

Recon and Security in the Urban Fight

by CPT Kyle D. Woods

The 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division's dramatic capture of Baghdad in April 2003 from Iraqi Republican Guard forces is legendary among today's armored force. The Spartan Brigade's Thunder Run ranks alongside Eagle Troop, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment's overwhelming victory at the Battle of 73 Easting in 1991 as proof of American armored supremacy in combat.

The 2-3 Infantry Division's actions in April 2003 are distinguishable by the terrain where the battle was fought. The Spartan Brigade fought through dense urban terrain in its rapid and forceful seizure of Baghdad's government district.

Since World War II, American military doctrine has, in writing, discouraged armored forces from participating in the urban fight.¹ However, military necessity has often pressed mechanized forces into the urban fight. American tankers and mechanized infantry have come to the rescue of their light counterparts in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and many times during the most recent war in Iraq.² In each conflict America's armored Soldiers have encountered fighting in larger and larger cities. This trend is likely to continue.

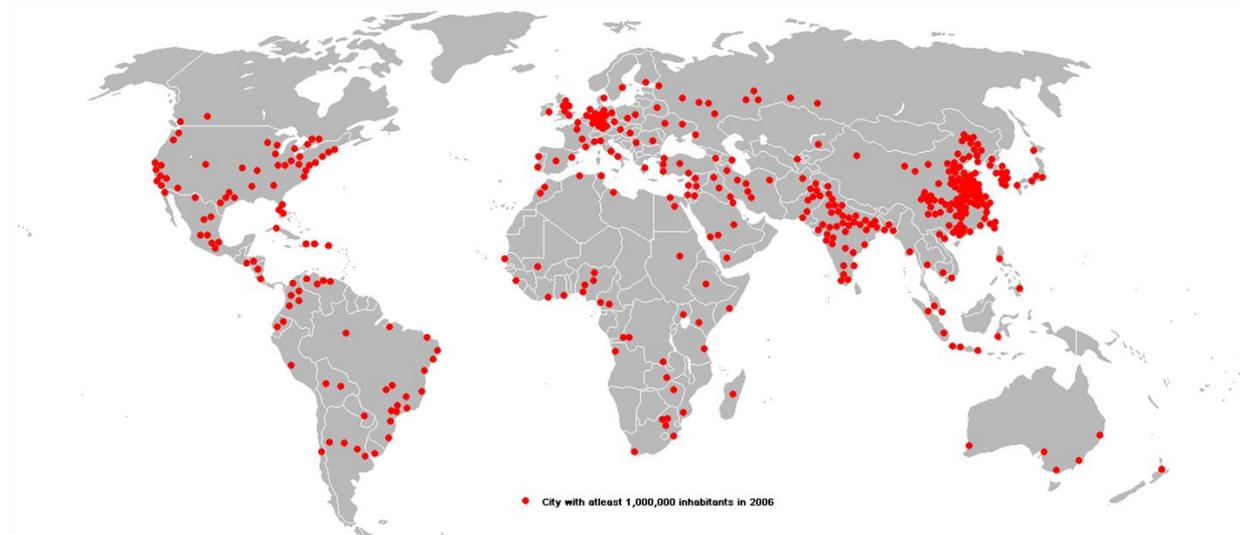


Figure 1. Map showing global distribution of top 400 “urban areas” with at least one million inhabitants in 2006.

The world continues to urbanize, especially in economically less-developed nations that are at a higher risk for armed conflict. By 2030 nearly 9 percent of the global population will reside in 41 megacities – defined as cities with a population of more than 10 million citizens.³ For example, by 2025 Lagos, Nigeria, and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), will each be home to more than 15 million citizens.⁴ That makes these cities roughly as populous as Los Angeles today.⁵

The development level of Nigeria and the DRC has left these cities lacking in comparative infrastructure and services. Nigeria continues to struggle with internal conflict caused by the fundamentalist Islamic terror group Boko Haram, and the DRC continues to experience civil unrest stemming from multiple internal and external sources.

As nations like the DRC and Nigeria continue to urbanize, the Army's mission to stand ready for rapid deployment anywhere on the globe must account for these megacities. For the Army's reconnaissance and security (R&S) experts, doctrine must be written to account for our role in these potential situations. While Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, provides for roles and responsibilities of the cavalry squadron in stability operations, little to no attention is paid specifically to urban operations, particularly during decisive action.⁶

Tasks	
5-75. Tasks for reconnaissance-in-force include:	
	Penetrate the enemy's security area and determine its size and depth.
	Determine the location and disposition of enemy forces.
	Attack enemy positions and attempt to force the enemy to react by using local reserves or major counterattack forces, employing fires, adjusting positions and employing specific weapon systems.
	Determine weaknesses in the enemy's disposition for exploitation.
	Locate obstacles and create lanes as specified.
	Enter areas of operation in complex terrain not previously occupied by friendly forces, such as urban environments.

