

THE BATTLE OF AACHEN

The 1944 Siege of Germany's West Wall Led to MOUT Fighting in a Historic City

by Captain Bruce K. Ferrell

Preface

At this year's Armor Conference in May, Fort Knox officially opened and dedicated a new, state-of-the-art Mounted Urban Combat Training Site. This is a significant milestone in the Army's attitude towards training for Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT). In years past, the mounted force often avoided serious MOUT training, handing it over to the light fighters like an unwanted problem. But the importance of being able to operate in cities has been vividly illustrated during our past and present operations in Panama City, Port-au-Prince, Mogadishu, and Bosnia. And the worldwide demographic trend towards more urbanized populations makes it all the more likely that mounted forces will conduct operations in urban areas.¹

The Armor Center identified the need for a training center specifically for mounted forces early in the 1980s, and the training site that was recently dedicated has been a long time in coming. While the new training site will help us to develop new tactics, techniques, and procedures for our modern forces and modern weaponry, we can also learn a great deal about MOUT from military history. Indeed, many of the same urban combat TTPs used during WWII by the U.S. Army are still applicable today. Many of these lessons were learned by the First Army during its siege of the first German city captured by the Americans, the city of Aachen, in October, 1944.

In the late summer of 1944, in accordance with General Eisenhower's "broad front" strategy, the Allies were on the offensive in every sector of the Western European Theater.² Despite constant British appeals for a focused "narrow thrust" into Germany to capture Berlin, Eisenhower maintained the strategy he believed would best accom-

plish the goal of German unconditional surrender. That strategy was to destroy Germany's ability to wage the war. To do this, Eisenhower sought to capture the industrial areas of the Ruhr and the Saar in order to deprive Germany of the critically needed resources and infrastructure in these areas. Eisenhower's plan employed armies along several major routes of advance into the heart of Germany. The most direct route to the Ruhr industrial area was the Maubeuge-Liege-Aachen axis.³ First Army, commanded by LTG Courtney Hodges, drew the task of moving along this axis, crossing the Rhine River, and capturing the area.⁴

The German forces opposing the Allies in the Western Front were under the command of *Oberkommando der West (OB WEST)*. After the Allied breakout from the bocage country of Normandy, German forces were continuously on the verge of being routed. However, all through the summer of 1944, *OB WEST* had managed to hold a cohesive front against the Allies in a massive delaying action. Hitler's constant orders "to hold at all costs" were of little help to the commander of *OB WEST*, General Walther Model.

Model sent report after report to *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OBK-W)* begging for reinforcements. In response to his constant appeals for help, Hitler replaced him with General von Rundstedt, who received the same "hold at all costs" orders.

Von Rundstedt, knowing he would get no help from the German high command, immediately set about to stabilize his front. He ordered his forces to fall back upon the West Wall, thus giving his forces defenses to fight from, shortening their interior lines and condensing the front.⁵ He didn't know it, but *OB WEST*'s mission was to delay the Allies long enough for Hitler to



assemble a massive force to conduct a sweeping counteroffensive "out of the Ardennes...across the Meuse and on to Antwerp!"⁶

On both north and south, the Maubeuge-Liege-Aachen axis was bordered by severely restricted terrain. To the north, the waterways of the Netherlands hindered mounted movement, while the Eifel highlands and the Ardennes to the south were too restrictive to allow movement of large formations. The Germans tied the Wurm River, running approximately southwest to northeast in front of Aachen, into the West Wall defense as an anti-tank obstacle, but the river was not much more than a stream, at best, and easily fordable in most places. Beyond the Wurm was an open plain dotted with small groups of built-up areas, broken only by the Roer and Erft Rivers.⁷

Tied into this natural terrain was the complex of man-made defenses known as the West Wall, or as the Americans called it, the Siegfried Line. Hitler had built the West Wall in 1936 as a strategic counter-move to the French Magi-



not line. It had been a monumental effort at the time, but once the Nazis conquered France, the fortifications of the West Wall had fallen into disrepair. One of the most fortified stretches of the wall remained in the Aachen sector. Around the city, the West Wall split into an east and west branch.

