

AN ATTACK ON DUFFER'S DOWNTOWN

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Preface

This recalling of an extended series of dreams will, if successful, serve to foment thoughts regarding what is, what could be, and what should be when a nation's soldiers and marines are once again committed to combat in the world's villages, towns, or cities. It is hoped that the following disconcertingly dark visions will provide fuel for the minds of young and old alike.

I at first thought that these dreams were all regarding my own tribulations; but as they progressed, it became apparent that the young officer had transformed. He was no longer me, but rather my son who had followed in my footsteps as a military man. This discovery made the dreams especially chilling, and as I write it is clear that the child now asleep in his crib beside me could suffer the calamities that seemed so real in my slumbers.

These reveries are as seen through the eyes of a company commander. Yet the fundamental principles that I (and my son) exercised (or too often failed to exercise) are no less applicable to sergeants, lieutenants, or even, I perhaps precociously assert, those of rank senior to captain. The individual dreams that together constitute this lengthy nightmare are unlikely to find exact replication in future reality. Rather, they relate the imaginary tribulations of two young officers confronted with their first urban combat experiences. Though for him cities, enemy, and forces may differ, it should not be difficult for the reader to apply any lessons he draws from this brief offering to other situations during training or operations in the field. Unlike my fanciful visions, there are challenges to come that will be all too real.¹

HINDSIGHT FORETOLD

¹This offering of course owes much to E.D. Swinton's classic, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1986 (and available from other sources). The author gratefully acknowledges the continued support of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Acquisition, Logistics and Technology, and thanks the following individuals for their reviews of early drafts: LTC (USA) Jody Prescott, COL (USMC) Tom Sward, LtCol (USMC, ret.) Duane Schattle, LtCol (USMC, ret.) John Allison, and Ms. Jamie Medby. Remaining flaws are the author's alone.

Prologue

I arrived with my company at the city of Duffer after a long air journey and most lengthy and exhausting road march to our area of operations. Lack of proper sustenance, the disorientation that can affect when surroundings are suddenly changed, and outright fatigue are likely to blame for the following black fantasy. It must be understood that each vision's events were independent of those before. Though the terrain was the same in every instance, it was new to me each time a dream started afresh. I therefore had no benefit from having fought over the ground in previous unconscious experiences. There was one very important exception. In every dream, I remembered the lessons learned from those prior. Fortunately, the entirety of the nightmare and its teachings are clear to me even after waking.

Glossary

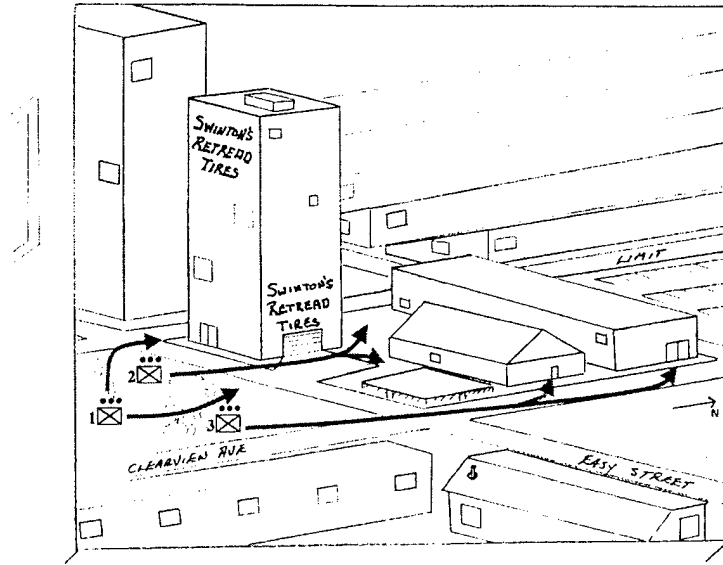
IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle
LD	Line of Departure
LOS	Line of Sight
MRE	Meal, Ready to Eat
OP	Observation Post
PFC	Private First Class
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
XO	Executive Officer

First Dream

I stood back in the darkness of the unlit room and cautiously peered out the window of the high-rise apartment building, looking down at what was to be my objective the following morning. The moonlit view was quite good; I could see nearly the entire block that it was my rifle company team's mission to clear. The buildings were neatly bounded by Clearview Avenue, Easy Street, Limit, and another road the name of which was unknown as it was in enemy territory (as was everything north of Easy Street). Our 1:25,000 maps were of course much too lacking in detail to provide such vital information as street names or the heights of buildings. The locations of the edifices as I could see them, however, did correspond to the sketch that I had made from my map before coming forward on this reconnaissance.

Streets conveniently ran north-south and east-west in this part of Duffer. Limit and Clearview ran from south on my left to north on the right. In its southwest corner, my objective contained a high-rise not terribly unlike that in which I stood. It was an old warehouse of nine floors with a faded sign declaring it once the property of "Swinton's Retread Tires." From the looks of the broken windows and shabby paint, it appeared that what Swinton had to offer would be of somewhat less value in the days ahead than had historically been the case. Continuing clockwise around the block, a one-story office building ran its entire length along Unknown Name Street. It had an entry at its east end, but apparently any others were on the north and, perhaps, the western sides of the cinderblock structure. Midway down the east end of the block was a colorful school building. From the bright paint scheme, I assumed it was for those just beginning their education. To the south and adjacent to the school was an enclosed area covered with sand, apparently a playground for the children during happier days than these.

The city blocks around my objective could serve a variety of purposes and pose a number of challenges. Immediately south of the objective was a park dotted here and there by tall, broad, and aged trees but little else. A series of apartment buildings ran along the western side of Limit. I could



only see a single one from my window observation post, but I had been told that the street was lined with structures of the same type for several blocks south. They would be little concern of mine, however, for Limit marked the boundary between my brigade and the unit to the west that would be attacking at the same time as would we. To be precise, the curb on the right or eastern side of Limit was the boundary, for any officer worth his salt knows one never draws a boundary down the center of a possible approach route. To the northwest of my objective was a series of long, slope-roofed structures of indeterminate use that resembled storage sheds. Across Limit from these buildings and north of my objective was an asphalt parking lot devoid of cars. The block to my right, of which I could only see a grassy corner, was apparently the location of the city hall, or so it had been depicted on the map. The building itself was located out of sight and well down Easy Street. My sketch reflected that it was surrounded by an expanse of open grass. Immediately to my front were two one-story buildings dedicated to some indeterminate commercial use. I dared not move too close to the window for a better look as the soldiers who manned this observation post (OP) had told me that snipers were active and anyone showing himself was likely to regret his foolishness. More accurately, the regrets would be those of his next of kin.

Despite there having had been fighting over the past several weeks, some quite severe, these same soldiers told me that civilians could occasionally be seen moving between the buildings below, albeit while looking about with furtive glances and using a stooped and hurried pace until they ducked into a building and disappeared. Children at times appeared on the school playground, but adults or older siblings quickly came to return them, protesting, to shelter. The only civilian vehicles on the streets were burned out hulks. There was a notable absence of males other than children or old men.

