MOUT

Decision Making in Action

Research Product 2001-02

FOREWORD

The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) has been conducting research over the past several years to better understand the challenges of Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT). Such operations place great demands on military personnel for new types of technical skill. They also generate a peculiar set of cognitive requirements related to a wide range of judgments and decisions necessary in an urban setting. It is critical our military be prepared for MOUT because the U.S., in large measure, is a victim of its own successes. Due to our technological superiority, few adversaries will be tempted to engage us in conventional warfare. At the same time, the specter of urban conflict offers attractive advantages to adversaries, such as the potential loss of civilian life, destruction of important landmarks, ease of access for media coverage, and increased potential to inflict injuries on our soldiers with relatively unsophisticated weapons systems. To make matters worse, the U.S. military has spent much less time preparing for MOUT than for conventional warfare, and has comparatively less expertise upon which to draw.

This publication is the first of four Klein Associates research products developed under a Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) contract aimed at training platoon leaders to make more accurate and timely decisions during urban operations. Developed from cognitive task analysis interviews with veterans having substantial urban combat experience, the research product provides a non-technical overview of the decision requirements platoon leaders will face in the process of clearing buildings, perhaps the most procedurally complicated and dangerous of all MOUT tasks. Follow-on products will include a detailed and comprehensive technical report documenting the analytical procedures used in the research effort, a CD-based instructor training program that can be used to improve the delivery of MOUT decision-making training to platoon leaders, and a report of an evaluation of this CD-based training program using cadets and instructors at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

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Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT)

Decision Making in Action

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14. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 words)*:

Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) create unique cognitive demands for small unit leaders. Years of experience are typically needed to master these demands. However, most platoon leaders tend to have limited experience in Army operations generally, and in MOUT specifically. Developed from in-depth interviews with veterans having MOUT combat experience, this report provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the decisions platoon leaders must make during five stages of building clearing: secure perimeter, approach building, enter building, clear building and maintain security, and evacuate building. The report also discusses five general skills that are required throughout building clearing missions: think like the enemy, maintain situational awareness and the big picture, project into the future, apply rules of engagement, and lead subordinates.

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Into Krustik

Lieutenant Gasko felt tightness in his stomach as he walked out of the building where a brief meeting had just concluded. His company commander had just informed him and his fellow platoon leaders (PLs) that a rapid clearing of three buildings on the outskirts of Krustik had to occur this morning to establish a foothold in the city for the rest of the battalion. The lieutenant was assigned to clear a two-story dwelling directly to the east of the other platoons' target buildings.

Clearing a building is complicated regardless of the circumstances, but this one was going to be especially tough. The company had just arrived on the edge of the war-torn village of Krustik the night before. Little intelligence was available on the village. They had used maps to do some rapid planning and coordination between the platoons for the assault, and so they knew the general layout of the buildings, but many things remained uncertain. In what shape were these war-torn buildings? Just how hostile and organized has the local militia become? How will the civilians react to military presence? During their brief planning meeting, the company commanding officer repeatedly answered, "Good question. We'll find out when we get there." Unfortunately, there was no time for certainty on any of these issues. Lieutenant Gasko was just going to have to do his reconnaissance online, as the mission unfolded.

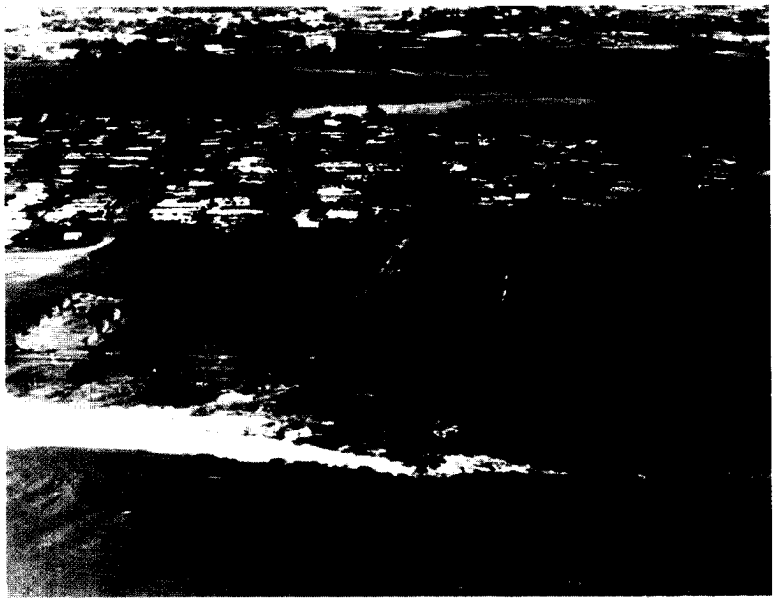

Figure 1. An aerial view of the war-torn village of Krustik.

Lieutenant Gasko spent the next few minutes briefing his squad leaders on the situation and formulating a rough plan. He had one truly seasoned squad leader, whom he chose to conduct the breach. He knew it could be a difficult task and wanted his best man to handle it.

He also spent a few extra minutes with his newest squad leader, who had limited experience in urban combat. He gave the squad leader a quick briefing on what supplies the squad should be carrying. He reminded the squad leader that soldiers go through water very quickly in these situations. "Be sure to bring enough," he warned. Lieutenant Gasko also suspected that heavy explosives might be necessary for breaching if entering through doors was not an option, so he told the squad leader to drop some of the grenades in favor of the demolitions. "Alright men, you've heard the plan. Let's get it done," Lieutenant Gasko ordered.

Introduction to MOUT Lessons Learned

The scenario on the previous page, "Into Krustik," is representative of many MOUT operations. You will continue reading this story throughout this guide. The U.S. military's involvement in MOUT, where units are assigned missions in urban environments, is becoming increasingly common. It is vital that we continue to prepare and train leaders, soldiers, and units who will be conducting these missions.

Purpose

This guide is designed for anyone who operates in Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) or teaches MOUT tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). However, for the purposes of this guide, we address MOUT decisions and judgments by framing them as challenges from a platoon leader's perspective. In the MOUT environment, specifically during building clearing operations, platoon leaders will be required to make many challenging decisions and judgments. Some will be closely tied to specific MOUT mission goals (e.g., securing the perimeter of the building) while others affect how the platoon leader arrives at his decision (e.g., understanding and applying Rules of Engagement [ROE].

This document was created as part of a project sponsored by the Army Research Institute (ARI) at Fort Benning, Georgia. We were tasked to uncover the decisions that platoon leaders face when clearing buildings in urban combat. We approach the building-clearing operation from a cognitive standpoint: understanding what is going on inside the head of a platoon leader and how his thinking translates into decisions and actions.

Importance of Decision Making Training

MOUT training generally focuses on procedures, such as where each member of a fire team should stand in a room-clearing operation and who covers each sector of fire. It also addresses the responsibilities of each soldier in tightly restricted operations. The ability to understand and apply basic operational procedures is the groundwork for mission success. However, this training does not prepare the individual soldier for the critical decision making issues unique to MOUT.

Once the mission is underway, platoon leaders may only have time to employ an abbreviated Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). Decisions are made under extreme time pressure, with high degrees of uncertainty and missing information, and in a setting of high vulnerability. Urban missions involve factors that are not present in traditional warfare settings. Buildings, cars, trees, streets and civilians heighten ambiguity and complexity. Platoon leaders will have to rely on their own experience, guidance from their company commander, and any experience possessed by other personnel in the platoon (most notably, the platoon sergeant).

Developing this Guide

This material is a compilation of accounts from experienced combat veterans who have had first-hand MOUT experience. Many of the experts Klein Associates interviewed have a store of experiences, insights, and lessons learned that are not found in training manuals. The interviews were specifically designed to identify the "nature" of MOUT missions, the critical decisions and judgments required to successfully execute the missions, and the variety of different cues and factors that might influence these decisions and judgments.

This guide is designed to familiarize you with the decisions that platoon leaders and others will confront in MOUT environments. It is important to understand that this is not a collection of "answers." We hope to enhance understanding of issues and challenges unique to MOUT, help you anticipate the need for these decisions, and reduce the surprises you encounter when arriving in a MOUT setting. The goal is to give initial exposure to the quandaries and uncertainties inherent to MOUT, and start building your base of experience and comprehension of MOUT decisions and challenges.

Organization of the Guide

In the **MOUT Overview** we will briefly describe MOUT environments. We will also introduce the distinct stages of the building-clearing operation and the collective factors to consider throughout such operations.

In the **Decisions in Action** section, we will break down each stage of building clearing, from securing the perimeter to evacuating the troops. The reader will see the kinds of cues, factors, and strategies that come into play during each phase of the mission.

