

CHAPTER 7

RIVERINE OPERATIONS**INTRODUCTION**

In areas with limited land transportation and abundant water surface, inland waterways provide natural transportation routes and are logical population centers. In some developing countries, inland waterways are major arteries for economic circulation. River transportation of local products may need military operations to keep waterways open and, in some instances, to transport area produce to maintain the local economy. Water routes are strategically and tactically important to an insurgent or enemy force, particularly in situations where an external aggressor supports and directs insurgency. Such a situation dictates a doctrine and strategy of interdiction and control of waterways. Operations involving this doctrine are riverine operations.

RIVERINE ENVIRONMENT

A thorough understanding of riverine environment is needed to plan and conduct riverine operations. In a riverine area, watercraft are the principal means of transport. In such areas, indigenous personnel often settle along the waterways because they are the only usable means of travel between villages. Civilian traffic and settlements conceal the enemy's movements and mining and ambush operations. Control of waterways is necessary in riverine areas.

Water lines of communication dominate a riverine environment. It consists of several major rivers and tributaries or an extensive network of minor waterways, canals, and irrigation ditches. Military movements use air and water transportation extensively due to the lack of a suitable road net. Suitable land for bases, airfields, and artillery firing positions may not always be available. The topography of the land, the location of the civilian population, the restrictions on using agricultural land, or a combination of these factors make land unavailable when needed.

ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND

Riverine operations are joint operations undertaken primarily by Army and Navy forces. Participating forces must coordinate and integrate efforts to

achieve a common objective. Department of Defense (DOD) and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directives prescribe joint forces command arrangements to ensure coordination and integration. Joint command organizations centrally direct the detailed action of a large number of commands or individuals and common doctrine among the involved forces. Flexibility in the organization ensures control and coordination of these forces in varying operational environments.

Mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available (METT-T) are the basis for the task organization. Considering the total forces available, riverine operations require a balance between types of forces. A special consideration in task organization for riverine operations is the amount of troop lift and fire support available from Navy, Army aviation, and Air Force units. The major factors determining naval support requirements are—

- The extent to which navigable waters permit moving naval support to, within, and around the area of operations.
- The size of Army forces needed in the objective area, the availability of other means of transportation, and the desirability of using other means to deliver them.

SECURITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The relationship between Army and Navy elements stationed on a land or afloat base is one of coordination and mutual support. The Army and Navy elements assign their appropriate share of forces for local base defense as the base commander directs. The main mission of the Navy force in base defense is to provide gunfire support and protection against any threat from the water.

During tactical operations, the Army commander provides, plans, and coordinates security elements (ground or air) along the route of the movement. The Navy element commander tactically controls the movement and maneuver of watercraft under the operational control of the Army commander being supported.

The senior Navy commander embarked is in tactical control while the afloat base is en route from one anchorage to another. Higher headquarters normally directs or approves the relocation of the afloat base. The Navy commander of the riverine force is responsible for moving Navy ships and watercraft between riverine bases and support facilities outside the riverine area. The Army commander in the riverine area is responsible for the security of movement for ships within the area.

CONCEPT OF RIVERINE OPERATIONS

Units conducting riverine operations use water transport extensively to move troops and equipment throughout the area. Waterborne operations normally start from areas where ground forces and watercraft marshal and load and where forces can effect coordination. This may be at a land base next to a navigable waterway, at an afloat base on a navigable waterway, or in an existing area of operations. Once troops are aboard, the watercraft proceed to designated landing areas within an assigned area of operations for offensive operations.

Unit plans include control measures, such as phase lines checkpoints, for the entire operation. The commander controls the unit's movement either from a command and control boat located within the movement formation or from an airborne command post. Maneuver unit commanders, embarked in command and control craft, leave these craft to take charge of their units.

The withdrawal of troops from the area of operations is a tactical movement back to the watercraft loading areas. Units are loaded in reverse sequence to that used in the waterborne assault landing. The maneuver unit employing a perimeter security provides the necessary loading area security throughout the withdrawal operation. A tactical water movement back to base areas or to another area of operations is performed after loading.

PLANNING FOR WATERBORNE OPERATIONS

Waterborne operations require detailed planning at all levels and close coordination with a supporting naval river assault squadron. Units conducting waterborne operations must be ready to begin as soon as possible after receiving orders. Boat operators require training in operation, maintenance, and navigation. As a minimum, training consists of briefings in the marshaling or staging area

to acquaint Army personnel with embarkation and loading procedures, required action during the water movement, security at the landing area, and landing procedures.

Plans for waterborne operations must be detailed enough to give all participating units complete information. Yet, they must be simple and flexible enough to be modified as the tactical situation changes.

Plans for a waterborne operation are usually developed in the following sequence:

- Scheme of maneuver based on METT-T.
- Assault plan based on the scheme of maneuver.
- Water movement plan based on the assault plan and the scheme of maneuver. (The water movement plan includes composition of the waterborne force, organization of movement serials, formation to be used, movement routes, command and control measures, mine countermeasures, plans for fire support, and immediate reaction to ambush.)
- Loading plan based on the water movement plan, the assault plan, and the scheme of maneuver.
- Marshaling plan, when required based on the loading plan, the water movement plan, the assault plan, and the scheme of maneuver.
- Deception plan, when required, based on the mission.

CONDUCT OF WATERBORNE OPERATIONS

Units are trained and prepared to conduct waterborne operations on short notice. Applying lessons learned in previous waterborne operations keeps SOPs current. Training and adequate unit SOPs allow marshaling activities to focus on the pending tactical operation.

Units prepare for the tactical operation, move to their loading areas, and load onto assigned watercraft according to the water movement table and information in the watercraft loading table. Bulk supplies and ammunition are transported to the loading site and loaded and lashed in designated watercraft. Several units may use the same loading site. Therefore, loading must be completed and

watercraft moved to their assigned rendezvous area according to the time schedule in the water movement table.

All water movements outside of the base areas are tactical moves. They are similar to the approach march of a movement to contact in ground operations; speed of movement and security of the formation are essential. The intent of the operation is to move directly to the objective. However, the unit is prepared for combat at any point along the movement route. The terrain and the enemy situation normally require advance, flank, and rear guards to protect the main body during the move.

WATERBORNE WITHDRAWAL

While preparing for waterborne operations, planners determine the availability of waterways in the area of operations, the tide and current for the scheduled period of the operation, and suitable loading sites. This information, kept current during the operation, is the basis for planning the waterborne withdrawal.

Active employment of watercraft during an offensive maneuver simplifies deception in the initial stages of a waterborne withdrawal. The quantity of available hydrographic information increases as a result of this employment.

When possible, waterborne withdrawal is timed so watercraft can approach loading areas with the current on the rising tide, load during slack high water, and depart with the current on the falling tide.

Due to the security problems that accompany large waterborne movements and using predictable routes, loading during the last hours of daylight and moving during darkness should be considered. Moving reconnaissance forward along possible withdrawal routes several hours ahead of the movement group is a useful deception measure.

Loading, normally the most critical phase of the withdrawal, requires detailed planning when selecting troop assembly areas, loading areas, loading control measures, and watercraft rendezvous areas.