I considered our mission as I felt my way down the dark stairway from the observation post. Though I had been in the army some six years, my experience with urban operations was limited. I nevertheless had confidence in my company of four other officers and some 115 enlisted men and knew that they had justified confidence in themselves. We were to attack from the south, clear the assigned block of enemy, and then pass another unit forward to continue the offensive action. In addition to the brigade attacking on our left, the remainder of our battalion was advancing on the right, through the block in which this building was located, to seize the city hall complex and grounds. I was proud to have been given the relatively independent and quite important mission along the brigade's left boundary.

Our battalion had just taken over from another that had been in the city for several weeks. They left with bodies bowed and visages gaunt. It had been hard to tell as they passed through buildings and in shadow, but their company strengths seemed far less than ours. We, having arrived at the airfield only three days ago, were at nearly full manning levels. All of us were anxious for a break in the monotony after weeks of pre-deployment training.

Little was known of the enemy on our objective other than that he had no vehicles and appeared to hold the block in limited strength. It seemed the park and objective were not mined or booby-trapped; I was told that civilians regularly moved through the areas. Trees here and there would provide some cover and concealment as we advanced through the park, but I had told the men that they would have to be prepared to fire and maneuver as they moved forward. Air support was unlikely; the cloud cover that had persisted for the last three days was not expected to lift

before the next morning's action. A helicopter landing on the rooftop of Swinton's had been considered, but a preliminary aerial reconnaissance reflected that our enemy was adept at his business. In addition to a small air conditioning structure atop the building, the roof was strewn with wires and what looked like antipersonnel mines to deny landing. Further, the other obstacles would remain even after rocket or artillery fire cleared the roof of the two enemy teams waiting by their anti-aircraft guns that were positioned there. We could expect little in the way of such fire support. Even our own company mortars would be very constrained in what they could do. The rules of engagement (ROE) made it clear that we were not to use indirect fire weapons unless someone who could confirm that civilians would not be unnecessarily endangered could directly observe the impact of the rounds. We were further constrained in that even with rifles, grenades, and other small arms we were to engage only confirmed threat targets: individuals carrying arms, engaging, or otherwise demonstrating the potential to cause harm to friendly or noncombatant. The purpose of such restrictions was protection of our men and the innocent; after all, we did not want to needlessly kill or wound the citizens of what was a coalition member's city. I therefore created a fourth maneuver platoon by combining my mortar and antiarmor sections and putting them under my executive officer (XO). I told him to coordinate with the first sergeant to ensure logistics support would be maintained throughout the attack. The Fourth Platoon had only nineteen soldiers and the XO, but it added to our available rifle strength in an environment known to exhaust men quickly.

By 0430 we were ready for our 0500 crossing of the line of departure (LD). Each man had camouflaged his face and hands with black and gray. First and Second Platoons would clear Swinton's warehouse; I would accompany them to help coordinate the nearly fifty men that would have to work their way through the dark interior of that imposing building. Second Platoon would first secure the area around the structure by occupying the open space between the warehouse and other buildings on the block while Third Platoon began clearing the school and office building. Then First Platoon would make the initial warehouse entry using both the customer entrance off East Street and the delivery dock on the building's east side. My newly created Fourth Platoon was to wait at the line of departure and come forward when ordered. At the conclusion of the attack, First and

Second Platoons would occupy the warehouse, Third Platoon the office building and school. Fourth Platoon, if not already forward, would join the platoons in the warehouse as it provided the most cover and concealment. We would then await the unit to pass forward.

We crossed our line of departure on time at 0500 and worked our way by alternate bounds from tree to tree toward Easy Street. Second Platoon led on the left, Third on the right. I stayed with Second Platoon as we approached Easy, crossed without resistance, and began to take up our positions around the buildings on our objective. Third Platoon skirted the fenced playground and continued to maneuver toward its objectives. Through my night vision goggles I saw its platoon leader wave his men forward to enter the school from the east side. They responded like the well-trained soldiers they were, disappearing from sight around the corner of the building. Ever at my side, radio operator Private First Class (PFC) Bonafides held up one finger followed by the joining of his thumb and index finger in the "OK" sign, our code that First Platoon had just crossed Phase Line Hue and was therefore midway across the park. Everything was going as planned. I looked at my watch; it was 0512.

A flash of light and explosion's thunderclap suddenly destroyed the night's silent darkness. It took a moment for me to reorient after the blinding glare. My men were being flung backwards as rounds found their mark. The screams of the wounded mixed with the unbroken din of small arms fire and detonations on what had almost instantly become a smoke-filled battlefield. I screamed at my radioman and pulled him toward the warehouse, the two of us crawling along as green tracers ripped overhead and into the grass around us. Through a break in the smoke I glanced toward the park, now lit as though it was day by parachute flares. First Platoon was pinned down in the open ground; mortar rounds fell among the few still able to crawl toward the trees that offered the only cover they could find. On my command, Bonafides and I rushed forward and crashed through the delivery bay door and into the warehouse. As I turned to shout for the radio microphone, my head snapped back as though hit by a baseball bat. All was black as I lost consciousness.

The enemy platoon leader was surprisingly civil, though he failed to offer either PFC Bonafides or me any part of the MRE he had taken from my left trouser pocket. The first floor room of the warehouse in which we

were held contained seventeen of my men, all alive but several badly wounded. My adversary told me he had counted another thirty-five lying motionless outside the buildings. These numbers did not include those killed or wounded by the booby-traps on the schoolhouse doors that had triggered his men's fire. What had been most effective, he said, was the combination of his men firing down from the upper floors of both the warehouse and the apartment building west of Limit. At the same, time his mortars, anchored with sandbags on Unknown Name Street and thus concealed from view by the office building, kept the sniper's targets pinned to the ground. Allowing half of us to cross had given his men the opportunity to kill and capture far more than had he engaged the leading units earlier. Only the smoke of the intense fire started by the booby-trap explosion and an unfortunate breeze from the north that blew the smoke over the park had kept his defense from being more successful; a number of my men had managed to return to the company headquarters under its concealment. He was disappointed that his platoon of twenty-three men had not been able to do more. Graciously, I was allowed to visit my captured soldiers and recover our dead. As I walked from man to man, checking wounds and collecting the dog tags of those who had died, my failures marched through my mind, as did the obvious lessons:

1. It is important to find concealed and, if possible, covered approaches to an urban objective. During city fighting, those in the open die.
2. Do not expect the enemy to be constrained by the same ROE as are you.
3. Despite constraining ROE, indirect fire weapons and missiles can play a valuable role. Mortars can serve in a counterbattery or interdiction role by firing into unpopulated areas around the objective. Similarly, antiarmor missiles can be devastatingly effective against snipers in the upper floors of buildings.
4. Snipers have a role in the offense as well as defense. Fourth Platoon should have covered the first three platoons as they attacked.

5. Do not assume that an area is free of mines or booby-traps because it is used during the day. Soldiers should expect booby-traps when entering a building. When feasible, they should sometimes create their own openings rather always using doors or windows. Both are likely locations for booby traps and mines, and always entering a structure in the same way establishes a pattern on which the adversary can capitalize.
6. The urban area is not two-dimensional. Plan suppressive fires on high-rise buildings both in your zone and across boundaries, including the latter in coordination with flank organizations should they be unable to deny the enemy's firing on your unit. Use smoke to conceal movement from both eyes at ground level and those overhead.

