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Charles Comfort's painting entitled *Chiesa di San Tomasso, Ortona* depicts a typical scene of destruction in the built-up area of the Italian port town in which Canadian troops fought such vicious battles in December 1943.

THE URBAN BATTLEFIELD AND THE ARMY: CHANGES AND DOCTRINES

According to some writers, what has been termed the urban battlefield made its appearance with the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.¹ In an earlier era, armies laid siege to cities but did battle in the countryside. In recent decades, however, there have been an ever increasing number of instances of combat taking place in urban areas, to the point that today the city and the battlefield have become inseparable realities. Too long an *a parte* would be required to explain the reasons for this change, but it is evident that large cities are now key military objectives, even in third world countries, because that is where one finds the major centres of population, wealth, transportation, mass media and warehousing of goods. Moreover, the military strength of western countries, especially the

US, makes it all but impossible for an unsophisticated 'enemy' to hope for victory on a traditional battlefield.

This notable shift has required important adjustments in thinking on the part of armies. One might indeed ask whether or not combat doctrine in western armies has kept pace with this new situation. The same question could, of course, be asked about troop training, but doctrine is the key since it is the foundation of military training and action. As for the Canadian Army, is it a step ahead in the field of urban combat as a result of its experience during the Second World War in Italy and in North-West Europe?

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Professional military journals, especially American publications, have recently given considerable attention to the issue of urban combat. These journals, along with the doctrine manuals of the US Army, the US Marine Corps, the Canadian Army and others, reflect the state of thinking of military organizations on the subject. While much of the recent writing deals with aspects of training, the development of doctrinal thinking is also evident. The Americans are already well advanced at the level of doctrine, and several European armies are also

of bitterness and shock among the American public, especially because the 'enemy' was not supposed to be a significant threat. The irregular Somali soldiers were from a developing society with very limited resources, and the US had sent in their Delta Force, an elite force which specializes in guerilla warfare. The awakening to the issue of urban warfare was reinforced by the two Russian sieges of the city of Grozny in Chechnya.

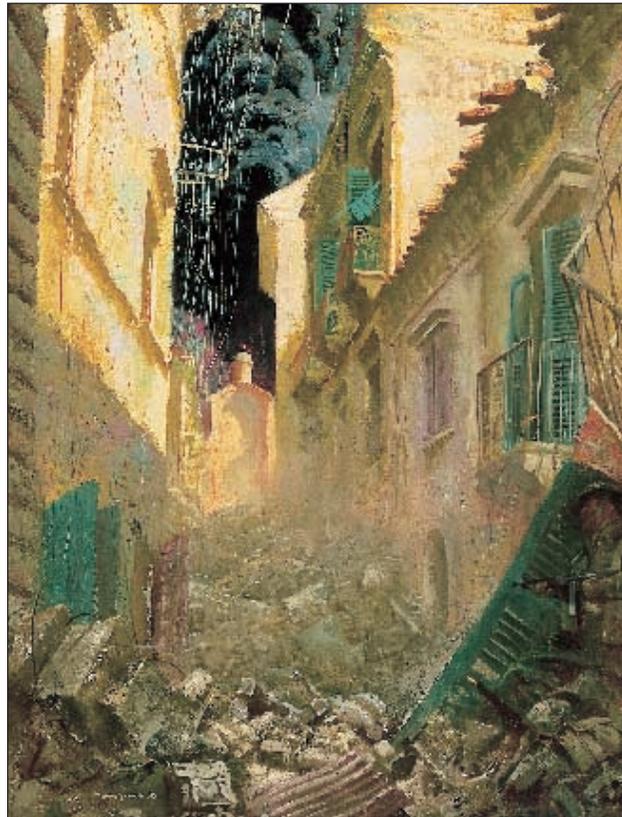
In fact, only a very few of the recent wars have not involved fighting in cities. The Gulf War, of course, was one of the notable exceptions. That war was not carried into the streets of Bagdad by coalition forces to wrest power from the Iraqi leader: intermediaries had to take on this difficult task and their failure did not come as a surprise. There is little doubt that Lieutenant-General Martin Steele of the US Marines had these experiences in mind when he claimed that the combat of the future would not be "the son of Desert Storm", but rather the "stepchild of Somalia (Mogadishu) and Chechnya (Grozny)".⁴

