

CAAT in Deliberate Urban Attacks

EWS 2005

Subject Area Strategic Issues

CAAT in Deliberate Urban Attacks

Contemporary Issues Final Draft
Submitted by Captain TB Swisher

to

Major TK Simperts, CG 9

8 February 2005

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 2005		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2005 to 00-00-2005	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE CAAT in Deliberate Urban Attacks				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Marine Corps War College,Marines Corps University,Marines Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5067				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

"Throughout modern history, we have consciously skirted fighting in urban areas. It is a very difficult and dangerous place to fight... one we want to avoid. But by 2010, over 70 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas... It is here that our enemies will challenge us... the urban areas will become the center of gravity for our foes. Cities have the potential to negate much of our current technological advantages..."

-Gen Krulak's 1997, "Three Block War" speech

General Krulak's "Three Block War" speech marked a cusp in the Marine Corps emphasis on Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) and deliberate attacks in urban terrain. Since the speech the Marine Corps has conducted many exercises in order to test and refine the current techniques and procedures for conducting deliberate attacks in urban terrain. Recently operations found the Marine Corps conducting deliberate attacks in urban terrain, fulfilling Gen Krulak's prophecy. These attacks are challenging due to urban area's concentrated population, abundance of natural cover, concealment and avenues of approach, and the three dimensional threat. Therefore, in order to be successful, deliberate attacks must occur in four phases; recon, isolation, gaining a foothold, and clearing in zone. Combined anti-armor teams (CAAT) are well suited for and should be utilized for the reconnaissance and isolation phase in a deliberate attack in urban terrain. Using CAAT for this purpose capitalized on their strengths and mitigates their weaknesses, mitigating some of the challenges in the execution of a deliberate urban attack.

Advantages the defenders have in urban terrain

The population, availability of cover and concealment, avenues of approach, and the three dimensional threat give the

defenders of urban terrain a higher advantage than normal defensive operations.

Urban areas contain concentrated populations. Whether it is the millions of people associated with large cities or just a few people in small villages (MCWP 3-35.3 1-4), people tend to congregate in and around urban areas. This creates two problems for the attackers. The first is the defenders availability of large voluntary or non-voluntary recruiting pool. The second is the large numbers of internally displaced personnel (IDPs). That will require the attackers to allocate resources for the movement and care of IDPs, thereby taking valuable assets away from the fight.

The man-made construction of the urban environment creates or accentuates a three dimensional environment. The first dimension is the sub-terrainian structure. Its prevalence is dependent on the city. Some examples may include underground transit or maintenance corridors, sewers, subways, and other underground passages. The second dimension is the surface or ground level and the third dimension includes everything above ground. Buildings, overpasses, and other vertical manmade structures offer the urban environment numerous elevated positions. As such, defenders are able to utilize the three dimensional environment to add extreme flexibility to their defense.

Cover, concealment and natural avenues of approach are abundant in the built up areas. With buildings, fences, curbs, cars, and the possible addition of battlefield debris, the urban area has a plethora of positions that offer cover and concealment. Because streets normally running somewhat straight, the defenders already have cleared fields of fire on the attackers avenues of approach. With the additions of simple obstacles (from the abundant building material present in urban areas) to already existing urban canyons, engagement areas are easily constructed and utilized.

Planning for deliberate attack on the urban terrain

With these advantages that the defender possesses, the attackers must carefully plan out their deliberate attack on the urban terrain. Deliberate attacks normally go in four phases; reconnaissance, isolation, gaining a foothold, and clearing in zone. The application of these four phases gives deliberate urban attacks a methodical process that is needed to ensure mission success with minimal casualties.

In MOUT the first phase, reconnaissance of the objective, is paramount. Because of the complexity of urban terrain, the standard 1:50K map does not provide enough detail to plan an urban attack. The recon can give a detailed sketch of the objective, conduct route studies, find possible support by

fire positions, and determine any possible information on the enemy's location and disposition.

The second phase is isolation of the objective. This is done to control enemy's ability to resupply the objective, retrograde from the objective, or displace to a secondary or supplementary position. This control must be maintained throughout the operation in order to limit the ability to maneuver or sustain enemy forces.

Third phase, gaining a foothold "provides the attacking force with a position from which they can continue the assault through the objective area" (MCWP 3-35.3 2-8) and should be done immediately in order to maintain tempo

The fourth phase is to clearing in zone. This is the methodical house to house process to clear the enemy from the objective. This is the most dangerous phase due to the advantages the defenders possess.