The reader will also encounter a fictional story about a MOUT mission. The main character, Lieutenant Gasko, is responsible for leading his platoon through a building-clearing operation. The decisions he makes in the story are explained and analyzed in subsequent sections. Occasional photographs, diagrams, and charts are used to illustrate many of the issues, decisions, and environmental cues.

MOUT Overview

The worldwide expansion of cities has increased the likelihood that today's military will operate in urban terrain. Panama City, Kuwait City, Mogadishu, Port-au-Prince, Sarajevo, and Kinshasa are just some of the cities in which our military has operated in the past decade. Urban terrain has its own unique challenges such as a complex three-dimensional landscape, a variety of construction types, limited sight and mobility, and degraded communications. In conducting urban operations, building clearings are one of the key tasks facing the soldier. This guide focuses on the challenges of building-clearing operations.

There are five specific stages to clearing a building. They are presented here in a linear fashion, but that does not mean they are distinct stages that always occur one right after the other. For example, implications for exiting the building should be considered while trying to plan the approach.

The five specific stages are:

- **Secure the perimeter**
- **Approach the target building**
- **Enter the building**
- **Clear the building and maintain security**
- **Evacuate the building**

During each of these stages there are overarching issues a platoon leader must consider. Take the following situation as an example: the platoon leader decides to obscure the assault with smoke grenades while sending his troops in through the back door of the target building. To the platoon leader, the plan seems workable and may succeed. However, the friendlies have utilized this tactic several other times, and the enemy may be prepared for it. The platoon leader has missed one critical element: he formulated a plan without thinking about how the enemy will counter his actions, or worse, be prepared for them ahead of time.

In addition to **thinking like the enemy**, the platoon leader needs to **maintain his situational awareness and concept of the big picture**. He cannot get tunnel vision and forget about the overall mission goals, objectives and status of the operation. He must also think ahead, or **project into the future**. His actions will have more than first-order consequences and he will need to consider how these will play out throughout the mission and after the troops have pulled out. He must also have the capability to **understand and effectively apply ROEs** and **lead his subordinates** through the mission. The platoon leader must use these skills at every stage of the mission. This is illustrated in Figure 2. The circles of general skills (think like the enemy, maintain situation awareness, project into the future, apply ROE, and lead subordinates) surround the specific stages of building clearing because they must be used in every stage.

In nearly every building-clearing operation, the plan developed prior to the mission will break down to some extent during its execution. The platoon leader will have to use these general skills to stay ahead of the enemy, accomplish the mission, and keep his troops safe. In addition, each specific stage of the mission has its own challenges and decisions that the platoon leader must face.

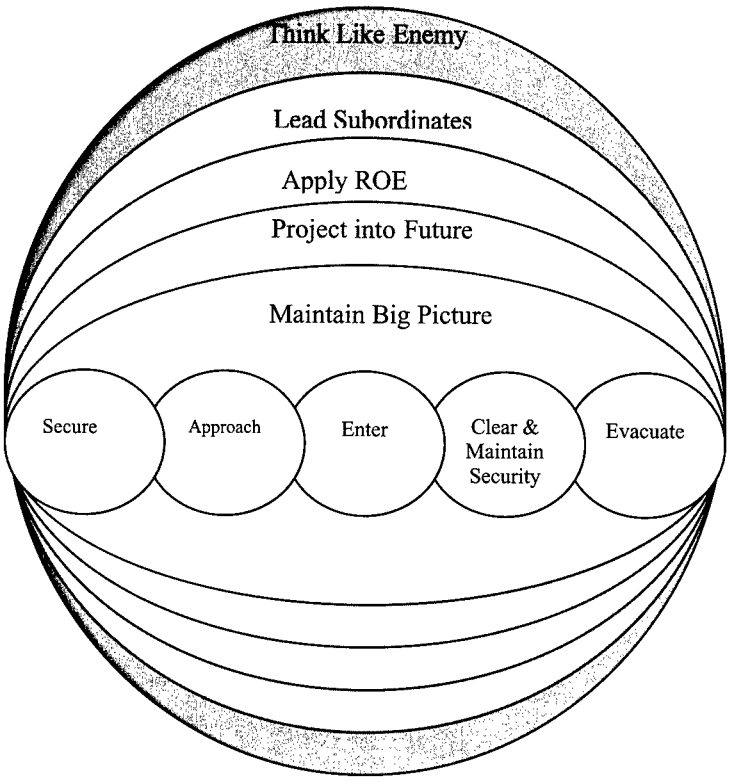

Figure 2. The ovals in the center of the figure show specific building-clearing stages and the outer layers indicate general skills required throughout the mission.

DECISIONS IN ACTION

This next section, **Decisions in Action**, will explore the five stages of building-clearing operations in MOUT environments **(Secure the Perimeter, Approach the Building, Enter the Building, Clear the Building and Maintain Security, and Evacuate the Building).**

Each section will discuss one of these stages in detail, beginning with the continuation of the story, "Into Krustik," that was introduced on Page 1. The story discusses the cues and factors of decisions that are made during each stage of building clearing. A map or graphic displaying factors mentioned in the story will follow.

Each section will conclude with a summary of the main decisions a platoon leader will face. These will be highlighted in bullets surrounded by a rectangular box and explained in more detail throughout the rest of the section.

The final section of **Decisions in Action** is titled **Other MOUT Requirements**. It will briefly discuss collective factors to consider throughout the building-clearing operation.

[redacted]

"It's time to move out!" Lieutenant Gasko calls. The platoon moves toward the edge of the city, using a treeline for cover. Surprise is always a good thing to have in these assaults, the lieutenant knows, but, once they reach the city, they may have to compromise surprise for speed. As the platoon nears the edge of town, the lieutenant surveys the street and surrounding area. He observes that the buildings are packed tightly together, and seem pretty much intact, and the walls appear to be made of thin concrete. He also notices that there are several metal barrels on both sides of the streets. "One or two civilians around the building, but they'll clear out when they see us. The rest of the civilian populace has been doing the same. No mobs forming; no adverse reaction to our presence; no reason to expect trouble from them. We'll leave them alone for now in accord with the ROE."

The main goal is to prevent people from entering and exiting the area.

Observing the intersection, Lieutenant Gasko thinks about where he would position his forces if he were the enemy. He notices a two-story tower across the intersection from the target building, and thinks "a sniper in that second story would have a perfect vantage point on the main door. I need the security element to be able to cover the tower."

"3rd squad and platoon sergeant, I want you to set up a secure perimeter right here..." He is careful that, in his placement, they can cover all critical areas around the building, given the ranges of their weapons. He thinks ahead about how he wants to clear the building, and makes sure that the security element will not pose a fratricide threat to the clearing element as they go through the building.

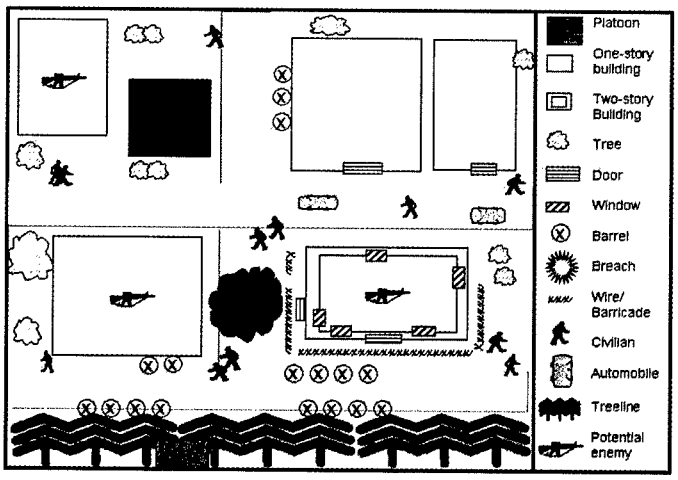

Figure 3. The objects highlighted in green are the cues and factors in the environment that help Lieutenant Gasko decide how to set up a perimeter around the target building.

To secure the perimeter, the platoon leader must make three main decisions:

- Where to Place Assets
- Which Assets to Use
- How to Reposition Assets

Where to Place Assets

Mission success is largely dependent on the support by fire position. The security element should be able to view as much of the building as possible. This is difficult because the platoon leader might give away his attack plan if the support by fire is too close to the building being assaulted. Also, intelligence about the building is rarely available, so the 0platoon leader will have to adjust the plan on the spot.

It is important to note that some of these goals may conflict with each other. The best angle to support fire may not be the one that allows the soldiers to use cover and conceal opportunities or cover enemy locations. The platoon leader will need to make tradeoffs and determine which is more important. The following is a description of cues in the environment and the implications of those cues on decision making in MOUT.

Effective Range of Weapons

Weapons with a longer range can be placed further from the building. The distance from the target can affect accuracy of shots so place weapons the optimal distance from targets. Think about where the bullets could go to prevent fratricide.

