

Chapter 15

Relief in Place

... the necessity for conservation of the fighting power of the troops requires provision for the periodic relief of units in line.

FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 22 May 1941

A relief in place is a tactical enabling operation in which, by the direction of higher authority, all or part of a unit is replaced in an area by the incoming unit. The directing authority transfers the responsibilities for the mission and the assigned area of operations (AO) from the replaced elements to the incoming unit. A commander conducts a relief in place as part of a larger operation, primarily to maintain the combat effectiveness of committed units. The higher headquarters directs when and where to conduct the relief and establishes the appropriate control measures. Normally, the unit relieved is defending. However, a relief may set the stage for resuming offensive operations. A relief may also serve to free the relieved unit for other tasks, such as decontamination, reconstitution, routine rest, resupply, maintenance, or specialized training. Sometimes, as part of a larger operation, a commander wants the enemy force to discover the relief, because that discovery might cause it to do something in response that is prejudicial to its interest, such as move reserves from an area where the friendly commander wants to conduct a penetration.

15-1. There are three techniques for conducting a relief: sequentially, simultaneously, or staggered. A sequential relief occurs when each element within the relieved unit is relieved in succession, from

right to left or left to right, depending on how it is deployed. A simultaneous relief occurs when all elements are relieved at the same time. A staggered relief occurs when the commander relieves each element in a sequence determined by the tactical situation, not its geographical orientation. Simultaneous relief takes the least time to execute, but is more easily detected by the enemy. Sequential or staggered reliefs can take place over a significant amount of time.

15-2. A relief is either deliberate or hasty, depending on the amount of planning and preparations. The major differences are the depth and detail of planning and, potentially, the execution time. Detailed planning generally

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facilitates shorter execution time by determining exactly what the commander believes he needs to do and the resources needed to accomplish the mission. Deliberate planning allows him and his staff to identify, develop, and coordinate solutions to most potential problems before they occur and to ensure the availability of resources when and where they are needed.

ORGANIZATION OF FORCES

15-3. Both units involved in a relief in place should be of similar type—such as mounted or dismounted—and task organized to help maintain operations security (OPSEC). The relieving unit usually assumes as closely as possible the same task organization as the unit being relieved. It assigns responsibilities and deploys in a configuration similar to the relieved unit.

15-4. The relieving unit establishes advance parties to conduct detailed coordination and preparations for the operation, down to the company level and possibly to the platoon level. These advance parties infiltrate forward to avoid detection. They normally include the echelon's tactical command post, which co-locates with the main headquarters of the unit being relieved. The commander may also attach additional liaison personnel to subordinate units to ensure a smooth changeover between subordinate units.

CONTROL MEASURES

15-5. Control measures associated with a relief in place are generally restrictive to prevent fratricide. As a minimum, these control measures include the AO with its associated boundaries, battle positions, contact points, start points, routes, release points, assembly areas (AAs), fire support coordinating measures, and defensive fire coordination measures, such as target reference points and engagement areas. (See [Figure 15-1](#).) Expanded discussions of all these control measures appear elsewhere in this manual. A commander may use any control measure he feels is necessary to conduct a relief in place.

PLANNING A RELIEF IN PLACE

15-6. Once ordered to conduct a relief in place, the commander of the relieving unit contacts the commander of the unit to be relieved. The co-location of unit command posts also helps achieve the level of coordination required. If the relieved unit's forward elements can defend the AO, the relieving unit executes the relief in place from the rear to the front. This facilitates movement and terrain management.

15-7. In a deliberate relief, units exchange plans and liaison personnel, conduct briefings, perform detailed reconnaissance, and publish orders with detailed instructions. In a hasty relief, the commander abbreviates the planning process and controls the execution using oral and fragmentary orders. In both cases, the relieved unit designates liaison personnel from its combat, combat support (CS), and combat service support (CSS) elements to remain with the relieving unit until completing the necessary plans. The relieving unit receives current intelligence, operations, and logistics information from the unit being relieved, as well as from common higher headquarters, adjacent units, and subordinate elements. The complexity of a relief in place requires

extensive liaison and reconnaissance. Exchanging information about the enemy and civilian situations, friendly dispositions, terrain analysis, and fire support and obstacle plans, coupled with reconnaissance, helps the relieving commander plan and execute his mission.

