



# Defending Against Soviet Forces On Urban Terrain

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Soviet military literature has recently emphasized the need for more training in military operations on urban terrain (MOUT). U.S. Army literature (FM 90-10) also provides guidance for conducting operations on the urban terrain peculiar to Western Europe. The reason for this emphasis in both armies is, of course, that if a war should break out in Western Europe between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces, fighting on urban terrain would be unavoidable.

In the January-February 1985 issue of *INFANTRY I* discussed Soviet doctrine for conducting operations in built-up areas. In this article, I offer some points a commander should consider in preparing to defend against such operations.

First, a defending commander must prepare to defeat Soviet reconnaissance elements. Those reconnaissance elements — mounted on BMPs, BRDMs, or motorcycles — will be able to call for artillery fire, pinpoint enemy defensive positions, and probe for defensive flanks and weak spots. If the defending commander can draw the reconnaissance forces well within the urban area before engaging them, he will have done much toward destroying the opposing commander's ability to employ artillery fire effectively. He will also most likely force the opposing commander to deploy his forces for a deliberate assault instead of attempting an attack from the march.

In fact, it may be advisable for the defending commander to allow the Soviet reconnaissance elements to drive through or past his concealed defensive positions to be engaged by deeper defensive positions or mobile hunter-killer teams while he waits in place to surprise the Soviet main body.

As for constructing defensive sites, FM 90-10 provides excellent guidance. If possible, the main defensive site should be placed in a ferroconcrete structure and its embrasures plugged with sandbags or covered with wire mesh. Heavy machinegun and RPG-7 fires are of limited value against ferroconcrete buildings while they will readily penetrate brick, soft stone, and wooden buildings. "Mouse holes" should be used for firing positions. (Soviet troops are trained to fire at open doors and windows and to attack and plug them during the assault.)

All defensive positions need to be mutually supporting and manned by at least two men, and soldiers cannot be hesitant about firing their weapons. In addition to firing at targets outside buildings, they should be trained to engage enemy troops inside buildings by firing through interior walls, ceilings, and floors. Unfortunately, because the M16 cartridge has limited penetrating power, most of this firing will have to be done by M60 machinegunners. (Infantry leaders should read or reread S.L.A. Marshall's *Men Against Fire*.)

Defensive positions should not be oriented solely toward an attack from the front. Multiple supporting positions should be planned, because the Soviet forces will try to hold such positions in place and take their objective from the flank or rear.

Soviet forces can be expected to employ large amounts of smoke — particularly in a deliberate attack. Defending troops therefore need to be taught to employ claymores and small arms fire through smoke cover. As in night firing, soldiers who are firing through smoke tend to fire high, so defensive positions need to be constructed to ensure grazing fire.

Selective rubble and preplanned killing zones should be used to channel and destroy attacking forces. Fou-gasse and multiple claymore mines will prove very effective for this task. (The wires on the claymore should be buried so that they will not be cut by artillery fire.) M24 off-route antitank mines should be emplaced so as to strike just above the height of tank road wheels.

Doors should be locked and blocked. Although Soviet doctrine calls for entering buildings through gaps blown in the walls, direct fire will not cut the metal reinforcing rods in concrete buildings. Furthermore, Soviet trainers do not allow troops to routinely blow gaps in scarce MOUT training facilities any more than U.S. trainers do. Therefore, Soviet soldiers train by entering open doors and windows. (A locked and blocked door could be a nasty surprise for the first soldier to encounter it!)

Evacuation routes and signals should be planned and should include the use of messengers, the local telephone system, and wire communications. Subterranean evacuation and resupply routes should be used whenever possible. At the same time, subways, sewers, utility tunnels, and drainage systems in the Soviets' advance route must be blocked and defended, because the Soviets will use them in a deliberate assault whenever they can.

Some way of fighting fires should be incorporated into defensive positions. Wet blankets should be placed around crew-served weapon positions as protection from flame.

