



A rifleman of the US Army 75th Ranger Regiment enters the breach during close quarters battle training.

Photo Credit: US Army 75th Ranger Regiment

“God is not on the side of the big battalions, but on the side of those who shoot best.”
- Voltaire, 1735



Taking back the Infantry Decimeter: Improving US Army Close Quarters Battle Part I of III

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Introduction

This three-part series is a primer for a broader and deeper capabilities-based assessment conducted during 2019 to be published in full at a later date intended to inform junior leaders and influence senior leaders to improve proficiency in close quarters battle (CQB) across the US Army Infantry. Among junior leaders, it is meant to provide an awareness of existing issues and emerging solutions to the challenge. Among senior leaders, it is meant to convey urgency to adapt via narrative and conviction to adapt via specificity of tactics and technologies in order to meet this challenge. Part I will illustrate the challenge by way of FICINT¹; Part II will describe the context and specific issues; and Part III will provide a recommended solution the Army can adopt to meet the challenge. It is written in partnership with the Army- not in criticism of it.

[Close quarters battle \(CQB\)](#) is physical or direct fire contact with an enemy combatant at close range (within ten meters, or “decameter”), under urgent conditions (targets are only able to be engaged for a few seconds) amidst an environment of limited visibility, dense vegetation, or, most commonly, enclosed or subterranean structures. Proficiency in close quarters battle is important to the Infantry. Despite [US Army senior trainers’ attitudes](#) that “CQB is the easy part of urban operations,” [research](#) suggests that general purpose force (GPF) Infantry proficiency in CQB is inadequate to meet policy-makers’ risk expectations in modern combat. By contrast, the US Army Special Operations Command’s (USASOC) 75th Ranger Regiment [habitually conducts close quarters battle](#) in declared theatres of active combat (DTAC). In preparation, the average Ranger rifleman conducts five times more institutional training (1000 hours) and up to nine times more organizational training (720 hours) in relevant urban combat tasks than his peer in the Infantry of similar rank and age (at 200 hours and 80 hours, respectively).²

A three phase strategy can be implemented to increase proficiency in close quarters battle among all Infantry forces in complement to the initiatives of the [Army Future Command’s Soldier Lethality Cross Functional Team \(SLCFT\)](#) and the [Asymmetric Warfare Group \(AWG\)](#). This strategy will ensure the Infantry’s relevance under both Precision operational conditions, the most likely future course of action during the irregular warfare against guerillas in dense urban environments of great power competition, and High Intensity operational conditions, the most dangerous future course of action during the large-scale combat operations (LSCO)

¹FICINT is a narrative approach articulated by *Ghost Fleet* and *Burn In* author August Cole characterized by the application of fictional writing about future scenarios informed by intelligence and grounded in reality to drive the evolution of national security practices.

² These statistics are based on authorized research conducted by the authors that will be articulated in Part II.

against peer-state infantry in austere environments expected of great power conflict. The strategy will remediate issues with the Infantry's mission essential task lists (METL), urban operations and marksmanship doctrine, cadre management, combat training center (CTC) urban campaign design, functional training schools, army skill identifier (ASI) designations, and unit tables of organization and equipment (TOE). With few exceptions, implementation of the above changes by leaders will *not* accumulate additional time or ammunition requirements- but rather modify the use of existent allocations to nearly double the relevant CQB training hours for their riflemen.

Urgency

The following work of FICINT is intended to convey the urgency of the challenges faced by the Infantry in preparing for urban operations and close quarters battle. The scenario is based on the [US Army Training and Doctrine Command's \(TRADOC\) Decisive Action Training Environment 3.0 \(2018\)](#), the standard employed by all combat training centers (CTC).



“Break, break, break. Ares Main, this is Lambda Charlie Zero One Romeo. Twisted Harpoon, I say again, Twisted Harpoon. Troops in contact with enemy regulars; assess *Spetznaz* given capability and outload. Tracking three by gun trucks in base of fire; fifteen to twenty dismounts maneuvering on our positions. Tempest 61 and 62 unable to INFIL for EXFIL due to SAFIRE. VDO at LZ Warbler for PC exchange.”