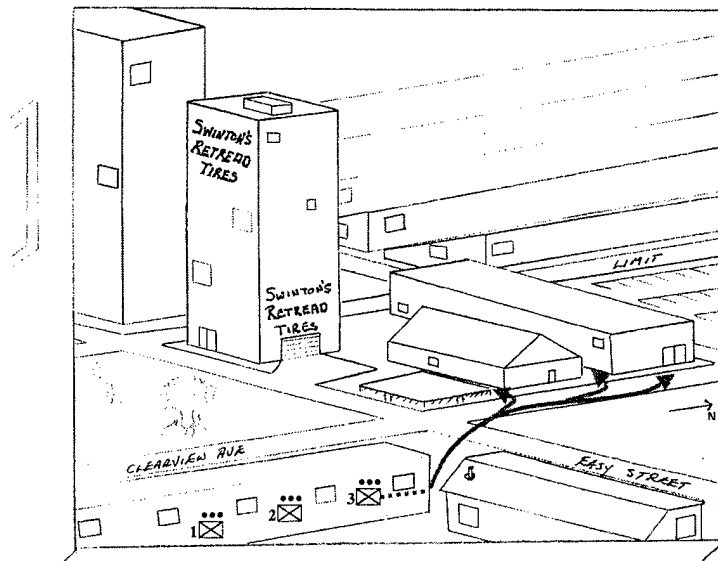
Each lesson passed in review again and again, mocking my naiveté. Thankfully, I eventually drifted into a second dream.

Second Dream

I found myself once again walking down the steps of the apartment building after having studied our objective. My first action on returning to the company command post was to call the battalion commander and request permission to move through the building to the east of Clearview Avenue during an approach, this despite that structure not being in my zone of attack. The commander approved the boundary shift and authorized my coordinating directly with the company commander to whom he had originally assigned that ground as well as the unit to our left across the brigade boundary. He also granted my request for the attachment of a smoke platoon. The company commander on our right was kind enough to allow me to position a fire support coordinator on an upper floor of the building from which I had performed my initial reconnaissance. That allowed for spotting the strike of mortar or supporting artillery rounds, an important consideration given our desire to minimize the risks to local civilians and their property.

The second order of business was to have my soldiers rehearse drills so as to better prepare them for entering buildings that might be mined or booby-trapped. Again the presence of civilians was a problem, for I could not simply fire a rifle through a window or hurl a grenade through a door as innocents within would be killed or wounded. We therefore decided to practice building entry procedures akin to those I had seen police special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams use. Soldiers would take their positions outside entry points in groups of three or four and dash through the door, each man having the responsibility to cover a given portion of the room as he entered. This procedure could be employed whether going into a building via a door, window, or another entryway. We would mix our entry points, sometimes using doors and windows after creating a distraction should the enemy have them targeted from within, other times blowing new access points.

I next directed that the best marksmen from each platoon be assigned to a sniper team. We positioned these men in the upper floors of the headquarters building, but I did not allow them to get too close to the



windows they would actually use, knowing the enemy would detect them and target their locations before the attack. Each sniper was assigned a portion of the buildings from which the enemy could engage us during movement (to include those to the west of Limit as coordinated with the unit on that flank), as were my antitank gunners. The latter were also assigned to the sniper team for engaging targets the riflemen were unable to neutralize. They would be employed sparingly so as to not cause unnecessary destruction, but I could not grant the enemy the leisure of unimpeded engagement of my men during the attack.

That left preparation of the attack route. One platoon was already bringing additional supplies forward from the rear and expanding the holes in walls along the supply route so as to ease evacuation of the wounded to the battalion medical station after the action began. I therefore sent the other two platoons into the long structure paralleling Clearview Avenue. Their task was to prepare passages through its interior and exterior walls so that we could move under cover that evening. Curtains in the windows of the building ensured any movement inside would not be visible, and I was sure to tell the platoon leader not to create an exit through the northern end of the structure until after dark. Soon I heard the sound of picks and shovels at work along with the occasional colorful

expression as a soldier found something not quite to his liking during the labor. The onerous tasks were eased somewhat by the presence of local children and women who sold soft drinks, samplings of local cuisine, and seemed pleased to have us there to protect them from deprivations at the hands of the enemy, sufferings they readily described.

We stockpiled supplies in the building in order to minimize the time it would take to bring them forward to the objective area after our successful attack. Ammunition and water were my first priorities, but medical supplies and barrier materials to help with the defense of our objective once it was taken were not overlooked. I completed final coordination with the smoke platoon leader. Fortunately a favorable breeze was forecast for the time of attack. It seemed all was advancing toward readiness in time for our 0500 attack. My men hammered their way through northern end of the building after dark, creating the hole through which we would pass the following morning.

Each platoon was assigned its tasks on the objective, all of which were much as I have described them for the first dream. First Platoon was to enter Swinton's after Second Platoon had secured the surrounding area, Second Platoon later joining them to assist in clearing the warehouse. Third Platoon would again clear the school and office building. I warned all men to check for booby-traps. I had no Fourth Platoon and therefore no reserve as the mortar men and antitank gunners would be fully occupied. Third Platoon was to move through the covered passage first, followed by Second and First Platoon in sequence. By early morning all was done and we settled down for a couple hours of rest with sentries posted and alert.

The company stepped off toward our objective as the minute hand struck the top of its arc at 0500. Remembering our lessons learned at such great cost, we quietly moved into the previously prepared building and worked our way through its rooms, the doorways or holes in each wall marked by dim lights so as to allow us to navigate in the otherwise near total interior darkness. The men were superb; I could not but feel proud as we approached the structure's exit and what would be a sprint across the intersection of Clearview Avenue and Easy Street. Before ordering the Third Platoon into the open, I tapped the smoke platoon leader on the shoulder, our signal to start the generators we had moved into position after dark. The still night air was suddenly torn by the sound of their

engines starting. I immediately ordered my men forward so as not to lose the element of surprise, ready to position myself between the Third and Second Platoons.

Even with the roar of the generators, I knew something was wrong the instant the first soldier attempted to exit the building. He was nearly blown back through the exit by the force of the several rounds that hit him the moment he showed himself. Others pulled him aside as another man dashed through the hole to lead the attack. I do not know whether he succeeded or not. As he stepped forward, the entire building seemed to explode with incoming bullets. The constant "thud, thud, thud" of heavier, larger caliber steel slugs tearing holes in the walls was accompanied by the lighter ping of rifle rounds racing through windows and hitting furniture, men, and equipment. Soldiers fell everywhere, their screams joining the already deafening cacophony of noise. Several soldiers made it out of the building despite the confusion. I could soon hear the comforting sounds of their rifles and machine guns answering those from across the street. I launched myself through the opening; the grass and street were filled with my men, some crawling forward, some moaning or screaming for a medic, others serenely still in the pandemonium of terror that confronted any who had made it outside and were still alive. Smoke was swirling across the park and streets, making it difficult to determine where our objective was located. Even with the obscuration, the enemy's fire continued to strike the northern exit of the building with deadly accuracy. I heard the unmistakable signature of antitank missiles cutting the air and mortar rounds impacting, but smoke and darkness combined with sounds reflecting off buildings to add to my disorientation and make it impossible to determine whose rounds were striking where. Bonafides was nowhere to be found, his likely having lost track of me as soon as I left the building. A swirling draft momentarily cleared the smoke, allowing a look at the objective area. Miraculously, four of my brave warriors had made it to the objective and were stacked outside the door to the school. Before they could make their entry, however, a rocket-propelled grenade round struck the building just above where they were gathered. All were blown to the ground as smoke once again drifted across my line of sight. I crawled to the lee side of the building paralleling Clearview and screamed through the windows for my men to withdraw.