## ARTILLERY FIRE

Plans should also be made to defend against enemy artillery. The Soviets' artillery doctrine is modified when applied to urban terrain. A large part of their artillery fire will be direct lay, and their artillery preparatory fires will be more limited to avoid creating obstacles. In defending against these fires, our commanders might use the Soviets' own experience from World War II, when they learned to use underground structures to protect their combat equipment and personnel. During the German artillery preparatory fires, for example, most Soviet soldiers would move rapidly with their weapons to basement shelters or to trench systems dug behind their buildings and well out of danger from collapsing rubble. Designated personnel and standby weapons would remain in place in specially prepared shelters. When the German

artillery fires were shifted, Soviet commanders would quickly move their troops back to their places to repulse the ground attack.

In order to add to the confusion of battle, defending forces should remove or relocate street name signs, building numbers, and traffic signs. (Although the Soviet Army has excellent maps, they are classified and Soviet squad leaders don't see or use them enough. For combat on urban terrain Soviet forces will therefore rely heavily on guide books and commercial maps of built-up areas in Western Europe.)

## FIRING POSITIONS

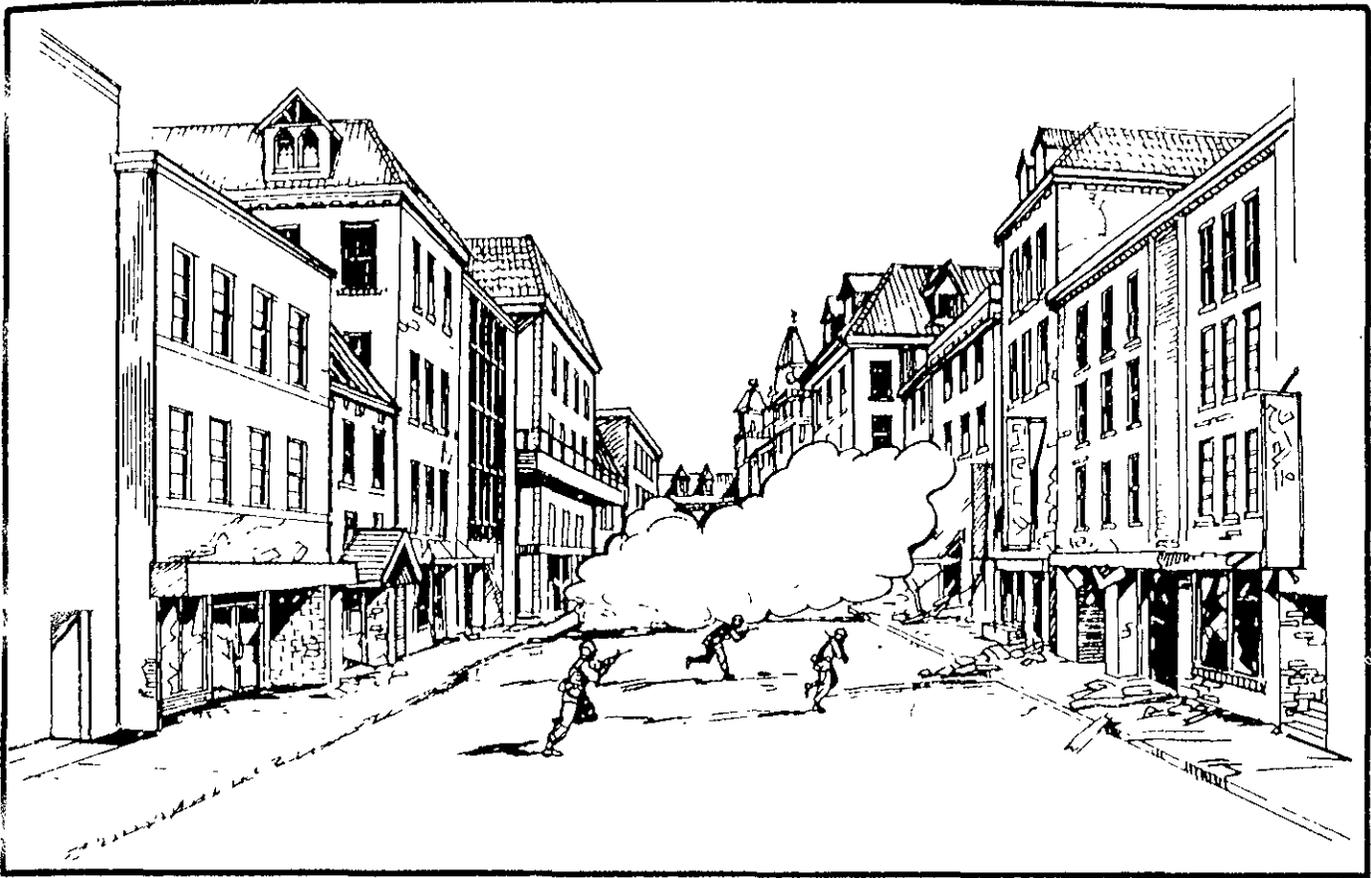
As for crew-served weapon positions, most of the defender's machineguns need to be employed at ground level with interlocking fields of fire at grazing height. Alternate firing positions, aiming stakes, and limit-of-sector stakes are essential. Most firing positions should be located inside basements and on first floors, with "mouse holes" for firing. (FM 90-10 provides excellent guidance on constructing firing positions.) Some machineguns may need to be employed on rooftops, along with Redeyes or Stingers, in an antiaircraft role. Depending on the tactical situation, the commander may put a light machinegun in the upper stories of a multi-storied building as a roving gun to engage targets of opportunity.

