

Commandant's Note

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URBAN OPERATIONS — MEETING THE CHALLENGES

Combat has always presented complex and varied conditions to the warfighter. Of all the types of combat faced by today's infantry, few are as challenging as the urban fight. The last half of the 20th century has seen increased urbanization around the globe. Millions of people have moved into the cities and shantytowns. As civilians have moved to the cities, the guerillas and insurgents have chosen the urban environment in which to base their operations. U.S. and coalition forces have invested significant resources in perfecting command and control systems; precise, lethal firepower; logistical support systems; and the tactics to win the urban fight; and our enemies have been diligent in trying to adapt tactics that will mitigate these advantages. Operating in and around urban areas creates complex, short range engagements, restricts mobility and observation, and increases the potential for civilian casualties. With this in mind, our infantrymen are constantly adapting and must constantly evaluate courses of action. In this Commandant's Note, I want to discuss the challenges of urban operations and the need for training, innovation and a continued combined arms approach as we prosecute the global war on terrorism (GWOT).

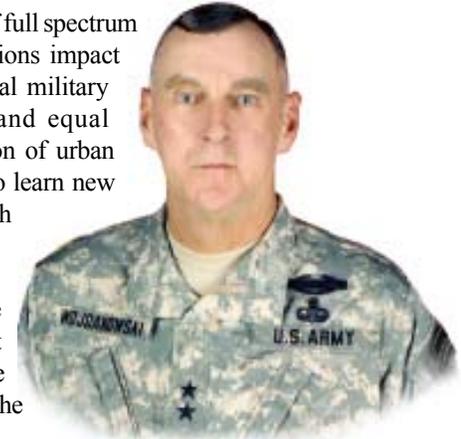
For well over 200 years and on battlefields around the world, the U.S. Army has conducted complex combat and non-combat operations in urban terrain. Today, in the urban areas of Afghanistan and Iraq, our infantrymen have continued adapting and perfecting the way they close with and defeat the enemy. The current GWOT fight continues this long tradition of U.S. infantrymen fighting amid the challenges of often unfamiliar terrain and a vulnerable civil population.

Much of the experience gleaned from World War II resulted in the first urban operations field manual "Combat in Fortified Areas," published in 1951 which offers valuable lessons to this day. In recent years our urban operations doctrine has evolved in two major areas. First, although some tactical situations may require systematic clearing of an urban area, today's infantry strives to avoid such a costly approach, seeking instead to attack key points of enemy strength or weakness focusing on centers of gravity and decisive points. This approach to urban warfare requires infantrymen to stay situationally aware, move rapidly, apply precision firepower, and maintain a complete understanding of the environment, including the disposition of noncombatants and enemy forces.

Unable to match our firepower our enemies increasingly seek asymmetric options to offset our advantages. Irregular warfare often takes the form of an insurgency and relies heavily on the support of the indigenous population. Our Soldiers must recognize the interdependent nature of the terrain, the enemy infrastructure, and the people. We can best assure ultimate victory by full consideration of all these factors.

The second area in which our doctrine has evolved is in the

recognition and integration of full spectrum operations. Civil considerations impact victory as much as traditional military objectives, and they demand equal consideration in the execution of urban operations. From the need to learn new skill sets associated with cultural understanding, use of translators, and small-unit leader negotiations, to the efforts required to perfect challenging techniques like room clearing, the impact on the infantry has been profound.



The need to fight as a combined arms team remains the cornerstone of our profession, and this is true of the urban fight today. The urban fight does not belong to infantrymen alone and combat experience highlights the importance of the combined arms team. The complex three-dimensional battlefield demands the integration of armored forces, aviation, engineers, indirect fires, and air support. Today's Soldiers are integrating even more assets at a lower level than ever before. In addition to the traditional combined arms team of the past, infantry units now must interact with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational forces. While the traditional combined arms team is critical to success in urban operations, it requires judgment in its application. Leaders must decide when they should enter and clear a building, and when it is necessary to destroy that very same building.

The Infantry School provides infantrymen the means and training to apply lethal firepower with precision. Future technology will continue to bring infantrymen increasingly precise weapon systems. Detection and target acquisition capabilities will continue to improve along with efforts to advance and synchronize our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. We will continue to improve non-lethal capabilities for the future battlefield.

Infantry leaders have great challenges ahead as they work to integrate new technologies, tactics and techniques, and to train with varied and complex teams. While all these new skills compete for training time, the need to master fundamental warfighting skills remains. It is creative infantry leaders and a growing experience base in the force that has allowed our Army to face challenges head on, and maintain the world's premier infantry force.

Mastery of the fundamental infantry skills, effective application of new technologies, a thoughtful planning process, and the application of battle command by adaptive leaders will allow the U.S. infantry to continue domination of the enemy wherever we choose to fight, even in urban terrain.

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