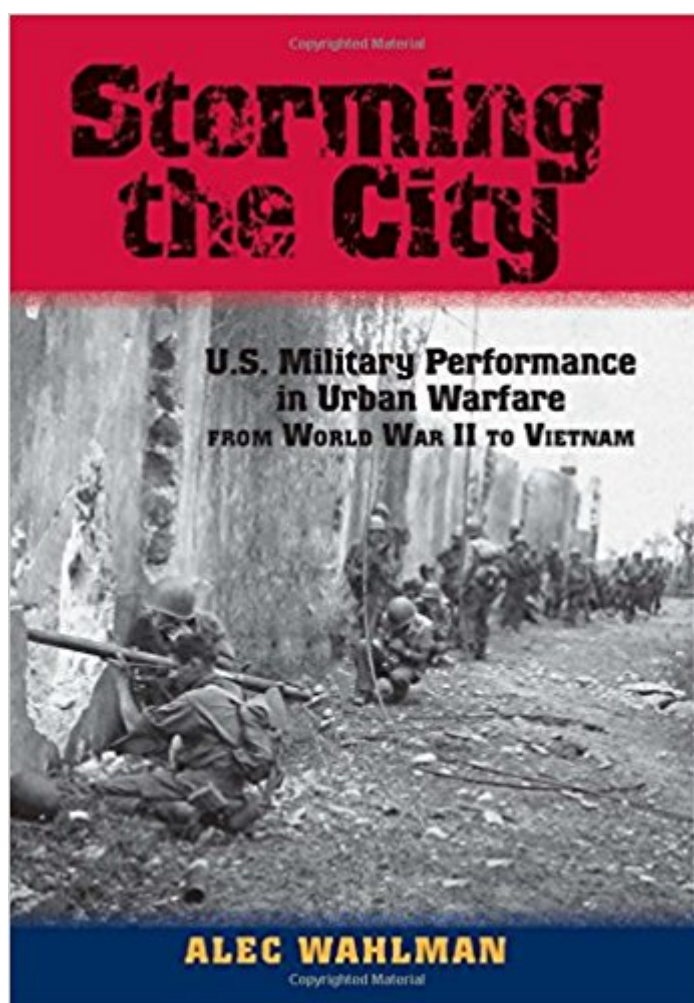


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# Storming The City: U.S. Military Performance In Urban Warfare From World War II To Vietnam (American Military Studies)



## Synopsis

History/Military Book Club Selection, 2015. In an increasingly urbanized world, urban terrain has become a greater factor in military operations. Simultaneously, advances in military technology have given military forces sharply increased capabilities. The conflict comes from how urban terrain can negate or degrade many of those increased capabilities. What happens when advanced weapons are used in a close-range urban fight with an abundance of cover? *Storming the City* explores these issues by analyzing the performance of the US Army and US Marine Corps in urban combat in four major urban battles of the mid-twentieth century (Aachen 1944, Manila 1945, Seoul 1950, and Hue 1968). Alec Wahlman assesses each battle using a similar framework of capability categories, and separate chapters address urban warfare in American military thought. In the four battles, across a wide range of conditions, American forces were ultimately successful in capturing each city because of two factors: transferable competence and battlefield adaptation. The preparations US forces made for warfare writ large proved generally applicable to urban warfare. Battlefield adaptation, a strong suit of American forces, filled in where those overall preparations for combat needed fine tuning. From World War II to Vietnam, however, there was a gradual reduction in tactical performance in the four battles.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Alec Wahlman has rendered an important contribution to our understanding of the problems involved in U.S. forces fighting in cities. Given the increasing move of the world’s

population into urban environments, this is an important book for policy makers and soldiers alike.

•Williamson Murray, author of *The Path to Ruin* and co-author of *A War To Be Won, Fighting the Second World War* "The United States is slowly coming to grips with the changing nature of military operations. The romantic image of battles in wide-open plains and deserts is being shattered by the new reality of urban combat. Wahlman comprehensively evaluates each case study and then considers them in total—a solid study. Military officers and cadets will all find this work informative and helpful in understanding the changing nature of military operations. I expect to find this on several recommended reading lists among military branches and services. Political decision makers also need to understand the complexity of fighting in an urban environment."

