

Combat Behaviours – Part II

By WO1 W & WO2 D – SASR

Developing robust combat behaviours for war requires critical thinking prior, during and after training.

WO1 W

In the previous article on combat behaviours in *Smart Soldier 61*, the discussion centred around two examples of how developing and understanding the cognitive perspective of skills and drills during combat training assisted in developing more robust combat behaviours. The examples used in this earlier article were the emergency reload and use of grenades.

This article will continue to look at combat behaviours by discussing the considerations that must be taught when dealing with doorways in an urban combat environment. In this way, we will also understand how to develop good combat behaviours during training to facilitate skills and knowledge to successfully negotiate doors. Finally we will briefly discuss elements of critical thinking to assist in improving your training design, context and application to optimise training outcomes.

All door-ways, before going forward, should be looked to; for difficult it is to know where foes may sit within a dwelling.

The Edda Of Sæmund The Learned, B Thorpe (trans)
1865, the Hávamál 1 (Sayings of the High One [Odin])

Urban combat

Urban combat can become intimate in its nature; at times only a thin layer of gyprock may separate you from your enemy. If we are in close urban combat, you could assume our coordinated defensive measures have been breached or we have purposely allowed the enemy close proximity to negate superior firepower. It is for situations such as this that we need to develop an understanding of our foe, understanding their capabilities and vulnerabilities. This article is less focused on the doctrinal aspects, and more focused on aspects that are related to human nature; in particular, the impacts of human behaviour (fight or flight) in close combat. Having an understanding of these behaviours will be useful as we start to consider the door in urban terrain.

Doors in urban terrain

In general terms, a doorway could be considered an obstacle or canalising terrain. As such, any doorway is a potential location for an ambush, IED or booby trap, and is worthy of an enemy's consideration to cover it with fire. Each doorway can differ considerably and all will need cognitive consideration as opposed to an autonomous response. As soldiers, we need to avoid unnecessary delays but we also don't want to bumble headlong into trouble. There is a fine balance that must be achieved through effective training and experience.

Put yourself in the enemy's headspace and imagine being told to hold or defend a room or urban structure from a determined assault. Think of what channelling barriers or early warning you would employ. Think of the cover you would utilise or build yourself.

Think of the tactics you would employ either by yourself or with your buddy or team. Where would you put yourself inside a room or area and what routes of ingress or egress would be open to you? What senses would you be relying on in the final moments before contact was initiated? Take that information and measure it against the tactical considerations for doorways provided in this article. If any information is found lacking then consider how you would tactically counter that circumstance.

There cannot be just one drill for doorways as that will not cover all contingencies. Rather we need a sound foundation from which to tweak according to a range of variables and situations at the time. Always remember, doorways form an integral part of a track plan or path – where possible avoid them if you can!

If you cannot avoid doorways, let's break down some tactical considerations for them.

Assessing doorways

Door assessments, where possible, should be done from distance. This assessment can be done from behind cover and prior to approaching the door, or it could be done (less than optimally) on the move as you approach the door. Take advantage of whatever the situation allows, but try not to leave this assessment until you get to the doorway. When assessing the doorway, ask yourself the following questions and review the scenarios provided:

- What cover is afforded to me and the team adjacent or close by the doorway?
 - A brick wall will clearly afford different cover from fire than a piece of corrugated iron or a thatched wall.
 - What ability does that cover have to soak up fire? How many rounds will it take before the cover is no good?
 - Where is the best place for me to cover and prepare for the next tactical bound?

During a room clearance in Baghdad of a known Al Qaida IED facilitator, one team stacked on a doorway about to make entry – our team waited only a few metres away looking for alternate entry points when a burst of AK47 smashed through the wall above the heads of the room entry team. Fortunately, the majority of the team had adopted the kneeling position prior to entry. At least five to six rounds were fired through a solid brick and cement wall approximately 8 to 10 inches thick. On retrieval of the weapon it was found to have armour-piercing ammunition.

- Which way does the door open and how does it open?
 - inward
 - outward
 - roller door
 - no door
 - fire doors, and so on.
 - there are too many variables to cover here, but the more we consider and practise, the better prepared we can be.