Table 1. FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, specifies that units should be prepared to conduct reconnaissance in urban environments for only one form of reconnaissance: reconnaissance-in-force.

With this in mind, the armored force as a whole should develop a generation of junior leaders better prepared for eventual conflict in megacities through: (1) development of a doctrinal template for how to fight the R&S fight in megacities; (2) foundational instruction on the history of armor and reconnaissance in the urban fight; (3) and integration of urban training into the Objective-T training system.

Foundation: change doctrine

Many operations orders from cavalry and armored units at echelon publish the following bypass criteria: "Bypass criteria: Bypass built-up areas and urban terrain." This typically is sound advice given the standard missions at the National Training Center (NTC) and home-station preparation for NTC. However, necessity in the operating environment (OE) has left commanders with no reasonable alternative to committing their R&S organizations into urban environments. Almost always these formations have deployed into combat scenarios with little to no urban R&S doctrine. Even after years spent fighting in urban areas throughout the U.S. Central Command area of operations (AO), our R&S manuals lack plans for execution of urban R&S by cavalry squadrons.

While it is true that we must always apply the mission factors of mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time and civil considerations to mission planning – which theoretically allows doctrine to be applied to any set of terrain or circumstances – the unique nature of urban warfare requires specific attention. Two reasonable and simple steps are available for the creation of urban R&S doctrine: (1) explicitly indicating which tactical tasks can be executed by R&S organizations in urban terrain; and (2) identifying which forms of R&S each echelon can execute within an urban environment.

Doctrinal framework

Establishment of a doctrinal framework through clear identification of tactical tasks for urban R&S is the first step in preparing cavalry squadrons for combat in an urban environment. Cavalry units in World War II planned and trained to execute reconnaissance operations almost exclusively. In practice, these missions ended up accounting for less than 10 percent of their actual combat operations.⁷



Figure 2. Soldiers from 3rd U.S. Cavalry Group in 1944. U.S. cavalry groups often were forced to seize and retain key terrain or move into urban environments to answer priority information requirements in a timely manner.
(U.S. Signal Corps photo)

To prevent this lack of preparedness for future urban operations, R&S doctrine should establish a select group of tactical tasks that R&S organizations can train to accomplish in urban environments. Currently the only explicit mention of urban terrain among reconnaissance tasks is the task under the form of recon known as reconnaissance-in-force to “enter AOs in complex terrain not previously occupied by friendly forces, such as urban environments.”⁸

Experience at NTC indicates that cavalry squadrons are often tasked to isolate urban areas in support of their brigade’s freedom of movement and maneuver. Ideally a squadron would be tasked in an urban environment to isolate, secure, retain and destroy.

Cavalry squadrons are always fighting to maintain a healthy number of trained dismounts. Each of these tactical tasks would lean heavily on the dismounted capabilities of each type of cavalry squadron, but it is possible for squadrons to become proficient at these tasks. These tasks would not be the primary tasks trained by the cavalry squadron, but they would be trained at least to a proficient level by Subjective-T standards to enable the squadron or brigade commander to employ the squadron in an urban setting if necessary. Training these tactical tasks at home station or in the combat-training centers would provide units with an experiential foundation should they be called upon to perform these tasks in an urban setting at war.

Alternatively to training a set number of tactical tasks, R&S doctrine could identify which echelons can execute the various R&S operations in support of their brigades in the urban fight.

The second step in providing a doctrinal framework for the execution of R&S operations in urban environments is organizing the forms of R&S by echelon. Security doctrine already clearly lays out which echelon of units may conduct screen, guard and cover missions.

For reconnaissance operations, the planning factors for area, route and zone reconnaissance would be raised above their current echelon. Rather than depending on a section to complete a route reconnaissance, that level would increase (most likely) to a platoon or troop, depending on the brigade combat team (BCT) cavalry squadron type and the threat level. Similarly, area reconnaissance would likely become a troop mission, with zone reconnaissance becoming a squadron operation due to the requirements to reconnoiter lateral routes and all areas within the zone.