The West Wall incorporated natural obstacles like rivers, lakes, railroad cuts and fills, defiles and forests as much as possible, but where natural obstacles were inadequate, there were massive chains of “dragon’s teeth,” rows of reinforced-concrete pyramids, increasing in height from 2.5 feet in the front rows to almost five feet in the back rows. Roads leading through the dragon’s teeth were blocked with gates made of steel I-beams, and all roads were additionally guarded by pillboxes. Pillboxes were 20 to 30 feet in width, 40-50 feet deep, and 20-25 feet high.

At least half of each pillbox was underground, the walls and roofs made of reinforced concrete varying from 3-8 feet in thickness. They had living quarters for troops and firing ports sighted

on designated areas. Additionally, to the rear of the pillboxes were bunkers, designed to house reserves and command posts. They were constructed in a similar fashion, with more living space and fewer firing ports.

Though these fortifications were in poor condition, and the speed and maneuverability of modern mechanized warfare had made them obsolete, the Allies would soon learn that even outdated fortifications could lend strength to any defense.⁸

In the center of all this lay the ancient city of Aachen. Militarily, the city was significant because it controlled most of the major roadways in the area. General Hodges knew he had to capture the city in order to secure his lines of communication for further advances east into the Ruhr. But aside from its strategic value, Aachen’s real significance lay in its political and ideological importance. Aachen would not only be the first German city besieged by the Americans, but was also the birthplace of Charlemagne, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which Hitler of-

ten referred to as the First Reich. Hitler had declared the rule of the Nazis as the Third Reich, psychologically aligning himself to the Holy Roman Empire and Charlemagne. To strike at Aachen, therefore, was to strike at a symbol of Nazi faith.⁹

To accomplish the First Army’s mission, Hodges directed the XIX Corps, under MG Charles Corlett, to attack through the West Wall north of Aachen, in the vicinity of Girkirchen. As part of this attack, the 30th Infantry Division, Corlett’s southernmost division was to break south over the Wurm River to capture Wurselen. The 30th Division’s attack constituted the northern prong of an encircling maneuver to surround Aachen. The southern prong would be conducted by the 1st Infantry Division, under MG Clarence Huebner. The 1st Division was from the VII Corps, commanded by MG J. Lawton Collins. The division was to attack north to initially capture Verlautenheide and then capture Ravels Hill (Hill 231). Once Aachen was encircled, the Allies would pound the city

with air strikes and artillery barrages, then conduct a deliberate assault.¹⁰

Facing the XIX Corps and VII Corps was the LXXXI Corps of the German Seventh Army, commanded by the newly appointed General Friedrich Koechling. The German Seventh Army commander, General Erich Brandenberger, put Koechling in charge of the LXXXI Corps to replace LTG Friedrich August Schack, who had proved ineffective at controlling his subordinates.

It was revealed that Schack's subordinate division commander in charge of the defense of Aachen, LTG Count Gerhard von Schwerin of the 116th "Greyhound" Panzer Division, had been planning to surrender the city to the Allies. Schack immediately relieved Schwerin, but failed to apprehend him in a timely fashion. Upon Koechling assuming command of LXXXI Corps, he pulled the 116th "Greyhound" Division out of Aachen and replaced it with the 246th People's Grenadier Division, commanded by COL Gerhard Wilck. Koechling also had at his disposal the 49th Infantry Division defending north of Aachen and the 12th Infantry Division defending south of the city. But both of these divisions had taken recent poundings. The 12th Infantry had recently arrived as a reinforcement from the German Seventh Army, but had been committed piecemeal by Schack, and therefore was forced out of Stolberg by the American 3rd Armored Division south of Aachen. In the north, the 49th Infantry Division was losing ground to the 30th Infantry Division's offensive to reach Wurselen.¹¹

To add to all this, the German Army spent enormous time and effort controlling the civilian populace of Aachen. Even after a forced evacuation by SS troops, it was estimated that some 40,000 civilians remained in the city during the siege.¹² Aachen was primarily Catholic, and therefore had been persecuted by the Nazis. They saw the oncoming American attack as liberation. Many of them hunkered down in cellars or attics, trying to avoid the SS troops sent to root them out of their homes, waiting for the Americans.