The Size of the Area to be Covered

If another building is in close proximity, the platoon may have to secure both buildings. This will take more manpower. In the story, the platoon leader only has to cover one building so the squad he has chosen should be adequate. If at all possible, the security team should be able to view all sides of the target building or buildings.

Enemy Locations

Make sure known enemy locations are covered and that the platoon knows these suspected enemy locations. In general, cover areas that are highly fortified. In the story, the platoon leader assumes the enemy is inside the targeted building and in the tower.

SECURE
The Best Angle to Support Fire

The ideal angle of fire is one that allows you to provide supporting fire until the moment troops enter the building. In addition, try to reduce the angle to as close to zero as possible. Be careful to leave a large enough distance between the target and friendlies to prevent fratricide.

Which Assets to Use

Because the platoon leader cannot always accurately predict what his platoon will encounter in a mission, determining which assets and people to employ can be very difficult. The platoon leader must match weapons and specific people, based on their strengths, to his purpose and put his best shooters on the best weapons. In order to figure this out the platoon leader must identify where the enemy is presumed to be in the building. The platoon leader can do this by imagining where he would place troops – in rooms easily fortified, spaces with an escape, and near doors or windows that offer a view of outside. The platoon leader must also estimate the enemy's weapons based on the enemy's previous engagements and intelligence reports. Once the platoon leader knows the likely enemy location and weapons, he can determine which weapons would be most effective against those and who has the training and experience to use those weapons.

How to Reposition Assets

As the platoon moves through the building, the platoon leader will need to reposition the security element so that the clearing element is always covered. This can be tricky because it requires estimating how quickly the clearing team will move through the building. If the clearing unit moves faster than the security element, they may be at risk because they are not covered. If the security element repositions before the clearing unit has moved, there is a risk of fratricide. In order to reposition the security element the platoon leader must anticipate which areas of the building will be cleared next and whether the security element will have a line of sight on that area. Also, it is useful to mark the windows of rooms that are cleared to inform the security element of the progress being made in the building.

Approach the Building

Approach the building in a way that minimizes risk to the platoon and does not reveal your presence to the enemy.

3rd squad has taken up positions on the perimeter of the building. Now it is time to move the clearing element up to the building. Lieutenant Gasko calls out to his other squad leaders: "1st squad take the left side of the street, 2nd squad the right! Let's be quick and quiet!" Knowing that bullets will ricochet close to the concrete walls, he reminds his squad leaders to stay away from the walls. He also reminds them that bullets will go through barrels and cars, just in case they try to use them for cover.

As they approach the target building, the lieutenant gets his first good look at the objective. His mind is processing at a mile a minute, and in about 10 seconds as they draw closer to the building, the lieutenant reconsiders the tower where he thought an enemy sniper might be hiding. He was right – a sniper in that second story would have a perfect vantage point of the main door. He calls 3rd squad on the radio. "Alright, security element, watch that tower closely for a sniper, and don't let him get off a shot."

Since they are still making a frontal assault, and since he is concerned about snipers, the lieutenant realizes that they will need to obscure their approach. There is little time for a feint assault, and the lieutenant does a quick wind and temperature assessment and decides that smoke will conceal the approach well.

The platoon is now at the intersection where the building is located. The lieutenant knows that intersections are death traps, so he has the platoon take cover short of the intersection. No movement from the objective or other surrounding buildings can be detected.

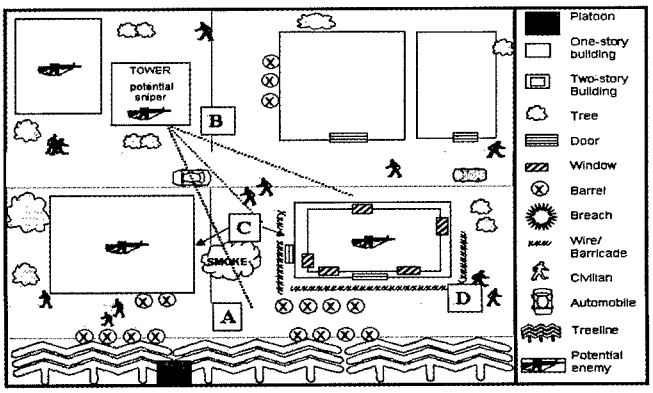

Figure 4. When approaching a building, Lieutenant Gasko needs to consider:
A. Open space in which platoon is vulnerable
B. Enemy line of fire
C. Walls: bullets travel along them
D. Barbed wire fence: booby-trap

Select a Route that Minimizes Hazards

There are a variety of hazards the platoon leader must be aware of such as: open spaces, potential enemy lines of fire, walls, civilian reactions, and booby-traps. This section will describe those hazards in more detail. The platoon leader may need to develop countermeasures to neutralize these hazards. The platoon leader may also need to adjust the plan to avoid hazards.

Open Spaces

The platoon is very vulnerable in open spaces such as:

- fields,
- streets,
- intersections, and
- the area around a building.

The sooner the platoon is inside the building or under cover, the better. There are strategies to deal with this challenge. The unit can approach from the woodline to stay concealed as long as possible. The unit should take the shortest unconcealed route to the building. There is an open space in Figure 4 (indicated by A) and the lieutenant must determine how to deal with it – either avoid the space or obscure the approach.

When navigating streets and intersections, some experts have had two elements move on either side of the street so they can protect each other's flank. The leader is positioned either in the middle or the end of the line. If possible, avoid frontal assaults since the enemy will expect it; if you have no other choice, make sure to obscure the frontal assault.

Enemy Line of Fire

One of the most difficult tasks in approaching a building is determining potential enemy lines of fire, especially since threats are often hidden. To be effective, the platoon leader must be able to think three-dimensionally and imagine threats that may be on the other side of buildings, walls, the ground, and so forth. In other words, the platoon leader must not limit his vision to the threats he can see in front of him. Anticipating enemy locations will help minimize risk to the platoon.

Building height and location, and window location are important in determining where the enemy might place a sniper. An experienced platoon leader will ask himself where he would place a sniper if he were in the enemy's position. Towers can be an ideal location because of their height. The height makes it easier to see a larger area (see Figure 5). Windows that face a likely avenue of approach or cover a large area are also potential sniper locations.

Figure 5. The tower has a good line of sight.

In the scenario, the platoon leader realizes that a likely sniper location is the tower. This is because it is a tall structure with a line of sight that covers a large area.

Walls

When navigating down streets (or within a building) the troops should not touch the walls. Although the walls may seem safe, bullets can ricochet 6-8 inches off walls and travel right along them. Bullets can hit soldiers who are pressed against walls.

Booby-traps

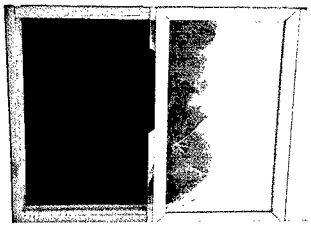

Figure 6. The enemy may break windows in order to fire weapons.

An absence of foot traffic could indicate that the local population knows that enemy activity is eminent. If the local population is avoiding an entrance to a building, it is likely the entrance is booby-trapped and should be avoided. Fortifications in the area can be detected by looking for broken-out windows (see Figure 6) or for traces of sandbags or materials and equipment stacked in rooms. Freshly upturned dirt around the building may indicate buried explosives.

Fences and wire around the building or barricades in front of windows and doors indicate that the building is important. These fortifications may also be an attempt by the enemy to channel troops into a specific route in order to ambush them. In the past the enemy have used barricades to force U.S. troops down a specific street or through a specific entrance. The enemy fortifies the location and waits to ambush the U.S. troops. The platoon leader may need to change the route of approach in order to avoid barricades or areas in which the platoon will be channelled.

Civilians

It is critical to know the attitude of the civilians. If there is a firefight, will the civilians run, will they join the fight, or will they let themselves be used as shields? The unit may be forced to fight an enemy that hides behind women and children for cover. The platoon leader should consider the type of area (residential, commercial, or industrial), its population, economics, and the number of civilians in the streets.

A crowd of civilians can quickly turn into an angry mob that needs to be managed. The crowd could become an enemy target in which case they would need protection. The crowd could also become hostile towards U.S. troops and quickly escalate to violence, attacking with anything from sticks and rocks to Molotov cocktails and guns. The platoon leader should also compare the clothing of civilians to clothing of enemy factions – do they dress alike, what are the differences? The enemy may disguise themselves by dressing as civilians.