Also, the nature of urban OEs requires more personnel to account for subterranean areas and multistory structures. Commander’s reconnaissance guidance established in FM 3-98 enables commanders to use a few

words to provide the necessary guidance to enable efficient reconnaissance operations in all spheres, including urban environments.

Establishing guidelines for leaders to plan different R&S operations at their echelon should be coupled with effective use of commander's reconnaissance or security guidance. A thorough review of the capabilities of each BCT cavalry squadron based on its current modified table of organization and equipment would provide the hard data necessary to determine the doctrinal width and depth for security operations these squadrons could reasonably provide in various urban settings.

Instead of tens of kilometers across desert terrain, squadrons would be counting city blocks. Each BCT cavalry squadron should have its own plan for how to fight for information and conduct security operations for its brigade in an urban setting. A strong doctrinal foundation on how to execute urban R&S operations would greatly complement a program of instruction in officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) developmental schools focused on the history of R&S operations in urban environments.

Instruction: learn from mistakes

Once urban R&S doctrine is firmly established, the armor community must instill the lessons-learned from our experienced veterans into our junior leaders. I was fortunate enough to have a Thunder Run veteran as a mentor when I was a young platoon leader; my platoon sergeant had served as a young specialist gunner in the scout platoon of 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, during 2nd Brigade's historic mission.

While senior NCOs and officers in our branch probably feel that our force has spent enough time in urban terrain, every year we commission thousands of officers and pin stripes on thousands of NCOs who do not have direct-action combat experience. The last platoon leaders to serve in America's armored-cavalry regiments in combat are now field-grade officers. The sergeants of 2003 are either retired or are first sergeants or command sergeants major. As a force, we are rapidly losing that hard-fought combat-veteran experience and risk losing their lessons-learned if we fail to properly codify and institutionalize their lessons.

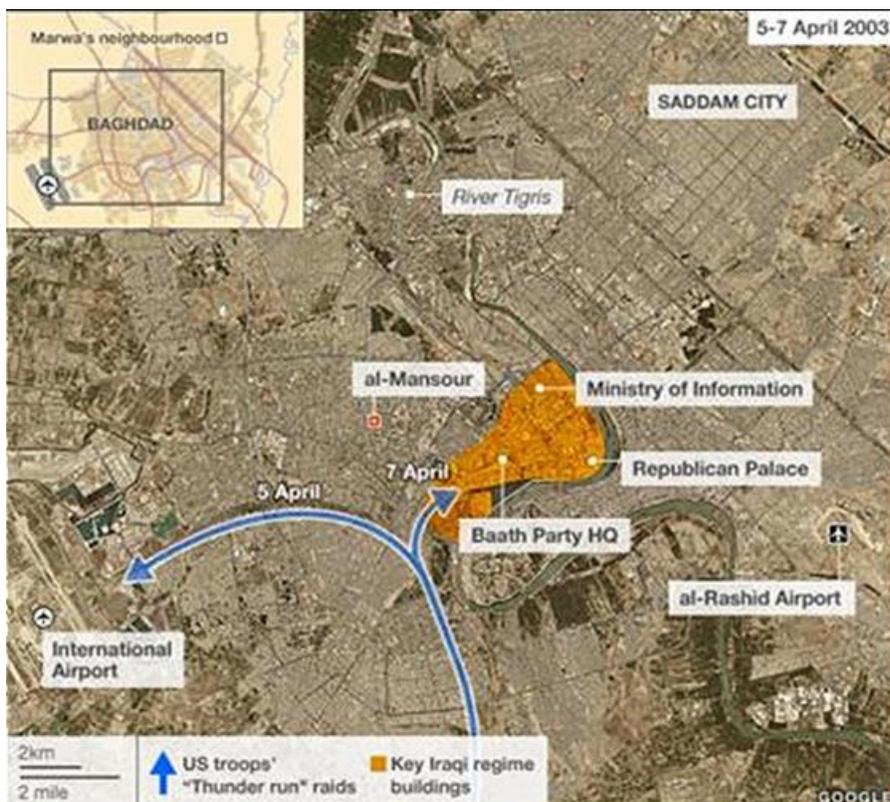


Figure 3. The 3rd Infantry Division's mechanized Thunder Run through Baghdad in 2003 demonstrated the potential for mechanized units to conduct operations in urban terrain during large-scale combat operations.
(Adapted from FM 3-98)

There are multiple options available at minimal cost for the Armor Branch to take lessons-learned and disseminate them to our up-and-coming R&S leaders during their time in the generating force. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) possesses the unique capability of reaching each officer and NCO during their Army careers. However, little to no time is currently devoted to the formal instruction of urban R&S operations for our junior leaders during their time in TRADOC. The Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) incorporates urban elements in at least the first graded tactical-decision exercise (TDE), and the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC) incorporates an urban operations order for a Stryker-based infantry company.