I returned to the company command post to find it devastated by enemy mortar and small arms fire. Only my first sergeant was alive, and he was badly wounded. He described how the men with him fired at targets from which tracers could be seen. Few muzzle flashes had been discernable; the enemy had apparently been firing from within rooms and using angles that made them difficult to locate. The immediate accuracy of their fire was such that my senior noncommissioned officer realized they must have preassigned targets in the daylight and locked their weapons into position such that they would strike home even in darkness and smoke. Our snipers and antitank gunners had quickly fallen to their better-concealed opponents. The few men not killed in the initial exchange of fire had been taken by surprise when enemy soldiers came in through the *rear* of the command post. Investigation revealed a manhole behind the building with its cover pushed aside. The enemy's sappers had known exactly where the company headquarters was located, apparently tipped off by someone familiar with our arrangement. The small team had used their weapons with brutal effectiveness before escaping back through the sewers. As the medics went about their solemn task, I considered what I had learned at the cost of 11 confirmed killed, 31 wounded, and 12 still missing:

7. Failing to cover the noise and dust of obvious attack preparations leaves little doubt as to the direction you will take. The direct route is seldom the best one during urban combat.
8. Seemingly covered approaches may offer little protection from larger caliber weapons, many of which can penetrate modern building materials. Though curtains may block an enemy's view, they do not stop his bullets.
9. The urban setting is often three-dimensional in the extreme. A leader can not afford to forget the possibility that an adversary might make use of subterranean passageways (nor that our force could also employ them to advantage).
10. The many ways an individual can move from one urban location to another means there is seldom a secure rear area. Soldiers in every position must be ready to defend themselves.

11. Having had the egress point from the building along Clearview Avenue visible to the enemy cost many men their lives. Positioning it so that the men exited the building on the east side would have shielded them from view and allowed a force to organize before moving across the dangerous open ground. Similarly, the loss of so many snipers and antitank gunners demonstrated the importance of not prematurely revealing the location of firing positions. So doing provides the adversary an opportunity to align his weapons during periods of good visibility, making them deadly accurate regardless of subsequent natural or manmade obscuration conditions. It was little compensation that our return fire likely taught the adversary to have snipers remove tracer rounds from their magazines.
12. Smoke can be valuable in urban areas, but it tends to swirl at intersections and its behavior is less predictable than in most other terrain. Train and prepare accordingly.
13. Stacking may work well for civilian police, but they seldom have to worry that snipers or other foes will engage them as they prepare to enter a structure. The massing that stacking requires offers an enemy a lucrative target. While the procedure may work when preparing to enter rooms from interior hallways, it is likely ill advised as a method when entering a building from the exterior.
14. Noncombatants, to include women and children, must be kept away from sensitive areas. They may be willing or unwilling sources of information vital to the adversary.

Third Dream

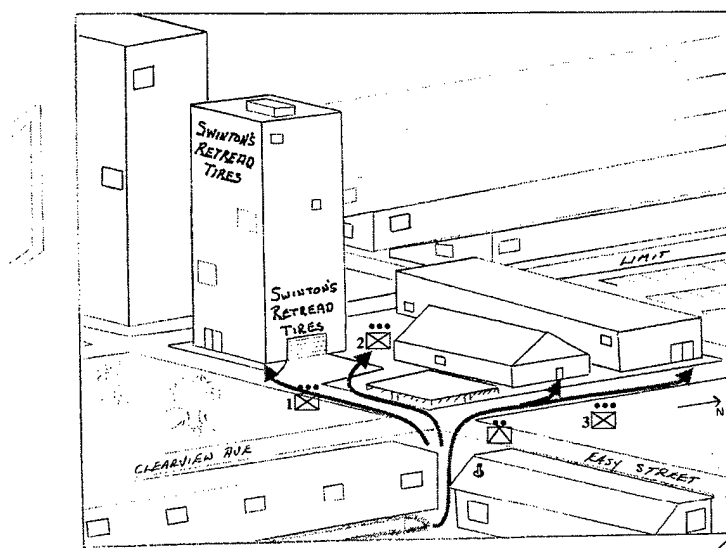
Once again I returned from my reconnaissance to the company headquarters, though it seems odd to apply such an imposing label to the small apartment that we crowded into for that purpose. Armed with the fourteen lessons learned from previous dreams and confronted with the same mission, I set out to prepare a plan that would bring my unit success at minimum cost. Reconnaissance confirmed that the company could move along the eastern side of the building paralleling Clearview Avenue without being seen from the objective until it reached the northernmost end of that long structure. At this point it was but a short, yet definitely most dangerous, dash across Clearview and Easy Street into the objective area.

I instructed one of my platoon leaders to dig a trench along the eastern side of the building along Clearview Avenue. The passageway was to be covered to provide protection against overhead fires and sufficiently deep so as to allow men to walk along it. He included a short, uncovered branch off the main trench every so often to serve as an observation post, thus precluding the enemy's surprising us as we moved forward. The last several meters would likewise be uncovered so as to allow the men to deploy into attack formation before leaving the concealment offered by the adjacent building. Further, we recognized that moving from south of Easy Street into the objective area threatened to be costly. I therefore planned to use smoke to conceal the approach and directed that extensive rehearsals be conducted so that soldiers knew what to expect and what azimuth to follow even should the black of night and smoke combine to deny them a view of key reference points. As the behavior of smoke in cities is often unpredictable, I instructed my mortar crewmen and antitank gunners to prepare to engage all likely positions where the adversary might position weapons to fire on us as we came at them. The mortars were also directed to engage targets north of Unknown Name Street to interdict any opposition that might try to reinforce those we would be attacking. (I had coordinated with the company commander to our right and again had a forward observer in the same building from which I had performed our preliminary reconnaissance.) In addition, I asked battalion for artillery, attack helicopter, and close air

support, assets that might be available to assist with this and other fire support tasks. The battalion commander said such support was on hand, but he reminded me that our rules of engagement allowed only firing on confirmed enemy so as not to cause unnecessary civilian losses. He then told me a television reporter and his cameraman would be accompanying the unit in the attack. First Platoon took them under wing while I continued my inspections to ensure we were properly preparing for the assault

Though the men grumbled at the digging, the trench was completed and camouflaged to defeat any enemy attempts to fathom our plans through the use of overhead imagery or patrols. We even brought speakers forward and played music to cover the sounds of digging. Rehearsals went well; the first sergeant used one of the intersections in the company rear to prepare a replica similar to the area where Clearview and Easy Street joined. The area was cordoned off to deny observation to the curious. Men rehearsed several times in daylight with no restrictions to their vision and later went through the plan at night. The first sergeant also had the company's mechanics weld manhole covers shut where we couldn't deny their use by parking vehicles on them. We were ready by our 0500 attack time.

