necessary to sustain the pursuit, transition to other operations, and translate tactical success into operational or strategic victory.

7-5. The commander must be aware of any approaching culmination point. The enemy is usually falling back on his supply base, and potentially on fresh units, while friendly forces become less effective as they expend resources faster than they can be replaced. Reasons to discontinue the pursuit include the presence of fresh enemy forces, greatly increased resistance, fatigue, dwindling supplies, diversion of friendly units to security missions, and the need to contain bypassed enemy units.

7-6. Those plan, prepare, and execute concepts introduced previously continue to apply during a pursuit. Assessment concepts described in FM 6-0 and FM 6-22 also apply. The commander modifies them as necessary to account for the specific existing factors of METT-TC.

ORGANIZATION OF FORCES

7-7. Normally, the commander does not organize specifically for a pursuit ahead of time, although he may plan for a pursuit as a branch or sequel to his offensive operation. Therefore, he must be flexible to react when the situation presents itself. The commander's maneuver and sustainment forces continue their ongoing activities while he readjusts their priorities to better support the pursuit. He acquires additional support from his higher headquarters in accordance with the factors of METT-TC. For most pursuits, the commander organizes his forces into security, direct-pressure, encircling, follow and support,

and reserve forces. The commander can employ available airborne and air assault units as part of his encircling force because of their ability to conduct vertical envelopments. Given sufficient resources, there can be more than one encircling force. The follow and support force polices the battlefield to prevent the dissipation of the direct-pressure force's combat power. Appendix B addresses the duties of a follow and support force. The reserve allows the commander to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities or respond to enemy counterattacks.

7-8. There are two basic organizational options in conducting a pursuit; each involves a direct-pressure force. The first is a frontal pursuit that employs only a direct-pressure force. The second is a combination that uses a direct-pressure force and an encircling force. The combination pursuit is generally more effective. Either the direct-pressure force or the encircling force can conduct the decisive operation in a combination pursuit.

FRONTAL

7-9. In a frontal pursuit, the commander employs only a direct-pressure force to conduct operations along the same retrograde routes used by the enemy. (See Figure 7-1.) The commander chooses this option in two situations. The first is when he cannot create an encircling force with enough mobility to get behind the enemy force. The second is when he cannot create an encircling force capable of sustaining itself until it links up with the direct-pressure force. Either situation can occur because of restrictive terrain or because an enemy withdraws in a disciplined, cohesive formation and still has significant available combat power.

