

MILITARY AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC SECURITY

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ARTICLE RECOUNTS UNIT'S FAILURE TO OBEY COMBAT ORDERS

[Excerpt from third installment of article on carrying out and not carrying out orders: "Never Talking About Retreating Regardless of the Difficulties"; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vietnamese, 28 June 1973, p 3]

The 2nd Artillery Battery is a typical example of activeness and inactiveness in carrying out orders.

When it entered campaign N., the battery received an order to rapidly mobilize its entire formation and pick up some 85 millimeter artillery pieces. On the way, the enemy landed to their rear; the infantry troops in this direction were in very great need of artillery in coordinated combat. In order to meet the infantry's need, a contingent from the battery continued on the way to pick up the artillery and the remaining contingent, under the command of Assistant Battery Commander Tran Ba Ke, returned with other types of artillery to fight the enemy. Due to the lack of communications, the cadres of the 2nd Battery made full use of the existing lines along the road and organized a chain of soldiers who stood and verbally passed orders from one to another. They were determined to overcome every difficulty that arose and never talked about retreating, consequently, the battery promptly hit the enemy's formation with its fire power and created favorable conditions whereby the infantry could rout the enemy regiment and protect the campaign's mobility corridor. With its spirit of overcoming difficulties and by fully carrying out the order mentioned above, the 2nd Battery continued to record many feats of arms, but, once, the unit failed to complete its mission when carrying out a combat order.

On this occasion, the 2nd Battery was ordered to move to the front and direct blocking fire at enemy tanks. The

unit reached its stipulated position, but, as soon as it finished preparing its combat position, it was attacked by enemy aircraft. This was followed by a very complicated change in the formation of the enemy's mobilized infantry troops and, at the same time, their aircraft intensified their activities in the area night and day. What was the enemy planning? Could the enemy surround their position? At their battle position, the cadres and soldiers were determined to implement two combat plans: using their artillery to fire at the tanks and using their machine guns and grenades to fight the enemy's infantry troops. But, the command contingent in the tower, while discussing measures for dealing with the situation, talked about retreating, about hooking the artillery up to the vehicles and rapidly pulling it to the rear! Where was the rear? The key cadres did not stipulate exactly where it was. When the vehicles and the artillery had withdrawn approximately 4 kilometers, enemy aircraft approached and attacked them. A number of soldiers were wounded and the desire to retreat which arose among the key cadres in the tower had a chance to develop further within the battlefield unit. Thus, all of the artillery vehicles withdrew to the rear. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to attack the enemy, the battery was not present in the area assigned it by its superiors.

Tran Ba Ke said to us:

"The 2nd Battery is a unit which has recorded achievements in mobile combat over long distances at 12 battle positions. Its cadres and soldiers have clung to their combat positions in the regiment for many days at a time and employed many different types of artillery and many artillery pieces. My unit has been able to record the achievements mentioned above as a result of its high determination to fight and overcome each difficulty. But, in such a process of continuous combat and continuous feats of arms, only 1 minute of laxity in the struggle against negative phenomena was all that was needed for the above mentioned failure to carry out a combat order to occur."

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