Use Cover and Concealment Opportunities

A platoon leader needs to use obstacles to his advantage as opportunities for cover and concealment. It is easy to confuse the difference between cover and concealment so platoon leaders should remind everyone of the difference. Concealment means the enemy cannot see you. Cover means the enemy cannot hit you because there is something between you and them, such as a wall. The platoon may be concealed by smoke so the enemy cannot see them; however, they are not covered and are still vulnerable to enemy bullets. Likewise, cars in the street can conceal maybe 1-3 soldiers, but unless the men are situated behind the engine block, they are not covered. Bullets can go through most parts of a car. Some items in the scenario, such as barrels in Figure 4, offer concealment but not cover. The surrounding buildings offer both cover and concealment.

Determine How to Obscure the Assault

In order to keep the platoon safe, the platoon leader must get to the building as quickly as possible. The platoon leader has two options for obscuring the assault; he can use surprise or speed. The tradeoffs associated with both surprise and speed are discussed below.

Surprise

In general, a platoon leader can use smoke, a distraction, a feigned attack elsewhere, or stealth in a surprise attack. Obscuring the assault with smoke affects visibility for command and control, and it is difficult to time and synchronize. In addition, smoke may not always be available, and, if it is, it may not rise depending on temperature and humidity.

We've also discussed that smoke conceals but does not cover. In a hostage mission, stealth is probably the best choice. Stealth requires cover and concealment opportunities or a nighttime operation. Much of what a platoon leader will decide to do will be based upon the type of mission that is underway.

Speed

A platoon leader can use speed to get to the building as quickly as possible, minimizing the amount of time the platoon is vulnerable. The platoon leader may use speed when there are not many cover and concealment opportunities available or when smoke and distractions are not possible. In this story, the platoon leader chose to do a frontal attack because of the likely sniper. Therefore he had to use speed and obscure the attack. He also took advantage of the few cover and concealment opportunities available (the metal barrels). The cars do offer concealment but do not offer much cover, only a small area behind the engine.

The lieutenant contemplates the best entrance that gains a foothold and surprises the enemy.

"Now, getting into the building..." the lieutenant thinks, "Our plan calls for speed, crashing through the main door, but that's not going to work. We'd be walking into a trap." The lieutenant notices many things that tell him this: The civilians are avoiding that door like the plague. There is wire strung all the way around the front of the building except for the door. Other barricades block the other entrances in the front of the building. "The enemy expects us to come through that door," he thinks. "They'll be waiting for us. If I was them, I'd have a bulk of my inside forces — including the AK-47s they tend to use — focused on that door...and maybe some outside forces!"

"We've got to move quickly. There are no other doors nearby and the windows would all require some climbing. With all the heavy gear and climbing, the time to build a step to the window, and a waiting enemy inside, we would be sitting ducks both inside and outside the windows." The lieutenant envisions a breach at a window: The cutting of the wire, and the building of a step, with a chokepoint of soldiers bunched outside the window, while, loaded with gear, each man slowly climbs in virtually unprotected to whatever waits inside. He quickly dismisses the idea. He scans the area to the left of the main door...not heavily barricaded...no holes...no windows. The concrete does not appear to be reinforced. "That's it," he decides. "We're blowing a hole 3 meters to the left of the door. That should get us into a separate room off the front entryway." Earlier, the lieutenant had planned for such a contingency, and had members of his platoon carry enough demolitions to breach the building by blowing a hole in the wall. They had to leave behind some other ammunition, but the lieutenant now sees it was a good trade-off. "By blowing through the wall, we'll catch the enemy inside off guard, but we'll be exposed outside for a longer time. In this case, the element of surprise is worth the risk."

"No more time to replan...the rest of the company is waiting for us to go," the lieutenant thinks. "If this mission is going to work, it means that we have to assault the building now." The lieutenant lays aside the multitude of other uncertainties and starts the assault.

The most experienced squad leader will take a fire team and initiate the breach. 3rd squad is in security positions around the intersection. They launch a series of smoke grenades and thick, gray smoke fills the intersection. The sound of automatic weapons fire fills the air from the building, and the security element returns fire. The fire team and 1st squad leader charge into the smoke, toward the wall, and begin cutting away the wire. Sure enough, a sniper begins to fire into the smoke from the tower across the street. "Gotcha," the lieutenant thinks as his security team quickly returns fire and eliminates the threat.

Seconds later the breach is complete and a team charges into the building. Lieutenant Gasko waits impatiently for word on the radio.

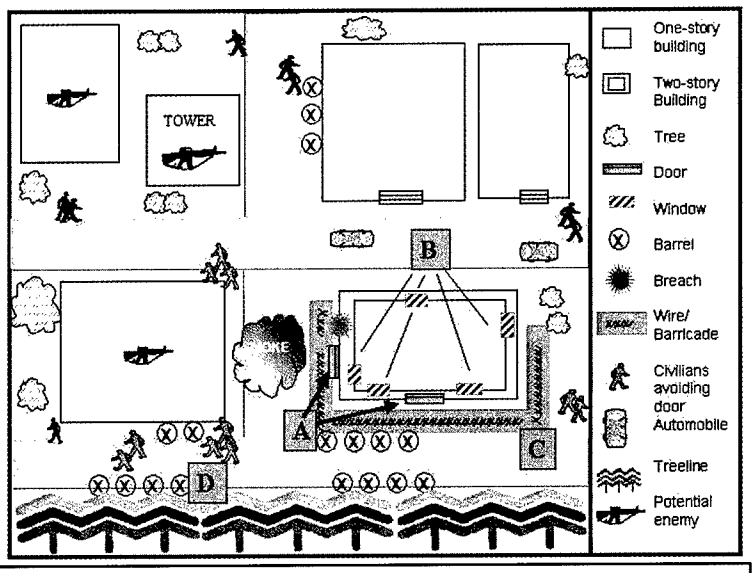

Figure 7. When approaching a building, consider:
A. Doors: the enemy may be waiting here
B. Windows: they take time to enter
C. Wire: may have to cut through it to get to window
D. Civilians avoiding the door to target building

The Lieutenant needs to make two critical decisions:

- Determine Entry Point (where to enter)
- Determine Entry Technique (how to enter)

Determine Entry Point

The platoon leader is often forced to take the most vulnerable route, and he does not have much time to reconnoiter. In general, look for things out of the ordinary such as civilians acting differently. These could indicate enemy activity or an ambush. It is important to remember:

Doors (A on Figure 7) are fatal funnels because you are an easy target; avoid them if at all possible.

The enemy will expect you to use doors and windows (B on Figure 7) so these will be heavily fortified.

The enemy may create barricades or string wire (C on Figure 7) to force the platoon to enter through the doors or windows.

ENTER

If people are avoiding a door (D on Figure 7), that may indicate an ambush or a booby-trap.

The goals are to gain a foothold and have the element of surprise. For example, going through the back is more surprising than going through the front. It is best to use an indirect approach, as an easy route tells you there is a surprise waiting for you. Do not do what is logical or expected by the enemy. Consider sewer entries, and use creative thinking to bypass obstacles. Enter the building as high as possible: top-down clearing is the preferred method, but often requires a helodrop on the roof. (Note: it is easier to blow a hole through a roof than through the side of a building.) Look for second floor entries if possible; however, grappling hooks are not a good idea because they leave you in the open and vulnerable for a considerable amount of time. If you must go through doors and windows be prepared for enemy defenses. When you enter through a window you need to disorient the enemy to buy time and get in. Door entry should be a last resort since they are typically booby-trapped, barricaded, and watched closely.

In the story, the platoon leader notices that civilians are avoiding the front door and realizes that the enemy may be waiting behind the door to ambush the platoon. The windows are a bad option because they would take time to enter and the soldiers would be easy targets while entering. Therefore, he decides that the windows and door are not options.

Determine Entry Technique

This involves determining how to enter the building and what equipment to use. Factors to consider include:

The type of mission the unit is tackling (stealth vs. speed): whether there is a need for a quiet entry, or whether noise is acceptable,

Intensity level of the conflict,

How the entry was planned prior to the mission,

The type and size of the building,

Resources and weapons capabilities and availability,

The status of the entry point (Is the door locked or unlocked? Are the entrances fortified?), and,

The construction of the building walls (thatch, wood, concrete, steel).

ENTER

During the story "Into Krustik," the goal is speed since it is a daylight operation and the entry team is forced to be in the open on the way to the target building. It may be useful to use deception (feigning an assault somewhere else) or stealth; however, sometimes the platoon will have to allow the enemy to see it. Enter the building under the assumption that you will be shot at so you will maintain your adrenaline and energy.

The type of grenades a platoon leader takes on the mission will depend on the type of walls. Outside walls are generally thick and difficult to penetrate. In larger buildings you need to be aware of potential gas or power lines in the walls, which will prevent you from using explosives to breach. In addition, shotguns, ramming equipment, and explosives that blow off the hinges require direct contact with the door and leave the soldier vulnerable to enemy fire. Shotguns can't be aimed cleanly. Opening a door will require three to four shots. Therefore shotguns are not very useful in MOUT. The platoon leader should also keep in mind that apartment buildings will have heavy security doors on the outside, and office buildings will have flimsy doors. If the unit is engaged in a low-intensity conflict and the door is open, use flash-bang or concussion grenades upon entry.