Antitank weapons normally have to be employed outside buildings since the backblast of the TOW, the Dragon, and the LAW usually prohibits their employment inside. Since most antitank shots will be at short range, and since both the TOW and the Dragon have a minimum effective range in which the gunner must acquire the missile, the LAW will be the primary antitank weapon in urban fighting. And as we learned in Vietnam, squad volley fire is the safest and most effective way to use the LAW.

TOWs and Dragons should be employed on the flanks of the urban area to help counter an expected envelopment action. The use of the TOW against the Mi-24 armored helicopter gunship should also be considered. It is well to keep in mind that when the Soviets attempt an attack directly from the march, they are vulnerable to interdiction on their flanks. Antiarmor hunter-killer teams, moving on routes parallel to the attack, should enjoy considerable success if they are employed in a logical and controlled manner.

TOWs and Dragons can be positioned along boulevards for long range shots against tanks, but the bulk of the antitank fighting will be done with other tanks, LAWs, mines, and M24 off-route antitank launch mines. (French MK-1 horizontal action antitank mines are also effective if they are available.)

Unit S-4s should try to obtain 90mm recoilless rifles and 3.5-inch rocket launchers for MOUT fighting from within buildings (as the Marines learned in Hue). Antitank weapons employed from above against the top armor of tanks should also be quite effective.



Antitank positions should not be disclosed prematurely. Tanks and artillery pieces in the direct fire and assault roles will figure prominently in the Soviet organization for combat, and Soviet reconnaissance forces will continually strive to discover antitank positions. These positions must therefore be moved once they have been discovered.

## RESERVES

A mobile reserve will be needed for defensive operations, particularly if Soviet forces should launch an air-mobile assault or a flank or rear attack. The reserve can also be used in its classic role of blocking penetrations, but it should not be prepositioned so close to the main defensive positions as to interfere with the defense's flexibility and mobility.

The defending commander should employ long range artillery fire against Soviet forces approaching the urban area to create confusion in the march column, slow its progress, and force the attacker to deploy his forces. And within the city, artillery and, particularly, mortar fire can be used to keep armored forces buttoned up and to separate the dismounted riflemen from their armor.

The movement of armored vehicles in a city can be a problem. The vehicles are often restricted to movement along streets — where they are more exposed to enemy fire. Accordingly, consideration should be given to moving tanks and tracks through buildings when possible. Factories, warehouses, and many large stores can be

driven through, but the buildings should be checked first, of course. (Tracked vehicles should not drive through buildings with basements as this tends to convert a tank into a pillbox.)