And that was it. The “balloon was up.” Task Force Rogers of the 75th Ranger Regiment was pinned down on exfiltration (EXFIL) requesting his quick reaction force (QRF) of 82nd Airborne Paratroopers to retrieve OBJ FENRIR and two other detainees off target. Sergeant First Class Charles Smith checked the chamber on his M4A1 one last time. His boys still hadn't gotten this new-fangled Next Generation Squad Weapon (NGSW) all the gun threads were talking about. He appreciated the Army's initiative to fix the acquisitions process and replace antiquated systems- but new “kit” wasn't going to compensate for the absence of skill he'd

worked his ass off to address since taking the platoon. He hoisted himself into the passenger seat of the hulking Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) and started comms checks across the Assault net. He was no stranger to long nights after twelve years in that same premier raid force he was about to go assist. But he didn't anticipate how long this one would become. For some of his men, like Gonzalez, it'd be their last.

Then again, the Army didn't anticipate it'd have to fight in a city of 2.5 million people.



Jones was the first into the breach: but Smith's lead Fire Team Leader wasn't ready. Despite three platoon and two combined arms live-fires, Smith was made to prepare his platoon for "the large-scale combat operations (LSCO) of great power conflict (GPC)" against Donovians in the arid wastelands of northern Atropia. His men knew how to establish a base of fire with .50 cal's and shoot Javelins- but despite his best effort to secure a "shoothouse" over the past year, he never got them into a building with live ammunition. Even blasting away next to your buddy on the berm would never prepare an Infantryman for the intimacy of the "belt-buckle" fight, as the "silverbeards" called it.³ The last repetition for his men, he'd learned, was more than a year prior when the whole battalion was instructed by a Company Commander, of all people, who'd done a single stint in Regiment. He tried not to scoff when the BC (battalion commander) held up augmented reality scenarios in the IVAS (integrated visual augmentation system) headset as an adequate substitute. He'd heard of MMTC (the Master Marksmanship Trainer's Course) at Fort Benning- but no one was allowed to send their best Paratroopers to a shooting school when they had to prep for the next CTC (combat training center) rotation. Especially since the AMU (Army's Marksmanship Unit) no longer instructed it. Is this what the Infantry had come to?

None of his guys had ever used a "banger"; built a door charge; or thrown a throw bot.

But they could dig a foxhole to standard.

³ "Silverbeards" are the venerable warriors of the Global War on Terror, with insight and fortitude hard won in the depths of inhospitable confines ranging from Mogadishu to Marawi, that advise the Army from within organizations like the Asymmetric Warfare Group to ensure these lessons are not forgotten.

Again and again his leadership had insisted on the inevitability of "high intensity multi-domain operations" against the 80th Donovan Tactical Group in a desert; not the "precision urban conflict" against Bilasuvarian Freedom Brigade (BFB) guerrillas enabled by Donovan *Spetznaz* he found himself now fighting in a city more densely populated than Mosul. Smith had only been out of Regiment for six months and had no idea what all that doctrinal jargon actually meant- but he was painfully aware his Paratroopers' ability to move, shoot, communicate, breach, exploit, and survive was *not* sufficient to perform with the precision expected of dense urban combat. Yet you can only "squeak the wheel" so loud before your crusade starts impacting the platoon's reputation with the boss, he reflected. He'd been careful not to get his guys punished as rogues because he pushed too hard.



Apparently Jones' base plate was loose and he was winded before he even turned the corner. The resulting cant of his monocle and the PVS-14s granularity added up to a distortion that prevented him from seeing the *Spetznaz* operator pie-ing the opposite door. If Jones had known what a "min-force"⁴ was, he might have recognized the double-threshold line of sight and called it out, taking up a position two rooms deep such that he could drop the enemy assaulter before he got seen. But he didn't know what it was. So he charged through the gap, dynamically and recklessly flinging his muzzle across his sector of fire.⁵ Just like he'd been taught in Basic- without a thought for the patient use of "tech" and deliberate "center plus tens"⁶ that might have saved his life.

As it was, Jones went down before he'd even acquired the threat. The Donovan operator deftly deployed a Zarya-3 flashbang, blinding the American and voiding Jones' chance at survival. The 1P87 optic guided the AK-15 battle rifle's controlled-pair with exceptional

⁴ Min Force- a deliberate clearance technique executed by an assaulter when one or more rooms can be partially cleared simultaneously from a covered position in the previous room through multiple open doors.

⁵ Sector of Fire- an arc of area inside a confined space covered by the assaulter's weapon system extending from a wall or one meter off an adjacent assaulter to the same limit on the opposite side.