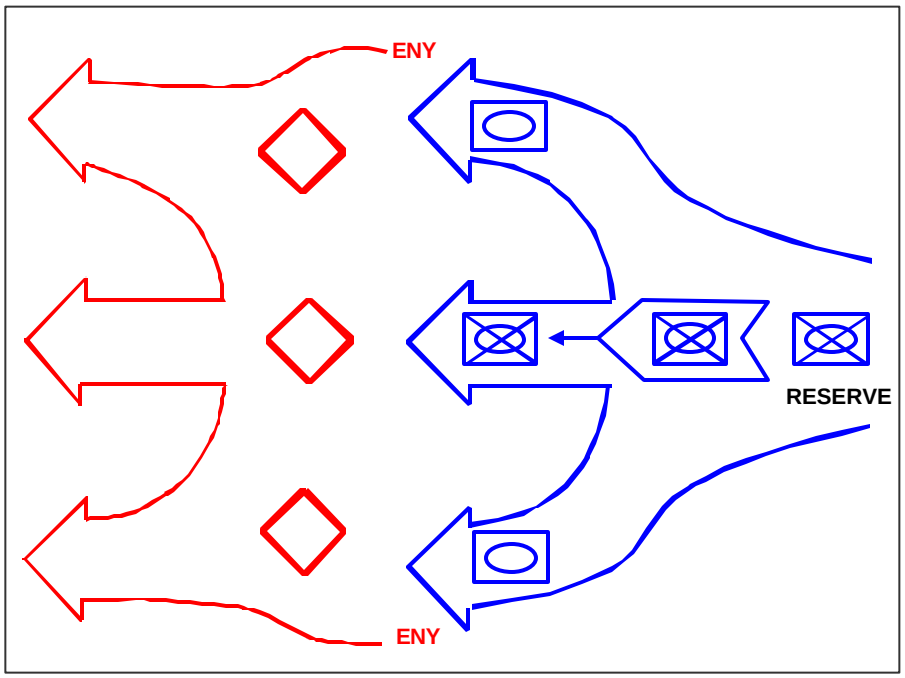

Figure 7-1. Frontal Pursuit

COMBINATION

7-10. In the pursuit, the most decisive effects result from combining the frontal pursuit with encirclement. (See Figure 7-2.) In the combination pursuit, the direct-pressure force initiates a frontal pursuit immediately on discovering the enemy's initiation of a retrograde operation. This slows the tempo of the enemy's withdrawal (or fixes him in his current position if possible), and may destroy his rear security force. The direct-pressure force's actions help to set the conditions necessary for the success of the encircling force's operation by maintaining constant pressure. The encircling force conducts an envelopment or a turning movement to position itself where it can block the enemy's escape and trap him between the two forces, which leads to complete annihilation.

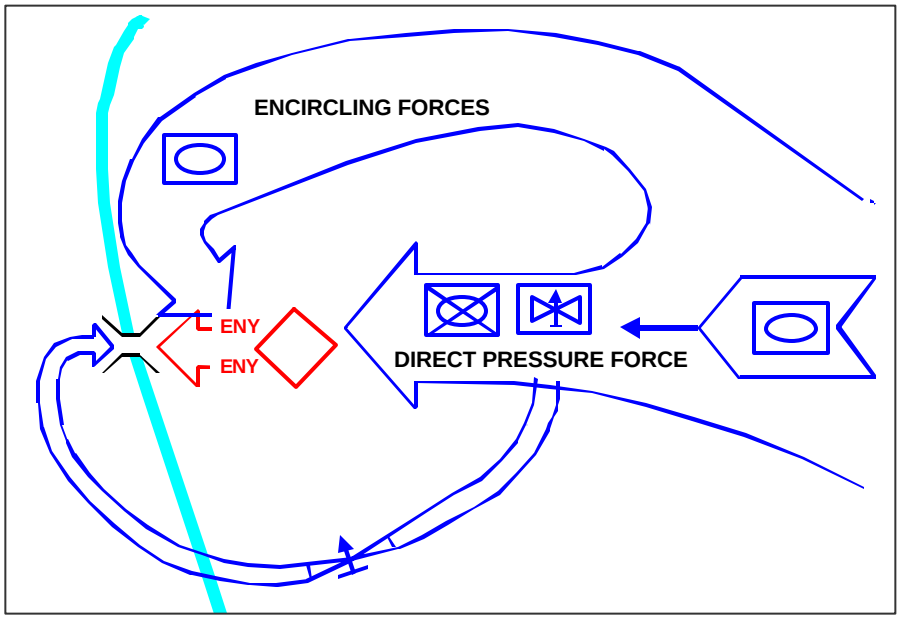

Figure 7-2. Combination Pursuit

7-11. The direct-pressure force conducts hasty attacks to maintain contact and apply unrelenting pressure until it destroys the enemy force. The direct-pressure force prevents enemy disengagement and subsequent reconstitution of the defense and inflicts maximum casualties. It forces the enemy to deploy frequently to delay the direct-pressure force and restricts his ability to disengage and rapidly move away. The direct-pressure force must be at least as mobile as the enemy. Heavy forces are ideally suited to this role, but the commander can employ light forces if the enemy is also foot-mobile. The direct-pressure force organizes to conduct a movement to contact and must be able to conduct a series of hasty attacks. It must be powerful enough to defeat enemy rear guard actions and maintain pressure on the enemy's main body.

7-12. The mobility of the encircling force must be equal—preferably superior—to the withdrawing enemy. If there is no inherent mobility differential, the commander must create one. This differential can also result from the direct-pressure force forcing the enemy to deploy. The commander can enhance, and

sometimes create, this mobility advantage by conducting countermobility operations against the enemy, specifically targeting locations such as choke points or bridges that will hinder the fleeing enemy's withdrawal. Heavy, air assault, and airborne forces are well suited for this mission. Attack helicopters are also effective when used as part of the encircling force. The encircling force must be strong enough to protect itself from the enemy's main body and slow or stop it until the friendly direct-pressure force can combine with the encircling force to destroy the enemy. It must be capable of mounting a hasty defense without placing itself at risk of annihilation. The encircling force must be self-contained since it normally operates out of supporting range of friendly indirect-fire systems. Therefore, it frequently has its supporting artillery attached. The primary mission of the encircling force is to prevent the enemy's escape by trapping him between the encircling force and the direct-pressure force. The commander can assign other missions to the encircling force, such as—

- ?? Destroying the enemy's weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means.
- ?? Linking up with airborne or air assault forces in their airheads.
- ?? Reporting terrain conditions and other combat information beyond that normally addressed in the unit standing operating procedures.