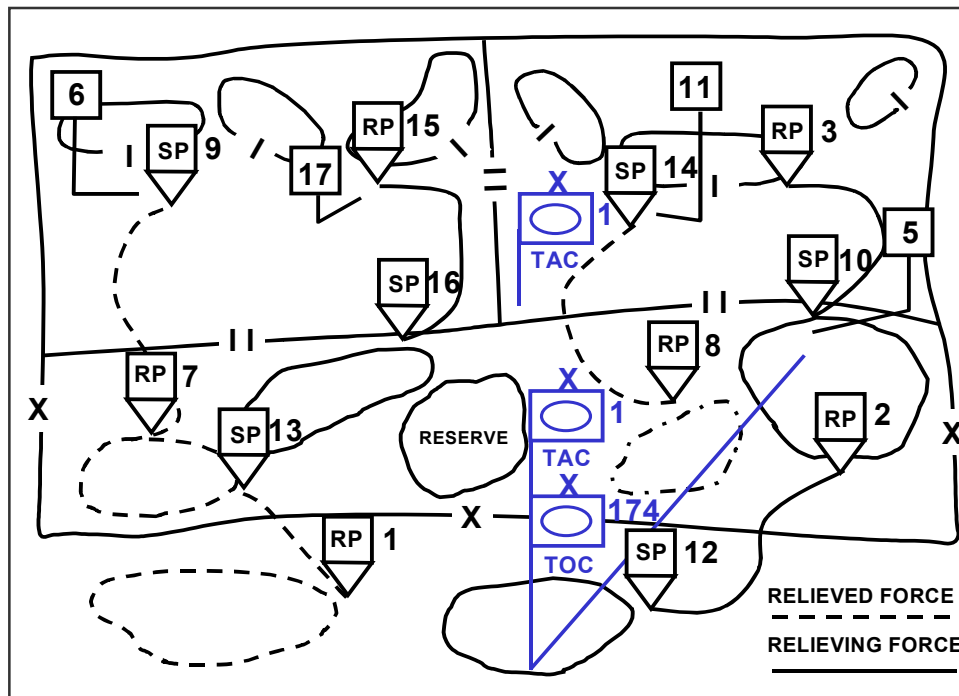


Figure 15-1. Overlay of a Brigade Relief in Place

15-8. The relief is a tactically vulnerable operation. The units involved must concentrate on security while preparing for and executing the operation. The intent of the operation is to complete the relief without discovery by the enemy. Consequently, commanders typically plan reliefs for execution during periods of reduced visibility, such as night or fog. Concealment of the relief from the enemy is a primary concern when the unit is conducting the relief as part of an economy of force measure to free forces for other operations. The enemy should perceive only one unit's command structure in operation—that of the unit being relieved—until completing the operation. This requires a detailed knowledge of friendly vulnerabilities. A counterintelligence assessment of enemy collective capabilities directed against the friendly forces involved in the relief can provide that detailed knowledge.

15-9. Generally, as soon as the mutual higher headquarters issues the warning order, the commander of the relieving unit co-locates one of his command posts with the command post of the unit being relieved. As a minimum, he establishes communications and liaison with that unit. The warning order designates the time of relief, relieving and relieved units, and sequence of events. It specifies the future missions of the relieved force, route priorities, any restrictions on advance parties, any extraordinary security measures, and the time and place for issuing the complete order.

15-10. During a relief, commanders and leaders from the relieving unit should conduct reconnaissance of the area for which they will assume responsibility. This leaders' reconnaissance should include the lowest-echelon leader allowed by the tactical situation. The reconnaissance should focus on the route into the position the unit is to occupy, the positions themselves, the current disposition of the unit being relieved, and any obstacles that could affect troop movement.

15-11. The two commanders must decide on a time or an event that initiates the passage of command. This allows the smooth transition of command and control from one commander to another. Normally, this occurs when the frontline subordinate commanders have assumed responsibility for their respective AOs and the incoming commander has sufficient communication facilities in operation to control the operation. Regardless of their parent organization, all units in the AO come under the operational control of the AO commander if the AO comes under attack or when a specified event occurs during the relief.

