

# URBAN SNIPERS

MAJOR WAYNE A. SILKETT

Nobody really wants to fight in cities and towns. Such operations are difficult, costly, and time-consuming. For this reason, built-up areas should be isolated and by-passed whenever possible. This is sound doctrine, regardless of who preaches it.

But the modern battlefield may not allow for the isolation and by-passing of built-up areas. This is especially true in Europe, where almost every day urban sprawl does away with more and more maneuver room.

Nevertheless, urban warfare can work to the advantage of an outnumbered defender. It not only provides an opportunity for greater mutual support and defense in depth, it can seriously slow the momentum of an enemy's attack and substantially increase his losses.

One way to make it easier to fight outnumbered and win in such operations is to use snipers on a large scale. When they are integrated with all other means of urban defense, snipers

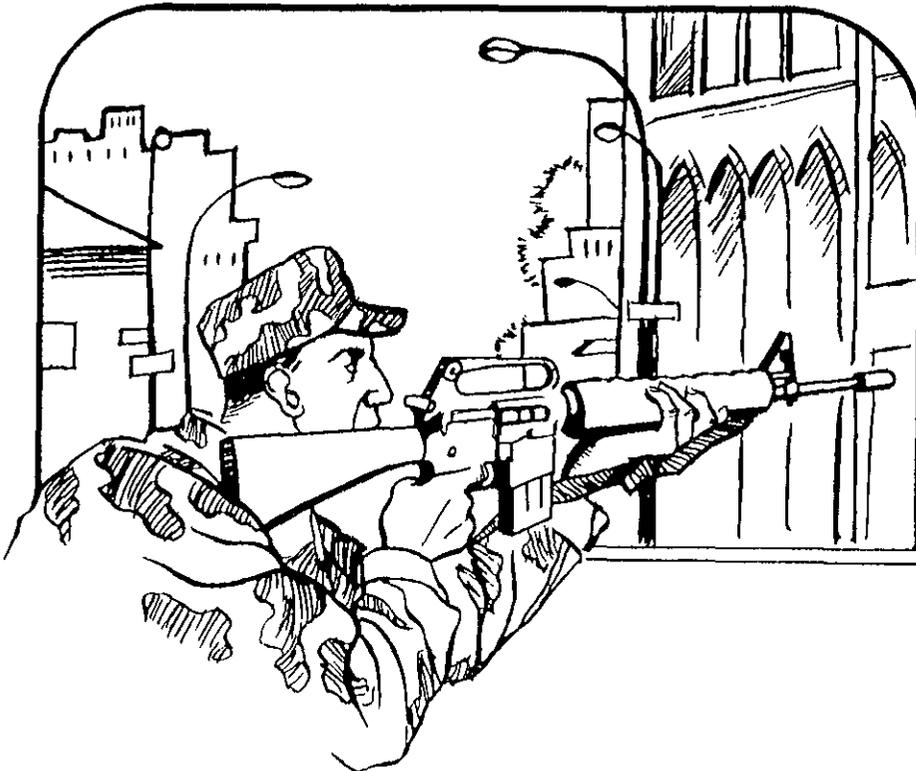
can be one of the most mobile, lethal, and cost-effective defensive measures used in urban combat.

Snipers have always been misunderstood and generally neglected. They have been considered a psychological weapon with more nuisance value than anything else. Historically, though, this has been because their employment was on a small scale and because they were often used in a haphazard manner. The time has come to consider the advantages of using snipers in large numbers in urban warfare.

How many snipers would be needed? There should be at least two snipers in each rifle platoon, which is six per company, or 18 per battalion. Even this number may not be enough, but it is a starting point.

An urban battlefield is well suited to the use of snipers in such numbers, perhaps moreso than any other combat environment. Cities and towns, intact or otherwise, provide excellent cover and concealment and are well suited to a defense in depth. And an urban battlefield is truly three-dimensional, with sniping positions and opportunities virtually unlimited. This, in addition to his own high degree of mobility and knowledge of the area, makes the sniper less accessible to the enemy and less vulnerable than other defensive measures.

One sniper cannot be everywhere, obviously, but several snipers, perhaps dozens per defensive sector,



can be almost everywhere — or they can certainly seem to be. Numerous well-trained and imaginatively used snipers can achieve the following objectives:

- They can inflict high losses on enemy officers and NCOs, who can be expected to be up front, particularly in urban combat, where decentralized operations require close contact and supervision.

- They can kill such critical personnel as reconnaissance and communication troops, vehicle commanders, engineers, and exposed artillery crewmen.

- They can force vehicle crews to button up, reducing their vision and thereby increasing the vehicle's vulnerability.

- They can slow an enemy's advance and dilute his offensive capability by making him divert his resources for the clearing, denial, retention, and monitoring of likely sniper locations.

- They can cause heavy losses and increase the psychological strain on the attacker and damage his morale.

No one seriously expects snipers — in whatever numbers — to win every urban battle. The combined efforts of infantry, artillery, combat engineers, armor, and air power may not win every one, either, especially when the defending force is seriously outnumbered. But if an urban defense cannot always defeat an enemy, it can always delay him, disrupt his offensive timetable, tie him down, and in-

lict high losses on him

Friendly forces may have to fight outnumbered, but they do not have to be outfought. A number of well-trained, resourceful snipers, imaginatively employed, well-coordinated and well integrated into the overall defense, could help make the difference between winning and losing.



MAJOR WAYNE A. SILKETT, now assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency, previously served with the Berlin Brigade. He holds master's degrees from Boston University and the University of Southern California and has completed the Command and General Staff College.

## Arctic Airborne Mortars

STAFF SERGEANT JOHN E. FOLEY

Alaska, a land of few roads with limited aviation support, lines of communication that are measured in hundreds of miles, and sometimes brutal weather conditions, represents a real challenge to the weapons platoon of an arctic airborne infantry company. I know. I had three years of experience with such a platoon and went through everything Alaska had to offer during three mortar ARTEPs, numerous field training exercises, and year-round training in mountains and muskeg.

From this, I have come to the conclusion that the present MTOE for the weapons platoon in the arctic air-

borne infantry company is not only unworkable, it is also unrealistic. The major problem areas can be grouped under three general headings: manpower, mobility and firepower, and antiarmor capability.

### Manpower

Its current MTOE gives the platoon a total of 1 officer and 17 enlisted men. These 18 soldiers must carry three complete 81mm M29 mortars and, during the winter months, must tow a minimum of two akhio tent groups. In addition, each man must

carry his individual weapon and a rucksack. When the unit goes to the field, every man carries either a radio or a major gun component, plus one round of 81mm mortar ammunition. The tent groups are critical during the winter months, and the rucksacks are a must during all seasons of the year. Unfortunately, when the platoon is engaged in a fire mission, no one is available to provide security.

The platoon needs at least eight additional soldiers — two radio-telephone operators in the headquarters squad plus two ammunition bearers in each mortar squad. These would give the platoon enough men to