



***Storming the City: U.S. Military Performance in Urban Warfare
from World War II to Vietnam***

By Alec Wahlman

Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2015,

368 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)

Rick Baillergeon

Since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the interest level in urban warfare has clearly escalated. This in turn has spurred a large increase in the publication of books tied to the subject. In my experience, these volumes have generally fallen into two categories in terms of content and focus. First, there are the volumes in which the author has focused on a particular battle or an aspect of urban warfare. The second are those books which are more general and may address numerous urban warfare battles in the past or provide more wide-ranging discussions. Both types of volumes can have much utility to readers depending on their quality.

Alec Wahlman is one author who has crafted a sort of hybrid of these groups. Within his outstanding volume *Storming the City: U.S. Military Performance in Urban Warfare from World War II to Vietnam*, Wahlman states in his introduction that, "The gap this study seeks to fill is between the detailed accounts of single battles and the broad pattern analysis across many battles that lacks tactical detail." I believe Wahlman has clearly achieved what he sought to accomplish.

Within his pages, the author has focused on four particular battles between World War II and Vietnam. These are Aachen (1944), Manila (1945), Seoul (1950), and Hue (1968). Within each, he employs the same four-part organization to address the battle. These complementary sections are:

- 1) The operational context in which the battle took place;
- 2) The opponent U.S. forces fought against;
- 3) A concise synopsis of the battle; and
- 4) An analysis of the tactical performance of the U.S. forces in the battle.

Although each section is extremely well written, two clearly stand out in terms of quality. First, Wahlman's ability to concisely provide readers with a synopsis of each battle is very impressive. In complying with his intent, the author does not produce a comprehensive account of each battle. However, he does deliver sufficient detail of the battle itself so readers have a good understanding of the fight. His ability to attain this truly sets the conditions for the author to focus on the clear strength of the volume — the analysis of U.S. performance within each battle.

In this section, Wahlman utilizes the same organization to conduct his analysis of each battle. He has selected six areas (basically battlefield operating systems or warfighting functions) to dissect U.S. performance: Command, control, and communications; intelligence and reconnaissance; firepower and survivability; mobility and counter-mobility; logistics; and importantly, dealing with the population. I found Wahlman's analysis authoritative and

sound. Importantly, he offers solid examples to reinforce his statements and opinions.

Wahlman takes his analysis one step further in his concluding paragraph. Within it, he compares performance between the battles. He offers areas in which there were significant differences within the battles. Just as critically, he suggests ways in which they were extremely similar. Wahlman summarizes each of the above when he states, "And yet, despite the variations in conditions, resources available, and foes, U.S. forces successfully executed their mission to capture the city in every case." He details his rationale on why this success occurred — transferable competence and battlefield adaptation.

Before my summary, I would be remiss in not highlighting two chapters within the volume which Wahlman has inserted. These two focus on U.S. military thought (doctrine, professional publications, etc...) as they pertain to urban warfare before and after World War II. As you would expect, he has placed them appropriately within the organization of his book. I feel readers will find these extremely informative, and they provide excellent background as readers move into the battle discussion.

In his conclusion, Wahlman states, "The central three-part question this study sought to answer was: When the need arose to fight in urban terrain in the mid-20th century, how effective were U.S. forces, why, and how did their performance change from World War II to Vietnam?" I believe Wahlman has unquestionably answered each more than adequately. In doing so, 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.