As fate would have it, the winds picked up just as we readied to cross Easy Street and assault the objective. Any smoke would therefore have



been of little value. I ordered my antitank and mortar fires to commence. My guidance to them was to maintain so great a volume of fire that no adversary dared raise his weapon to engage, this despite my first sergeant and XO's protestations that such uninhibited use of firepower was outside the bounds of our ROE. From my perspective, one of my soldier's lives was not worth the risk of waiting for a confirmed target to appear. The fire tore into the southern sides of the school building, Swinton's Retread Tires, and the office building as we crossed the dangerous intersection. The gunners thereafter continued to engage, antitank rounds successively climbing the warehouse so as to stay two floors ahead of our advancing infantry. Other antitank gunners moved forward through the trench with the rest of us and engaged the eastern sides of the same buildings before we attacked. The infantry assaulted with rifles and machine guns firing, the latter in disciplined three-round bursts just as we had rehearsed. Our casualties were light as we swept across the intersection and into the buildings against only moderate resistance. Battalion supported me with interdicting fires into the parking lot and open grass areas north of the objective when our OP reported enemy attempting to reinforce the objective over the parking lot to its north. By 0520 the school and office building were ours; six hours later we had cleared all floors of the warehouse, a period lengthened due to the physical and mental fatigue suffered by the members of First and Second Platoons during their grueling floor-to-floor and room-to-room clearing. Blowing holes through doors and leading with a grenade before entering a room had the advantage of both minimizing the enemy's ability to resist our onslaught and neutralizing any booby traps that might have been set. We unfortunately had three men wounded when fragments from one of our grenades came back through the school's thin walls, but all in all the tactics unquestionably saved our soldiers' lives. Still, our losses were not light. Despite the increased use of firepower, the well-planned enemy defense was responsible for seven dead and another fifteen wounded. We killed many of the enemy and captured several as well. The most unfortunate part of the operation was the discovery of twenty-six civilian dead in a classroom toward the back of the school, many of them children, apparently the victims of our grenades and rifle fire used in clearing the building. Several families, their own dwellings destroyed in earlier fighting, had occupied those parts of the building not in enemy

hands. The reporter and photographer seemed to understand when I described the situation as one of "either us or them," but I couldn't be sure. That wasn't surprising given that they were civilians and thus could not fully understand the demands of war.

The men were magnificent as they prepared defensive positions in and around the buildings to repulse any efforts by the enemy to retake the objective. We passed our fellow soldiers forward to continue the attack and reorganized while awaiting another mission. Our battalion commander came forward and spoke to many of my exhausted soldiers. I saw him shaking a hand here, patting another on the back there. Imagine my surprise when he ordered me to the rear. My executive officer was placed in charge and I was informed that I was to consider myself relieved pending a full investigation of the decisions leading to what were thought to be excessive noncombatant casualties. Surely my commander, a combat veteran, understood that the rules of engagement could not be fully complied with in our situation? He told me we would talk more later, but said that he was disgusted. My disregard of the ROE and the resultant deaths of so many civilians had cast the legitimacy of the entire coalition operation in jeopardy. As I walked away from the company, I considered what my apparent success, but actual failure, had taught me:

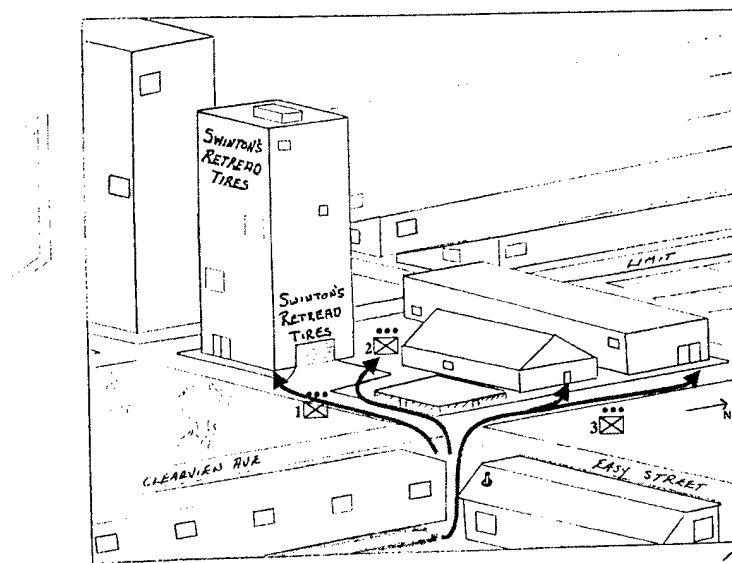
15. Though much of a city or town might be under asphalt or concrete, preparation of a covered and concealed approach may still be possible.
16. It is not enough to focus only on the objective area, but also to deny the enemy the ability to reinforce those you are fighting. Indirect and aircraft fires may be able to help in this regard given favorable conditions, though in other instances the isolation may have to be accomplished through proper positioning of ground forces.
17. Rules of engagement are not guidelines that a commander can accept or reject at will. If a plan can not be accomplished without violating the ROE and those constraints can not be changed, the plan is not a viable one.

18. Often what seems to be the correct decision at one level of command may be otherwise at other echelons. It is essential that leaders consider not only the perspective of their own unit, but that of other relevant participants as well, to include the enemy, adjacent friendly units, higher headquarters, and noncombatants.
19. Fragments and rounds from friendly as well as enemy fire can pass through some floors, ceilings, and walls. It is necessary to monitor the location of other friendly forces and take other precautions so as not to inflict inadvertent casualties on your own soldiers or noncombatants.
20. Urban operations are exhausting work. They not only demand tremendous and extended physical exertion, but also subject soldiers to extraordinary psychological stress. It may be necessary to rotate units during building and room clearing so as to allow men to rest.

Fourth Dream

The task of attacking and clearing one rather small city block seemed quite daunting as I walked back to my company command post from my initial reconnaissance. There was much to do if we were to incorporate all that the twenty lessons suggested. What was immediately obvious was that my men and I were confronting a situation for which our previous training had little prepared us. I called the company's officers and senior sergeants together to explain our common dilemma. We discussed how the company might succeed at minimal cost without disregarding the welfare of our host nation's citizenry. Though time was short, I took our many ideas, the guidance provided in our manuals, and the valuable teachings of my prior unconscious ruminations and outlined a training program that capitalized on the little time we had available for preparation. Instruction was to emphasize the need for constant communication, both within each man's unit and with the command group and other platoons. All soldiers were to review the rules of engagement with their leaders and understand that the ROE would significantly influence the manner in which we executed our mission. We would engage only confirmed targets. There would be no wanton destruction in the hopes of killing the adversary. While my dedicated and professional subordinates undertook to instill essential skills, I sat down to formally outline a plan for the attack.

