

# URBAN OPERATIONS

## LEARNING FROM PAST BATTLES

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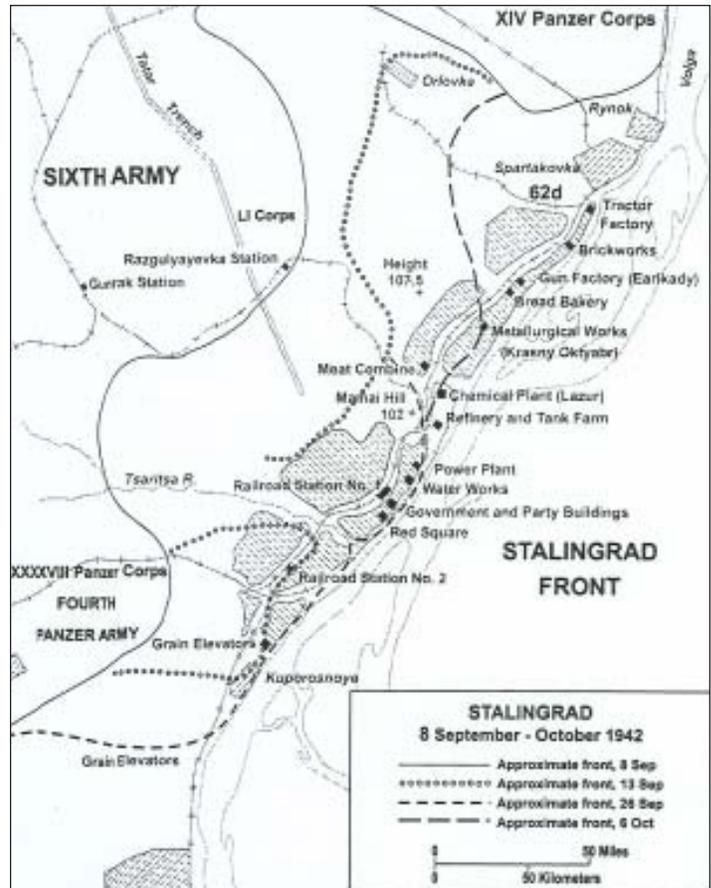
The need to train Soldiers on urban combat, something the U.S. Army has found increasingly necessary since the early years of World War II, has received even closer attention over the past three decades. It is a fact that many of the conflicts in which the United States has been involved have included the need to defeat insurgent forces within built-up areas. The history of urban operations is an interesting one, and each battle offers lessons of relevance to today's Soldiers. *City Fights: Selected Histories of Urban Combat from World War II to Vietnam*, edited by COL John Antal and MAJ Bradley Gericke, focuses on urban combat, and its detailed accounts of some of history's salient city fights offer valuable insights into lessons learned at horrific cost in men and materiel, and are well worth the read. In this article, I want to discuss five historic battles on urban terrain, each of which offers its own lessons.

### STALINGRAD, 1943

In *City Fights*, COL Eric M. Walters presents a detailed study of the Battle of Stalingrad in World War II. On August 21, 1942, the German Sixth Army under the command of Colonel General Friedrich Paulus and the Fourth Panzer Army under Colonel General Hermann Hoth launched an offensive to seize the city of Stalingrad on the Volga River in southern Russia. German forces managed to occupy most of the city west of the Volga by mid-November. On November 19, the Red Army commenced an attack code-named Operation Uranus by three complete armies on the Sixth Army's flanks, and on the 22nd managed to sever the German lines of communication. The Germans continued fighting until their surrender on February 2, 1943.

Adolf Hitler and his staff underestimated the will of the Red Army, even as his field commanders already knew they were facing a tenacious, implacable foe. The main Soviet force attacking from the east was the Sixty-second Army led by Major General Vasili Ivanovich Chuikov, who was described both as a fatalist and as an inspiration to his troops. He played for time by allowing the Sixth Army to take key areas in the city, but each time the Germans won a contested area it was at a heavy cost of men and equipment. To compensate, the Germans would be forced to move troops from their flanks to the front lines, unwittingly weakening their defense against the Red Army's planned counteroffensive. During urban operations time is a critical factor, and a problem with the campaign for the Germans was how the Soviets perceived time. The Germans wanted to quickly accomplish their objectives, but the Soviet defenders were more interested in dragging the conflict out as long as they could to whittle the Germans down both physically and psychologically.

From August 23-25 and on September 3, the Luftwaffe pounded the city from the air, but the rubble they created would ultimately come to haunt the ground forces tasked with clearing and securing



Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations  
Map 1 — Stalingrad

the city, because the collapsed buildings made it difficult to maneuver the tanks and artillery pieces tasked to provide close support to German infantry. The rubble also made it difficult for the German forces to locate Soviet troops. Reducing a city to rubble may make impressive propaganda footage for the home front, but once the enemy infantry re-occupies the ruins the cost of dislodging him will be high in terms of both lives and the vast quantities of munitions the urban fight demands. Once Soviet forces were able to interdict the overextended supply lines on which the Germans depended, the outcome of the battle of Stalingrad and the fate of the Sixth Army were no longer in doubt.

### WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING, 1943

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on January 18, 1943, illustrates another dimension of urban combat, one in which an ostensibly helpless populace faced with certain death rose up against its captors. As the Holocaust began to unfold across Eastern Europe, German forces first began concentrating Poland's estimated 3 million Jewish citizens into the ghettos of selected cities, and then

started deporting them eastwards to extermination camps. One of the worst of these was Treblinka, where close to 300,000 victims had been murdered in the two months preceding the middle of September 1942. The first wave of deportations was carried out relatively peacefully, since Jewish resistance leaders and their followers initially believed the German explanation that they were being sent to labor camps. As word of the extermination camps leaked out, those Jews still in the Warsaw Ghetto realized that resistance was their only choice. In *City Fights*, David M. Toczec describes the techniques used by Warsaw's Jews in 1943. Two groups, the Jewish Combat Organization (ZOB) and the Jewish Military Union (ZZW), took charge and prepared to conduct operations inside the Warsaw Ghetto. In addition to fortifying key points within the Ghetto, they quickly executed those among them who were Nazi collaborators, including members of the Jewish police and actual German secret police (Gestapo) agents.

They then waited for the Germans to attempt to deport them.