The preferred method of clearing is to go from the top of the building down to the lowest levels. Momentum is greater and grenades can be thrown down, but not up, the stairwells. Since enemy can't enter from the top, fewer security elements are needed and energy is conserved. In addition, pushing the enemy down to the bottom floor gives them a way to escape. If they are pushed up to higher levels, there is a greater chance they will feel trapped and fight to the end. Therefore the platoon should enter the building as high as possible.

Lieutenant Gasko is fortunate to have thought ahead and brought demolitions on the mission. He decides to use these resources to breach a wall and enter the building where it is least expected.

[redacted]

The smoke is clearing now, and there is scattered fire coming from inside the building. After about 10 very long seconds of fire exchange, 1st squad leader calls on the radio: "We have the entrance secured. There are three enemy casualties, one apparent civilian casualty, and no friendly casualties. Approximately 10 enemy have retreated down the main hallway right in front of me."

While clearing, gather information and plan your next course of action.

"Nice work, Sergeant," Gasko replies. Based on the report, the enemy appears to have moved down the hallway. The gunfire sounds suggested nothing out of the ordinary. "Start the clearing, Sergeant. Let me know when you've got the first two rooms cleared. Then, I'm coming behind you with 2nd squad," he tells his squad leader.

Upon hearing from 1st squad leader, the lieutenant enters the building with the rest of the clearing element. He now sees part of the internal layout for the first time. The main hallway heads east from the entrance and has rooms branching off on both sides. There appears to be a T-intersection at the far end of the hallway, and a stairway heading to the second floor. He decides to establish some communication protocols. He quickly specifies to the squad leaders certain locations within the building as numbered checkpoints.

By this time, 1st squad leader and the alpha fire team of first squad have cleared the first three rooms and have encountered only frightened civilians. Unfortunately, one of the less-experienced members of 1st squad, with an itchy trigger-finger, shot one of the civilians in the shoulder. The lieutenant is now concerned about the operational abilities of the team. He quickly scans their faces and sees a couple of glassy stares. The lieutenant orders leapfrogging between the clearing teams in the building: alpha team, first squad will maintain and extend security in the rooms they've just cleared, and bravo and charlie teams of first squad will carry on the clearing task. He sets up one of the cleared rooms as a holding place for any more civilians the platoon encounters in the building

As clearing continues, Lieutenant Gasko continues leapfrogging the clearing teams after every 3-4 rooms are cleared. At one point, he realizes that his clearing element is too spread out. If the enemy were to organize a counter-attack, some of the platoon would be left with too little self-protection. So he reconfigures his units and ensures that they can defend themselves. Some of the enemy forces have decided to barricade themselves and fight to the bitter end, but the lieutenant sees that most of them are retreating within the building. He redirects the clearing operation, so that it pushes the enemy toward a corner of the building with an exit to the outside. Here they'll have the option of escaping back into the city.

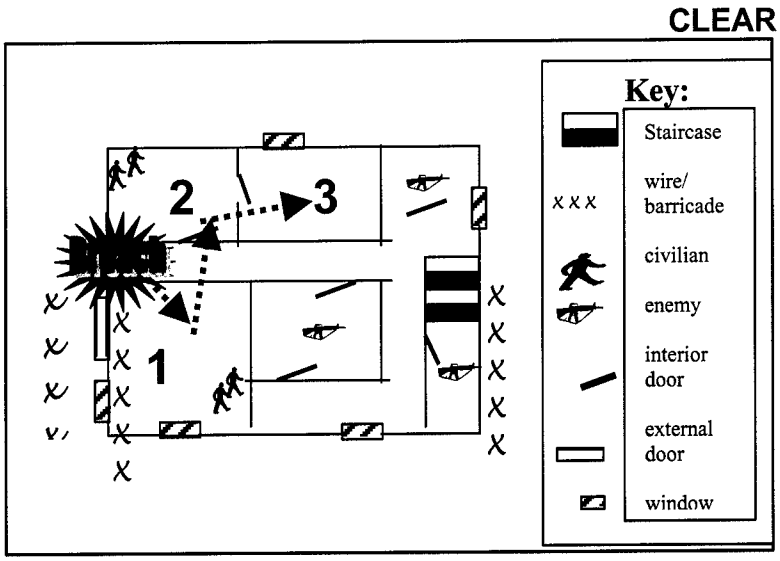

Figure 8. In the story, 1st squad (in green) breaches to the left of the side door. The cleared rooms (in order) are indicated by green numbers. Notice that Room 1 has a door closest to the breach. To prevent bypassing a threat, the squad moves laterally from the second to the third room since they were adjoined.

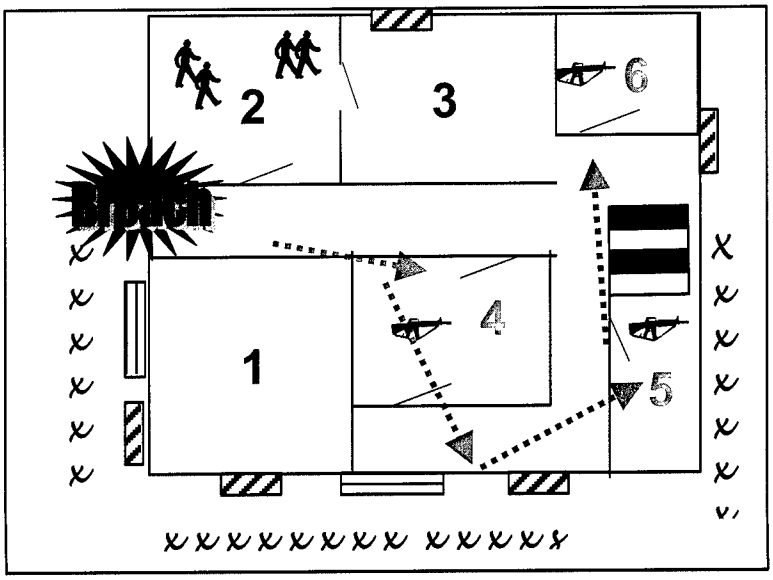

Figure 9. 2nd squad enters and immediately continues the clearing (in orange). Room 4 has two entrances that need to be secured, so the squad chooses to exit through the second door on the way to Room 5. In addition, 1st squad is using Room 2 to gather and detain civilians.

CLEAR

Gather Information and Assess Clearing Progress

The platoon leader gathers information from multiple sources – troops in the building, the security element outside the building, higher command, support personnel – in order to assess the progress of the mission. By assessing how well the mission is progressing, he can determine whether and how to adjust the plan. A major part of the assessment is using the new information he has collected to judge the enemy threat. By continually assessing the progress of the clearing and the nature of the enemy in and around the building, the platoon leader can set expectations for what the platoon will encounter next (e.g., in the next hallway or on the next floor), and he can determine the next course of action to take. The always-changing nature of a battle can prompt decisions to call for reinforcements, continue or adjust the plan, or even abort the mission all together.

Communications from Troops

Decisions like where to place personnel are largely based on communications from troops within the building. The platoon leader must have a sense of where each of his clearing units is located, and he must gauge the enemy's location and how the enemy will react to his presence in the building. Will the enemy stay and fight? Will they try to escape? While it is imperative to collect information from the forward clearing teams, it is also necessary to minimize communications in order to prevent giving information to the enemy

Another issue related to communications within the building is that of synthesizing information received from different sources. The platoon leader may get reports from two friendly units – for example, a clearing team and the security element – about where the enemy has been sighted. While the reports might sound distinct, they may in fact be referring to the same group of enemy soldiers. Buildings can make for confusing battlefields. Their 3-dimensional nature and complex floorplans can be deceiving, and depending on how the communications are delivered, the same reports can seem like two different reports, two different reports can seem like the same sighting, and reports can even seem contradictory. To avoid confusion in synthesizing information received from various sources, it is helpful for the platoon leader to develop protocols, reference points, and the like with his platoon in advance of the mission.

Furthermore, radios frequently will not work in buildings, depending on the construction (the heavier the building materials, the worse the radios will perform). Experienced platoon leaders have developed strategies whereby the RTO will stand by a window (in a cleared room) that provides good line of sight to the security element. He then serves as a relay station between the platoon leader, who is located nearby in the building, and the security element (especially the platoon sergeant).

In the story, Lieutenant Gasko relies on communications from inside the building. His squad leader reports that the entrance has been secured and relates the operational status of friendly, enemy, and civilians present. Gasko then waits to enter the building until he receives confirmation that the first grouping of rooms has been secured.