The commander can assign the encirclement mission, wholly or in part, to available airborne or air assault units because their vertical envelopment capabilities allow friendly forces to be inserted deeper into enemy-controlled territory than would be possible with ground operations. The time required to plan airborne operations and stage airlift platforms impacts on the utility of airborne forces in small-scale pursuit operations.

7-13. The direct-pressure and encircling forces require engineer support to create lanes through obstacles, which enables them to move rapidly and continuously. The commander should place his engineers well forward in his movement formations to quickly breach any obstacles that cannot be bypassed. Engineers accompanying the encircling force must also be prepared to conduct countermobility and survivability tasks.

CONTROL MEASURES

7-14. The commander uses control measures to retain his tactical options to converge on the most important axis or to redirect his pursuit effort on a new axis. These control measures should be flexible and capable of rapid adjustments to reflect changing conditions. This flexibility is also necessary when engaging advancing enemy reserves or counterattack forces.

7-15. Centralized planning and decentralized execution characterize the pursuit. The commander balances the need to prevent fratricide with the need to allow subordinates to take advantage of fleeting opportunities in a pursuit with rapidly moving forces and a rapidly changing situation. The commander designates an area of operations (AO) for each maneuver unit involved in the pursuit. He establishes few control measures for the direct-pressure force other than phase lines and checkpoints because of the pursuit's nature. He uses these phase lines to designate a forward and rearward boundary for the direct-pressure force. The forward boundary relieves the direct-pressure force of any responsibility beyond the forward boundary. It also gives the higher

headquarters flexibility to deal with the encircling force and enemy elements located beyond that forward boundary. The rear boundary becomes the boundary between the direct-pressure force and the follow and support force.

7-16. If the encircling force is a ground element, the control measures are almost identical to those of an envelopment. The commander must designate a route, an axis of advance, or an AO adjacent to that of the direct-pressure force to allow the encircling force to move parallel to and eventually get ahead of the fleeing enemy force. He designates a terrain objective as a guide for the encircling force. (See Objective HAWKE in Figure 7-3.) However, he may change this objective rapidly and frequently, based on the progress of the encircling force and the enemy. The objective should be a piece of ground that provides the encircling force good, defensible terrain that the enemy cannot easily bypass. The commander often selects choke points, such as defiles and bridges, as objectives for his encircling force.

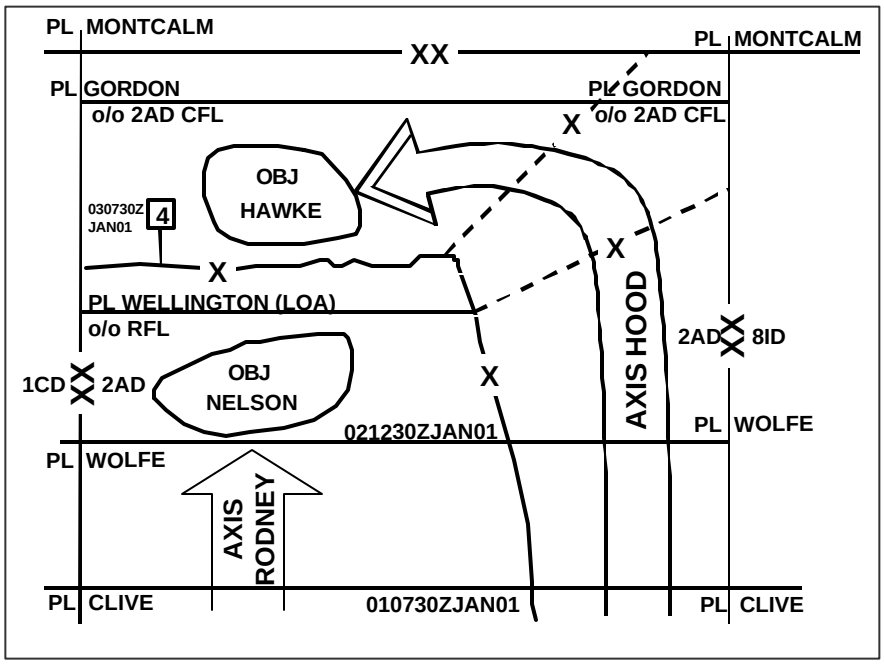

Figure 7-3. Pursuit Control Measures

7-17. The commander establishes a boundary or a restricted fire line between the encircling force and the direct-pressure force before the encircling force reaches its objective. He establishes other fire support coordinating measures (FSCM) around the area currently occupied by the encircling force to relieve it of unnecessary fire support coordination responsibilities. He directs security operations beyond the encircling force, allowing it to engage the withdrawing enemy without devoting resources to flank and rear security. The commander establishes additional control measures to control the convergence of both elements of the friendly force, such as phase lines and contact points.