A perception generally shared by contemporary armies is that fighting in a built-up area is combat that has degenerated and gone out of control. It is an aberration that should not be accepted or taught. In the opinion of analyst David Ashworth,

"Such a mutual aversion to fighting in the city ... was elevated to a convention of military society. This convention was incorporated into military codes of practice, which transcended dynastic or national allegiance as part of a semi-mystical, professional honour system, linked to a warrior class."⁵

This convention aside, there are perfectly valid reasons for avoiding urban combat: it tends to be very costly in human lives, and it greatly slows an advancing army. However, modern armed forces must now begin the process of adapting to the new context of war. It is not simply a matter of modifying army structures or adjusting their tactics, but rather of a deeper examination, of adopting a visionary approach that is likely to revolutionize military practice and, indeed, bring about a new culture of warfare.

Doctrine serves as a framework and a reference tool for armies in the development of tactics and in the establishment of effective training programmes. Doctrine is in fact the lens through which armies glimpse their actions. The official American definition of the term in the *Dictionary of Military Terms* is somewhat vague: "Fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application."⁶ The definition in the *International Military and Defence*



Via Dolorosa, Ortona. Another of Charles Comfort's paintings of the street battlefields in Ortona in December 1943.

dealing with the issue. Canadian thinking about fighting in built-up areas is, however, far less advanced, and, one might say, barely underway. A look at the historical context in which Canadian military thought on the subject has evolved sheds light on the situation.

It is undeniable that combat is increasingly taking place in urban areas: of the last 250 missions of the US Marine Corps, 237 have involved urban combat operations.² Nonetheless, it was only after the fighting in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, in October of 1993 that western armies were alerted to the reality of contemporary urban warfare.³ During this battle, which lasted less than 48 hours, 18 American soldiers were killed and over 77 were wounded. While the Americans managed to extricate themselves, they did so at considerable cost. This unsuccessful operation brought reactions

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Encyclopedia appears to be preferable because it is more precise, and it is the one recommended by historian Trevor N. Dupuy,

“In the military, doctrine is viewed in terms of strategy and tactics; it is the basis for both academic training and field exercises; and is, in some cases, the military’s forecast of future activities and events. Its most critical military application is how forces will fight in combat operations.”⁷

It is thus important to examine several prevailing doctrines of urban combat.

The US Marine Corps recently set up a special study project made up of a series of exercises dubbed “Urban Warrior”. According to the Marines, the world’s urban population will make up 70 percent of the globe’s population by 2020.⁸ As a result, the Marines “vie[w] the world’s rapidly expanding urban areas as the most likely places for future conflicts.”⁹ The “Urban Warrior” experiment, which took place in March 1999,¹⁰ reflects the Marine Corps’ awareness that it is now necessary for modern armies to conduct operations in urban areas, and that this type of combat can no longer be avoided in all circumstances. The Corps’ doctrine on urban conflict was revised in 1998.

The doctrine of the US Army, albeit in a less extensive way than the Marines, has also studied the question of war in the city. The doctrinal manual, FM 90-10 *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain* (MOUT), dates from 1978¹¹, and is one of several manuals now being revised. However, a combat guide for the soldier, published in 1993, complements and updates some aspects of American doctrine.¹² A new, modified doctrine is expected to be published in February of 2001.¹³