As mentioned, Soviet reconnaissance elements will try to determine the location of crew-served weapon positions, particularly those with antiarmor weapons, and will try to neutralize and destroy them early in the attack. Accordingly, the defending soldiers must observe fire discipline, employing only the crew-served weapons that are necessary for eliminating select targets and then shifting those weapons to alternate sites.

Command, control, and communication problems will plague Soviet forces in any battle on urban terrain. Intelligence efforts and combat patrols should therefore concentrate on compounding these problems by neutralizing command posts.

During the hasty attack, Soviet command vehicles can be identified by their multiple or special antennas, their lack of anti-aircraft armament, and the proximity of the chemical reconnaissance, artillery, and air defense artillery command vehicles. During preparations for the deliberate attack, Soviet battalion command posts will normally be located within 200 meters of the front units in places from which direct observation is possible (in multi-storied buildings, for example).

Defending troops need to be taught to don chemical masks in case the Soviet forces decide to employ chemicals. The Soviets could use a mixture of HE and chemical munitions for tactical surprise, or an agent such as HCN to rapidly neutralize a strongpoint. HCN can be delivered

effectively by Soviet BM-21 multiple rocket launcher units and, in an advance to contact, can be available within an hour after the reconnaissance elements make their initial contact. The lethality and rapid dispersal of HCN makes it ideal for use on urban defensive positions.

Soviet forces will probably employ flamethrowers as well, up to two per squad in their assault group. The Soviet LPO-50 flamethrower has a maximum effective range of 50 meters and a strong recoil that makes the prone firing position the only accurate one to use with it. Defensive planning should therefore identify potential flamethrower positions and ensure that effective fire can be brought to bear on them. The Soviets also use crew-served TPO-50 flamethrowers (with a maximum effective range of 150 meters) and flamethrower tanks.

The defenders can use flame warfare, too, through fougasse, the US M9E1-7 flamethrower, and the M202A2 flash. (The backblast area of the M202A2 prohibits its use inside most buildings, however.)

Finally, breakout and linkup planning should begin as soon as the defensive plan has been issued, because the Soviets will try to envelop the urban defending forces, sealing the city off to prevent their withdrawal or reinforcement.

To effect an envelopment, the Soviets may use ground, airborne, or airmobile forces. Tanks, TOWs, and Dragons can be used for flanking shots against ground forces that are trying to bypass the urban area. If it is available, a tank-heavy force can be prepositioned at the logical juncture beyond the urban area.

The commander should be aware that Soviet airborne forces, once they have been dropped, are mechanized — BDMs and ASU 85s will accompany any airdrop to the rear of the urban area. Airmobile forces, however, normally consist of regular motorized rifle soldiers without their APCs.

The logistical demands of urban warfare can be heavy for both sides; large quantities of cartridges, antitank and antipersonnel grenades, artillery projectiles, smoke rounds, signaling equipment, shaped charges, bangalore torpedoes, antitank and antipersonnel mines, grapples, assault ladders, and barrier materials will have to be

pushed forward. Food and water resupply and medical evacuation efforts will prove difficult.

The Soviet logistical system lacks the manpower to support this kind of battle and will be hard pressed to maintain its forward supply dumps. An immediate counterattack following heavy fighting may be easier because of the Soviets' resupply problems.

Soviet attacks have been stopped by a strategically placed field kitchen. (Although Soviet troops are prohibited from consuming enemy food or drink, including alcohol, without medical clearance, experience has shown that discipline may break down after the capture of food and drink.) Indeed, the German army of World War II sometimes deliberately gave ground to the Soviets in selected sectors of the front. In those sectors, the Germans would "abandon" field kitchens with prepared meals and register preplanned artillery strikes on them. Such tactics often proved quite effective.

The defense of urban terrain will be one of the most difficult combat tasks an infantry unit will be called on to undertake on the contemporary battlefield. The unit's success or failure ultimately will be decided at the small unit level. House-to-house fighting will be a squad and team leaders' battle, and this is the level at which leadership initiative is weakest in the Soviet forces. If enough confusion can be created, Soviet attacks may falter or fail completely when the battle reaches the squad level.

Well thought out plans and battle drills, coupled with realistic MOU training, will go far toward improving our ability to win in this environment.



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