As we have done with other training objectives, such as Army Values training, we should interview our armor leaders on their past combat experience in urban terrain and create an archive to be used during instructional blocks in the Armor Basic Officer Leadership Course (ABOLC) and the various NCO Education System (NCOES) schools. Following the development of a foundational block of instruction on R&S operations in the urban OE, TRADOC should package various urban R&S videos and lessons, then publish them for use by leaders across the force.

The first step to teaching the lessons-learned by the current and previous generations of R&S professionals to our junior leaders is instruction in ABOLC and NCOES. To build on the lessons-learned by R&S experts in urban operations in the past two decades, it is critical that a leadership-development program is incorporated into the basic officer course and multiple levels of cavalry-scout NCO developmental schools. The Army today has an opportunity to chronicle and capture the firsthand accounts of thousands of its own professionals who served through urban combat operations on a large scale. The battles of Fallujah, Sadr City, Mosul, Baghdad and more have left our force with a cadre of leaders who understand urban operations and proofed their knowledge in combat.



Figure 4. A U.S. Army M1 Abrams tank maneuvers in the streets as it conducts a combat patrol in Tall Afar, Iraq, Feb. 3, 2005. The tank and its crew are attached to 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. The Army has an opportunity today to chronicle and capture the firsthand accounts from a cadre of leaders who understand urban operations and proofed their knowledge in combat. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Aaron Allmon)

Unlike Operation Desert Storm, our armored force was heavily involved in urban fighting during the aforementioned operations. This has built a generational wealth of R&S experts who can lend their voice to developing and publishing the best possible urban R&S doctrine our force has ever had.

Resources required

The only resources required to portray the tactical scenario and decisions the leaders faced in the moment would be the interviewees, a camera and a terrain board or similar table where they could review their actions. Thorough research would likely find corresponding news or home-video footage of many of the engagements to bring these battles to life and show our new officers and NCOs a fraction of the reality of R&S operations in the urban fight. Ideally these programs would be targeted for their specific echelon of developmental school. For example, ABOLC would incorporate interviews with scout- and tank-platoon leaders from urban fights, while the Senior Leader's Course would incorporate section sergeants from the military-occupation specialty 19D and 19K communities.

Targeting the videos to the actual echelon of training and positioning the instruction at the correct time in the training glidepath of each school would be critical. For officers, the instruction should occur sometime after or in the latter portion of tactics training. Placing the urban R&S instruction at the right time in the course would maximize the value of the instruction, and it could avoid relying on follow-on courses like the Scout Leader's Course (formerly known as the Army Reconnaissance Course) or Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leader's Course to carry the full weight of urban-operations training within TRADOC.

Realistically, every hour of the method of instruction for these courses is meticulously planned and resourced. By setting aside a half day of instruction – or even if just assigning the viewing of these videos as homework with an hour blocked out for discussion and review – it would provide a significant improvement to the instruction our junior leaders now receive.

Once we have developed a strong instructional program in TRADOC, we can execute the second step: publishing that information to the force. The instructional videos developed as classroom instruction or homework for our officer and NCO developmental schools could easily be packaged and published to the force. Mobile-training teams from the schoolhouse are expensive and difficult to coordinate for units in U.S. Army Forces Command to attend. By electronically publishing these developmental programs on an Army system like the Army Training Network or Army Knowledge Online, TRADOC could make these learning tools accessible to our junior leaders worldwide with minimal cost.

Junior officers and NCOs could reference the same videos they discussed and learned in class and use them in their own training plans to spread the tactical lessons-learned in combat by our R&S professionals across the force. Use of these videos as TDEs or as part of unit leadership-development programs would ensure the institutional knowledge gained during the urban-warfare operations of the past two decades would not be lost among our next generation of cavalymen and -women.

Using the two-pronged strategy of classroom review of lessons-learned during urban R&S operations and dissemination of the same material to the force at large, our armored force can retain the institutional knowledge gained firsthand in combat.

After the establishment of urban R&S doctrine and teaching our junior leaders the lessons-learned in the urban operating environment, the most important step remains. Without practical application and execution in the field, we will not be able to successfully apply our urban R&S doctrine in combat.