- Course of action available to the enemy based on the floorplan. As with skills in the field – an infantry soldier’s job is to read the ground to influence tactical success. Urban terrain is no different.

Bypass

- Assess alternate options. Always remember doorways form an integral part of a track plan or path. To emphasis this important point again, where possible avoid them!

Cover (personal security)

- There are a few things we can consider and employ that will significantly enhance our security in and around doorways, such as the following:
 - Use of cover
 - As with all things in regards to survivability, always minimise the amount of ‘flesh and bone’ exposed to fire. Use your speed and cover to ensure the only thing visible to your foe is a bare outline of your shoulder and head, which encompasses your firing eye and barrel – make yourself hard to hit!
 - Light
 - Assessing doorframes can give an insight into the available light behind a doorway.
 - Consider the difference between light inside/dark outside versus the opposite of dark inside/light outside. The advantage will always go to the person with the darkness on their side. Both will require a slightly different approach or different technique depending on what conditions you find yourself faced with.
 - Consider the control of light where possible. This could be as simple as turning lights on or off, or using kinetic effects to extinguish the light¹.
 - Torches and lasers are discussed later.
 - Height
 - Mitigate against materials adjacent to doorways that will not soak up fire. Do this by simply lowering your profile. Take a knee at a minimum, and go prone where the situation demands.
 - Put yourself in your foe’s position. How would I defend or hold that doorway and consider where you would aim your fire to cover doorways. Once considered, and where possible, don’t be there!
 - Depth
 - Giving yourself depth from the doorway will enhance:
 - Visibility providing the ability to communicate, aids in situational awareness.
 - The ability to manipulate your firearm and associated arcs of fire.

¹ You can simply shoot out the lights if safe to do so, as long as it does not jeopardise yours or the teams’ position. You can also smash the light if required but that is hard work if the light is a long distance off.

- Your concealment, particularly when combined with the use of light.
- Your ability to manoeuvre and respond to threat.

Deception

- As with all things Infantry Minor Tactics, 'up the guts' remains an option but often is a suboptimal choice. Always use cunning where the situation allows or demands it. Doorways are an integral part of a track plan or path. You know the drill by now – if you can avoid them, do so!
 - Look for windows from which to observe, cover or make entry.
 - Look for structural weaknesses, holes or gaps with which to observe, cover or make entry.
 - Think of the entire environment; attack from below (think basement or floors below) or from above (roof, roof cavities and floors above).
- Sound
 - We should employ all of our senses in close combat and, depending on the scenario, hearing will be your primary, personal form of ISR. Depriving the enemy of this sense through stealth and being quiet where you can will reduce their effectiveness in being able to react. Their vision is likely to be limited, and noise in and around the doorway ensures his level of alertness is increased.
 - An exception to this would be when you need some form of deception to help cover manoeuvre of elements or yourself, while affecting another area of the battlespace.

Entering a room/building through a doorway (if unavoidable)

- Clearing
 - Ideally, clear as much of the room as possible from an external perspective before entry.
 - Consider the amount of information to be processed by the brain when entering rooms with regards to its size and complexity.
 - Have a range of TTPs for this, employing all the variables mentioned above and below, for single, pairs or multiple person clearance.
- Speed
 - Think of yourself as a rally car driver. At times you will need to have the 'pedal to the metal'; at other times you will need to slow down to negotiate an obstacle. Doorways would constitute such an obstacle. When you decide to cross the threshold, do this with drive, speed and purpose, but be prepared to slow down when clear of the 'fatal funnel' to allow your brain to process and catch up with your feet. Your bullets will always move faster than you, but only if your brain has the time to detect and positively identify threat.
 - So remember, fast where you need to be, slow where you have to be.
 - Only go as fast as your cognitive ability allows. This takes well thought out progression of training and disciplined rehearsals.
 - Unit and sub-unit assault speed can be achieved with good planning and collective, responsive TTPs. Try not to feel that the pace of an assault can be

greatly enhanced by your individual action. There will be cases where it does, but assaults will also bog down with casualties.