According to Toczec, when the Germans attempted this on January 18, 1943, ZOB members pulled out pistols and began shooting, causing several German casualties. Even though the Jewish resistance was limited for the most part to small arms fire, the Germans were in shock that the Jews would fight back and made plans to crush the Ghetto. Their offensive began on April 19, 1943, and the forces led by SS Obergruppenführer Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankenegg included 16 officers and 850 men of the Waffen-SS, police, and Wehrmacht units, two armored cars, a tank, and 2,000 reserve troops. Toczec points out that as soon as they began to fan out to round up the inhabitants, the ZOB again opened fire with pistols as well as homemade grenades and Molotov cocktails. The Germans retreated and regrouped. Von Sammern-Frankenegg's superior, Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop, took control of the operation. He came up with a solution to their problem: they would use fire or explosives to get rid of the insurgents. Sewers were filled with poison gas or booby traps to keep the ZOB members from using them as a means of escape. The operation dragged on into May with no end in sight. On May 8, the tactical headquarters of ZOB was destroyed, but still they fought on. The operation slowed on May 16 after the destruction of Warsaw's main synagogue.

Toczec points out that the Polish Home Army (AK) behaved in a similar fashion to the ZOB and that the Germans repeated their past mistakes. The leader of the AK, Tadeusz Komorowski, believed that the German presence in Warsaw was weak enough to defeat. They were also fearful that if the Red Army were to liberate the city they would put in place a Soviet-run government instead of Poland's government in exile. Morale for the AK was high, even though weapons and supplies were low, because they believed that they stood a chance at freedom after five years of occupation. The plan, code-named Operation Burza (Tempest), was to coordinate a simultaneous attack on six city districts: Old Town/City Center, Zoliborz, Wola, Ochota, Mokotow, and Praga. The attack was to take place during rush hour at 5 p.m. to hide their movements as well as to give AK operatives a few hours of daylight in which to complete their missions. They were depending on speed and surprise to get the upper hand on the Germans.



National Archives and Records Administration

*Jewish civilians are led away in a copy of a German photograph taken during the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland, 1943.*

The Germans knew through informants that an uprising was coming, but were still caught off guard when the action actually started. They quickly regained their senses and sent word of the attack throughout Warsaw. Fifteen minutes later, tanks and armored vehicles began entering the city. The AK found that they were unable to secure the locations that were needed for success, but they had nevertheless made some progress. Toczec describes how on the second day the AK managed to secure several districts of the city, gaining control over the gas, electric, and water works in the process. Using what limited resources they had, the AK also managed to destroy at least 12 tanks. The German garrison was in a panic. Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler was not pleased.

Himmler was given permission from Adolf Hitler to gather a force to "erase" Warsaw. It was composed of the entire Posen police force, augmented with some artillery and two brigades (Dirlewanger and Kaminski Brigades, named after their commanders). The units were put under the command of SS Gruppenführer Heinz Reinefarth. His instructions were to: "...destroy Warsaw completely...[s]et fire to every block of houses and blow them up," according to Toczec. On August 5, Reinefarth's units entered Warsaw. The plan was to split the city in two, attacking from the west through Wola and southwest through Ochota. The fighting was brutal, especially among the two SS units. Toczec asserts that the Dirlewanger Brigade was populated with condemned criminals and political prisoners and led by a man who had served a term in jail for molesting a child. He also points out that Kaminski Brigade was filled with undisciplined Ukrainians and Soviets who were known for their excess during antipartisan operations in the Soviet Union. By the end of the day several thousand Poles were dead, but this act of genocide did not dishearten the AK. It did the opposite, strengthening their resolve. They wanted revenge for the horrors perpetrated upon their citizens.

The German forces received a new officer; one Himmler believed could get control of the city. The man was Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach, Hitler's head of antipartisan combat units. He was given orders to use any means necessary to end the insurrection. Toczec says that instead of following his orders he devised a plan with "a political and a military part." Von dem Bach relieved

Kaminski from command and placed a competent officer in command of his brigade. Von dem Bach slowly stopped the executions and granted the Polish Home Army combatant status to entice the Poles to surrender. He changed the ad hoc tactics that were being used to quell the uprising to tactics that were more systematic and organized.

The Poles nevertheless continued to fight. The greatest threats they faced included the fortified buildings the Germans used for headquarters and the Panther and Tiger tanks in and around the city. While they lacked the firepower needed to take on the German fortified positions, they had some success in dealing with the tanks. While they had some British PIATs (projector infantry antitank), a weapon that fired a shaped charge to about a hundred meters, they mostly relied on *filipinki* (homemade grenades) and Molotov cocktails. Taping several *filipinki* together and tossing them at the tank's tracks would cause an explosion strong enough to either disable the track or destroy the tank's suspension. As long as one grenade went off, the others would follow suit. The Poles managed to capture a number of tanks with this method, forming the 1st Insurgents Armored Squadron as a result.

Toczek notes that Molotov cocktails, bottles filled with a flammable liquid which, when ignited and broken, would set anything it hit on fire. While some of the fluids were ignited with a burning rag, most used gasoline. Others used a tissue that would ignite upon striking a target. The drawback of the weapon is its bulky size. Several would be used on one tank to increase the chances of it catching fire. Many Poles had to carry several Molotov's at a time and had to move with the flammable liquid sloshing out. A group of Boy Scouts found a solution to this problem. By placing filled bottles at barricades and along known vehicle routes, all the Poles had to do is carry the ignition source with them. Between the use of homemade grenades and Molotov cocktails, the Polish insurgents managed to disable or destroy about 50 tanks in the first few days of the uprising.

The Poles also constructed barricades to slow the German advance into the city. Toczek notes that these barricades would be made from whatever was at hand, from abandoned vehicles and furniture to paving stones reinforced with sandbags. In the

narrow streets of Warsaw, the barricades were very successful in halting German progress into the city. Often the barricades stood firm even when rammed by German tanks. But the Germans devised ways of getting around this obstacle.

When facing a barricade the preferred method used a small remote-controlled tracked vehicle loaded with explosives called *Goliath*. The *Goliath* was connected to the lead tank via a cord. When a barricade was found, the lead tank in a column would stop, move the *Goliath* toward the barricade, and use its explosives to clear the way. Poles learned to target the cord connecting the *Goliath* to the tank with *filipinki*, hoping to sever the connection. Toczek explains that AK insurgents would then take the 500 kilograms of explosives from the disabled *Goliath* for their own use.

Another method the Germans used for dealing with barricades was to shield their forces with Polish civilians. The belief was that the insurgents guarding the blockades would not fire upon their own countrymen. Most of the time the Germans were correct in this assumption; however, sometimes it didn't always end as planned. During the first week of the uprising, an AK machine-gun crew guarding a barricade along Powazkowska Street saw a group of civilians moving toward them. The civilians were moving in front of a German military police unit. The AK crew fired a warning shot and then realized why the civilians were not dispersing. The civilians were tied to a ladder that stretched across the width of the street. The AK members chose to fire into the crowd to halt the German advance. Tactics like this only enraged the Poles to fight even harder.