What is CAAT

CAAT is not on the Battalion's Table of Organization, it is an ad hoc unit, prescribed by the Battalion Commander. CAAT is usually formed by the joining of the heavy machine gun Platoon and the TOW section, but can also include the javelin section. CAAT platoon's crew serve weapon systems consist of the M2 50 cal machine gun, MK19, TOW system and the 240G medium machinegun. The platoon's mode of transportation is

either the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) or the Interim Fast Attack Vehicle (IFAV). There can be seven heavy machinegun vehicles and seven TOW vehicles in a CAAT platoon, but the number varies from battalion to battalion. The idea behind the CAAT platoon is that the machine guns will protect the TOWs from enemy infantry and light armored vehicles and the TOW will protect the Machineguns from the Medium and Heavy tanks. CAATs advantages are in their mobility, maneuverability, firepower, and communications. Their disadvantages are in their lack of armor.

There is not a great deal of doctrine concerning the tactical employment of CAAT. Though according to "Machine Guns and Machine Gun Gunnery"; in the defense CAAT could be assigned such missions as "...conducting anti-armor ambushes forward of the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA), supporting a combat outpost, or reinforcing a counter attack force." (MCWP 3-15.1 6-8) In the offense, CAAT "...can act as a motorized scout element that seeks to find and maintain contact with the enemy while the unit's main body maneuvers to engage, or they can conduct route reconnaissance and provide reports about the trafficability of a unit's planned route of march." (MCWP 3-15.1 6-8) Both of these missions capitalize on CAATs mobility and firepower without becoming decisively engaged with the enemy.

CAAT in deliberate attacks on urban terrain

In accordance with Marine Corps leadership principle recommending that leaders should "Employ [their] unit according to its capabilities." We must look at CAATs strengths and weaknesses, and then task them accordingly. CAAT is best suited for the reconnaissance and isolation phase of the four phases of the attack.

As with normal offensive operations, during a condition of unknown or low threat CAAT will consistently perform route reconnaissance in front of the Battalion. MOUT should be no different. CAATs maneuverability, quiet movement, extensive communication equipment and TOW sights (thermal capable) make them highly capable of reconnaissance in the urban area. In the urban area, the value of a good intelligence preparation of the battlefield is more necessary than normal. As such, CAATs missions range in this phase could include; taking pictures or making sketches of the objective area and the routes in the area, observing any obstacles or enemy positions (the TOW thermals they could see personnel inside windows and other darkened areas), observing enemy movement in or out of the objective, or serving as transport and security for a leader's recon or sniper employment. As the infantry battalions only organic motorized scout unit, CAAT can give their headquarters quick, reliable intelligence.

Major Jenkinson, OIC for the MOUT training center in Germany noted that "...one phase of the MOUT deliberate attack clearly stands out as the key to the assaulting units' success or failure at the tactical level-isolation." (Jenkinson 49)

The long range of CAATs weapon systems allow CAAT to be positioned at critical areas and project influence over great distances. These positions may also serve as support by fire positions to facilitate the establishment of a foothold or the clearing in zone phases. If there is no critical area, or the distance is too vast for their weapon systems, CAAT can capitalize on their mobility. This can be accomplished by giving them a mission similar to ones given in the security area of the defense (guard, screen, or cover) in order to isolate the objective area. A caution is that they should be employed "...outside RPG range of a built-up area." (Jenkinson 51)

During both the establishment of a foothold and the clearing in zone, CAATs lack of armor hinders its survivability from the three dimensional threat of the urban environment. During the Marine Corps Urban project Metropolis the Battalion found "The CAAT teams...lacked the armor to protect themselves when left without security. The only time CAAT was destroyed in the urban environment was when they were separated from the larger force without security or

overwatch." (MCWL 25) Though the threat can be slightly lowered by the integration of infantry, it is still not an optimal mission for CAAT. CAATs survivability is in its mobility, and this mobility is degraded in the urban canyons. BLT 1/6 in Afghanistan effectively utilized a CAAT and infantry task force to conduct small scale hasty urban attacks and even then CAAT occupied a support by fire position out of the urban areas. (Niedziocha 25-28) CAATs lack of armor makes it a vulnerability to drive down the urban canyon with known threats.

Project Metropolis

The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab is currently conducting Project Metropolis to develop new ways to attack urban areas. Three tactics that they are studying are; urban penetration, urban thrust, and urban swarm. None of these studies a formal isolation phase. They kept CAAT in the reserves and activated them for missions such as quick reaction force, convoy security, flank security, rear security, check point control, patrolling to emplace and retrieve snipers, and casualty evacuation. They also urged that in a high threat environment CAAT should not screen forward. (MCWL) Though there was no formal isolation phase, the use of CAAT in Project Metropolis was relegated to missions similar to those assigned to isolate the objective.

"If the general is unable to control his impatience and orders his troops to swarm up the wall like ants, one-third of them will be killed without taking the city. Such is the calamity of these [urban] attacks." (Sun Tzu 78-79) CAAT offers an extremely effective warfighting capability but must be used carefully in high threat environments. Urban's population, natural cover and concealment, cleared avenues of approach, and three dimensional threat lead to special planning consideration for CAAT. For its survivability CAAT must utilize its mobility. The reconnaissance or isolation phase in a deliberate attack on urban terrain allows CAAT to utilize its strengths.

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