- Spacing
 - Normal patrolling guidelines with regards to spacing should be applied in complex urban terrain. Where possible, always have elements of your brick one bound back, which could be as simple as one room behind. There is a tendency to bring all personnel into each successive room or area as you clear; however, this severely limits your situational awareness and ability to manoeuvre in the event of an incident or contact with the enemy.

- Tools
 - There will be a range of tools and techniques at your disposal before or during the threshold crossing. All will have advantages and disadvantages. Know what they are, and try and use the right tool for the right job.
 - Torches can be used to clearly enhance your visual clearance into darkened areas. This has the potential to attract enemy fire, so techniques should be developed to minimise these occurrences. You can also use torchlight to signal intent.
 - Laser (passive and active) can be used to highlight trip-wires, and to indicate to threat force or non-combatants that they are being covered. It can also be used as a source of light in darkened areas.
 - Night vision goggles (NVG), when in use, require care to be taken when using them and moving through urban terrain because of the transitional aspects of light. Black as night one minute and potentially broad daylight the next. Find time to peer under the black and green to assess the ambient light that is available.
 - Grenades are a 'double-edged sword' and often not as lethal as you'd expect. If you're going to throw one, then throw two; one long and one short. Listen after deployment for effects on the enemy, and be wary of visual impairment if you intend to enter before the dust settles. The components of effectively using grenades at doorways are complex; focus a good amount of training here. F3 practice grenades are an outstanding training aid for this.
 - Verbal communications may be necessary as some situations could require for calling out to combatants and non-combatants. Consider language difficulties, as well as measures to control those you do call out.
 - Offensive weapons are to be used in extreme cases and may require for you and the team to pull back and employ heavy weapons or external fire support.
 - Explosive method of entry (EMOE) is another tool to be considered if available.
 - Extendable ladders are an excellent tool to enable movement over fences, walls, into higher floors or down into subterranean tunnels. Extendable ladders should be part of every section's equipment in an urban environment.

We may incorrectly associate dust and smoke as a visual impairment from a grenade detonating in rooms that have dirt floors; however, well-constructed buildings made of

brick and cement can also cause serious visual obstruction from grenades. During the clearance mentioned previously, a grenade was used to clear the room from where the enemy fire had originated. My team was called to clear the room. On entry, due to cement dust and debris, you literally could not see your hand in front of your face and much of that room clearance was done by feel. It took several minutes for the dust to settle before we could make entry into the next area.

Training for doorways in an urban environment

There is a great deal to remember for such a simple thing as a doorway, let alone the subsequent room clearance. As with all things in training, knowledge and exposure to good training will develop confidence and competence. If you are a trainer, instruct others to incrementally develop skills and knowledge. If you are developing your own skills, apply the following principles to enhance survivability and tactical success:

- Move fast where you have to, move slowly where you need to.
- Where possible, use a pace which comfortably ensures target acquisition and accurate shooting.
- Use as much cover as possible. Your own weapon and eyes always lead.
- Recognise the tactical implications of your movement from a team perspective. A well-trained team will achieve far more on a battlefield than any individual.
- Think in order to 'assess, bypass, cover, deceive and enter'.
- Know your enemy!

For more information on effective use of cover see *Smart Soldier 50*.

Critical thinking by all

Developing effective, progressive training for chaotic and complex combat requires critical thinking² on the part of all members, especially trainers. When preparing your training (whether it be doorway clearance, room clearance, ladder work, and so on) use critical thinking to ensure vital questions and problems are used to gather and assess the information being delivered prior to, during and after training. This will lead to reasoned conclusions as well as being able to test relevant criteria against 'old norms' and current standards. If done with an open mind and good communication, this will lead to solutions to complex problems and help you develop challenging, rewarding and enjoyable combat training that will improve soldiers' survivability on the battlefield.

Conclusion

This article provided a detailed look at combat behaviours for dealing with doorways in an urban combat environment. It provided guidance for trainers and soldiers alike when preparing for urban tasks. That said, and even though we only discussed doorways in detail here, remember that what is covered in this article amounts to a very small portion of the overall complexity of urban combat.

² A definition of critical thinking is 'the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it' (Paul & Elder, 2016).