A combination of logistical shortages and lack of air cover due to poor weather forced Hodges to halt his of-

fensives in mid-September.¹³ The pause in fighting allowed the Americans to re-tool their units for decisive action. Hobbs planned to make a three-pronged attack in the north, employing all the regiments of the 30th Division simultaneously. The 117th Infantry Regiment, under COL Johnson, was ordered to seize high ground in the vicinity of Mariadorf to secure the division's left flank. The 120th, under COL Purdue, was ordered to seize high ground northeast of Wurselen and also to cut off the Aachen-Juelich highway running northeast out of Aachen. The 119th, under COL Sutherland, was ordered to take north Wurselen in order to link up with elements of the 1st Division to close the encirclement of Aachen.¹⁴

In the south, Huebner's 1st Infantry Division was also preparing to resume its offensive. Because of his extended front, Huebner could only free the 18th Infantry Regiment under COL Smith for his portion of the attack. In preparation for the attack, COL Smith organized special pillbox assault teams equipped with flame throwers, Bangalore torpedoes, beehive munitions, and demo charges. They trained for several days on the tactics to reduce pillboxes. Smith also task-organized M10 tank destroyers and 155mm howitzers for direct fire suppression of fortifications.¹⁵

Additionally, tanks and tank destroyers were used for a variety of secondary purposes. Flamethrower tanks were especially useful for clearing out pillboxes and bunkers. Bulldozer tanks were used to bury those pillboxes that could not be destroyed.¹⁶

On the German side, Koechling was assembling ad-hoc units from stragglers, deserters and anyone else he could throw into the lines. Then on 7 October, von Rundstedt released his theater reserve, the I SS Panzer Corps, to Koechling to reinforce the defenses of Aachen. Unfortunately, Koechling was so desperate for reinforcements, he began committing the Panzer Corps units as soon as they arrived in his sector, rather than waiting to use them as a concentrated force.

On 7 October, the 30th Division resumed its offensive in the form of a massive aerial bombardment, followed