•Stephen A. Bourque, co-author of *The Road to Safwan* "This is a very serious and well executed work. The quantity of knowledge packed into these pages is immense, with conclusions closely tied to the declared purposes of this study and strongly supported by abundant evidence; this book has real value."

•Anthony James Joes, author of *Resisting Rebellion and Victorious Insurgencies* "At a moment when urban conflict has replaced maneuver battles and decisive victories in the field as the dominant form of war, Alec Wahlman's insightful study of city-fighting throws new light on a much-neglected aspect of the past and opens up a loop-hole through which we can peer into a likely future."

•John Gooch, author of *Mussolini and His Generals* "It is a text for everyone, from general war buff, cadet, grunt, military enthusiast, or military professional--the author's research results adding copiously to our knowledge on how to fight, if necessary, from room to room in an enemy city."--*Leatherneck Magazine* "Should be required reading for anyone concerned with the future of warfare in the 21st century. . . . Urban warfare has increased steadily in importance, and yet has traditionally been neglected with respect to developing doctrine. This book is a welcome contribution toward shedding more light on the subject."--*Defense Media Network* "An unexpectedly readable, interesting, and well-written examination of exactly what the subtitle imports. . . . [T]he book examines how 'transferable competence' and 'battlefield adaptation' were key in capturing each city--and how the ability of the military to accomplish this has degraded over time. . . . The writing is excellent, economical, tactical, and, amazingly, readably technical."--*Library Journal* "This is an excellent book and it should be read by doctrine thinkers and people that think all city fights are slow motion slugfests with an invisible enemy as has been the contemporary norm. . . . A great book that I highly recommend."--*Battles and Book Reviews* "For a study focusing on the relatively recent advent of American forces fighting in built-up urban areas, this is a needed contribution, given the many cities, particularly in Iraq, which have

been devastated in an attempt to win people's hearts and minds."--Journal of America's Military Past

Wahlman's research claims to undermine two myths about urban warfare. First, the attacking force's "traditional" three-to-one manpower advantage was proved unnecessary. Americans had only a three-to-two advantage in Manila, and at Aachen the Germans actually outnumbered Americans by three-to-one. The second myth is that urban fighting is an infantry job. Wahlman challenges that by saying that infantry "is most effective when part of a combined arms team," which relates to his transferable competence argument."--VVA Books

Outstanding. . . . Wahlman's ability to concisely provide readers with a synopsis of each battle is very impressive. . . . He has provided readers with a volume which is highly informative and thought provoking. He has also provided readers with a context and background to examine urban warfare in the present and the future."--Infantry

Wahlman's thorough and thoughtful analyses hold appeal for military leaders as well as academic readers. What will stand out to an Army staff officer in particular are the frameworks used by Wahlman to examine each battle. . . . When showing the comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of each battle through the warfighting functions, the criteria are listed within charts that are identical to course of action comparisons in the military decision-making process. For this and other reasons, any combat arms staff officer will surely appreciate Wahlman's work."--US Military History Review

ALEC WAHLMAN has been an analyst for fourteen years at the Institute for Defense Analyses, a Federally Funded Research and Development Center that works primarily with the Department of Defense. He earned his PhD in military history from the University of Leeds (UK) and lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

Excellent analysis of US military involvement in UO.