15-12. The fire support coordinators coordinate fire support coordinating measures and identify those artillery and other fire support units that are available to support the relief. The relieving unit adopts the fire plan of the unit being relieved. The fire support assets of both units support the relief. This is critical if the enemy detects the relief and tries to exploit the situation. Units plan their fires to deceive the enemy and expedite the relief. Units should maintain normal activity patterns. For example, a unit should continue to expend the same average number of artillery rounds per day during the relief that it expended prior to the initiation of the relief. The commander should not relieve fire support and other CS and CSS units at the same time as the maneuver units they support. The commander relieves these organizations at other times.

15-13. The relief plan must specify the method to use in relieving artillery units. If terrain allows, relieving artillery units should not occupy previously used firing positions. Instead, relieving firing units should establish firing positions nearby those firing positions of the relieved unit and carefully integrate their fire with that of the relieved unit. Occupying firing positions at night or during periods of poor visibility enhances OPSEC.

15-14. Priority of the air defense effort is to protect identified choke points, battle positions, routes to conduct the operation, and AAs. The air defense assets of both units support the relief. The air defense unit supporting the relieving force coordinates with the replaced force's supporting air defense unit. This coordination covers, but is not limited to, air intelligence preparation of the battlefield, rules of engagement, current air activity, present fire unit positions, Army airspace command and control information, the operation plan, logistics, and communications. Higher-echelon and joint air defense organizations may also support the relief. Provisions to obtain local air superiority reduce the vulnerability of the forces during the relief in place when the units involved cannot avoid congestion on the ground.

15-15. The relieving unit verifies the obstacle records of the unit being relieved. Handover of obstacles is a complex procedure. Initially, the engineer priority is on mobility to get the relieving unit into the AO. It focuses on those

routes and lanes leading into the AO. Once the relief occurs, priority of the mobility and survivability effort transitions to support the relieving unit's continuing mission. The commander may require his engineers to assist with survivability tasks to support the relieving force.

15-16. Force-intermingling inherent in a relief, places an increased burden on command and control systems. The consequences of mutual interference between the units and the complexity associated with such areas as traffic control, fire support coordination, obstacle plans, and communications require close coordination between all headquarters involved. Establishing early liaison between the stationary and the relieving forces is critical.

15-17. The relieving unit is responsible for all sustaining operations. As the support elements of the unit being relieved displace, they leave the relieving unit supply stocks according to previously coordinated arrangements. If the units conducting the relief have different modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOEs), mission analysis must be conducted to determine how the relieving unit will meet all of its responsibilities and what weapon systems will be used. The unit logistics staff must determine any special support requirements the relieving unit will have and address supporting those requirements with the available supporting organizations. The unit logistics staff ensures that both commanders know of any CSS constraints that might affect the relieving unit. The two units' rear command posts also co-locate and a single headquarters coordinates traffic movement into and out of the AO.

PREPARING A RELIEF IN PLACE

15-18. The commander conceals the relief from the enemy for as long as possible. At the first indication that a relief is necessary, which is usually the warning order for the relieving unit, both the relieved unit and the relieving unit review their OPSEC plans and procedures. Commanders may use deception measures when conducting a relief in place to maintain secrecy. To maintain security during the relief in place, the relieving unit makes maximum use of the relieved unit's radio nets and operators. Both units involved in the relief operate on the command frequencies and encryption variables of the relieved unit at all levels. The relieved unit's signal officer is in charge of communications throughout the relief operation.

15-19. To enhance security, commanders impose light and noise discipline and electromagnetic emission control measures, such as radio silence or radio-listening silence. In joint and multinational operations, the senior commander specifies the frequency bands and equipment types affected. Radio silence is a condition when the commander turns off all or specific radio equipment. Radio-listening silence is a situation in which combat net radios remain turned on and monitored, with strict criteria governing when a station on the radio network is allowed to break silence. An example of radio-listening silence would be, "Maintain radio listening silence until physical contact with the enemy is made."

15-20. The units conduct rehearsals to discover any weaknesses in the plan and familiarize all elements of both forces with the plan. Finding time for rehearsals requires commanders and staffs to focus on time management.

15-21. Reconnaissance elements of the relieving unit precede its movement with a route reconnaissance to the AA. They conduct reconnaissance of the routes leading from the AAs to the positions of the unit being relieved. The commander of the relieving unit normally conducts a leader's reconnaissance before starting the operation.