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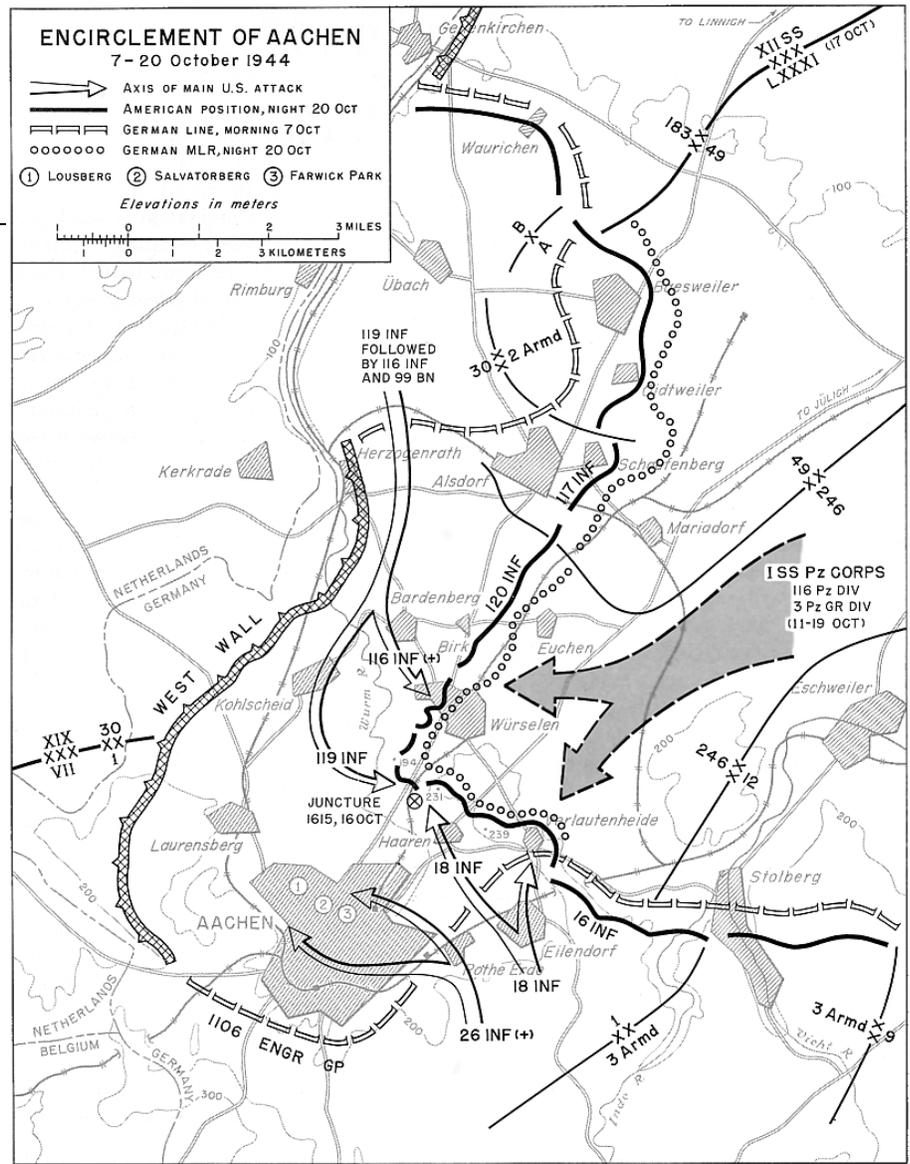
by massed artillery barrages. The division commenced its ground assault immediately after the strikes. Determined patrolling had revealed the locations of most of the Germans' manned fortifications, so the attack was focused on destroying those positions. The division attacked from Alsdorf south towards Uebach and Wurselen, with their final objective being Hill 194 south of Wurselen. They received stiff resistance from the 108th Panzer Brigade and the Mobile Regiment von Fritzschen, recently arrived into their sector from the I SS Panzer Corps. On the eastern flank, Mobile Regiment von Fritzschen successfully blocked the 117th Regiment at Mariadorf. Then on 8 October, the Mobile Regiment attacked north-west towards Schaufenberg and Alsdorf searching for the regiment's flank. This move threatened to encircle them. Fortunately, elements of the 743rd Tank Battalion were roaming the streets of Alsdorf when the Mobile Regiment entered the city. The tanks and tank destroyers of the 743rd quickly took out three Mark IV tanks. The shock effect of this halted the German counterattack.¹⁷ The 117th Regiment then re-established the division's left flank during their counterattack on 9 October.

On the western flank, the 120th Regiment quickly moved to its objective of North Wurselen, a mere 2,000 yards from the link-up point at Ravels Hill. However, their quick advance had overextended their lines, and on 9 October the 108th Panzer Brigade counterattacked into Bardenberg, threatening the 120th's line of communication. It took three days of counterattacks by both the 120th and 119th Regiments to uproot the Germans from Bardenberg. Then on 11 October, the skies cleared, enabling U.S. planes to attack the col-

ums of German counterattack forces.¹⁸ With the help of air power and field artillery, the 30th Division retained a tenuous hold on its initial objectives.

Meanwhile, the southern prong attack of the encircling offensive commenced on 8 October. In order to offset its numerical disadvantage with surprise, the 18th Infantry Regiment conducted its attack in the pre-dawn darkness. As a result, the regiment successfully captured all of its initial objectives with minimal resistance. By evening on 9 October, the 18th Regiment was in possession of Ravels Hill, the designated link-up point with XIX Corps. In addition, by 10 October, the regiment had captured Haaren, a suburb of Aachen astride the two major highways leading east out of Aachen. Thus, the 18th Regiment had cut the Germans' lines of communication into the city.¹⁹ The real challenge was to hold their objectives despite vicious German counterattacks. These counterattacks typically consisted of massive artillery barrages, followed by infantry attacking, supported by tanks and assault guns. Ironically, the American troops often occupied the very pillboxes they had cleared earlier in order to defend against the German counterattacks. Fighting was often from pillbox-to-pillbox, foxhole-to-foxhole, hand-to-hand.