I would not realize it until awakening from the totality of this nightmare, but the trench we prepared in this fourth dream was virtually identical to that used in the third. While mortar, artillery, aviation, and other available fire support could not be employed indiscriminately, it was evident that such fires could be very valuable in isolating the objective area. The company commander to our right was kind enough to allow me to put an OP in the building from which I had performed my preliminary reconnaissance. Battalion assisted further by sending a unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) team of two soldiers forward to assist with reconnaissance and target acquisition. My mortar section sergeant was more than happy to assume responsibility for so valuable an asset. Together the OP and UAV team gave the company complementary capabilities to detect any enemy



attempts to reinforce or resupply the objective area. Pre-planned fires based on a thorough preliminary reconnaissance using these assets would allow us to isolate the objective without undue risk to the city's citizens. The Third Platoon leader was directed to complement the indirect fires by establishing a machine gun position at the eastern end of the office building. This team would destroy any counterattacking elements that survived the indirect fires. Second Platoon was to similarly establish two positions along Limit to deny any reinforcement attempts from the west. In order to disrupt our enemy's efforts to rest, we directed a cacophony of noise at high volume through speakers that accompanied the psychological operations (PSYOP) unit we requested for that purpose. The members of this team interspersed terrible music (though some of our younger soldiers argued that "it rocked") with messages warning the adversary of the hopelessness of his situation and encouraging him not to resist. Most importantly, this continued all night, making it virtually impossible for his men to sleep. Our own soldiers slept in shifts well to the rear so as not to be disturbed by the performance. It would have been preferable to initiate this effort several days before the attack, but our late arrival meant that we could deny the defenders only a single night's repose.

The Mortar Section sergeant had detected a troubling situation while scanning the upper floors of Swinton's warehouse the previous afternoon. We had requested and been assigned two sniper teams to assist us in suppressing fire from the tall structure. Using their scopes, these soldiers noticed that the enemy had knocked holes in the southern wall of the building in several locations to create firing positions from which his soldiers could fire while lying prone rather than more fully exposing themselves in window frames. That of itself was of little concern, but the actions taken these adversaries to further protect themselves were highly reprehensible. Civilians, all of them women or children, were forced to sit or stand next to the enemy. In one case a young boy was forced to lie on a floor with an enemy gunman positioned behind him. We reported the situation to battalion and were told that in such situations the laws of warfare permitted us to engage the enemy despite the obvious risks to the innocents. Our soldiers were none too happy to hear that they might confront situations in which killing innocent noncombatants would be unavoidable. We nevertheless rehearsed for the possibility. Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants also personally discussed the issue with their men, reviewing the ROE and doing what they could to prepare them for the very difficult decisions each man would have to make in the fight to come. I was thankful that we had the snipers with us. Their excellent marksmanship would at least minimize the risk to civilians during the initial stages of the assault.

Artillery support accompanied our mortars in putting out smoke that did much to ensure we safely crossed Easy Street and Clearview Avenue after exiting the trench at 0500. We smoked both the park and the eastern approaches while maintaining our PSYOP serenade so as to confuse the enemy. The PSYOP team further helped by broadcasting the sounds of an attack to make those on the objective think our main effort was coming from the park. The snipers, having previously identified their targets, fired well-aimed rounds before the initiation of the ground attack and thereafter when gaps in the smoke provided opportunities.

The three platoons swept onto the objective against little resistance. The consistent replenishing of smoke concealed their movements long enough for them to gain positions along the less exposed sides of buildings. From there they used flash-bang grenades to divert the enemy's attention

while soldiers entered the structures. Entry points were carefully selected so as to minimize exposure to booby traps or the adversary's fire, both that from other buildings and from positions inside the structures themselves. The use of diversions and unexpected entry points had the added advantage of reducing the effectiveness of the enemy's use of civilian shields as we approached from unanticipated directions.

We took several casualties in the schoolhouse and office building, but it was the warehouse that proved the most costly prize. Our access to its upper floors was limited to a single staircase and an exterior fire escape. Despite the synchronization of sniper fire to support the floor-to-floor movement of First and Second Platoons (which I rotated to give soldiers some much-needed rest), the trapped adversary fought ferociously. The mix of friendly, enemy, and noncombatant made the action very confusing; two of our men died while trying to avoid having to fire into an area where youngsters lay cowered on the floor. One man was wounded by our own snipers when radio communications back to headquarters failed and Second Platoon advanced to a floor thought still to be in enemy hands. The fighting in Swinton's continued throughout the day and it was only as the sky was lit orange by the setting sun that the warehouse was secured.

Two enemy counterattack attempts failed. The first, made by dismounted infantry alone, was easily turned back by a combination of artillery fire and that from the machine gun positions. The second was more difficult to defeat despite its early detection by the UAV team. It included a tank and two infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs). That the attack had to cross open ground was a godsend. The tank was destroyed by an artillery round guided to its target by laser designation from the OP. The IFVs managed to close to within one hundred meters of the office building before being knocked out by the antitank weapons the Third Platoon leader had wisely positioned with the machine gunner.

We further strengthened our defense after darkness fell, but the enemy gave us no opportunity to test them. The executive officer brought ammunition, food, and much needed water forward. Medics evacuated the many friendly, civilian, and enemy wounded and dead. At 0400 the following morning we passed another unit forward to continue the attack. Our mission had been successfully accomplished, but the cost was significant. Eleven of our comrades died and seventeen were wounded.

Three others from the warehouse fight had to be evacuated when they simply could not handle the stress. Of the over twenty civilians in the warehouse, three were killed and six wounded. My men had performed virtually flawlessly, but the losses were still far too high. It seemed the nature of urban warfare was to punish even the best prepared. The XO was finally able to report the last of the wounded evacuated and the resupply complete. I told him to allow two hours before waking me and sought a corner on the first floor of the warehouse where I could sleep. Several lessons from the fourth dream presented themselves in the very few moments before I drifted into the next:

21. Accuracy is sometimes not enough. One must have some control over the effects of a unit's fire. Snipers' rifles proved a more effective asset than the more devastating antitank rounds given mission constraints.
22. Old lessons often apply to urban fighting just as they would elsewhere. The "indirect approach" of not coming through the expected entry point to a building saved both soldiers' and noncombatants' lives. The enemy was unprepared for the combination of diversions and attacks from unanticipated directions.
23. Command and control and line-of-sight communications are notoriously difficult during urban combat. Redundant and alternative means of transmitting essential information should be a part of any plan. In the case of snipers providing supporting fire, hanging a signal panel, sheet, or other prearranged visual sign out of windows to mark cleared floors might have precluded the fratricide incident resulting from a break in radio communications.
24. Urban fighting is not just a light infantry struggle. Consider the use of mechanized and armored vehicles if they are available, and realize that the enemy might also employ such assets.
25. Operations in built-up areas are not only physically exhausting; the psychological stress associated with them is extraordinary. Leaders must do all they can to account for it. Allocating time for

rest, eating, and reassuring the men that their actions are honorable and appreciated are fundamental first steps toward precluding psychological casualties.

26. Good tactics, fine training, and superb preparation can dramatically reduce casualties and increase the probability of success during urban fighting. Nevertheless, such undertakings are likely to be casualty and resource intensive. Plans must ensure aggressive and robust medical and logistical support.