Perceived Enemy Threat

Soldiers can form expectancies about enemy threat by utilizing intelligence reports before the start of the mission. Being familiar with any available photographs and the known enemy "look" (nationality and uniform) can help to identify a threat under pressured situations.

During the clearing, look for weapons, fortifications (such as sandbags stacked in various rooms), medical supplies, ammunition, maps, documentation, and equipment. The presence of these items indicates that the building is important for the enemy. Maps and documents could indicate the building is an enemy headquarters. Ammunition and other equipment might suggest it is a supply depot. The more important the building, the more heavily fortified it will be, and the more enemy troops you are likely to find.

Level of enemy threat can be inferred through body language such as how weapons are held. If you encounter the enemy size up his body language: How is he holding his weapon? Is he ready to shoot? Does he look caught off guard? When you are in the situation, you will have to make quick decisions as to how to neutralize the threat.

Determine Next Steps

Throughout the clearing, the lieutenant must continually assess the situation within the building. His assessment will guide his decisions as to how and where to proceed. An accurate assessment also helps in deciding what resources are needed to complete the job and what should be reported to the company commander.

While the platoon leader needs to "think ahead" throughout the whole mission, it is especially critical that the decisions he makes during the clearing stage reflect his strategy for exiting the premises and maintaining and extending security. In essence, the lieutenant must maintain the "big picture," including where his soldiers are located, in and outside of the building, and how the plans are progressing.

SITREPs and other information aids in choosing next steps:

Fortification of the building and rooms

Noise from other floors

Reports about enemy number, weapons and if they are exiting the premises

Civilian reaction (are they bearing arms or forming mobs?)

Number of friendly troops available

CLEAR
Plans May Change

Experts always assess the progress of the mission against the plan. The tendency to want to maintain the designated plan, even when it becomes obsolete, is natural. Be advised that the initial plan *always* needs to be changed or adjusted once the operation is underway. The platoon leader should expect to experience such things as unfamiliarity with the floor plan and depletion of resources. He may need to make changes on the spot. For example, if friendly noncombatants go down, the platoon leader may consider switching personnel. Unexpected casualties may be a cue to listen more closely to what happens in the next rooms to prevent further injuries.

In the story, Lieutenant Gasko's troops encounter frightened civilians in the first rooms that are cleared. Since civilian presence in the building is a security threat, and enemy personnel could easily sneak in with them, Gasko needs to quickly modify his plan. However, he must remember the mission order to guide any adjustments he makes.

Several other factors can contribute to altering the plan, including:

Whether the platoon is taking fire, and from where. If the platoon is taking fire, it is clear that the enemy will fight, at least to some extent. What is most important is *where* the enemy is firing from. The platoon leader may need to change the flow of the clearing if the enemy's location is in conflict with the initial plan. For example, the platoon leader may decide to breach interior walls to reach and clear desired areas of the building, instead of using hallways.

If the enemy is located near an easy escape route (e.g., window or door), the platoon leader may capitalize on the opportunity to push the enemy out of the building, even if it means changing the flow of the clearing. This decision would also depend on mission objectives with regard to destroying versus removing hostile elements.

If the platoon encounters rooms that are manned by enemy soldiers, they will need to conduct a deliberate, room-by-room clearing.

If you know for sure that all enemy are located on a floor other than where you enter, use stealth instead of speed to penetrate the building until you reach them.

Whether there are ground threats surrounding the building. The flow of the clearing might be adjusted based on exterior threats, to prevent clearing teams from passing windows or walls that put them at risk from hostile units outside the building.

The floorplan and other building characteristics. The floorplan may be different than anticipated. It is *imperative* to adjust the plan if two clearing units will end up approaching one another – for

example, if they will round a corner and meet each other. This situation would put them at significant fratricide risk.
In general, choose a direction that enables the clearing elements to maintain only secure areas behind it.

A wide hallway provides the opportunity to conduct simultaneous room clearing, with two teams abreast. This increases your speed in the building, which is a great advantage.

If there is an opportunity to begin clearing at a higher level than planned, take it. It is much easier and safer to perform top-down than bottom-up clearing. Your momentum will be greater going down; you can throw grenades down stairwells but not up; fewer security elements will be required for "clean" upper floors; and top-down clearing generally gives the enemy a better escape route. If you must start clearing in the middle of the building, clear downward and secure, and then clear the rest of the way up.

The unplanned presence of civilians. Civilians in the building will slow you down. They will also make the clearing more complex. In cases where hostiles and civilians are located in the same room(s), you may need to try a negotiation strategy before entering and clearing the room.

Create a secured holding area for civilians who are encountered during the clearing, especially when their .attitude toward U.S. troops is negative or just unclear.

Monitor Combat Effectiveness and Assign Duties

Due to the physically and mentally exhausting nature of the building-clearing mission, squads should generally be assigned to both clearing and security roles. The platoon leader is responsible for determining the physical and mental state of his soldiers and making adjustments to duties when necessary. He needs to monitor how many soldiers are guarding people, the length of time that they have been in the building, and the expressions on the faces of the troops. Observe whether uniforms are torn, bloody and dirty. Consider the weight of the equipment load the soldier has been carrying. Realize that stress, excitement and fear wear people out, even if they have not encountered any enemy.

In addition, knowing how individual soldiers respond under pressure is critical. Some people freeze up and do nothing in the wake of danger and others will only do what they are told and nothing else. Keep in mind that when soldiers see a buddy die, their morale drops and feelings of invincibility disappear. Knowing these tendencies beforehand can help the platoon leader plan for adjustments and changes.

CLEAR

Tips for Assigning Clearing Tasks:

- **Squads can only do one task at a time. Only split a unit if you are relatively sure there is no threat.**
- **Splitting forces can facilitate momentum, but there is more potential for friendly fire.**
- **Never let two units approach each other: there is a potential for fratricide.**
- **When clearing rooms in succession, squads should never bypass a threat. Prisoners or noncombatants should be secured and guarded.**

The platoon leader should look for signs of emotional burnout, like fear, stress, and fatigue. These emotions can be apparent in the body language of the troops. For example, the "1000 yard stare" – hollow looking eyes staring off into space – indicates that the soldier is in a robotic state, and he isn't alert, sharp, and on his toes.

When clearing rooms, adrenaline levels of the troops fluctuate, especially if the squad prepares to clear a room and then finds it to be empty. Maintaining vigilance is extremely challenging when the first rooms encountered are empty.

The rush from highs and lows are fatiguing and should be a factor in changing up squad roles during the clearing. To help with this problem, the platoon leader can order squads to use a "leapfrogging" technique, where the first squad clears three or so rooms and then provides security while the second squad clears the next section of rooms. Security is a relatively easy role, so it's a good follow up task to clearing rooms, which expends so much energy. Making adjustments in duties will prevent friendly, enemy and noncombatant fire.

Communicate Orders and Intent

The platoon leader must communicate directions and information to both his platoon and higher command. This becomes difficult if the unit can't use radios to communicate with those outside the building. The RTO may have to move to a window to communicate with the company commander. In addition, it is easy to become disoriented once inside the building, so giving accurate directions can be a challenge. Prior to the clearing phase, the platoon leader should have established checkpoints, such as stairways, and trained the unit in the meanings of communications they will be using. The goal is to avoid surprises.

In the story, Lieutenant Gasko recognized the need for numbered checkpoints when he ordered the squads to split the clearing. He envisioned 2nd squad getting to the T-intersection of the building and

knew that communications could get chaotic and hectic, so he established protocols. Instead of trying to determine directions, floors, or individual lefts and rights, teams that were facing different directions and located on different floors could quickly share situation assessments and movements by referring to checkpoints. This would help with radio communications and even reduce confusion should the radios go out. The use of 'left' or 'right' is dependent upon one's position in the building, so the platoon leader can also use compass directions, floor numbers, or reference points to clarify communications.

Place Security Elements

The main consideration in maintaining and extending security is determining where to place security elements within the building. It requires the involvement of many people and three-dimensional thought regarding possibilities about which "clean" areas the enemy could access. Consider the number and locations of hallways and stairwells and room characteristics when deciding how to guard against intrusion.

The goal is to ensure that the enemy does not have access to your clean areas and cannot sneak in behind the clearing team. One good rule to follow in order to reach the goal is to *never* bypass a threat. Security should typically be placed in rooms that have just been cleared. One strategy is to have the team that just cleared those 3-4 rooms now maintain security in those rooms before the platoon moves to the next sector of the building (see Figure 10). Look for locations that offer good vantage points of key areas. The placement of security can cover larger segments. For example, a single security pair can guard an entire hallway of cleared rooms if there is only one way to access the hallway. In this case they should be stationed near the access point. Remember that the people in overwatch outside the building are also preventing the enemy from entering the building and providing information about what is happening outside the building. The placement of security elements can also help in directing additional friendly traffic that enters the building. A key concern is potential fratricide — a security unit should never be placed where clearing units may approach.