Because of the constant German local counterattacks, the 30th and 1st Infantry Divisions had still not effected a link-up. Despite this gap in the encirclement, General Huebner delivered his surrender ultimatum to the garrison of Aachen on 10 October.²⁰ The task of assaulting the city fell to the 1st Infantry Division's 26th Infantry Regiment, commanded by COL John Seitz. At his disposal, he had two battalions, the 2d Battalion, commanded by LTC Derrill Daniel, and the 3d Battalion, commanded by LTC John Corley. Daniel's battalion would cross the Aachen-Cologne railroad and assault through the center of the city, while Corley's battalion would initially attack around the north of Aachen to recapture the suburb of Haaren, then attack south-west to capture the dominating high-ground on the northern side of Aachen. This high-ground consisted of several points of key terrain. The highest terrain was Lousberg, called Observatory Hill by the Americans because of the



obvious building on top. Below Observatory Hill was the Salvatorberg, a lower hill with a cathedral on it. Below Salvatorberg was Farwick Park, slightly elevated on the east side of Aachen. Farwick Park was even more important because the Hotel Quellenhof was located in it, and this is where the 246th's headquarters was located.

While the Americans were preparing to take the city, the Germans were still holding out hope that they could relieve the siege. Even as the American air bombardment and artillery barrage delivered over 300 tons of explosives on Aachen on 11 and 12 October, elements of the 3rd Panzer Division and the rebuilt 116th Panzer Division began to arrive to reinforce the LXXXI Corps. In addition, Koechling sent the 1st SS Battalion, Battalion Rink, into Aachen to "reinforce" the 246th.²¹

On 12 October, LTC Corley's 3d Battalion commenced its attack by secur-

ing the suburb of Haaren. Then on 13 October, the battalion began its attack to seize Observatory Hill, while LTC Daniel's 2d Battalion simultaneously began its assault into the center of the city. Daniel had anticipated very determined German resistance during his assault, and had prepared his men for the fight. Artillery and mortars would pummel the streets ahead of advancing infantry. The pattern of indirect fire was coordinated by city blocks. Once the clearing teams reached a certain point, the indirect fire would shift to the next city block. Infantry squads clearing houses were given either a tank or a tank destroyer to suppress houses and buildings as the infantry approached. Once the infantry reached the house, the tank or tank destroyer would shift fires to begin suppressing the next house or building. The infantry and combat engineers would clear buildings using flame throwers, grenades, and demolition charges. Checkpoints were

established at street intersections and no unit could advance beyond a checkpoint without coordinating with their adjacent unit at that checkpoint. These measures made the advance very slow and deliberate, but were necessary to ensure there would be no pockets of enemy resistance left behind and to prevent fratricide.

Despite the deliberate nature of the assault, the Germans fought viciously both in the city and outside against the American encirclement. The Germans used the sewers very effectively, which took the Americans by surprise at first. Because of this, the attacking Americans would weld each manhole shut as they progressed through the streets.²² Also, the Germans effectively used cellars and basements. They even knocked down walls between the cellars of adjacent buildings so they could move troops from one building to another. They found that the reinforced concrete walls of the more modern apartment buildings could withstand direct fire from even tanks and tank destroyers, so they turned every apartment building into a collection of room-to-room strongpoints. The only way the Americans found to penetrate such buildings was to use 155mm howitzers in direct fire mode.²³

Outside the city, German forces continued to attack to break the encirclement. On 12 October, two regiments of the 116th Panzer Division (the 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and Kampfgruppe Diefenthal) attacked the towns of Birk and North Wurselen to break the 30th Division's encirclement. The American defense of these positions played out like a ballet of reinforcing units. While individual small groups held their ground, battalions, regiments and the division would rapidly feed reserve forces into any penetration of their lines. The see-saw fighting between the 116th Panzer Division and the 30th Division continued through 15 October.²⁴

Meanwhile, by 14 October, LTC Corley's 3d Battalion had advanced into Farwick Park. On that same day, forward positions of the 18th Regiment near Verlautenheide reported the build-up of German forces opposite their positions. These forces were the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the 8th