The AK used the sewers as a way to safely travel from place to place, much as the Russian defenders at Stalingrad had done. The sewers were a way to move supplies, men, and information. The Germans did not use what they learned during the ZOB insurrection and only became aware of the AK's use of the sewers by accident. Fighting soon broke out over control of manholes. The Germans began to booby trap portions of the sewers. Barbed wire was packed into some tunnels. One method used grenades attached to tripwires stretched across the pipes. More often than not, the concussive blast was deadlier than the fragments. Another technique was to pump fuel down the sewers and ignite it,

incinerating or asphyxiating anyone inside. While the risks were great, the Poles continued to use the sewers until the end of the uprising.

Lacking portable radios, the Poles were reliant on a group of messengers. To allow the men to keep fighting, these messengers were normally women and children. The radios they did have could not receive messages from each other, but they had the ability to contact London, which became a relay station of sorts, sending out messages ranging from status reports to viable sewer routes.

Communication problems were one of the main reasons why the AK base of operations moved several times. Many logistics problems started to arise as their supplies dwindled and their units began to be isolated by German forces. Because the AK's were unable to secure an airstrip, Allied resupply came in the form of airdrops. U.S. and British air drops were not very accurate and few of the 288 supply containers dropped actually made it into the hands of those who needed them. Soviet airdrops were more accurate but, because their packages did not have parachutes, the AKs often found damaged equipment in them, rendering weapons and ammunition useless.

The Poles believed that the Red Army would come to their aid at any moment. The Red Army had captured the suburb of Praga, and the AK constantly tried to get them to cross the Vistula River to help them fight. While the Soviets did send over two battalions of conscripted Poles, they had little or no training and became more of a hindrance when their food and ammunition ran out. When the AK was considering surrender to the Germans near the end of September, there were still attempts to get the Red Army to respond to their pleas. They received no response. With their last hope gone, the Polish Home Army signed an armistice on October 2 with all organized resistance ending on the two days later. More than 200,000 Polish Home Army soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded in the uprising, while German casualties were estimated at between 20,000 and 26,000 troops. After almost two months of fighting, the Germans were back in control of Warsaw.

According to Toczek, the Poles were willing to fight so hard against the technologically and numerically superior

Germans because they felt they had nothing to lose. The five years of occupation and the atrocities that the German forces had committed only spurred them on. Their enemy would offer no quarter, so the Poles made it clear that they would die before they would surrender or give up ground. Even when von dem Bach gave them combatant status in August, they continued to fight because they did not believe that was possible. Only when the Polish Home Army realized that Allied resupply efforts could not sustain them and that the Red Army would not cross the Vistula did they even consider surrender.

The Polish Home Army had a strong infrastructure. Toczek points out that whenever the Polish forces gained they moved in and started to organize both combatant and civilian movement through the area. Members knew their roles and when casualties started to climb, new leaders could be found quickly, maintaining a sense of unity throughout the uprising. Women and children played important roles, moving supplies and information, guiding other forces through the city, and often acting as combatants.

The Germans were overconfident in their abilities. Many didn't realize what the Poles were capable of until it was too late. Without an organized plan of attack, the Germans often found themselves in very bad situations. When their efforts became more systematic, they began to make progress. Rubbling and burning buildings made some progress, but it gave the Poles the opportunity to circle back and occupy positions behind the lead units. The author points out that once small combat patrols were left between each unit the Germans began to get rid of the threat of Polish snipers.

The fighting in Warsaw is similar to the fighting going on today in the Middle East. A technologically superior force has to deal with a poorly equipped, well organized, and inspired insurgent force who would often rather die than surrender. The fight will be in the streets and in the sewers. Toczek says that the two techniques of disrupting an enemy's resupply efforts and dispelling their belief in the assistance of their allies are as viable today as it was during the uprising in Warsaw.

### AACHEN, 1944

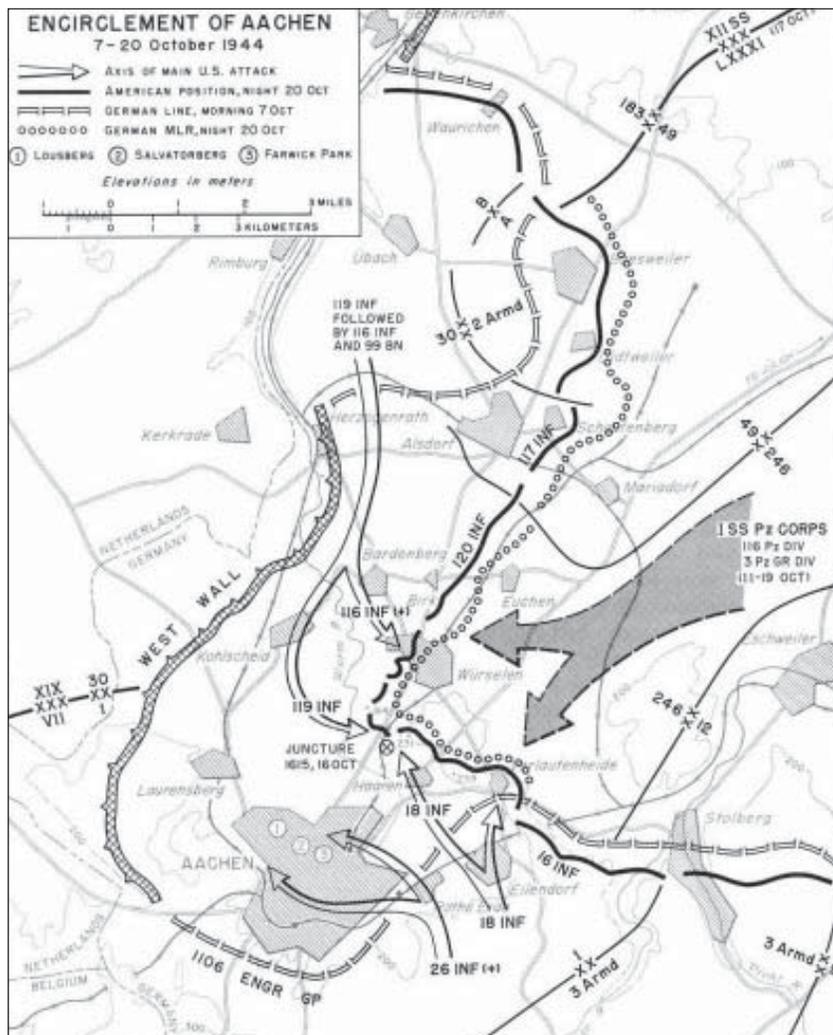
As described in *Block By Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations*, edited by William G. Robertson and Lawrence A. Yates, the Battle of Aachen is unique in several ways. According to the author of the article on Aachen, Christopher R. Gabel, it was a part of Operation Overload, but the city itself was not a major industrial target. It was a part of the Westwall, a.k.a. the Siegfried Line. The city lay between two belts of bunkers and obstacles to the east and west, but the city itself was undefended. The city also lies in a valley with high ground surrounding it. The original plan was to break through the defensive barriers and continue to the Rhine River, but the city was more important to the Nazi ideology. Settlement of Aachen dated back to Roman times, and the city was the capitol of Charlemagne's empire in the early Middle Ages. It was also the coronation place for the kings of the Holy Roman Empire from 813 to 1531. Since Hitler believed

that the Holy Roman Empire founded by Charlemagne to be the "First Reich," its capture by the Americans would be a blow to the morale of the Nazi Regime.