Soviet doctrine from the period before the end of the Cold War did not appear to be quite so opposed to operations in cities or villages as was the doctrine of NATO armies.¹⁴ This doctrine, like that of Western armies, recommends that urban combat should be avoided, or employed only as a last resort.¹⁵ It points out though, that an attack into an urban area can lead to victory because the defender, despite knowing the terrain, would be seriously encumbered by having to care for civilian inhabitants and their needs. This is a notable difference from western doctrines which tend to ascribe advantage to the defenders. Russian memories of the pain and hardship of the fighting in Leningrad, Stalingrad and Berlin seem to have faded next to memories of victory. For strategic reasons, Warsaw Pact forces planned for fast-moving, deep offensive thrusts in the event of an attack against NATO, and they intended to bypass large built-up areas. If, however, it were

not possible to avoid a city, a surprise attack would have been attempted before the defenders could get organized. If the effect of surprise was lost, a minimal number of troops would then have cordoned off the city while the bulk of the first echelon forces would bypass and continue their advance.¹⁶ The attack into the built-up area would await the arrival of second echelon forces. According to military analyst William J. Lewis, Soviet infantrymen were fully trained for combat operations in cities.¹⁷

Despite the pervasive threat that hung over their country — and their many cities — during the Cold War, the Germans did not seem to attach much importance to urban combat in their preparations for war. Although German doctrine alluded to the effects of the presence of civilians and the need to look after them, it mentioned combat in built-up areas only when discussing



Captain Orville Fisher’s painting, *Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders Advancing into Caen*, shows the heavily bombed battle-ground into which Canadian troops advanced in July 1944.

the effects of different types of terrain in defensive, offensive and delaying operations.¹⁸ The terrain first examined was not the city, but the forest — the implication being that the primary obstacle to waging traditional war in open country was the forest, even though it is increasingly disappearing, and not the urban sprawl that has overtaken Germany in recent decades.

One of the merits of German doctrine was its distinction between the village and the town on one hand, and the large city and the conurbation on the other. Villages and towns can be very useful to defenders as the framework of an effective defence by functioning as barriers which can channel an advancing enemy and by providing concealment for the defending troops. It noted that large cities and conurbations, on the other hand, should not be part of the plans to defend the national territory; and specifically that the defence of large urban agglomerations should be carried out on terrain well forward of the built-up area.¹⁹ Attacks on cities, large or small, should be avoided unless occupation can take place quickly or it is an essential first stage of another operation.²⁰ In suggesting that urban agglomerations should be bypassed during attacks, German doctrine is in agreement with other modern professional armies.²¹

French doctrine recognizes that the city will play an important role in future conflicts between professional armies. "Conflicts between conventional armies will be brief, but of high intensity, made up of battles that will attempt to bypass urban areas even though it will be necessary to control them. They will take place in a media-intensive environment and will make use of advanced-technology heavy equipment as well as professional forces that are highly trained but few in number."²² Even though the French doctrinal document advocates what could be called a 'reflex' of bypassing cities, its discussion of the need to control the city leads logically and almost inevitably to urban conflict.

Of course, not all military doctrine writers are convinced that great changes are underway in the art of waging war, or that there are changes in the locations where it will take place. However, minds are being opened, and some doctrine is beginning to take account of urban realities when considering how war will be conducted.

Until very recently in Canada, the "Particular Operations" series of tactical doctrine manuals (which deal with specialized operations that do not take place in open country) did not include a manual dealing specifically with urban combat operations or, as it is better known in Canada, fighting in built-up areas (FIBUA). Instead, the series deals with military operations in different geographical settings, such as *Operations in the Arctic and in the Sub-Arctic Areas* (B-GL-302-002), *Operations in the Jungle* (B-GL-302-004), and *Operations in the Mountains* (B-OG-302-005). Other field manuals in the "Particular Operations" series are concerned with *Assistance to Civil Authorities* (A-OL0302-008/FP-001, FT-002 and FT-003) and *Airmobile Operations* (B-GL-302-011).²³ This does not mean, however, that no Canadian thought on the subject exists. After an exchange of ideas with American col-

leagues in 1978, a Canadian officer reported that the American approach to combat in cities differed from the Canadian way.²⁴ This officer, after reiterating the old precept of avoiding urban areas, acknowledged that a significant change had taken place:

