

TRAIN IN THE JUNGLE, FIGHT IN THE CITY: COMPARISONS BETWEEN CLOSE-COUNTRY AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT SKILL- SETS REQUIRED BY SOLDIERS

The continually changing combat environments faced by Australian troops puts pressure on Army and combat units to ensure that soldiers are fully prepared to sustain combat operations. Deployments to Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East have highlighted the complexities of these operating environments. From open country to close country and through to the urban landscape, these environments, and the threat force encountered, challenge the Australian soldier like never before.

Currently, the focus on operations is centred on the Asia-Pacific region. Operations in this region will likely be conducted in various complex terrains including a combination of jungle, mountain, littoral, open and urban terrain. Land operations will be characterised by reduced detection and engagement ranges, restricted mobility and decreased weapon effects, the degraded performance of communications and the continued requirement to achieve decisive outcomes.

Understanding the terrain is the first important step in our ability to conduct operations. Both close country and urban environments are complex and consist of three interrelated terrains: the physical, human and information terrains. In order to fully understand the similarities between close country and urban environments we need to consider these three terrains in detail – this will enable soldiers to apply sound judgment and actions when operating in these environments.

Complex physical terrain is any terrain where a force's weapon range exceeds its sensor range – in other words, troops cannot achieve unobstructed situational awareness to the maximum effective range of their weapons.

Complex human terrain is where numerous population groups coexist in the same physical space. These might include ethno-linguistic groups, political factions, tribes or clans, religious sects, or ideological movements.

Complex informational terrain arises when multiple sources, or transmission paths for communications, data or information (including news media) exist in an operating environment.

This article aims to briefly examine the similarities between operating in a close country environment and an urban environment. It will look at the basic skills required by soldiers; being the ability to shoot, move and communicate.

Shoot

The ability to accurately engage, kill or incapacitate the enemy using a variety of weapons is a fundamental skill of combat. Combat effectiveness is founded, in part, on a military ethos, high levels of combat shooting and marksmanship proficiency developed in individuals prior to deployment on operations. The soldiers' ability to effectively and instinctively engage an adversary can dictate the outcome of contact with enemy combatants; this will be referred to as 'shoot'.

Tip: Coupling of optics to task. The individual weapon, currently the Enhanced F88 Steyr rifle, has a relatively short barrel length and is light weight and lethal. Additionally, the F89 Minimi

Light Support Weapon has the same characteristics. When coupled with reflex style optics and lasers, these weapons allow the operator to engage small, fleeting targets.

Tip: Awareness of surrounding structure / foliage. In both close country and urban environments, fragmentation grenades are used extensively during combat. Fragmentation grenades are an essential weapon for assaulting and clearing buildings in an urban environment, as well as providing effects during the break in and fight through of an enemy position in close country. When employed, consideration must be given to the effect of grenades bouncing back and the risk of penetration of walls and foliage, thus causing injury to friendly forces.

Tip: Employment of smoke. Smoke grenades are used for screening and signalling. Care should be taken using smoke grenades: the smoke may obscure at a distance from its point of origin which could cause delay – this could cause confusion due to the lingering effect and the subsequent delay in dissipation.

Tip: Understanding keyholes. A keyhole, in this sense, is a clear passage of flight that allows the grenade to travel along its trajectory unopposed. Grenade launchers should be used to assist initial entry into buildings and/or during initial contact with the enemy. The exploitation of keyholes will assist friendly forces in seizing and maintaining the initiative. Grenade launchers are excellent weapons for use in close country and urban environments: being light, easy to operate, far more accurate and able to deliver a heavy weight of fire over short ranges. The use of a grenade launcher significantly reduces the vulnerability of the firer in comparison to the use of hand-thrown grenades. However, care must be taken to ensure that the projectile does not strike an object and explode at minimal arming range.

Tip: Employment of Anti-armour weapons. The employment of the M72A6 66mm Light Direct Fire Support Weapon and M3 84mm (Carl Gustav) Medium Direct Fire Support Weapon may be limited in both close country and urban environments. Minimum arming distances must be considered at all times and this requires experience and training. Other limitations include safety factors such as the back blast danger area, which is more hazardous due to loose rubble within the urban environment and the foliage encountered within the close country environment.

Move

Patrolling is an all-corps responsibility and is conducted as part of all operations. It is carried out not only in the forward areas, but also in rear areas to counter enemy infiltration and to protect installations and administrative areas. To be successful, patrolling needs to be well planned, active and aggressive. The capability of being able to close with the enemy by dismounted means will be referred to as 'move'.

Tip: Formations and size of patrols. Dismounted urban patrolling may be conducted by team, section, platoon minus and platoon strength patrols dependant on task. Within a close country environment patrol sizes will usually vary between reconnaissance patrols of three to five men up to fighting patrols of platoon size. The formation used by the patrol in urban or village environments will normally be 'Staggered File' with the patrol equally divided on both sides of the street. Within a close country environment, the majority of patrolling will be conducted in 'Single File'. This is primarily due to the observational constraints of the vegetation and terrain.

Tip: Maintenance of patrol pace. The speed of the patrol should be slow and deliberate. This will promote a relaxed, confident attitude towards the local population. It will also enable patrol

members to concentrate on the urban environment and population, therefore, increasing their information gathering potential. A steady patrol pace will also reduce fatigue. Patrolling in tropical areas imposes greater physical and mental strain than in temperate conditions.

Communicate

Because radio, line and other means of communication are used for C2, they carry information that is essential for the safety of our forces. Therefore, it is extremely important that those personnel who use the radio are well disciplined and effective communicators. The ability to rapidly and effectively pass information within these operating environments will be referred to as 'communicate'.

Tip: Consider the terrain and general security environment when planning methods and means of communications. Urban structures may often interfere with radio and visual communications systems, even over very short distances. Ultra High Frequency (UHF) radios will generally outperform Very High Frequency (VHF) radios in urban terrain. The careful selection of frequencies applies equally to ground, surface and sky wave propagation and, thus, to all frequency bands. Dense foliage causes weakening of radio waves and reduces range. Elevated antennae, radio rebroadcasts, radio relay links and retransmission sites can offset this to some extent.

Conclusion

The ability of soldiers to 'shoot' in close country and urban environments is remarkably similar. This can be attributed to the complexities of the physical terrain including reduced engagement distances, multi-dimensional engagement areas and the make-up of the environment (foliage, buildings etc). Both the physical and human terrains affect the ability to 'move' in close country and urban environments. The terrain and limited visibility result in similar patrol formations, decreased patrol speeds and an increase of fatigue experienced by soldiers. The ability to 'communicate' in these environments, while affected by the physical terrain, is also similar. This is attributed to the characteristics shared by close vegetation and high density structures.