If everything had gone according to plan, the Battle of Aachen would never have taken place. The battle began on September 12, when allied force VII Corps, consisting of the 1st Infantry and 3rd Armored Divisions, began to penetrate the Westwall in a section south of the city. By the 15th, the divisions had managed to penetrate some of the wall's defenses at a high cost in casualties. The going was slow. Rain hampered the off-road mobility of the Allies, and the cloud cover allowed the Germans enough time to reinforce the sector without having to worry about Allied planes. By the 17th the Germans had enough manpower to start a counteroffensive. With Allied forces facing a renewed enemy and having to deal with a lack of supplies, the plan changed on September 24. The forces were now to encircle the city.

Another Allied force, XIX Corps, began an attack on a portion of the Westwall north of the city. After a bombardment involving 26 artillery battalions and 432 tactical aircraft, the 30th Infantry Division crossed the Wurm River and headed for the Westwall. The artillery had little effect on the Westwall's fortifications, so small groups of infantry had to break through with a combination of grenades, pole charges, and flamethrowers. The 30th Infantry

Figure 2



The Siegfried Line Campaign, Charles MacDonald, U.S. Army Center for Military History

Division crossed the defenses on October 3. To secure their left flank, the 2nd Armored Division positioned itself east of their location.

On October 7, the 1st Infantry Division was told to move north to meet up with the 30th to encircle the city. The 18th Infantry Regiment draws the assignment as lead element. The 18th formed special pillbox assault groups built around flamethrowers, Bangalore torpedoes, and demolition charges. The regiment also had access to a battery of 155mm self propelled guns, a company of self-propelled tank destroyers, and a company of M4 "Sherman" tanks. Each battalion was accompanied by an air liaison officer.

The 18th was given the objective of securing three hills along the way. They captured the hill Verlautenheide on the morning of October 8 after a heavy artillery strike. That afternoon, Crucifix Hill fell in a similar fashion after bitter fighting. They reached the crest of Ravel's Hill on the night of October 9. After clearing out pillboxes that they managed to bypass, they dug in and waited for the remainder of the 30th Infantry Division to arrive. Meanwhile, the Germans continued to receive reinforcements. These reinforcements included the 3rd Panzer Grenadier and 116th Panzer Divisions. The man in charge of placing these troops, General Friedrich J. Koechling, was forced to use them where they were immediately needed, instead of organizing them for a counteroffensive. Both the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions managed to defend themselves against the German counterattacks with massive artillery and air support. This delayed the 30th Division for another week.

The First Army decided to proceed with taking Aachen even though the encirclement of the city was incomplete. It was believed that with Aachen in their hands the men surrounding the city would be free to counter German resistance coming from the east. The only available forces that could take the city were two battalions of the 1st Infantry Division. These came from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 26th Infantry Regiment.

The 2/26 was given the task of clearing out downtown Aachen while the 3/26 was given the tasks of securing two hills on the north side of the city, Salvatorberg and Lousberg. All civilians were to be evacuated from the area.

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battalions had to go on in terms of published doctrine on urban combat. The manuals only had a few pages on how to fight in villages and towns, with nothing mentioning city fighting. At best, it gave them an idea of what to expect. The manuals predicted that the enemy would defend the city throughout the town and that some buildings, especially those with cellars, would be made into strongholds capable of all-round defense. Another tidbit of information stated that the streets would be swept with gunfire and the safest way to travel would be to move from building to building by blowing holes in the walls.

Other than that, combat would involve a methodical, firepower-intensive approach. Strongpoints in the city would be taken care of with direct-fire artillery, followed by infantry. Frequent stops would be required to restore contact with the other units. When it came to armor support, the manual was vague as to how the tanks would aid in an urban combat situation, only that "opportunities will present themselves frequently where the support of tanks in such situations becomes desirable."

From October 8-12, the two battalions worked their way to their respective jump-off positions. The 2/26 was securing themselves at the foot of the railroad embankment of the Aachen-Cologne railway. The 3/26 secured its position in the industrial area east of the city.

On October 10, the commander of the 1st Infantry Division, MG Clarence R. Huebner, sent an ultimatum to the garrison at Aachen explaining that the city had 24 hours to surrender. When the deadline came without a response, the Americans began a two-day bombardment of the city. VII Corps and 1st Infantry Division artillery fired 4,800 rounds into the city along with 62 tons worth of bombs on the first day. On the second day, 5,000 more rounds and 99 tons of bombs were used on the city. Because

most Germans in the city had access to protected positions like cellars, basements and air raid shelters, the show of firepower had little impact on the population.

The two battalions began their operations at the same time. The 2/26 began its assault with artillery fire and followed it by tossing grenades over the embankment. When they made it to the top, they found that the embankment was not defended. The embankment was an obstacle for the tanks to get over. Two tanks did make it over the embankment by going through a railway station built into the embankment.

Before the operation began, LTC Derril M. Daniel, the 2/26's battalion commander, prepared for operation. He began by reconfiguring his battalion by integrating combat arms at the small unit level. Each rifle company became a task force, augmented by two 57mm antitank guns from the regimental antitank company, two bazooka teams, one flamethrower, three tanks or tank destroyers, and two heavy machine guns. This gave each rifle company access to a wide variety of weapons systems for any situation.

To aid in communication Daniel set up a system in which all intersections and prominent buildings were numbered to speed up communication and to help coordinate the battalion's elements. Daniel ordered a strong liaison between units at all times. There were mandated stops at designated checkpoints for reestablishment of contact along the line. Offensive operations stopped at night along designated main streets to avoid night combat.

Logistically, Daniel improvised a mobile battalion ammo dump. In order to transport wounded soldiers, he managed to obtain some M29 cargo carriers, known as "weasels," whose tracks could easily traverse the rubble-filled streets.

The catchphrase for the operation was "Knock em' all down." There was not a second thought given to collateral damage. Daniel believed that the enemy wouldn't be able to fight effectively if the buildings they were fighting in were crumbling around them. The plan was often to force German forces into the cellars where Allied infantry would finish them off with bayonets or grenades.