PLANNING A PURSUIT

7-18. The commander anticipates an enemy retrograde operation as either a branch or a sequel to the plan. The plan should identify possible direct-pressure, encircling, follow and support, and reserve forces and issue on-order or be-prepared missions to these forces. The commander should employ the maximum number of available combat troops in the pursuit. He bases the details of his plan on the enemy's anticipated actions, the combat formation of the attacking troops, and the amount of planning time available. The commander also considers—

- ?? Possible routes the enemy might use to conduct his retrograde operations.
- ?? Availability of his intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to detect enemy forces and acquire targets in depth.
- ?? Scheme of maneuver.
- ?? Availability and condition of pursuit routes.
- ?? Availability of forces to keep the pressure on the enemy until his destruction is complete.
- ?? Critical terrain features.
- ?? Use of reconnaissance and security forces.
- ?? Allocation of precision-guided munitions and aviation support.
- ?? Availability of CS and CSS resources.

Pursuit planning must address the possibility of defending temporarily during operational pauses while making preparations to continue the pursuit or to consolidate gains. However, the use of an operational pause generally results in the abandonment of the pursuit because the enemy is able to use that time to organize a coherent defense.

7-19. The commander must specifically address how to detect the enemy retrograde operations; otherwise, the enemy may succeed in breaking contact. The commander relies on active reconnaissance, an understanding of enemy tactics, and knowledge of the current tactical situation. He must watch for signs that indicate the enemy is preparing to conduct a retrograde, such as when the enemy—

- ?? Lacks the capability to maintain his position or cohesion.
- ?? Conducts limited local counterattacks.
- ?? Intensifies his reconnaissance and intelligence efforts.
- ?? Increases the amount of rearward movements and changes the type of elements conducting them, especially by fire support and reserves.
- ?? Prepares his facilities, installations, equipment, and supply stock-piles for demolition and destruction.
- ?? Decreases fire in intensity and effectiveness through the AO.
- ?? Increases his fires in one or more individual sectors of the front, which does not appear to be in accordance with the developing situation, and at a time when the amount of defensive fires seems to be decreasing.

The presence or absence of any of the above signs may not necessarily indicate the start of a retrograde operation. The enemy could be attempting to draw friendly forces into an ambush or setting up a counterattack as part of his defense. The decision of when to start a pursuit is part of the art of tactics.

7-20. When the commander initiates a pursuit, he often creates the encircling force from uncommitted or reserve elements. Normally, these forces do not have

fire support assets allocated to them. The commander must plan how to redistribute his fire support assets to properly support the encircling force. Attack helicopters and close air support are well suited to support the encircling force.

7-21. Engineer mobility and countermobility assets are instrumental in sustaining the rate of advance and hindering the enemy's withdrawal. Engineers prepare the route of advance and support the lateral dispersion of units transitioning to the pursuit and the movement of the reserve. During the pursuit, the commander must plan for his engineers to provide assault bridging and emergency road repairs to sustain the tempo of the pursuit. The commander also plans to use his engineer assets to block any bypassed enemy's withdrawal routes by using antitank and command-operated mines, demolitions, and obstacles.

7-22. Logistics units should plan for increases in the demand for fuel and maintenance as the tempo of operations increases. In the pursuit, priority of logistics normally goes to units having the greatest success. Logistics planners need to anticipate success since the depth of the pursuit depends on the capability of logistics assets to support the operation. The logistics elements supporting the pursuing force should be as mobile as possible. Logistics planners are particularly concerned with supporting the encircling force, such as casualty evacuation over possibly unsecured LOCs. The commander may need aerial resupply or heavily guarded convoys to support this force. Security for logistics convoys and LOCs are major planning considerations.

7-23. The commander uses all available logistics assets to provide essential support to the force pursuing the enemy. His pursuit plan must result in a force prepared to conduct wide-ranging operations using all available maneuver assets throughout his AO to complete the destruction and morale collapse of the enemy force.