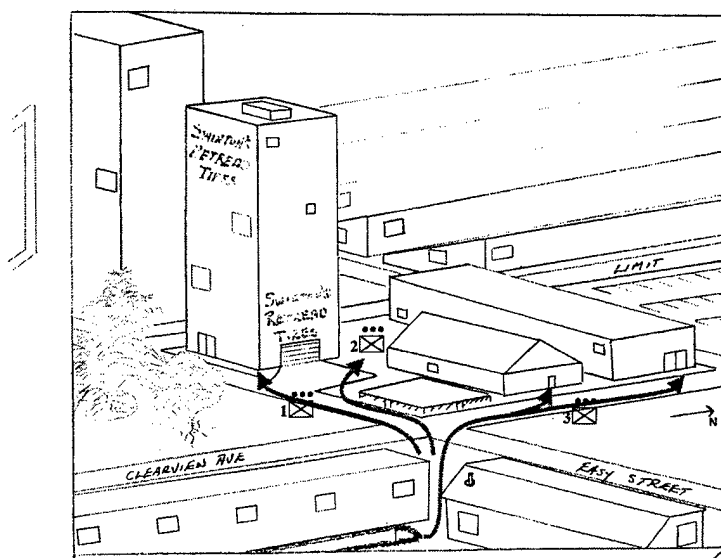
Fifth Dream

Though I did not realize it until after my ultimate awakening, there was something fundamentally different that distinguished my final dreams from the first four. The "Swinton's Retread Tires" lettering was considerably more faded, almost to the point of being indistinguishable, and the trees in the park were notably larger as I gazed from the window of the OP. There was a detachment from the mission at hand unlike anything felt before, yet the pit of my stomach was knotted with a fear more palpable than any I had felt previously. It was only when the individual cautiously looking out the window turned toward the stairs that I realized it was not I performing the reconnaissance. The source of my detached but emotional involvement was apparent when I moved ahead of the departing officer and looked at him closely. The name was mine; the body and visage were not. Gazing at this never-before-seen young captain with set jaw, I suddenly realized that he was my son grown into a man. He too led a company, but he had chosen to join the Marine Corps. A discarded newspaper at the head of the stairs provided the year: 2024. My shouts went unheeded; my son could obviously not sense my presence. Heart racing as I followed him down to ground level, concerns raced through my mind: What was his unit's mission? Was he any better trained than had been I nearly a quarter century before? Could he draw on the lessons that my company had acquired those many years ago?

My notional personal past was part of my reverie-induced memory in these final dreams. Our armed forces had finally succeeded in those urban undertakings of which my company had been a part at the dawn of the twenty-first century, but the numbers killed and crippled had made any politician's declaration of victory ring hollow to military man and civilian alike. By choice my subsequent career had been dedicated to better preparing our soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen for urban operations to come. My ultimate position before retiring had been one in which I had tried to influence the development of urban doctrine, training, and technologies to improve our capabilities in that realm.

I have to admit my pride in watching my son as he briefed his leaders on the coming operation, and my relief as I heard him cover points that reflected his understanding of the lessons purchased many years before at such cost. The men seemed better versed in urban difficulties than we had been. The same mix of excitement, fear, and determination was on the faces of those in the room as had been the case with my company when I had worn the captain's insignia, but their equipment was considerably more advanced. Helmets had lens-thin vision enhancement devices. Individual weapons allowed near-instant selection of lethal or non-lethal munitions; all such systems had lasers to assist aiming and range finding. Hands-free radios permitted communications not only within the company, but with artillery, helicopter, and fixed-wing aircraft pilots as well. Yet not all problems had been solved. The executive officer reminded all present that the radios would not work when line-of-sight (LOS) was lost and that they must therefore remember to attach retransmission devices to walls as they advanced between buildings, down corridors, and through rooms. These, he said, would help with radio communications, global positioning relays, and navigation of ground and air robotic systems in situations where LOS would otherwise have been lost. To his credit, my son designed his plan to allow for the rotation of platoons during actions to clear Swinton's Tires. He reminded his leaders that though the soldier of 2024 was thought to be five times as lethal as his counterpart at the turn of the century, urban operations still exhausted men far more quickly than actions on other terrain.

The information operations sergeant, a sharp young noncommissioned officer assigned to the company staff, outlined what his section had learned from the intelligence collected using the company's unmanned aerial vehicle and unmanned ground systems. Information regarding what could be seen from outside the buildings on the objective area was quite good, but the sergeant's efforts to probe structure interiors had been stymied by the adversary. Windows had been kept closed and the gaps under doors covered. Even vents had been blocked. The sergeant was frustrated. He told my son that the enemy had apparently gotten word of our prior use of systems able to enter buildings; he was now taking precautionary measures, measures that unfortunately proved all too effective.



The approach trench was virtually identical to that we had used years before. The attack began at 0500. I noticed that smoke generation was more consistent and better sustained, and the lenses worn by my son's marines could apparently see through frequency "windows" designed into the obscurity. The unit moved superbly, taking maximum advantage of shadow, the shielding afforded by buildings, and excellent intra-unit communications. The din of combat was no less; the confusion it caused had not at all diminished with the passage of two decades. Pre-operation rehearsals and firm leadership proved as crucial now as ever.

Small pre-packaged explosive devices eased door, window, and wall breaching. The most serious problems were those confronted when marines entered the various structures. Intelligence analysis had done superbly in depicting the situation outside, but information regarding what lay within was little better than when I had led soldiers. Reaction to enemy contact had to be immediate. Deadly fire splintered furniture, tore through walls, and sent brick and cinder block fragments into skin and facemasks. Marines had to make snap evaluations on seeing a potential target: Enemy? Friendly? Innocent? A moment's hesitation proved costly to a man more than once. The enemy's use of civilian shields proved no less deadly to my son's men than it had to my soldiers. Despite their instructions to engage

with lethal force when necessary, soldiers tried switching their weapons from "lethal" to "non-lethal" when confronted with killing innocent women or children. Their good intentions cost them their lives.

Third Platoon had long since secured the school and office building nine hours after initiation, but only the lower three floors of the warehouse were in our hands at that point. The battalion commander was able to make radio contact with my son; he demanded faster movement as the unit designated to pass forward was to have begun its attack several hours before. All of my son's protestations fell on deaf ears. The pace of the attack was increased. The "improvement" was accompanied by a similar upswing in the number of men killed and wounded. It took another five hours before the last resistance was eliminated. The attackers accomplished their mission, but eight of those making the attack were killed and another thirteen wounded. I came across my son, begrimed head resting on equally filthy hands, as he discussed the mission with his first sergeant. Together they made the following observations, some of which involved decisions I had made in my later years of military service:

27. The value of good intelligence is timeless. Intelligence systems that do not provide information on what is inside buildings are inadequate to the task of supporting modern combat operations.
28. It is not only the friendly force that adapts; the adversary will do so as well. In an urban environment, where communications are often faster and contact with other enemy and noncombatant groups more likely, such adaptation is likely to be more rapid than under other conditions.
29. Military operations demand far more from non-lethal systems than do most police contingencies. Point non-lethal capabilities alone are insufficient. There is a need for non-lethal systems with area effects that can be employed over distances of several hundred yards, thus avoiding having to close with an able adversary intermixed with civilians.
30. The tempo of urban operations can be very high, but its character can be deceiving. Little ground may be covered while the number of events ongoing in a given instant can be

extraordinary. Speed may be a key to success in some cases; in others it might be ill-advised. There is a danger of commanders at different echelons seeing events very differently and demanding rates of advance not consistent with the situation at the cutting edge.

Their voices faded as I found myself drifting into a sixth dream.

Sixth Dream

I walked down the stairs with my son a second time, as frustrated at my inability to communicate as was the case on the initial occasion. His orders briefing reflected that he had retained the lessons from previous efforts but nothing else from those events. Interestingly, my pre-retirement decisions with regard to better developing urban capabilities had somehow also been influenced by the same lessons. The capabilities available here in 2024 now included considerably more in the way of systems able to “see” within buildings without soldiers actually having to enter the facilities. In addition, both unmanned aerial and ground robotic vehicles could deliver a plethora of mines (lethal and non-lethal), foams, lights, and other apparatus to deny the adversary observation of our forces as they made their approach on the objective.