The strategy began with heavy artillery striking German lines of communication. Medium artillery was used on the lines. Most projectiles were equipped with

delayed fuses, preferably exploding inside targets. Most of the division and corps artillery were to the south of the city. The big guns were a great help to the infantry inside the city, but they couldn't count on having artillery support all the time. The artillery had to deal with two battles: the battle in the city and the battle to encircle it.

Tanks and tank destroyers were used in tandem with infantry. The infantry's goal in these operations was to keep the Germans from firing Panzerfausts, short-ranged (30-80 meters) antitank weapons, while using the tanks to take strongpoints in the city. Platoons normally kept their tanks one street behind the street that they were clearing. The tank would carefully move up around the corner and start firing on a specific building. The infantry would then clear out the building, and the tank would begin to fire on the next structure in line. When the block was cleared, infantry started firing into every possible location a Panzerfaust could be fired from, and the tank moved into the newly cleared street.

The rifle platoons did what they could to stay out of the streets. Heavy machine-gun fire in the streets limited German movement. The infantry moved from house to house by blasting holes in the walls with bazookas and demolition charges. The preferred way of clearing a building was from the top down and with the liberal use of grenades.

The 2/26 took out every German stronghold they came in contact with. They also blocked off all manholes so that the Germans could not double back to old territory. All civilians the battalion came across were evacuated from the city.

As fighting continued through October 14, the 2/26 and the 3/26 received a new weapon from VII Corps: a self-propelled 155mm gun. The weapon was capable of firing a 95-pound armor piercing projectile with enough force behind it to clear a block of buildings. In *Block by Block*, Gabel states that Daniel was "enjoined to take good care this asset."

The day ended at a designated phase point, but a gap had been formed between the 2/26's right flank and the 3/26's left. Daniel blamed the 3/26 for stopping on the wrong landmark. The Germans did not exploit the opening, but Daniel did lose a 57mm gun to enemy fire from his right flank.

On October 15, the gap was filled when the 2/26 linked back with the 3/26. Gabel mentions that the 2/26 found a fortified 3-story structure. It was an above ground bomb shelter. A burst of fire from the company's flamethrower enticed the 200 German soldiers and 1,000 civilians inside to surrender. Dusk marked the beginning of a counterattack. According to Gabel, the Americans lost a tank destroyer, an antitank gun, and a heavy machine gun. Gabel also says that the Germans lost a tank and a platoon's worth of infantry.

Gabel describes how, on the morning of October 16, the 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions linked up east of Aachen, completely encircling the city. Germans responded to their success with a counterattack. All ongoing operations underway by the 1st Infantry ceased as the 2/26 took the time to secure their position. The 1106th Engineer Group, located on the battalion's left flank, pivoted its right flank forward from south of the city to tie in with the 2/26. At this point, Daniel employed a 155mm gun against a pillbox. To protect the weapon he sent tank destroyers to fire into crossing streets. Infantry was sent to clear every spot within Panzerfaust range of the armor. The 155mm gun demolished its target, which

upon closer inspection turned out to be not a pillbox but a camouflaged tank.

On October 17 and 18, 2/26 continued to their objective. The 1106th Engineers continued to displace themselves to cover the battalion's flank. As the 2/26 moved forward, their front widened, and Company C (1/26 Infantry) was added to Daniel's command by 1st Infantry and would later be responsible for a zone on the battalion's right flank. During this time period, the 2/26 came under fire from a church steeple that the Germans had reinforced with concrete. Small arms and tank destroyer fire were ineffective. The 155mm gun was brought out and it succeeded in knocking the entire structure to the ground. The author believes that this was a prime example of the "Knock 'em all down" strategy.

On October 19, the 2/26 received another battalion, the 2/110 (28th Infantry Division) to fill a gap in the line. Some of the 2/26 went to assist the 3/26 in securing Salvatorberg. Gabel mentions that the right wing of the battalion hit heavy resistance on October 20 at the Technical School. It fell the next day, the 2/26 taking several hundred prisoners. Upon finding another railway embankment, the 2/26 repeated the same grenade technique employed at the beginning of the operation. While securing the other side of the embankment, the 2/26 received word that Colonel Wilck, the German commander, had surrendered to the 3/26.

The two environments that the two battalions fought in were vastly different. While the 2/26 fought mostly in urban combat, the 3/26 began operations in Aachen's industrial area and moved toward the many resorts and hotels in the north side of town. They also had to contend with the best troops Colonel Wilck had on hand. The colonel knew that he could not afford to lose control of the hills, and hence made the 3/26's job as difficult as possible.

The 3/26 began its operation on October 13, moving through the apartments and factories in northeast Aachen. They made steady progress up Juelicher Strasse until they came under fire from a 20mm cannon. Gabel states that this forced the infantry out of the street. As a result two tanks were left exposed to Panzerfaust fire; one tank was destroyed and the other damaged.

The 3/26 concentrated its forces on taking out a German strongpoint held up in St. Elizabeth's Church on the 14th of October. By nightfall the 3/26 had advanced to the edge of Farwick Park, only a few blocks away from Colonel Wilck's headquarters in the Hotel Quellenhof. Wilck decided to move his headquarters to an air raid bunker 1,200 yards west of the hotel. Wilck received the only reinforcements that would make it to the city. They were members of the SS Battalion Rink and were, as Gabel puts it, "the best, most fanatical personnel that Germany had to offer." While they had suffered significant losses passing through the 30th Infantry's lines, the remaining troops would spearhead a counterattack the next day.

The 15th marked a good deal of progress for the 3/26, thanks to some 4.2mm mortars they had with them. When they reached the Hotel Quellenhof, the SS troops began their counterattack. The 3/26 was forced to fall back. This began a change in tactics for the 3/26, which would spend the next two days on the defensive. On the 18th, the 3/26's offensive operations began anew. Contact was made with the 30th Infantry by a patrol sent out beyond their right flank. Afterwards they reclaimed the ground that they had lost on the 15th and began an assault on the Hotel Quellenhof. The Americans fought room to room and managed to force the German

defenders into the basement where grenades and machine-gun fire finally compelled the survivors to surrender. Farwick Park was now in the hands of the 3/26. Gabel adds that with the defeat of the SS Battalion Rink, the rest of the German defense would suffer.

For the final assault the 3/26 received assistance from VII Corps in the form of Task Force Hogan. TF Hogan comprised an armored infantry battalion and a tank battalion (minus a medium tank company) from the 3rd Armored Division. TF Hogan was to attack the northwest corner of Lousberg while the 3/26 attacked from the east. German resistance was weakening as the 3/26 quickly took Salvatorberg. By 1202, both TF Hogan and the 3/26 had linked up on Lousberg.