If a room has a window that an enemy could enter from the outside, it must be secured. However, security is generally not needed on upper floors that are cleared. Make sure to secure all elevator shafts, and listen on the radio for additional rooms, stairs, trap doors, etc. that are unexpected. The perimeter security should cover fire escapes.

CLEAR

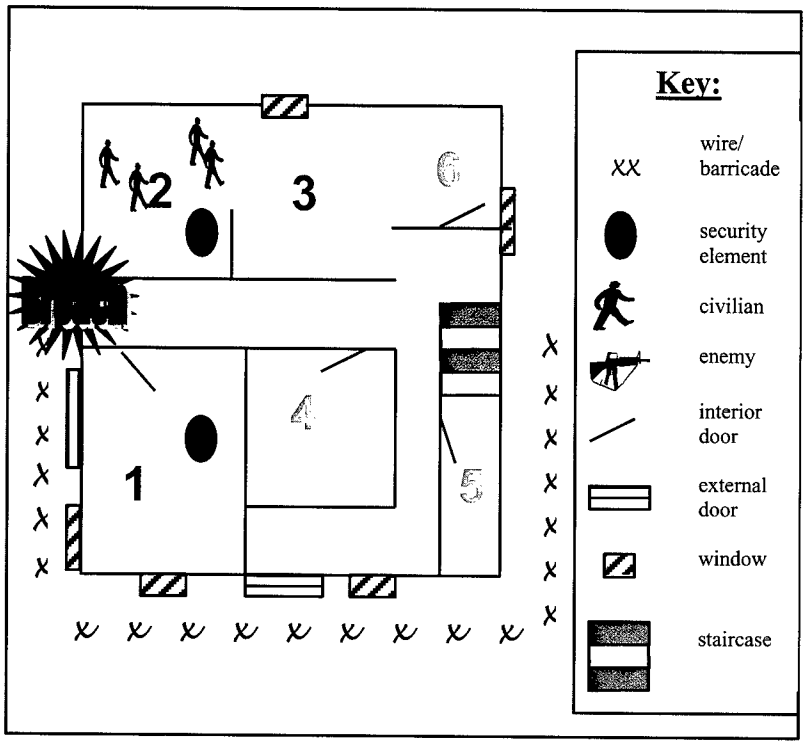

Figure 10. The rooms numbered in green represent those cleared by alpha team, first squad and the rooms in orange were cleared by bravo team, first squad. A security element (in blue) stationed where the breach occurred and where the civilians are being detained will serve multiple purposes. Room 1 needs to be guarded since it con-ains a door and two windows. Room 2 contains no windows, so holding civilians there minimizes the chance that enemy can shoot in or sneak in. However, the civilians should still be guarded for their own safety.

The lieutenant knows that the civilians encountered on the first floor become a potential threat to the last team leaving the building, as the enemy can sneak in with them and hide during the clearing. His resources are quickly depleting, but the lieutenant doesn't want the civilians to move around and attract more enemy or friendly fire. He doesn't want any more accidental shootings to occur.

Ensure that the building cannot be "unsecured" and choose an extraction point that aids the start of the next mission.

Nothing in the ROE prevents Gasko from gathering the civilians and putting them in a cleared room on the ground floor. He decides to assign a soldier to guard them while the platoon tries to drive the rest of the building occupants out into the city.

Fortunately, in this case, most of the enemy eventually retreated back into the city, and in less than 10 minutes, the building is cleared. As the clearing progressed, Lieutenant Gasko placed small security elements in the four lower corners of the building to ensure that all possible entrances were covered, and the building could not be "unsecured" by the enemy during the clearing. Although security elements are in place and the mission is wrapping up, Lieutenant Gasko warns his platoon about falling into a 'going home' mentality. "We're not out of here yet. Keep your guard up!"

Once the building has been cleared in its entirety, Gasko begins to assess whether the planned evacuation route – via the south side entrance — will work out. He knows from his initial approach from the treeline that wire and barricades were constructed around the south entrance, so he decides he'll need to find a different extraction point. He also knows that the other platoons in the company are clearing the buildings to the west and northwest. "I'll need to avoid those areas," he thinks to himself. "I don't want to confuse 1st and 2nd platoons and get ourselves shot at."

He quickly assesses the layout of the streets and the locations of others buildings from memory. "Ok men, listen up!" he addresses his clearing element. "We're going out the same way we came in. When you get outside, I want you to proceed east to the other end of the building, then south to the treeline. We're not gonna take the shorter route around the west side of the building because I don't want to get in 2nd platoon's way. Everyone got that? 1st squad leader, you go first and set up an overwatch position on the northeast side of the building. 2nd squad leader, you and your clearing team will be last out of the building. Make sure all is clear behind us as we go. And make sure you stay with the civilians until the very last."

EVACUATE

Gasko knows the dangers of evacuating toward an area that hasn't been secured, but he weighs the risk of moving toward the other platoons and determines he'd rather stay out of their way. Most likely, the enemy is on the run, having been pushed out of the three buildings. Therefore, fratricide is a bigger risk than enemy fire. Also, the greatest threat – the sniper – was neutralized at the beginning, and he knows his platoon sergeant did not allow another enemy sharpshooter to take his place in the tower.

All in all, the lieutenant was relieved. Many things that could have gone wrong did not. His platoon had only one casualty...a surface bullet wound taken by a corporal as he entered one of the last remaining rooms. The lieutenant did not have to deal with the evacuation of friendly casualties. Unfortunately, one civilian was fatally hit during the mission. A second civilian was hit in the shoulder. The lieutenant understood, though, that given the chaos of building clearing, they were lucky. His subordinates acted superbly, and when they tired, the lieutenant switched them effectively. The enemy was disorganized, and for the most part, did not want a fight. The enemy had expected the platoon to enter through the front door and fall into their hands. When that did not happen, they fell apart. That would change, the lieutenant knew, for just as he had learned lessons from this experience, so would the enemy. They would not make the same mistakes again, and the next clearing surely would not go off as smoothly.

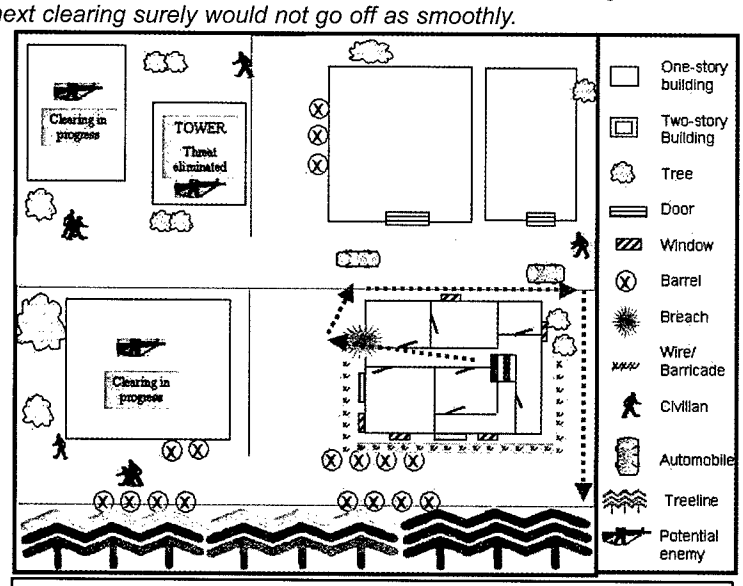

Figure 11. The objects in orange are the factors the lieutenant considered in choosing his extraction point (in red).

Evacuating the building involves:

- Handling Noncombatants and Casualties
- Ensuring Subordinate Vigilance
- Choosing an Extraction Point

At this point in the story, Lieutenant Gasko is thinking about how to evacuate the clearing element from the building. He is fortunate not to have sustained casualties in his platoon. However, he must consider the injured noncombatants. His biggest decision during this stage was whether to stick with the pre-planned extraction point. He decided not to, and then had to weigh the risks to determine which point would be best for conducting the evacuation.

Noncombatants and Casualties

Before the mission, higher command may give instructions for dealing with noncombatants. Instructions may be to bound civilians for their own personal safety, sort through them looking for enemy personnel, or gather them all into one room so only one guard is required to watch them. However, if no instructions are given or if ROE are unclear, the platoon leader will need to make the call. Consider the number and personal hostility of the noncombatants. Have you had to physically restrain some of them? Is there a history of noncombatant actions against friendly troops? Sometimes the situation warrants adjustments to the instructions from higher command. The platoon leader needs to decide if he can justify minor violations of those orders.