Execution: get repetitions in field

The final and most difficult step in building an R&S force capable of executing operations in the urban environment is training in the field. While urban operations should not take precedence as the priority for R&S organizations in the field, there are a couple of methods to place urban training in the right priority level for squadron commanders and to execute it in a resource-starved environment.

The Army's new training system, called Objective-T, establishes clear criteria to reach each level of readiness. To reach a "trained" or "T" rating, units must be externally evaluated, and they must have conducted their respective mission-essential tasks (METs) at night and in a chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN)-contested

environment. Adding urban terrain to the requirement to reach a T rating would ensure that units execute this training.

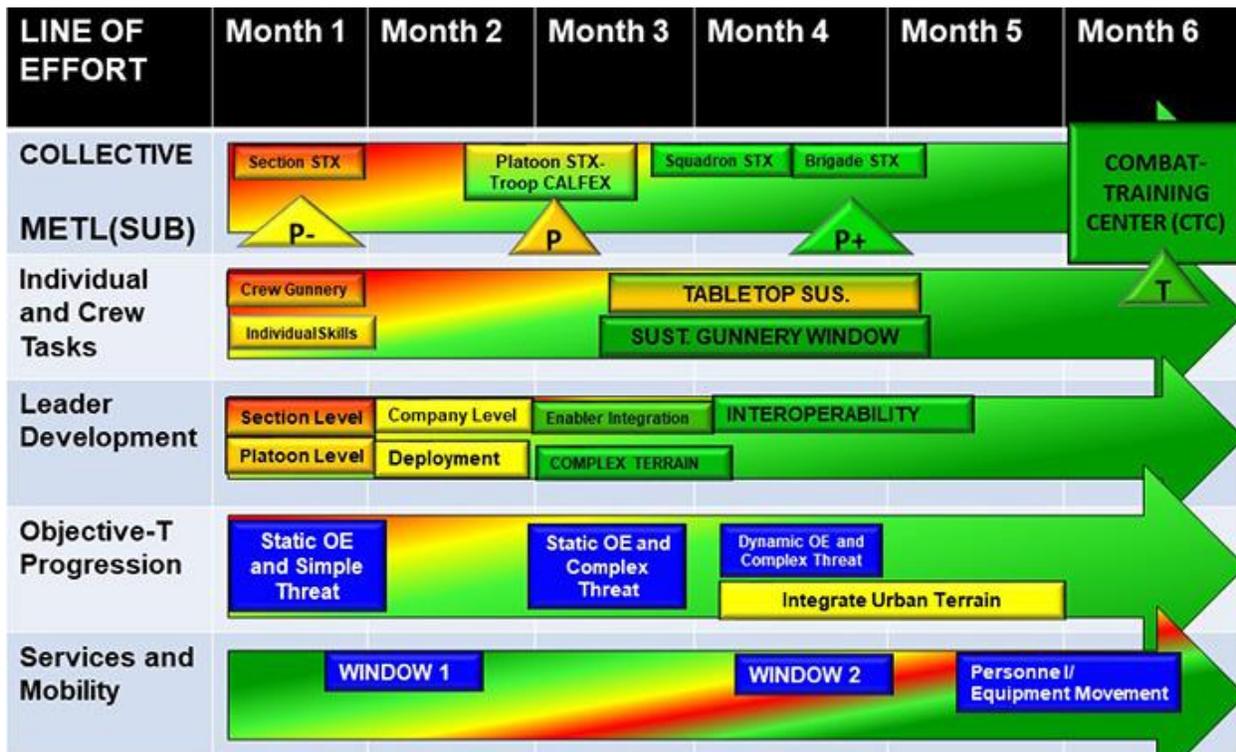


Figure 5. The road to a T rating: “a way” of integrating urban-terrain training into a standard combat-training center train-up for a cavalry squadron. Applying urban-terrain training at the squadron level as units transition to a dynamic OE would ensure sections and platoons are fundamentally sound. (Graphic by author)

After the addition of urban training to the requirements to reach a T rating, the next step would be ensuring that units posted in locations without reasonable urban-warfare training sites (which are high-cost and high-demand) are able to execute urban training in the Close-Combat Tactical Trainer (CCTT) or Virtual Battlespace Simulator 3 or analogous simulated battlespace.

First and most important to executing quality urban R&S training in the field is integrating urban OE training into Objective-T requirements. Objective-T’s evaluation criteria are a significant change for the evaluation of unit readiness. By imposing criteria such as external evaluation, the requirement to train at night and under contested CBRN conditions, the Army would be moving closer to creating homogenous training plans for all units that share the same METs.