Wilck knew that it was only a matter of time. He issued an order to fight to the last man and bullet, though Gabel mentions that it is not known how many of his troops actually received this information. By October 20, TF Hogan and the 3/26 managed to eliminate the last enemy resistance. The Battle for Aachen ended on October 21. A small unit from the 3/26 was heading towards a nearby air raid bunker, not knowing it was Wilck's headquarters. The battalion commander, LTC John T. Corley, was about to fire the 155mm gun at the structure when a white flag was raised. Wilck had sent out some American prisoners to surrender. Wilck sent out one final radio broadcast professing his dedication to Hitler and Germany and surrendered to the 3/26.

One of the problems that faced the American forces after the battle was collecting all of the German soldiers. With the German main lines of communication destroyed, the Americans were forced to take one of Wilck's staff officers and drive him around in an armored car to let the remaining German troops know of the surrender. Another problem the allies faced was the 7,000 civilians found remaining in the city. During the operation, the civilians were moved to an open field where the Counter Intelligence Corps began screening them for German spies and high-ranking officials. Eventually these evacuees were



National Archives and Records Administration

*The endless procession of German prisoners captured with the fall of Aachen march through the ruin city streets to captivity.*

relocated to a German army barracks located four miles from Aachen. It was a place where the civilians could wait while the screening and registration process took place.

Aachen was captured by Americans who had no prior experience in urban combat, but who used lessons learned during earlier phases of Operation Overlord to help them. Small, combined-arms forces were extremely effective. The lines of battle were easily distinguished, so that American forces knew where German soldiers were in front of them at all times. Gabel adds that in some ways the battle was handled much like other battles in World War II, with artillery and bombings weakening a position and infantry moving in afterwards. One of the most important lessons from the battle arose from the number of civilians found in the city. While there was a mandatory evacuation by Germany before the fighting and by the U.S. forces during it, around 1,000 civilians were still unaccounted for after Wilck surrendered. The lesson here is to never assume that all civilians have left a contested area.

## SEOUL, 1950

Following the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, North Korean forces capitalized on their element of surprise, quickly overrunning South Korean units and seizing Seoul, the nation's capitol, within three days. In *City Fights*, MAJ Thomas A. Kelley recounts and analyzes the actions before and during Battle of Seoul, in which the city was finally liberated on September 29, 1950. Kelley notes that one of the first problems in trying to liberate a city is determining how you're going to get troops there. GEN Douglas MacArthur came up with a plan to land an amphibious force at the communist-occupied port of Inchon, facing the Yellow Sea. Because Inchon hardly seemed an ideal landing site, MacArthur believed that his troops would have the element of surprise, and he was right. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) did not have a large enough force in the area to push back the amphibious assault and retreated in the face of the landings.

The main fighting force was the U.S. X Corps, commanded by MG Edward A. Almond, and comprised the 1st Marine Division, the 7th Infantry Division, corps artillery battalions, an engineer brigade, and an amphibious tank and tractor battalion. The landing at Inchon took place on September 14, 1950, and it wasn't until the 25th when the forces succeeded in fighting their way to Seoul. Among the first objectives were to cut the main roads leading to the city. Units of the 1st Marine Division succeeded in seizing Kimpo airfield, cut the rail line into Seoul, and seized several key hills. The 17th Republic of Korea (ROK) Infantry Regiment and the U.S. 32nd Infantry Regiment advanced on Seoul from the south.

The Eighth Army, commanded by LTG Walton H. Walker, was having problems in breaking through the NKPA's defenses. The breakthrough was important to MacArthur's plan to retake Seoul and push the North Koreans back across the international border, so MacArthur directed his planners to begin looking for alternatives. Before a detailed plan could be formed, the Eighth Army, with the help of bombers and attack

aircraft of the Far East Air Forces, succeeded in breaking through the North Korean lines. The breakthrough began on September 22 and by the 23rd, the Eighth Army was in pursuit of retreating enemy forces.

While the Eighth Army was executing its breakthrough, the X Corps movement towards Seoul slowed down. The North Koreans were able to recover from the shock of the initial attack and started moving reinforcements into the area. The 1st Marine Division managed to inflict severe casualties on the North Koreans as the United Nations forces advanced on three axes. The 1st Marine Regiment was to clear the suburb of Yungdungpo, cross the Han River, and then seize South Mountain. The 5th RCT would team up with the South Korean Marine Regiment to retake the city. The 7th Infantry Division would protect the southern flank and push a task force south to Suwon. The NKPA had dug defensive positions into a series of hills west of Seoul and Yongdungpo, where they offered stubborn resistance; the U.N. forces wouldn't make it to the city until the 25th of September.

When they reached the city, the U.N. forces chose not to surround it. Kelley explains that this might have been a factor in liberating the city so quickly. By leaving the enemy the option for withdrawal it kept them from believing that they had to fight for the city to the death or until they received orders to surrender.

Even though this might have helped the U.N. Forces to retake the city faster, it did not make it any easier. The fighting in the streets was brutal. The NKPA had committed countless atrocities including torture, mutilation, and genocide. U.N. Forces often found evidence of these war crimes and were appalled that civilian noncombatants and military prisoners of war would be treated in such a way. Modern soldiers encounter similar acts of violence committed against civilians by terrorists, and while some soldiers may be emotionally and psychologically able to cope, there will be others who will find it difficult. This was the case with U.S. and



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*Korean women and children search the rubble of Seoul for anything that can be used or burned as fuel on November 1, 1950.*