Tactical doctrine stresses that urban combat operations be conducted only when required and that built-up areas are to be isolated and bypassed rather than risk a costly, time-consuming operation in this difficult environment. Adherence to these precepts, though valid, is becoming increasingly difficult as urban sprawl changes the face of the battlefield.²⁵

Information about the conduct of fighting in built-up areas is indeed contained in the tactical doctrine manuals of the different arms and services of the Army — armour²⁶, artillery, infantry, engineers and administration. The treatment of fighting in built-up areas is of necessity limited in these manuals which cover all phases of war. The more expansive of them devote at most twenty pages to urban conflict. Canadian doctrine on war in urban terrain thus lacks rigour, clarity and depth. Further, from a strictly military point of view, one cannot help wondering about the level of cooperation that would exist among various arms and services units in the event of having to engage in urban fighting.

In 1998, Canadian doctrine was revamped so as to give greater emphasis to manoeuvre and deep attack operations, and overall sustainability. This new version incorporates the same shortcomings as the old — the treatment of fighting in urban areas remains vague and superficial. At least, however, the urban theatre is now seen as more important, and no longer considered on the same footing as the 'geographic' theatres of the past.²⁷ Still, the revised doctrinal document does not give a central place to operations in the built-up areas. Indeed, urban combat in itself is seen to be at the opposite end of the spectrum from manoeuvre warfare, which envisions rapid, bold advances in open countryside. For doctrinal reasons then, the Canadian Forces will continue to avoid fighting in built-up areas.

A brief history of urban combat doctrine may help to explain certain weaknesses in Canadian thought in this area. Tactical manuals dealing with desert operations (B-GL-302-003) and operations in urban areas (B-GL-302-006) were intended to be written within the framework of a renewed doctrine envisaged for the early 1960s, but they were never completed.²⁸ Funding simply did not allow for the reformulation of doctrine in one fell swoop; instead, changes were to be made over time, according to the priorities of the moment, and the urban battlefield was never a high priority. The publication of training pamphlets on specialized terrain operations

began only in the 1970s after the founding of the Operational Doctrine Review Board in March 1972. A manual on military operations in the arctic and sub-arctic was issued in first draft in March 1974, with subsequent editions in June 1975 and January 1977, with amendments added in April and August 1982. The manual on jungle operations appeared in March 1977 and January 1979, with amendments in December 1982. Finally, the manual on military operations in mountainous areas was published in December 1976.

That the Army gave priority to doctrine about operations in extremely cold climates is understandable; it is directly related to Canadian geography and climate. Operations in mountains are equally important because of the Rocky Mountains, even though this region is not as vulnerable to attack as is the far North. The relevance of jungle warfare is perhaps less evident, but is no doubt explained by Canada's concerns about becoming involved in Cold War conflicts in sub-tropical Asia (mainly in Vietnam) and in Africa (Angola and Mozambique).

The apparent reluctance to deal clearly with fighting in built-up areas needs some explanation. Undoubtedly, Canadian soldiers have the same aversion to combat in built-up areas as their NATO allies and most other armies. As early as 1950, an official Canadian Army course document pointedly noted the difficulties of urban warfare:

Fighting in built-up areas is primarily an infantry battle and is about the worst type of fighting infantry are called upon to execute. Infantry must fight over restricted and unfamiliar ground, at close quarters, and under conditions where normal support cannot function fully. It is uncomfortable, unnerving, noisy, dirty and, as it is usually done in small groups, demands high skill and courage.²⁹