Determining how and when to evacuate casualties is difficult. What happens if a fire team takes two casualties and other soldiers in a firefight cannot stop to give first aid? The need arises to prioritize between mission accomplishment and the welfare of injured troops. The platoon leader should listen to the medic's recommendations and know about the type of casualties the platoon is facing. Factors that will come into play include the evacuation assets available and the relative importance of the mission. One strategy that can be used is to try to pass the injured back to the squads in the rear until they reach the medical area. Bear in mind the commander's intent, the mission plan and original objectives, educated guesses about floor plans in uncleared areas, and whether a feasible contingency plan exists.

Ensure Subordinate Vigilance

The security elements have been put in place, and all remaining personnel are being evacuated from the building. However, the platoon leader notices that SITREPs, POSREPs and SALUTEs are not being called in. The platoon leader also notices talkative soldiers who have stopped being watchful and using cover. Their body language shows they are no longer tense, wary, and alert. The platoon has adopted a "going home" mentality before the operation has been completed. This is extremely risky to the safety of the platoon and the goal of

accomplishing the mission. Platoons need to be reminded of the tendency to drift into a non-vigilant state before missions have been accomplished.

Choose an Extraction Point

When the mission has been successful, it is not difficult to determine that the clearing is completed and figure out how and when to exit the building. However, when the platoon leader has to consider whether to stop the mission due to loss of personnel or inability to meet the objectives, this becomes a more difficult judgment. The depletion of combat-effective people means the mission is essentially done. The only other factor to consider is the mission objective and whether it has been completed. The mission is completed when either zero enemy remain or the mission objective has been accomplished. In a snatch mission, once the snatch has been made, the mission is complete. Once you have decided to evacuate, choose a safe extraction point that is a good starting point for the next operation.

The streets are the most dangerous place to be, depending on whether other friendly elements control the area. It is best to avoid putting the clearing element back on the streets and out in the open. In addition to the threat of enemy fire, there is also the risk of fratricide. Attempt to avoid moving toward other friendly units engaged in a mission, unless you know for a fact they have secured their area and are aware of your movements. It is often necessary to send the first group out of the building into an overwatch role, to protect the rest of the clearing element as they evacuate. The evacuation operation should be mutually supportive throughout. To ensure close control of the platoon, give squad leaders clear limits of movement and concise instructions.

Other MOUT Requirements

We have outlined five stages of a MOUT building clearing operation: Securing the perimeter; Approaching the building; Entering the building; Clearing the building and Maintaining security; and Evacuating the building – and have discussed the lessons learned by seasoned platoon leaders and MOUT operators. We also briefly presented five additional skills in the MOUT Overview that good platoon leaders apply during each stage of the mission.

Lieutenant Gasko exhibited these additional skills as he conducted his mission:

- Think Like the Enemy (Maintain the enemy's perspective)
- Maintain Situation Awareness and the Big Picture
- Project Into the Future
- Apply Rules of Engagement
- Lead Subordinates

Think Like the Enemy

During the mission, it is critical to take the perspective of the enemy. By placing himself in the enemy's shoes, a platoon leader can anticipate hostile courses of action and locations. For example, what positions give the best vantage point and control important areas? The tallest building in a key intersection is usually a critical piece of terrain to be controlled. However, building construction is also an important issue. The more solid the building, the more likely the enemy will use it.

The platoon leader should also consider how the enemy will think about the friendly force. What will the enemy believe are the friendlies' vulnerabilities, and how will he try to exploit them? Also, what is the most effective way for hostiles to employ deception techniques? Remember that the enemy is an intelligent adversary and will learn from his mistakes. One of the worst things a platoon leader can do is establish patterns in his operations. If clearing teams use the same technique each time they enter a room – blow off the door hinges (bang), throw grenades (bang), and then enter with controlled shooting (shoot, shoot) – the enemy will learn to keep their heads down until the second bang and then come up shooting.

Remember that battle lines are quite different in MOUT than on traditional battlefields. Friendly and enemy forces will most likely be intermixed instead of occupying different "sides" of the city. Buildings that were recently cleared can be re-occupied by enemy forces if security teams do not remain in place in the building. A cleared area only remains "clean" if friendlies occupy it or have good eyes on the structure.

Maintain Situation Awareness and the Big Picture

This requirement involves keeping track of what is happening and determining how to adjust the plan in response. Situation awareness is a central factor in every decision the platoon leader will make. It should encompass awareness of the platoon's status – what is morale like, how are resources holding up, and so forth – as well as an assessment of what the enemy and civilians (if applicable) are up to. Several subtle cues will contribute to situation awareness, and experience as a platoon leader enables recognition of those cues. However, it is also important for the platoon leader to locate himself in a place where he can see the big picture and take in communications from his platoon and other relevant units (like his company commander and adjacent platoons). If a leader is too close to the building, it will be more difficult to see the big picture (and therefore prepare for next steps).

Inexperienced platoon leaders often falter when they don't allow the plan to change. Inevitably, the platoon will encounter surprises once the mission begins. While a complete and well thought-out plan is important, it will almost never hold up in its entirety. The platoon leader must use what was learned during the planning process in addition to what he sees on the battlefield to make adjustments to the plan. Some will be minor, others major. Flexibility is key for mission accomplishment.

Project into the Future

A good situation awareness enables a platoon leader to set expectations for what will happen next. He can project into the future. And if he can predict what will be encountered around the next corner, he will have the edge over the adversary.

The platoon leader should think about where to proceed next, what personnel will be required for the next move, and where he should be located to best support the next step. As a general rule, assume the worst with regard to the enemy. Think ahead as to how the layout of the streets or the building can make your force vulnerable, and cover those vulnerabilities before you reach them. This can be done through overwatch positions or by avoiding potentially sticky areas.

Think ahead as to how many people you'll need for security inside the target building. Fewer people are necessary for a top-down clearing than for bottom-up clearing, since upper floors do not need to be secured once they are clear. Also keep in mind that too many people can actually be detrimental to a mission. The more moving parts involved, the more difficult it is to coordinate the operation and keep track of how things are progressing.

Apply Rules of Engagement

The primary challenge with applying ROE is being able to correctly interpret what they do and do not permit. ROE may appear to be written by lawyers, not by the soldiers who have to abide by them. Therefore they can be ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory. To safeguard from confusion during mission execution, a good platoon leader will ask an exhausting number of questions about the ROE prior to the mission. Think about all the different contingencies that might be encountered, and ask about how the ROE should be applied in each. The goal is to determine the *meaning* behind the ROE so that the platoon can better respond to what is actually encountered without the confusion around what is an acceptable response.

For example, if ROE refer to a "hostile act," the platoon leader might ask what constitutes a hostile act. Firing at a civilian? Firing at a friendly helicopter not attached to the platoon? Firing at the platoon but missing? What are the bounds of a hostile act?

Lead Subordinates

The requirements for effectively leading a platoon include issuing clear and direct communications, exercising good control over the unit, and judging the combat effectiveness of individuals and teams. The platoon leader is ultimately responsible for the mission. As such, he must ensure that other members of the platoon (e.g., squad leaders) are not put in a position where they are making decisions for which they're not responsible. Place clear limits on subordinates' movements and activiies. If squad leaders get ahead of the platoon leader, they will be forced to make decisions that are above their level. This is an issue of protecting squad leaders more than restricting their initiative. The platoon leader has the big picture, so he must ensure he makes decisions that will impact the picture instead of inadvertently handing them down to squad leaders.

The vigilance of the platoon is another critical issue for the platoon leader. Subordinates can relax their guard at times when they remain vulnerable. The platoon leader is responsible for assessing whether subordinates are being vigilant, and keeping them on their toes if they are not.

IN CLOSING

The MOUT battlefield presents a unique set of challenges, most of which require experience to become proficient in handling. However, we hope that this guide can provide some key insights for Lieutenants to take with them to the MOUT battlefield.

Other MOUT Decision-Making Resources:

Decision-Centered MOUT Training for Small Unit Leaders

This final technical report describes the interviews with experienced combat veterans, and includes the complete set of MOUT decision challenges from which this guide was gleaned. Contact Klein Associates [debbie@klein-inc.com or 937- 873-8166] or Dr. Kenneth Evans of the U.S. Army Research Institute [evansk@benning.army.mil or 706-545-5589] for more information.

IMPACT–IMproving Performance through Applied Cognitive Training

IMPACT is a multimedia CD-ROM that provides guidance for facilitating decision-centered MOUT training. It includes a library of platoon-level MOUT battlefield scenarios. Contact Klein Associates [debbie@klein-inc.com or 937- 873-8166 or] or Dr. Kenneth Evans of the U.S. Army Research Institute [evansk@benning.army.mil or 706-545-5589] for more information.

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