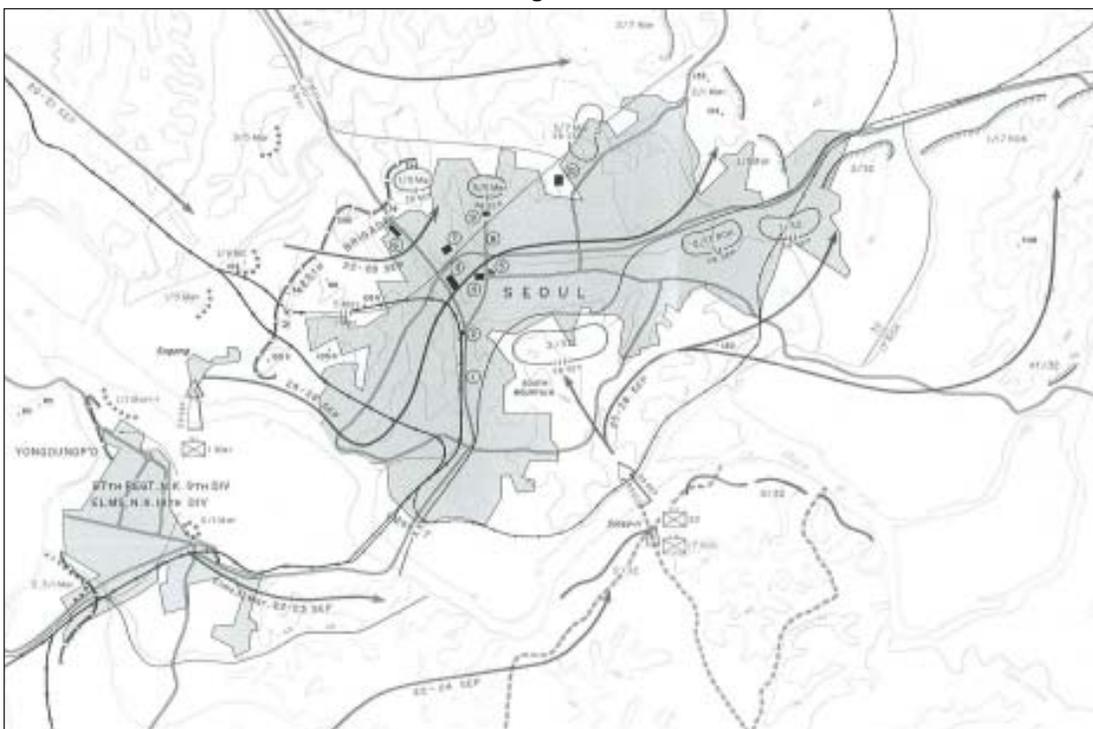
Allied soldiers who witnessed the aftermath of the North Koreans' brutality, and as a result some soldiers had to be evacuated to receive proper treatment of these unseen wounds or required further treatment upon their return home.

Fire was another problem during the liberation of Seoul. Retreating NKPA units set fire to large areas of the city to create obstacles, deny U.N. forces access to infrastructure, destroy supplies, or just to cover the extent of their war crimes or crimes against humanity. Burning buildings, blinding smoke, toxic gases released by chemical fires, and searing heat made it difficult for soldiers to function properly. The enemy's use of fire as a weapon to impede movement, to generate refugees, or to destroy facilities to keep them from being taken is a consideration for future leaders

as they contemplate the urban fight.

Seoul was liberated on September 28, 1950. More than 65 percent of the city was destroyed. According to the reasoning of the NKPA, the destruction of the city was the best course of action, regardless of the staggering cost to Seoul's citizens and property, but it could have been even worse. Kelley points out that taking the city by laying siege to it might have resulted in "an even more prolonged battle, stronger defenses, and higher civilian casualties." By using a judicious combination of artillery and air support, the U.S. Army and Marines accomplished their mission and saved the lives of many on both sides.

**Figure 3**



South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950), Roy E. Appleman, Office of the Chief of Military History

Once Seoul had been liberated, the South Korean government quickly returned to the city. If the government had not reestablished control over its capitol, the U.N. forces would have had to have stopped pushing the North Koreans back and instead had to deal with the humanitarian efforts to provide for the many refugees in the area. When a city is liberated, the aftermath often involves helping to restore order, food, water, clothing, and shelter to the civilian population, and this can place inordinate demands upon a military force that is trying to conduct combat operations at the same time.

### HUE, 1968

The battle of Hue City occurred in 1968 and was one of the landmark battles of the Vietnam War. Vietnamese communist forces launched their lunar new year's offensive on January 30, 1968, in a series of coordinated attacks by Viet Cong (VC) sappers and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regular forces down the length of South Vietnam. The ancient imperial capitol city of Hue was one of the first cities attacked. Two regiments of NVA and VC with a total of 7,500 soldiers advanced on Hue late in the evening of January 29th and were in position to attack by the morning of the 31st. Around 2 a.m. on the 31st, the NVA 6th Regiment linked up with its guides and seized a bridgehead into the Citadel, a castle-like structure that had been the residence for Annamese emperors since the early 1800's. The NVA 4th Regiment joined the 6th Regiment and they raised their communist flag over the Imperial Palace. Their two main objectives were to seize control of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam 1st Division headquarters in the northeast corner of the Citadel, and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) headquarters located on the south side of the Perfume River. By taking the Citadel, the VC had succeeded in splitting the two forces off from each other.

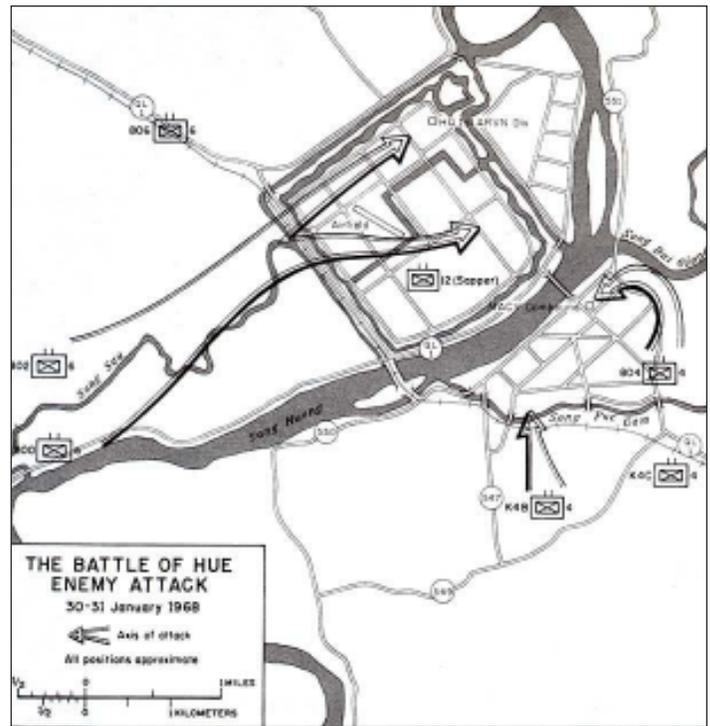
After receiving incorrect information on the attack, Task Force X-Ray, a forward headquarters of the 1st U.S. Marine Division, sent a rifle company — Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (1/1) — to aid the U.S. and Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces that were being overrun. The company met up with four M48 tanks along the way. Because the VC forces failed to destroy the An Cuu Bridge, the 1/1 managed

to get close to the MACV compound before they were pinned down by enemy fire. Hearing the relief force was pinned down, BG Foster C. LaHue sent LTC Marcus J. Gravel, commander of the 1/1, along with Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines to aid them.

When the two battalions linked up, they fought their way to the MACV compound, where they set up defensive positions around the headquarters, the navy's boat ramp on the river, and the base of the Nguyen Hoang Bridge. The bridge, connected to Highway 1, was their way into the Citadel. The Marine battalions were given new orders from III Marine Amphibious Force to go to the ARVN headquarters and link up with its commanding officer, General Ngo Quang Truong. MAJ Norm Cooling, author of the account of the battle for Hue in *City Fights*, notes that the soldiers in this situation believed that III MAF was not fully aware of the situation, and hence this decision was not a good one. Gravel sent out Company G to secure the bridge; they managed to take it after a two-hour firefight, but they were forced back to the MACV compound three hours later in the face of a VC counterattack.