At the same time, the probable effects of the use of nuclear weapons heavily influenced military professionals, and they were less than eager to attack cities that might well become nuclear targets. Finally, the general under-development of Canadian doctrine, especially that dealing with 'Particular Operations', had its effect. In 1963, when a revision of doctrine was deemed necessary, no Canadian manuals existed which treated any of the 'Particular Operations'. When it was suggested that manuals on these operations be created, priority was given to the recasting of general doctrine; specialized operations doctrine was relegated to the back burner

since, according to a worksheet from the time, it "will be largely produced taking existing British and American doctrine".³⁰

The Canadian Army's lack of attention to fighting in built-up areas is somewhat surprising; indeed, it is paradoxical that Canadians are not at the vanguard in this area. The battle of Ortona, in Italy, conducted by 1st Canadian Infantry Division in December of 1943, is surely one of the highlights of Canadian military history. Canadians were credited with the tactical innovation of blowing holes through the stone walls of adjoining buildings so that they could continue their advance without exposing themselves on the streets to enemy fire. This notable development was acknowledged by Canada's allies.³¹ A month after the Normandy landings, Canadians were involved in fighting in the city of Caen. Later in northwest Europe, Canadian troops



Engineers Clearing Roads Through Caen. This painting by Captain Orville Fisher depicts the rubble-strewn streets of Caen through which the Canadians fought in July 1944.

advanced through densely populated terrain. Yet, few traces of this Second World War experience seem to remain in present-day Canadian doctrine.

The Second World War legacy of Canadian expertise in fighting in built-up areas deserves to be revisited, analyzed and integrated into doctrine. Answers must still be found to certain questions. Were cities systematically attacked after the Ortona experience? Did aviation and artillery play key roles when Canadians encountered a built-up area along their route of advance? Was the rule of 'cordon and bypass' — the dogma of professional armies — followed by Canadians during the Second World War, and to what extent? The Canadian

experience must, of course, also be compared to that of the Americans. The battles of Caen and Cherbourg in the 1944 Normandy campaign took place at nearly the same time, and American GIs also blew holes in walls in order to be able to advance under cover.³²

A major historical change in the relationship between the army and the urban battlefield has taken place. This change, gradual though it may have been, is now an undisputable fact: since the Second World War urban battlefields have become increasingly commonplace. Nonetheless, professional thought about fighting in built-up areas is still evolving. While some armies may be more progressive than others, all still believe that urban combat should generally be avoided.

The most striking aspect of Canadian Army doctrine is its weakness in the area of war and the city. This is surprising since this army's most significant recent experience in combat occurred during the Second World War, when Canadian expertise in fighting in built-up areas was widely acknowledged. This contradiction can in part be attributed to a general failure to develop a distinctively Canadian operational doctrine, and to weak-

ness in the development of doctrine for combat in specialized areas. While it is true that the Canadian Army has always carried out some training to fight in built-up areas, this training could only benefit from sound and comprehensive doctrine.

Avoidance can no longer be the foundation of the Canadian Army's doctrine on urban area warfare. Both doctrinal and cultural changes are needed, and some armies will take longer than others to bring this about. It will also be difficult to accomplish because those who oppose this change are able to point to several centuries of combat tradition.

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NOTES

1. Among others, Michael Dewar, *War in the Streets: The Story of Urban Combat from Calais to Khafi*, London: BCA, 1992, p. 16. Dewar contends that the first modern urban battle was that of Madrid in the fall of 1936. Nevertheless, in the more distant past fighting did take place in cities, and urban agglomerations were not always spared. After sieges, fighting in the city often occurred, which ended up being all the more hard and cruel because the population had resisted for a long time and had made life difficult for the besieging troops. Such was the case with Homer's Troy, at Jerusalem in 70, at Rome in 476, and at Constantinople in 1454.

2. According to Gary G.W. Schenkel of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab at Quantico (Virginia), quoted in R.W. Glenn, *Marching under Darkening Skies: The American Military and the Impending Urban Operations Threat* (Rand Corporation, 1998), p. 3.