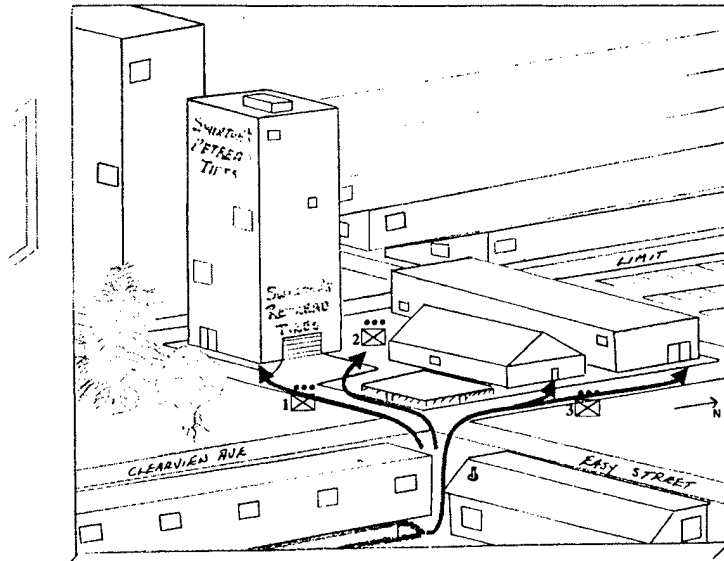
My son completed his briefing. The company dispersed to its platoon areas for planning, rehearsals, and other final preparations. Leaders from two attached units huddled off to the side as those from the remainder of the unit left the headquarters. They represented psychological operations and civil affairs units; the discussion involved coordinating actions designed to keep the innocent out of harm’s way. Announcements were to go out over radio and loudspeakers throughout the city telling of the following morning’s distribution of food, potable water, and medical care to civilians. The messages would inform interested parties of the locations chosen for provision of such services, all deliberately chosen so as to be distant from those where fighting was to take place. The citizens of the city were further encouraged by the declaration that such benefits would only be provided on a first come, first serve basis, thus encouraging their timely movement.

The hour of attack approached. Leaders regrouped for a final intelligence update. Tiny, robot-delivered sensors had entered the building through holes drilled by their transporters and sent back images of enemy dispositions. For internal rooms inaccessible to the drilling robots, some of the smaller were equipped with fiber optic-sized chemical test probes able to tell whether a room contained human beings or not and whether those

enclosures had explosives within their confines. Sensors were placed on tested rooms' entry points in order to detect any passage that might signal a change in status. Enclosures devoid of human presence would be rapidly sealed, marked, and bypassed during the attack. Together this pre-attack reconnaissance and room sealing would save marines from the physically and psychologically exhausting task of having to clear every room while not knowing what threat awaited them on the other side of a door, wall, or window. The problems with line of sight and occasional discovery of our surreptitious mechanical "agents" meant that our intelligence picture was imperfect, but it was far better than having no understanding of what awaited us within the three structures. Unfortunately the news was not all good. Positions had been well prepared by the enemy and some civilians were already hostages. Other rooms contained unarmed individuals, apparently noncombatants attempting to hide from the dangers of combat.

The men moved in a silent file along what would have been a familiar trench had I been able to recall events from dream to dream. Smoke again concealed the crossing of Clearview and Easy. The enemy was further disconcerted by robots flashing blinding lights at random, the lights making targeting of our men difficult, the randomness likewise complicating destruction of the unmanned systems. Other robots sprayed foams that covered lower floor windows to block enemy observation while another type of unmanned ground vehicle laid mines to block threat reinforcements that might attempt to come to the aid of the defenders. Together these systems reduced number of soldiers that had to undertake tasks that would have put their welfare at risk. Several of the robots were casualties of enemy fire despite the smoke, light, noise, and additional measures taken to protect them, a reminder of how fortunate we were to not have marines doing their tasks.

The movement onto the objective area was magnificent. There were no casualties aside from one man who tripped over a curb and broke his arm. Actions inside the warehouse, school, and office building were time-consuming and extraordinary in the demands on the men despite their excellent physical condition, preparation, and the benefits of new technologies. The intelligence provided by the various sensors did assist in rapid identification of enemy positions in some cases, but as should be expected the adversary responded to the attack in unpredictable ways.



Prepared positions were abandoned and apparently pre-planned alternatives manned in several instances, thereby mitigating advantages obtained via pre-attack investigations. Panicked civilians emerged from hiding to further confuse an already chaotic situation. Radio communications failed at crucial times; those directing supporting fires from across the park could not tell what floors the company had cleared until signal panels were hung from south-facing windows. The enemy unexpectedly used smoke inside to disorient us and obscure mines concealed under furniture, carpets, and other debris. Adversaries command detonated other explosive devices, hidden from sight two or three floors below lead elements so as to inflict casualties on support personnel and those resting, men whose exhaustion had made them less cautious about not bunching up than they should have been. The company was nevertheless successful. The objective fell; the subsequent attack passed through without interference. The trickery of the enemy (we would have hailed it as brilliant initiative had we ourselves conceived of the actions) and his excellent defense had caused the loss of five killed and fourteen wounded.

I waited outside the east door of Swinton's to accompany my son on what I knew would be a difficult yet morale-raising journey around the

objective. I had convinced myself that my supportive spirit lent some comfort despite his not being able to consciously register my presence. It was a tour never taken. His was the fourth body brought from the building.

Despite advances that allowed our forces to destroy multiple targets with a single round at phenomenal ranges in other environments, the cost of operating in a city in 2024 remained far too high. A good unit learns from its successes no less than from its failures:

31. An enemy knowing of excellent intelligence collection capabilities will do all he can to deceive collectors and avoid showing his hand before a fight.
32. Noncombatants will turn up at the most inopportune times on an urban battlefield. Their presence and unpredictable behavior should be part of a unit's training and rehearsals.
33. The density of concealed routes, debris, and potential hides means that areas thought to be under friendly force control may contain latent threats. Good security procedures should never be relaxed.
34. For any foreseeable future, urban combat is going to be extraordinary in its demands on those who undertake it. Technology can offer valuable advantages; the right choices in developing capabilities will directly impact urban battlefield success or failure and lives saved or lost.
35. Well trained, well led, disciplined leaders and combatants will, as always, ultimately determine whether a mission ends in success or failure. All other initiatives must work toward their betterment and survival.

I awoke to a room just dimly lit by a sun not yet over the horizon. My shirt was soaked from the horrors that the six dreams had together brought to mind. Words fail to describe my relief at finding my son still fast asleep in his innocence after I dashed into his room. Resting with my arms on the head of his crib, I realized that my thirty-five lessons had come at little cost indeed. There are sure to be others yet to come from future operations in villages, towns, and cities around a world seemingly determined to avoid peace. Unfortunately, they will be learned at far greater expense than a

night of uncomfortable sleep. The challenges are already evident. Now is the time to act rather than waiting for the consequences of inaction.

The morning's sunlight began to enter my son's window. I moved so as not to cast a shadow over him.

P-8058-1

AN ATTACK ON DUFFER'S DOWNTOWN

Glenn