American troops attacking Aachen faced determined SS defenders who had fortified the historic city's stone buildings. This forced the use of heavy artillery in the direct-fire mode, like this M12 155mm self-propelled howitzer – shown here in full recoil as it engaged German armor.
– Photo Electronically Modified

Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the leading forces of the 3rd Panzer Division, more reinforcements from the I SS Panzer Corps. On 15 October, Corley's 3d Battalion advanced through Farwick Park and put the Hotel Quellenhof under siege with a 155mm howitzer. On that same day, the 3rd Panzer Division launched its attack against the 1st Infantry Division in the vicinity of Verlautenheide. Though completely uncoordinated, the SS Battalion Rink also launched a localized counterattack in Farwick Park, driving back the 3d Battalion. With two major fights going on, General Huebner deemed the attack by the 3rd Panzer to be of the greatest threat, and ordered LTC Corley's offensive within Aachen to cease until the threat to the encirclement could be defeated.²⁵

General Huebner had pulled his 116th Infantry Regiment, commanded by COL Joe Dawson, into the encirclement from the south to bolster the weakened 18th Regiment. Despite this reinforcement and the use of massive artillery barrages by the Americans, the regiments of the 3rd Panzer overran two companies of the 16th Regiment and one company of the 18th Regiment, puncturing the inter-regimental boundary between them. Just then, bombers and fighters came to the 1st Division's rescue, defeating the 3rd Panzer's attack. The German attack continued on 16 October, but the Americans held their positions, even against point-blank tank fire. On that day, using tank destroyers and artillery

fires, the 3rd Panzer's attack was finally defeated, and the 1st Division remained in control of Ravels Hill and Verlautenheide.²⁶

In the 30th Division's sector, fighting was at a standstill. Hobbs had failed to take Wurselen despite receiving reinforcements from XIX Corps on 13 October in the form of a tank battalion from the 2nd Armored Division and a regiment from the 29th Infantry Division. The 30th Division finally captured Wurselen on October 16 with a two-pronged assault to the south, driving the 116th Panzer from the field in final defeat. At 1615 hours on 16 October, a patrol from the 30th Division linked up with the 1st Division's outpost on Ravels Hill. The encirclement of Aachen was complete.²⁷

LTG Collins, VII Corps commander, had finally grown impatient with the drawn-out siege of Aachen. During the lull in the fighting within Aachen, he reinforced the 26th Infantry Regiment with two tank battalions and an armored infantry battalion. He ordered Huebner to resume the assault of Aachen no later than 18 October.²⁸

For the LTC Wilck and the 246th Division, the encirclement of Aachen sealed their fate. Even as von Rundstedt ordered Wilck to hold the city even if he were "to be buried in its ruins," he withdrew the decimated I SS Panzer Corps units back from Aachen.²⁹ Wilck moved his headquarters from the Hotel Quellenhof to an air raid bunker at the north end of Lousberg

heights called Rutscherstrasse. He hunkered down and waited for the American assault to commence.³⁰

On 18 October, Huebner began his final offensive to take Aachen. They immediately took the Hotel Quellenhof, only to find that Wilck had moved. Even with crumbling German resistance, the deliberate securing of the city took several days. On 20 October, the Americans had located Wilck's new headquarters and were tightening the ring around it. Corley once again pulled up his 155mm howitzer to pummel the air raid bunker. After being bombarded during the night of 20 October, Wilck finally surrendered at 1205 hours on 21 October 1944.³¹

The American victory at Aachen was a costly one. The 30th Division incurred some 3,000 casualties during their encircling attack from the north. The 26th Infantry Regiment, the force that assaulted the city, had a combined total of 498 casualties. The fight had used up every reserve of both the 30th and 1st Divisions. Though the actual siege of the city had taken only 10 days, the operations to encircle Aachen had taken six weeks. On the German side, the vaunted I SS Panzer Corps had lost 50 percent of its combat power and retreated from Aachen in defeat. The LXXXI Corps was decimated, having completely lost the 246th Grenadier Division in the surrender of Aachen. The city of Aachen itself lay in ruins, with 80 percent of the buildings in rubble.³²