3. See M. Hollis, "Platoon Under Fire", *Infantry*, January-April 1998, pp. 27-34; C. Ferry, "Mogadishu, October 1993: A Company XO's Notes on Lessons Learned", *Infantry*, November-December 1994, pp. 31-38; "Mogadishu, October 1993: Personal Account of a Rifle Company XO", *Infantry*, September-October 1994, pp. 23-31.

4. "The Three-Block War", *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1998, p. 37.

5. G.J. Ashworth, *War and the City*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 113.

6. U.S. Department of Defence, *Dictionary of Military Terms*, New York: Arco Publishing, 1988, p. 117.

7. Trevor N. Dupuis ed., Vol 2, Washington, New York: Brassey's, 1993, p. 773.

8. Scott R. Gourley, "USMC 'Urban Warriors' launch new exercise", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 10, 1999, p. 11.

9. *ibid.*

10. For an overview of the USMC's activities in this area, see, among others, Ralph Peters, "The Future of War", *Maclean's*, April 26, 1999, pp. 40-43; S. Gourley, "USMC 'Urban Warriors' Launch New Exercise", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 10, 1999, p. 11; and J.A. Lasswell, *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1998, pp. 36-39.

11. Department of Army, FM 90-10 Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT), Washington, DC: August 1979, pp. 182.

12. Department of Army, *FM 90-10-1 An Infantryman's Guide To Combat in Built-Up Areas*, Washington, DC: May 1993, p. 281.

13. *CAC Doctrinal Literature Master Plan*, available on the Internet at www.cgsc.army.mil/CDD/ADMIN/DImp.ht, May 14, 1999.

14. John C. Scharfen and Michael J. Deane, *Soviet Tactical Doctrine for Urban Warfare*, Stanford: Stanford Research Institute, October 1975, p. 1.

15. Major A.E. Henesley, *Soviet Military Operations in Built-Up Areas*, Washington: Defense Intelligence Agency, July 1977, p. 27.

16. William J. Lewis, *The Warsaw Pact: Arms, Doctrine, and Strategy*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publications, 1981, p. 268.

17. *ibid.*

18. German Army, Hdv 100/100, *Führung im Gefecht (Command and Control in Battle)*, September 1973 (Modified in June 1996), Chapters 29, 32 and 34.

19. *ibid.*, Chapter 29, Section II.

20. *ibid.*, Chapter 32, Section II.

21. During the height of the Cold War in Germany, the task of defending cities fell to a part of the Territorial Army known as *Wallmeisters*.

22. Emat, October 1998, "L'engagement des forces terrestres au XXI siècle: une approche française"; p. 3. De nouveaux types de conflits, a) les conflits symétriques.

23. Catalogue of Land Army doctrine, 1995, A-GL-000/AX-000.

24. National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 24, Box 23795, File 1180-120/c93, Part 1. Paper on MOUT to CA/US Tactical Doctrine Seminar, Report Annex A, May 15, 1978, LtCol. ME Pillar DMPR 2.

25. *ibid.*, Paper on MOUT to CA/US Tactical Doctrine Seminar, May 8-11, 1978.

26. Which, it might be added, devotes only two paragraphs to the subject. See B-GLI-305-001/FT-001, *Armour*, Volume 1, The Armoured Regiment in Battle.

27. B-GL-300-004 / FP-001, The Land Force, Volume 4 - "Sustainability", Chapter 8, April 1999.

28. NAC, RG 24, Vol. 50-199, File 1150-110-P46.

29. Canadian Army Staff College, "Operations War - Town Fighting 1, Fighting in a Built-Up Area." 1950.

30. NAC, RG 24, Vol. 5078-216, File 5-3411-1, pt-2.

31. Jary and Carbuncle, "In the Jungle of the Cities. Operation in Built-Up Areas", *British Army Review* 121, April 1999, p. 61.

32. Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy. How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945*, Lawrence (Kansas): University Press of Kansas, 1994, pp. 93-96.