The III MAF sent the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry to a landing zone near Highway 1. Their mission was to disrupt the NVA's lines of communication. They fought for several days but were unable to complete their mission. The NVA managed to receive reinforcements and strengthen their hold on the city. The weather began hampering airborne support, but Company F, 2/5, was able to complete an insertion onto the landing zone near the MACV compound on the second day. The next day Company H, 2/5, joined the forces at MACV.

On day four, LTC Earnest C. Cheatham, Jr., commanding officer of the 2/5, was given



Field Artillery, 1954-1973, MG David Ewing Ott, Department of the Army

Figure 3

the order to move a convoy into Hue and assume command of the forces under Gravel. COL Stanley S. Hughes, asked to assume overall command of all U.S. Marine forces in the area by LaHue, was also in the convoy. The convoy was ambushed during the advance to the MACV compound. Hughes took command from Gravel and gave orders to begin eliminating enemy combatants on their side of the river. Cheatham was to move his men west of the compound towards the Phu Cam Canal. Gravel's men would move with the 2/5 but would move along the Phu Cam clearing out hostiles and trying to keep Highway 1 open to the compound. ARVN troops that were inside the MACV compound at the beginning of the attack would deal with snipers and remaining pockets of resistance. They would also care for any civilian refugees found during the marine advance.

The Marines had been used to rural and jungle combat. Urban combat was an alien concept to them.

They learned lessons that would help them later in urban combat, but casualties were high at first. The only advantage the Marines had was their armor, and even then the VC and NVA had B-40 antitank rockets. Because of restrictive rules of engagement (ROE), U.S. forces were unable to employ artillery, naval surface fires, and aircraft munitions. Just as U.S. forces attacking

Aachen in 1944 discovered numbers of civilians still in the city, so too would the Marines find themselves trying to clear enemy-held buildings filled with noncombatants. While the U.S. was under strict ROE, the VC and the NVA were not. The enemy did not hesitate to use noncombatants as human shields. On day five of the attack, the 2/5's executive officer, MAJ Ralph J. Silvati, got several E-8 tear-gas launchers and gave them to the fighting forces. These non-lethal weapons made it easier to chase NVA and VC out of buildings while keeping civilian casualties to a minimum.

The Marines made steady progress in clearing out the enemy forces. The areas cleared included the treasury, the university, and the Joan of Arc School. By the 6th of February, most of the capitol had been cleared of communist fighters. By the 10th the south side of Hue was secure. It took several more days for the Marines to make sure all communist forces were eliminated from the area. The Marines also began to discover mass graves filled with South Vietnamese who had been summarily executed during the NVA's control of the city.

On the other side of the river, Brigadier General Troung and his ARVN 1st Division began to try and take back the Citadel. After four days of counteroffensives, he requested American aid. MAJ Robert H. Thompson and his 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (1/5) received the mission. Their orders were to relieve General Troung's ARVN 1st Airborne Task Force along the northeast wall and continue to clear the wall. They made it into the Citadel on February 13 and found that the Vietnamese 1st Airborne Task Force had left the area too soon and that the NVA were moving into the positions they left behind. The NVA engaged them and rendered Company A, 1/5 combat ineffective. It was now clear that the communist forces inside the Citadel were well fortified and camouflaged. Hughes began to argue for an ease of the ROE so that bigger and better weaponry could be employed to rout out the enemy. The request was approved and Thompson began to employ 5 and 6 inch naval guns, 8-inch and 155mm artillery, and fixed-wing Zuni rockets along the wall. Riot control gas was also used. Cooling writes that one possible explanation for the ease of ROE on the U.S. operations in Hue was that GEN Creighton W. Abrams, the deputy theater commander, had established a MACV forward command post at Phu Bai, eight miles south of Hue.

Even with the increase in firepower now available, it wasn't until February 21 that the 1/5 could succeed in taking the Citadel's northeast wall. The ARVN had problems with taking the southeast wall and the imperial palace. Thompson had to turn his battalion around and continue fighting. His fighting force was exhausted, so he turned to a group of Marines that had recently arrived: Company L, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5). During the 3/5's assault, four battalions of the 1st Cavalry Division began an assault on an NVA supply installation in the La Chu Woods west of the city. With the communist's lines of communications (LOC) severed, and little hope of supporting the remaining forces inside the Citadel, the NVA 6th Regiment began to withdraw on the 23rd. The same day, Thompson took the southwest wall and began to focus his attention on the imperial palace. An elite ARVN group, the Black Panther Company, performed the last assault and took the palace back. Final mop up operations began on the 26th with the operation ending on midnight on the 27th.

**Much of what Soldiers learn about urban combat was gained on the battlefields of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War ... The most important weapon on any battlefield is the knowledge of how previous generations operated in similar environments.**

There are many lessons to take from this battle. First, the most important thing a fighting force can do is to secure their LOC. By securing the helipad and naval boat ramp near the MACV compound the Marines and Army units in the area assured that the soldiers would have supplies for themselves and for the growing number of civilian refugees. The rules of engagement were strict in the hope of preserving the historical city and avoiding civilian casualties. These ROE often kept the Marines from completely eliminating an enemy presence. One example of this was a group of NVA hiding inside a pagoda. The Marines had to contact their headquarters to request permission to fire on the structure. By the time they had received a response, the NVA had managed to escape. The ARVN, however, had different rules of engagement and they called in air strikes inside the Citadel. The ROE of any urban setting must ensure the safety of civilians and buildings of historic importance while being flexible enough to allow soldiers to do what is needed to prevent the enemy from withdrawing and regrouping.

Intelligence on the situation was lacking throughout the fight. One reason may be that there were poor communications and information dissemination across the board. The U.S. had learned that there was an increased military presence in the demilitarized zone and along the Laotian border, but they did not realize what this meant until it was too late. The communist forces managed to obtain the element of surprise. Also, there were problems with the bureaucratic structure of how information was disseminated. An NVA radio transmission was intercepted on January 30 by an army field radio intercept station mentioning a possible attack on Hue. Instead of informing MACV, the information was sent to Da Nang for analysis. MACV didn't get this information until after the battle had started.

George Santayana's dictum that "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" applies to the urban combat of today. Much of what Soldiers learn about urban combat was gained on the battlefields of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Today we are learning valuable lessons as well in Iraq and Afghanistan. The most important weapon on any battlefield is the knowledge of how previous generations operated in similar environments. By remembering and applying this principle, we can better prepare Soldiers for the challenges they will face on future battlefields.

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