The long term implications of the battle for Aachen are mixed. By capturing Aachen, the First Army had accomplished one of its intermediate objectives to crossing the Rhine River and capturing the Ruhr industrial area. No doubt, the loss of Aachen was a psychological blow to the Germans and must have infuriated Hitler. The securing of Aachen also allowed General Omar Bradley to insert a new Army, the 9th U.S. Army under LTG William Simpson, into his lines, thus affording more combat power to the 12th Army Group. However, considering the amount of time and resources that the siege of Aachen consumed, the battle must be considered a strategic victory for the Germans because it gave Hitler the time he needed to build his forces for the Ardennes counter-offensive in December 1944.³³

The real value in studying the battle of Aachen is the lessons that the battle teaches to our Army today. As the world becomes more and more urbanized, the likelihood that American forces will be required to conduct Mounted Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) in future conflicts is extremely high. Many of the tactics, techniques, and procedures used during the assault on Aachen still remain relevant today.

The most important lesson to learn from the battle of Aachen is the importance of combined arms operations in urban warfare. As LTC Daniels' 2d Battalion showed us, conducting urban fighting requires all the BOS elements. His use of artillery forward of the assault teams to clear the streets, his use of tanks and tank destroyers in direct fire mode to suppress strongpoints, and his use of infantry and engineers to clear buildings are all relevant TTPs in modern-day urban warfare, and are even part of our doctrine.³⁴ Daniels also used command and control methods equally useful today in order to prevent bypassing enemy resistance and fratricide by establishing checkpoints at street intersections. General Hobbs demonstrated the importance of intelligence in urban warfare during the attack by the 30th Infantry Regiment to seize North Wurselen; because his determined patrolling had revealed many of the locations of the enemy's positions, his forces were able to focus their efforts to take them out.

Other major lessons emerge from German mistakes, especially by Koechling. He committed his reinforcements (mainly the I SS Panzer Corps) piecemeal, rather than waiting to consolidate the arriving units and staging a major counter-offensive. This is a counter-example of the principle of *mass*. The American forces only did a slightly better job of applying mass when committing their reinforcements. Where the Americans had the distinct advantage was not necessarily the ability to mass units but the ability to *mass fires*. Artillery and air power must also be massed, and the Americans constantly made up for their weaknesses on the ground with overwhelming firepower. An excellent example of this was the use of air power to defeat the counterattacks of the 108th Panzer Bri-

gade in Bardenberg, aimed at enveloping COL Purdue's 120th Regiment on 11 October.

A third major lesson is the importance of command and control and tactical patience. The 26th Infantry Regiment's assault on Aachen was very slow and deliberate. Often, when in the offense, forces rush to reach their objectives, but in urban warfare, slow is better. Every pocket of resistance must be eliminated and every strongpoint neutralized. Tedious tasks like welding man-hole covers shut and coordinating with adjacent units at every street corner are time-consuming, but are critical to force protection in urban combat.

Combined arms operations, decisive massing of fires, inventive command and control techniques, and tactical patience are principles equally applicable to the modern day urban battlefield as to the battlefield of Aachen. There are many more lessons to be learned from the history of urban combat, not just at the Battle of Aachen, but other cities as well, and many more when considering battles in other countries. Even more importantly, studying the history of urban combat teaches military professionals an appreciation for the bravery and determination needed to fight under these conditions, as displayed by the soldiers of the 30th and 1st Infantry Divisions.

Notes

¹Robert S. Cameron. "It Takes a Village to Prepare for Urban Combat...And Fort Knox is Getting One." knox-www.army.mil/armormag/nd97/6mout.htm.

²Charles Whiting, *Bloody Aachen*, (New York: Stein & Day Publishers, 1976), 26.

³Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign: The United States Army in World War Two, the European Theater of Operations*. (Washington, D.C.: The United States Army Center for Military History, 1963), 7. There were four major routes of advance into Germany. In 21st Army Group's sector, under the command of General Bernard Montgomery, the first route of advance ran through the plain of Flanders with relatively flat ground, but contained too many water obstacles to be considered a rapid route of advance. The second route ran along the Maubeuge-Liege-Aachen axis north of the Ardennes. This route was the most direct route into the Ruhr, but was heavily built up, especially around the city of Aachen. The third and fourth routes lay in 12th Army Group's sector, under the

command of General Omar Bradley. The center route in Bradley's sector ran straight through the Ardennes, but the terrain was considered too restrictive for the route to be considered an axis of rapid advance. Finally, in the south, lay the Metz-Kaiserslautern-gap route through which Patton's 3rd Army was advancing.

⁴Ibid., 8. Despite the fact that Eisenhower sought a unified advance on a broad front against Germany, it was logistical considerations which led him to weight Montgomery's 21st Army Group in the north. The Allies were outrunning their supply lines. Their only existing deep water port was back in Cherbourg. Antwerp was in Allied hands, but the German Fifteenth Army maintained control of the channel leading to Antwerp, denying the Allies access to the critical port. Therefore, on 23 August 1944 Eisenhower attached First Army, under LTG Courtney Hodges, to 21st Army Group. This move freed Montgomery's southern units of the Aachen sector of front and allowed him to shift his focus to the plain of Flanders.

⁵Ibid., 17-19.

⁶Whiting, 14.

⁷MacDonald, 29.

⁸Ibid., 34-35.

⁹Ibid., 281.

¹⁰Ibid., 284-285.

¹¹Whiting, 36. LTG Count Gerhard von Schwerin was now totally disillusioned with the war. He had been very successful in the Balkans, receiving the Knight's Cross in 1943. But Schwerin was not a National Socialist and as the war dragged on, he struggled constantly at having to serve a master in whom he did not believe. When Hitler's order to defend the city of Aachen at any cost came down to him, he quickly resolved to surrender Aachen upon the beginning of the Americans' assault. He drafted a letter expressing such intentions in secret and planned to deliver it to the Americans when their offensive started. His letter was discovered during an SS raid in Aachen while they were evacuating civilians from their homes.

¹²Aachen had a pre-war population of 165,710. MacDonald, 29.

¹³Ibid., 67. Logistical shortages were created by the beginning of Operation Market-Garden on 18 September 1944. This operation, the brain-child of General Montgomery, was a bold airborne offensive conducted in the north to capture crossing sites across the Rhine. The operation was unsuccessful.

¹⁴MacDonald, 294.

¹⁵Ibid., 287.

¹⁶William B. Folkestad, *The View from the Turret: The 743rd Tank Battalion During WWII* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1996), 64. It is interesting to note the limitations of air power and artillery barrages when attacking heavy fortifications. The aerial bombardment missed the entire attack sector of the 30th Divi-

sion, and the artillery barrages were ineffective because the impacting rounds proved unable to penetrate the West Wall pillboxes.

¹⁷Folkestad, 63.

¹⁸MacDonald, 299.

¹⁹Ibid., 287-288.

²⁰Whiting, 110-111. General Huebner's ultimatum read: The city of Aachen is now completely surrounded by American forces... If the city is not promptly and completely surrendered unconditionally, the American Army and Air Force will proceed ruthlessly with air and artillery bombardment to reduce it to submission... In short, there is no other way out. Either you surrender the city... or you face total destruction. The choice and responsibility are with you. Your answer must be delivered to the spot designated by the bearer of this document within 24 hours.

²¹Whiting, 115. In actuality, the SS Battalion was sent into Aachen to intimidate Wilck and ensure that he would not surrender the city.

²²Whiting, 138.

²³MacDonald, 311.

²⁴Ibid., 301.

²⁵Whiting, 151.

²⁶MacDonald, 291-292.

²⁷Ibid., 306.

²⁸Ibid., 314.

²⁹Whiting, 151.

³⁰MacDonald, 315.

³¹Ibid., 316.

³²Ibid., 317-320.

³³Ibid.

³⁴*FM 90-10-1, An Infantryman's Guide to Combat in Built-Up Areas.*

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