⁶ Center Plus Ten- a deliberate clearance technique executed by two assaulters on a closed door in which, upon the door's breach, each visually clears half of the room they are about to enter plus another 10 degree arc from the center of the portal into the other's sector, while ensuring his muzzle remains one meter distant from his fellow assaulter.

precision, multiple 7.62x39 rounds tearing through an upper thoracic cavity exposed by a poorly-fitted chest plate.

Second into the breach, Anderson had frozen in the "fatal funnel"⁷- as one does without the stress inoculation gained only by countless live-fire reps in the room. Gonzalez, recognizing his buddy's paralysis, thrust him through, knowing that the only way to live was to keep moving forward. What was a well-intentioned life-saving shove ended poorly for the young farm boy from Indiana, as he tripped on a stool he wasn't even looking for. The second Donovanian operator neutralized his prostrate body before efficiently occupying his own point of domination⁸ on the "strong wall."⁹

As Gonzalez desperately raised his weapon to respond, his "gangster grip" caught on one of multiple unbuttoned pouches haphazardly adorning his vest. Even if he'd beaten the *Spetznaz* paragon to the draw, his weapon's handrail lacked sufficient "real estate" for his "support hand" to rapidly stabilize the gun; his thumb couldn't even reach the PEQ-15 laser switch; and his sling wasn't even adjustable- only a simple piece of nylon that further impeded his agility. His kit setup was non-ergonomic in every way. And he hadn't the luxury of an exquisite nine-week close quarters battle shooting school to compensate. His jerking attempt at a trigger squeeze lodged a bullet in the wall behind- and the third Donovanian responded with a PKP burst that left Gonzalaz twitching violently next to his buddy until the light faded from his eyes.

Having lost the initiative, Smith's lead squad fell back and attempted to consolidate in the only foothold they had in the complex. But the Mikran Zeal rotary wing attack drone (RWAD) that flashed through the portal vaporized that aspiration as eight ounces of thermobaric charge inflicted another five casualties on the beleaguered platoon.



⁷ Fatal Funnel- a colloquial term used to describe any canalizing breach-point through which assaulters are forced to enter under the potential of direct fire.

⁸ Point of Domination- a physical location in the room at which the assaulter stands so as to maximize his ability to recognize and engage targets within his sector of fire in complement to his fellow assaulters.

⁹ Strong Wall- a close quarters battle formation in which assaulters align themselves exclusively on the edge of the room from which they entered, facing toward open area so as to maximize each assaulter's sector of fire.

The enemy had only been four in total- likely of the Donovians' elite hostage-recovery Omega Group. But the immaculate marksmanship, dominance in the room, shrewd use of enablers, and momentum in the breach had made them seem like ten. As he stood there, trying to review his remarks for the memorial service one last time, Smith had to admit he'd rarely executed authentic "force on force" operations, even with his Rangers. The still vivid memory of the foe's indisputable close combat overmatch was unnerving, even for him. Luckily, all they'd wanted was their scientist, formerly the Ranger's "precious cargo," whom they wrenched away from his broken platoon before withdrawing on their Grizzly 700 ATVs into the impenetrable mass of humans thronging the Baku night.

His Paratroopers had come to save the day- but the price had been too high. The "general purpose" for which they trained did not allow them to master close quarters battle. For all his time and experience as a Special Operations Ranger Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), he'd been unable to get them what they needed. When he survived this "pump," he wouldn't make that mistake again- he'd gladly fight for less airfield seizures if it meant a few more reps in the "shoothouse" for the boys.



The Authors

The authors are veteran leaders of the US Army 75th Ranger Regiment, Airborne, Stryker, Mechanized and Light Infantry formations. A few are listed below but this work is a credit to many others left unnamed.

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The National Center for Urban Operations (NCUO) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit team of experienced practitioners and public servants uniting the larger network of interest in order to generate material, educational, training, and conceptual solutions to the emerging problems associated with the asymmetric threats and complex characteristics of the dense urban environment.

The mention of other organizations in this article do not imply endorsement of the positions or views expressed within. This article does not represent the views of the United States Government.

The featured carbine silhouette is that of an HK416 A5 equipped with a Nightforce ATACR 1-8x24 optic, MAWL-C1+ illuminator, Surefire X300 V weaponlight, and Surefire SOCOM-Mini 2 silencer. It exemplifies the close quarters battle rifle configuration carried by the world's most elite assaulters. The image was assembled by the authors.