By adding the urban OE for maneuver organizations, or specifically R&S organizations, Objective-T could ensure that commanders factor in this type of OE to their training plans. By restricting it to the highest readiness level, commanders would retain the ability to prioritize urban training last, or not at all if their guidance is only to reach a “proficient” level based on competing requirements at the brigade or division level.

Once codified within Objective-T as a requirement, installations would see an uptick in demand for their urban training spaces. To prevent units from having a training requirement they are incapable of achieving, it is critical that units are provided the necessary resources to execute urban training. This remains true even if it comes in a simulated environment.

Second and equally as important as integrating the urban OE into Objective-T is ensuring the training standards are executable by subordinate units. The Army has invested millions of dollars to develop simulation centers at all major installations to ensure Soldiers can receive training from the individual level all the way to the division level in a simulator. Individual marksmanship is trained in the Engagement Skills Trainer (EST). Crews are trained in the

Remote Virtual Tactical Trainer and the CCTT. Battalion, brigade and division staffs execute command-post exercises (CPXs) at their unit mission-training centers that ensure staffs can perform the necessary planning and CP functions at all levels.

By creating the requirement in Objective-T for urban training and allowing the use of simulators, commanders could execute urban R&S training through CPXs and in the EST and CCTT to ensure proficiency for their units. Units are already required to conduct a CPX to reach the highest readiness rating for their staffs, and the deliberate incorporation of an urban R&S operation in their planning would require no more resources or requirements. Our existing CCTT simulators have urban terrain that could easily support company/troop-level maneuver and below, ensuring that all our armor vehicle crews can train in the urban OE without burning any fuel.

Moving forward

In conclusion, the Armor Branch has a unique opportunity to capitalize on existing combat expertise in urban R&S operations to develop a first-ever urban R&S doctrine for our mounted force. Through the establishment of doctrine by specifying tactical tasks for cavalry squadrons in the urban OE or identifying echelons that can perform forms of R&S operations in urban environments, we can build a foundation across the force.

Building on this foundation and leveraging the human capital available in the force, the Armor Branch can develop a series of interview videos and TDEs based on real-world combat scenarios from urban operations in the past 20 years to train junior officers in the generating force and publish these videos for the force at large.

Finally, and with the most difficulty, by incorporating an urban OE into existing Objective-T evaluation criteria for R&S organizations and by allowing the use of simulated training environments to act as this urban terrain, the branch can train the techniques, tactics and procedures developed by junior leaders to enable R&S operations in the urban fight.

We owe it to the Soldiers of the future to provide a framework for the execution of R&S in the urban environment. In every major conflict in our Army's history, we have employed mounted troops within urban environments out of necessity. We must recognize the reality that our next conflict will likely occur in a country with large urban environments or possibly even in a megacity. With this in mind, we can move forward by identifying the best possible employment methods for our R&S personnel in those scenarios to enable the success of the Army within urban OEs.

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Notes

¹ Richard Ogorkiewicz, "Armor and Future Urban Warfare," *ARMOR*, March 2004, www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR.

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³ "Bright Lights, Big Cities," *The Economist*, Feb. 4, 2015, www.economist.com/node/21642053.

⁴ "Growth Areas," *The Economist*, Dec. 13, 2010, www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2010/12/13/growth-areas.

⁵ Data Access and Dissemination Systems, "American FactFinder – Results," Oct. 5, 2010, factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?srx=bkmk.

⁶ FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*. July 2015.

⁷ Ogorkiewicz.

⁸ FM 3-98.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABOLC – Armor Basic Officer Leadership Course

AO – area of operations

BCT – brigade combat team

CALFEX – combined-arms live-fire exercise

CBRN – chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear

CCTT – Close-Combat Tactical Trainer
CLC –Cavalry Leader’s Course
CP – command post
CPX – command-post exercise
DRC – Democratic Republic of the Congo
EST – Engagement Skills Trainer
FM – field manual
MCCC – Maneuver Captain’s Career Course
MET – mission-essential task
METL – mission-essential task list
NCO – noncommissioned officer
NCOES – Noncommissioned Officer Education System
NTC – National Training Center
OE – operating environment
R&S – reconnaissance and security
STX – situational-training exercise
TDE – tactical decision exercise
TRADOC – (U.S. Army) Training and Doctrine Command
TRP – troop



Figure 6. U.S. Soldiers of 350th Infantry Regiment liberate the Italian towns of Isola Vicentina and Sandrigo April 29, 1945. (Photo by Laura Kreider, U.S. Army Garrison Italy)