EXECUTING A PURSUIT

7-24. The decisive operation in a pursuit destroys the withdrawing enemy. This generally occurs as a result of encircling the enemy between the direct-pressure and the encircling forces or a major geographic barrier—such as an unfordable river—and his defeat in detail. The timely and correct decision to initiate a pursuit is critical to its success. If the enemy begins a retrograde undetected, he avoids the constant pressure that results in disrupting that operation. The commander expects the enemy forces to conduct retrograde operations at times advantageous to them—usually at night or during bad weather.

7-25. A pursuit is often conducted as a series of encirclements in which successive portions of the fleeing enemy are intercepted, cut off from outside support, and captured or destroyed. (Appendix D discusses encirclement operations.) The direct-pressure force conducts a series of hasty attacks to destroy the enemy's rear security force, maintain constant pressure on the enemy's main body, and slow the enemy's withdrawal. At every opportunity, the direct-pressure force fixes, slows down, and destroys enemy elements, provided such actions do not interfere with its primary mission of maintaining constant pressure on the enemy's main body. The direct-pressure force can bypass large

enemy forces if it can hand them off to follow and support units, or if they do not pose a risk to the direct-pressure force.

7-26. As soon as the commander designates a unit as the encircling force and directs its actions, the force moves as swiftly as possible by the most advantageous routes to cut off the enemy's retreat. If the encircling force cannot move farther and faster than the enemy, it attacks the enemy's main body from the flank. When this occurs, the commander should constitute and dispatch a new encircling force.

GAIN AND MAINTAIN ENEMY CONTACT

7-27. At the first indication of an enemy retrograde, the brigade or lower-echelon commander who discovers the enemy's rearward movement acts to maintain contact with the enemy across a wide area without waiting for orders from higher headquarters. This ensures that the enemy does not break contact and conduct an orderly retirement. These forces in contact constitute the nucleus of the direct-pressure force. As the situation permits, they reform into a movement column with reconnaissance and security elements in the lead and, if necessary, to the flank.

7-28. During a pursuit, the reconnaissance effort is intensive. Reconnaissance elements concentrate on all routes the enemy could use when conducting a retrograde operation. These elements provide information on the disposition of retreating enemy formations and on the forward movement of his reserves as the pursuit develops. The tactical situation during a pursuit may become obscure because of its potential depth. Much of the combat information needed during a pursuit is located behind the fleeing enemy force. Therefore, air reconnaissance, backed by technical intelligence systems, is vital to the overall reconnaissance effort. It can determine—

- The beginning of the rearward movement of enemy sustainment forces.
- The composition of retrograding forces and their direction of movement.
- The composition and direction of enemy reserve forces moving forward.
- The nature of obstacles and intermediate defensive positions.

Information about fresh enemy reserves and prepared positions is vital at the stage when a pursuit force may be approaching a culminating point; it may be the basis for terminating the pursuit.

7-29. The primary mission of the encircling force's reconnaissance assets is to find routes for the encircling force to allow it to move behind withdrawing enemy units and establish blocking positions. This mission may force these reconnaissance assets to operate outside the supporting range of the main body as they try to maneuver behind the retrograding enemy force. The encircling force avoids combat when possible until it reaches its assigned objective area. However, en route to its objective, it overruns any small enemy positions while bypassing larger enemy units. Forward security elements of the encircling force conduct activities to prevent the enemy from interfering with the forward movement of the encircling force's main body. These security elements move rapidly along all available roads or routes and overrun or bypass small enemy pockets of resistance. If they encounter strongly held enemy positions, they attempt to find routes around or through these positions. The encircling force can then avoid these enemy positions and occupy blocking positions before

withdrawing enemy forces can reach them. If necessary, the encircling force organizes a hasty defense behind the enemy to block his retreat.

DISRUPT THE ENEMY

7-30. Keeping the enemy from reconstituting an effective defense is critical to success. Constant pressure by direct-pressure forces and echelon fire support systems disrupts and weakens the enemy. The commander uses lethal and nonlethal direct and indirect fires to keep pressure on the enemy. The enemy commander must not be allowed to freely adjust his dispositions to counter the actions of the friendly force. Artillery fire and air strikes harass and disrupt the enemy's attempts to move engaged forces to the rear or bring previously uncommitted forces into action. In a pursuit, decisive operations may include the ground maneuver of the direct-pressure or the encircling force. Fire support targets in a pursuit include fires on enemy columns and troop or vehicle concentrations at road junctions, defiles, bridges, and river crossings. They also include the repulsion of enemy counterattacks, destruction or delay of enemy reserves, and destruction of the enemy's fire support means. The commander conducts offensive information operations against the enemy's command and control (C2) system as an integral part of this disruption process, with emphasis on destroying or degrading the enemy's capability to reconstitute and synchronize an effective defense.