"Storming the City" is a study of US military performance in urban assault from World War II to Vietnam using studies of Aachen, Manila, Seoul, and Hue. The author finds lessons common to all of these battles. Using a standard format for each battle, the author evaluates the US and enemy forces, command, control, and communications, intelligence and recon, firepower and survivability, mobility and counter-mobility, logistics, and the civilian population. Nineteenth century saw urban warfare mostly occurring against mobs, and the First World War saw little urban combat at all, so the pre-war US military put little emphasis on urban warfare doctrine. Despite this, the US military did well with urban combat in World War II thanks to both a doctrinal and a societal proclivity to

adaptation. At Aachen, the best showing by the US military in urban combat, the US Army attacked and captured Aachen despite the being outnumbered by 3 to 1. The city was first surrounded, a vital prerequisite that would be neglected at Seoul and Hue. In the case of Manila, Japanese troops received orders to withdraw only after it was too late. Reading the book, I got the impression that in all the battles discussed, the lower ranks performed well, using creativity and improvisation to solve the unique problems while at Seoul and Hue, the higher ranks failed operationally by not encircling the cities. Notably, in both Aachen and Manila, American troops attacked from an unexpected direction. With increased urbanization and the desire by enemies to mitigate American strengths, the author discusses lessons and looks to the future. The author attributes success to transferable competence in the form of good small unit leadership, an emphasis on firepower, skill with combined arms, experience, and well designed armored fighting vehicles. Adaptation of the troops to urban conditions has been quick and effective. The author dispels two myths of urban combat - the need for superiority in numbers and the assertion that urban warfare is best left to the infantry. In the future, recon, intel, and sensors will be more important than ever, and effective public relations will need to counteract enemy propaganda exploiting civilian casualties - something that the public was less concerned with in past decades. Body armor combined with new large caliber exploding rounds has the potential to make US forces much more effective in urban environments. Although it would be nice to hear about more recent conflicts, overall the book is an easy and pleasant read with valuable insight.

A summary of the review on [...] Defense analyst and "War on the Rocks" blogger Wahlman takes a very critical look at American military performance in urban settings. After an introduction discussing the military implications of increasing urbanization, Wahlman devotes a chapter to the American experience and thoughts about urban combat prior to World War II. He follows this with chapters on combat in Aachen in late 1944 and in Manila in early 1945, in which he argues the Army did surprisingly well. He then gives us a chapter on the American military thinking about urban combat after World War II, which suggests some loss of interest. This is followed by chapters on the fighting in Seoul following the Inchon landings in September of 1950 and in Hue during the Tet Offensive in early 1968, in which American soldiers and marines did well despite lacking much training for the mission. In his conclusions, Wahlman notes that in all four battles, U.S. forces proved resourceful and adaptable, and did well, but might have done better. He adds that the four actions dispel some myths about urban combat, most notably that the attacker must be greatly superior in strength and that urban combat is primarily an infantry matter. Although Wahlman might have given some

thought to more recent urban fighting, notably Fallujah in 2004, this is a very valuable read for anyone interested in urban combat, or in the operations he does cover.'For the full review, see [...]

Wahlman has written a book with what are really case studies and a consideration of US military doctrine regarding cities. His examples are Aachen (1944), Manila (1945), Seoul (1950) and Hue (1968). In each he considers the same factors, but if I read them correctly, the critical factor is that US units have been allowed to respond to local situations, and that US troops have done well, with the proviso that US commanders in these cases used firepower and machinery rather than lives. The accounts are well done and informative, but I think adding a couple more would make the book have more resonance in the present: Baghdad would be the obvious, and perhaps New York on 9/11 since defending a city from a major operation seems as likely in the future as storming into one. There is some intriguing detail about weapons and characters of the enemy. In Aachen, the US troops storming into the city were outnumbered 3 to 1 by German defenders, but the quality of those defenders was mixed and Americans displayed exceptional adaptation. In the Manila example, it took two US reinforced divisions to clear the city, with heavy civilian casualties: it is debated but Japanese intransigence and atrocity probably was more at fault than very heavy US bombardment. The Japanese troops were mixed quality but determined. In the Hue example, the city was stormed by North Vietnamese regulars as well as guerillas, so in a sense the US response was defensive. In the example of Seoul, the Marines were exceptional. I think the example could have been elaborated, because the city was the scene of more than just the 1950 operations (the operations described followed the US landings at Inchon). Wahlman does cite some mistakes. In Aachen and Seoul the cities were not completely cut off, so substantial enemy forces were able to escape encirclement. Overall, the book is better written than most military history, and the sections where he writes of doctrine are less dry than is typical.

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