15-22. The commander must allocate time to construct individual vehicle fighting positions if a heavy unit is relieving a light unit. In a similar fashion, preparations for an armor heavy unit to relieve a mechanized infantry heavy unit must include expanding individual vehicle fighting positions to accommodate the larger tanks.

15-23. While the units involved plan, prepare, and execute the relief in place, their common higher headquarters and other units continue actions to mask the relief. These include using demonstrations, feints, smoke, and harassing and interdiction fires. The common higher headquarters executes operations to attack and disrupt the enemy's uncommitted and reserve forces during the relief. Its intent is to fix or distract the enemy so that he does not detect or interfere with the relief.

EXECUTING A RELIEF IN PLACE

15-24. In situations where the commander desires to conceal the relief from the enemy, such as during a sequential or staggered relief, the relieving unit may occupy the same positions as the unit it relieves. Alternatively, it may establish more favorable positions within the vicinity of the relieved unit's location. Occupying different positions makes early discovery by the enemy more likely. Any increase in activity in forward positions can reveal the relief to the enemy. Friendly intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems attempt to detect if the enemy can discover the relief before its completion.

15-25. The enemy can usually detect a relief effort because of the increased activity resulting from the movement of soldiers and equipment out of position by the relieved unit and into position by the relieving unit. Additionally, after any period of combat, there are differences in the types and amount of equipment between the relieving unit and the relieved unit, even if they have the same MTOEs. These differences can also reveal the relief to the enemy. The two units establish guidelines for exchanging compatible equipment and supplies to limit these differences. In addition, it may be necessary to exchange certain weapons, supplies, equipment, and occasionally, vehicles between units. When major differences in the number of combat systems between the units exist—for example, a tank-heavy task force relieves a mechanized infantry-heavy task force—inoperable equipment or visual simulators may assist in hiding the change of units.

15-26. In a simultaneous relief, the relieving unit begins moving from its current location to AAs in the AO of the unit being relieved. Once the relief begins, all elements involved execute the relief as quickly as possible. Both units are vulnerable to enemy attack because of the concentration, movement, and intermingling of forces in a simultaneous relief. Any unnecessary delay during execution provides the enemy additional time to acquire and engage the forces involved. All units in the AO come under the operational

control of the relieving unit commander at the time or triggering event previously established by the plan for the operation.

15-27. As the first relieving element arrives from the AA to assume the position, it establishes a screen of the relieved unit's positions as the tactical situation permits. The remainder of the relieving unit moves forward to positions behind the unit being relieved. The relieving unit may use the relieved unit's alternate and supplementary defensive positions to take advantage of any previous defensive preparations. At the previously established time or event, passage of command takes place. At that point, if possible, the commander of the relieving unit informs all units involved in the relief of the passage of command.

15-28. The relieved unit continues to defend. The relieving unit's advance parties coordinate procedures for the rearward passage of the relieved unit. On order, the relieved unit begins withdrawing through the relieving unit and moves to AAs. Crew-served weapons are usually the last elements relieved after exchanging range cards. The relieving unit replaces them on a one-for-one basis to the maximum extent possible to maintain the illusion of routine activity. The relieved unit's CS and logistics assets assist both the relieved unit and the relieving unit during this period.

15-29. A relief does not normally require artillery units to relieve weapon system for weapon system unless the terrain limits the number of firing positions available. Generally, the relieved unit's artillery and other fire support assets remain in place until all other relieved elements displace and are available to reinforce the fires of the relieving unit in case the enemy tries to interfere. If the purpose of the relief is to continue the attack, the artillery of both forces generally remains in place to support the subsequent operation.

15-30. Multiple main supply routes that allow only one-way traffic can simplify the forward and rearward movement of both units. The relieving unit's rear command post controls both units' military police and any other traffic management assets. (The main command post performs these functions if the echelon does not have a rear command post.) The commander uses these assets to help control unit and convoy movement on lines of communications, main supply routes, and movement routes throughout his AO.

15-31. In the future, it is likely that conflicts will involve the relief of an allied or coalition force. The commander should consider the following additional points when such reliefs occur:

- Dissimilar unit organizations may require special adjustments in assigned areas.
- Control of fire support may require special liaison.
- Language difficulties may require an increased use of guides and translators.
- Using relieved unit communications requires special signal arrangements and additional operators.
- Ammunition and equipment incompatibility may make exchanging assets more difficult.
- Impact of civilians on the operations.