FIX THE ENEMY

7-31. Using movement and fire effects or fire potential, the commander fixes a withdrawing enemy. If the direct-pressure force disrupts the enemy's C2 system, his ability to counter friendly efforts is significantly degraded, and the goal of fixing the enemy is much easier to accomplish.

7-32. The enemy attempts to use his reserves to restore the integrity of his defenses or prevent his withdrawing force from being overrun. Fixing enemy reserves is essential to the pursuit's success and is normally the focus of echelon shaping operations. The direct-pressure force fixes enemy reserves in place or slows them down so that they remain outside supporting distance until the withdrawing enemy force is completely annihilated.

MANEUVER

7-33. To execute the pursuit, the commander normally combines a frontal pursuit with an encirclement. The direct-pressure force conducting the frontal pursuit advances in a column formation as quickly as possible. After a penetration, existing gaps between the different units of the direct-pressure force are likely to increase in size. Aware of the vulnerability of his open flanks in this situation, the commander must deploy his reserves where they can respond to dangers on his flanks. He does not expect a uniform rate of advance on all axes. Some columns may move rapidly while others are still engaged in penetrating the enemy's rear guard defensive positions or meeting enemy counterattacks.

7-34. The actions of the direct-pressure force should facilitate the commitment of an encircling force that moves parallel to the rearward-moving enemy. The depth of the pursuit depends on the size of the forces involved. It takes a division-level or higher commander to make the decision to initiate a pursuit

because of the resources necessary to conduct a pursuit. The commander directing the initiation of a pursuit informs his higher commander of his intentions. This allows even greater resources to be devoted to the pursuit and avoids desynchronizing the higher headquarters' major operation or campaign.

7-35. The direct-pressure force normally employs an advance guard to prevent the enemy from ambushing the main body of the direct-pressure force and to overrun or bypass small enemy forces. The security element moves on multiple avenues of advance. If it encounters enemy units beyond its capacity to defeat, it conducts actions on contact to develop the situation. The commander uses combat information provided by these actions on contact to guide the main body of the direct-pressure force to destroy withdrawing enemy forces. These actions of the direct-pressure force may or may not be in conjunction with the actions of any encircling force.

7-36. The commander does everything possible to place his encircling force behind the withdrawing enemy and trap the bulk of that enemy force between the encircling force and the direct-pressure force. The direct-pressure force maintains enough pressure on the withdrawing enemy force so the encircling force can envelop it. To perform this task, the direct-pressure force must be strong enough to overcome any enemy rear guard before the enemy's main body can make a successful withdrawal. Once in position, the encircling force defends or attacks as necessary, responding to the enemy's actions and those of the direct-pressure force to complete the enemy's encirclement.

7-37. The pursuing force must not give the enemy time to reorganize for an all-around defense after it is encircled. If the enemy forms a perimeter, the pursuing commander must repeatedly split it into smaller elements until he destroys the encircled enemy force. If time is not critical, the commander can keep the encirclement closed, defeat enemy breakout attempts, and weaken the enemy by fires alone. He can greatly accelerate the collapse of a large, encircled enemy force by using psychological operations, precision-guided weapons, and improved conventional munitions in mass. (Appendix D addresses the reduction of an encircled enemy force.) If the resulting encirclement does not destroy the withdrawing enemy force, the commander conducts additional pursuit operations until the enemy is destroyed.

FOLLOW THROUGH

7-38. Once the commander initiates a pursuit, he continues pursuing the enemy until a higher commander terminates the pursuit. Conditions under which a higher commander may terminate a pursuit include the following—

- The pursuing force annihilates or captures the enemy and resistance ceases.
- The pursuing force fixes the enemy for follow-on forces.
- The high commander makes an assessment that the pursuing force is about to reach a culminating point.

7-39. A pursuit often transitions into other types of offensive and defensive operations. If the enemy attempts to reorganize, forces conducting a pursuit execute hasty attacks. They conduct an exploitation to capitalize on the success of these attacks and then move back into pursuit. Forces conducting a pursuit may also transition into a defensive operation if the pursuing force reaches a

culminating point. This usually occurs when the enemy introduces strong reinforcements to prepare for a counteroffensive.